Philippines

Country Facts
Population: 97,976,603
Languages: Filipino [Tagalog], English, regional languages
Predominant Religions: Christian [Roman Catholic]
Time Zone: Eight hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 220 volts
Telephone Codes: 63, country code; 2, city code for Manila

Introduction:
The Philippines is full of natural beauty, including gorgeous beaches, hills that look like candy drops, amazing waterfalls, old rice terraces and reefs full of marine life. However, visitors aren’t likely to see such wonders unaccompanied, as the locals are very outgoing. They consider solitude-seekers an oddity — Filipinos prefer to have company.

Travelers to the Philippines will be included in bayanihan, theFilipinos’ term for their communal spirit. The local jokes, smiles and laughter will be shared with their visitors — such friendly people are rare elsewhere. Travelers who care more about exploring a culture and making friends than visiting tourist sites will be pleased with the Philippines.

In rural areas and on some southern islands, travel can be a little hazardous, but most of the country is safe. The government has worked hard, and fairly successfully, to curb petty street crime, tourist scams and dishonest cabdrivers. Security is strong, especially in shopping areas and hotels — all people who enter such places are checked. It’s wise, though, for visitors to stay aware while traveling in the Philippines.

Compassion in the Philippines:
Compassion International’s work in the Philippines began in 1972. As of 2010 more than 53,400 children participate in more than 300 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 1,050 infants, toddlers, mothers and caretakers through 29 centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 135 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Philippine children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- Maintaining cordial relations at all times is essential in this culture; making only positive comments is a good place to start. Negativity of any kind can cause "loss of face," which has unfortunate consequences in this culture, including loss of reputation as well as the severing of friendships and other meaningful bonds.
- Expect to be engaged in conversation in social situations — silence may be interpreted as discomfort or dislike. Don’t be alarmed if new acquaintances start asking you about your personal life. Filipinos can be chummy and talkative in a friendly way. The country
is known for the warmth of its people. If you are uncomfortable, just redirect the
conversation and change the topic.

- Some Filipinos can be shy and do not always answer directly. If the response you need is
important, make sure that you communicate that it is OK to answer negatively.
- Although there are many social inequalities, there is a belief that everyone must be
treated with civility. Moreover, as people rise in importance, they are expected to behave
with heightened modesty and graciousness, especially in their dealings with the poor.
For example, beggars are politely refused with the phrase "Patawarin po," which means,
"Forgive me, sir." Snubbing a beggar may result only in "loss of face."
- Visiting men should expect to shake hands firmly with other Filipino men, both upon
introduction and subsequent meetings.
- Generally there is not supposed to be physical contact between men and women in
public. When in public, rather than initiating a handshake, men should wait for a Filipino
woman to extend her hand. Foreign women may initiate a handshake with Filipino men
or women. Christian women in the communities appreciate a handshake, especially
when a foreigner initiates it.
- Close, upper class female friends in the Philippines greet each other with a hug and kiss.
Similarly, close, upper class male friends may exhibit close physical contact, such as
holding hands or walking arm in arm with a friend. A handshake, bow and smile are
most common in the poorer communities.
- As a sign of respect, children, when introduced to elderly, take their right hand and put it
on their forehead (just like what you commonly see when the Pope or a priest visits the
children in Eastern countries). It is called "pagmamano."
- Children address older males as "kuya," a respectful title for an elder brother, and older
females as "ate" for elder sister.
- Filipinos often greet each other by making eye contact, smiling and then raising and
lowering their eyebrows.
- When someone raises his or her eyebrows at you, it is often a way of indicating that you
have been understood.
- Raising one's voice is unacceptable in Filipino business culture. Moreover, it's important
to maintain a low, yet controlled tone of voice at all times. Striving to speak this way can
help you conduct business with greater effectiveness and may even allow you to project
more of an authoritative, confident image.
- Don't assume that a smile is an indication of amusement or approval. Frequently,
smiling is used to mask embarrassment, nervousness and other feelings of distress. This
is why you will sometimes observe Filipinos smiling or laughing during inappropriately
somber or tense moments.
- Visitors should avoid staring at Filipinos because they easily interpret a stare as a hostile
gesture. If you are stared at, it will be in your best interests to look away or return a nice
smile.
- It's recommended that you break eye contact several times in the course of a
conversation. When you look at a Filipino too intently, it is often interpreted as
"gawking" rather than a sign of attentiveness.
• When it is necessary to walk between two people, lower your head with your hands clasped in front of you as you pass them. This gesture confers respect.
• Because of the years of U.S. military presence in the Philippines, most North American gestures are recognized and understood.
• Pointing a middle finger at a person or thing is considered the most obscene gesture in the Philippines.
• Since pointing can easily be perceived as an insulting gesture, Filipinos rarely indicate objects or directions by pointing with their fingers. Instead, they indicate with a glance or by pursing their lips.
• To beckon someone, hold your hand out, palm downward, and make a scooping motion with the fingers. Beckoning someone with the palm up and wagging one finger can be interpreted as an insult.
• You may observe people hissing in restaurants; this is a common way of beckoning servers. It is not used to beckon foreigners.
• Indicating "two" with the fingers is done by holding up the ring and little finger, instead of the forefinger and middle finger. The thumb is not generally used to count numbers in the Philippines.
• It is considered impolite to put your hands on your hips when talking.
• A Filipino, especially a child, may try to get your attention by brushing a finger against your elbow.

Dos and Don'ts:
• Don't be enticed to exchange money on the street. Use only licensed money changers.
• Do bring a cell phone. Most Filipinos use them because they are relatively inexpensive and more accessible than the nation's landlines.
• Don't be surprised by blackouts. Power shortages in Manila occasionally occur, especially during typhoons.
• Do keep in mind that the city streets can flood. A couple of hours of rain can block the underground sewage system, forcing the water to surface. This can cause traffic problems, and numerous people to be stranded.
• Do keep an eye out for potholes and the never-ending reconstruction and repair of roads and streets. This can be a nuisance especially during rush hours.

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:
Visitors should avoid travel after dark and be wary of overly friendly strangers in urban areas. When shopping in flea markets or other crowded areas, beware of pickpockets. Avoid using backpacks if you can’t watch what goes on behind you. Bring only necessary cash and items. When riding in taxis or using public transportation, always be alert and avoid traveling alone late at night.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for
that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations — wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

Health:
Outside Manila, sanitary conditions in most restaurants can pose problems for travelers. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be OK, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, and avoid local dairy products. Stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks.

Malaria is endemic in rural areas — consult your physician about anti-malarial measures, use locally available mosquito coils, and bring plenty of insect repellent. Skin infections can be a problem in the tropics — even the smallest wound should be disinfected and covered with a bandage. Tuberculosis is also quite common, and you may contract the disease if you have dealings with infected individuals. Even children are not exempt. Ask your doctor about vaccination options.

Bring all prescription medicine needed for the trip. Manila has adequate medical and dental facilities.

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov] or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Vaccinations for hepatitis, typhoid and tuberculosis, as well as anti-malarial medication, may be suggested.

Money:
The country’s official currency is the Philippine peso. Foreign visitors may find that their money goes a long way in the Philippines. The best form of currency is cash and credit cards. Not all banks honor traveler’s checks. ATMs are plentiful and can be found in almost every corner, particularly in the malls. Check to see if the ATM displays a Cirrus or VisaElectron sign, as only these will permit withdrawal of cash via a credit card. Be careful when using ATMs, as foreigners who appear to fumble may immediately be assisted by curious onlookers, sometimes even by security personnel. Thank them for the assistance, but insist on keeping the transaction private and never divulge your PIN. There are many foreign currency exchange counters in malls, as well as business districts, and these normally give higher rates for a dollar-to-peso conversion than the banks. Before purchasing anything, find out whether prices will be quoted in U.S. dollars or Philippine pesos (especially with local tour operators).

Weather:
November through February, temperatures are cool and pleasant (it’s usually 15 F / 7 C cooler in the mountain areas). April and May are very hot and humid. June through September is the rainy season.

Dress:
You can keep cool by wearing the sensible clothing and fabrics that Filipinos have developed to deal with the heat and humidity. For men, the barong Tagalog, or long-sleeved shirt, worn untucked, will get you through even the most formal occasions. The short-sleeved style, the polo barong, is even cooler. For women, maintain modesty and avoid slinky outfits such as tank tops and body-hugging dresses. Filipinos are generally more conservative than their counterparts in developed countries. To manage the heat, bring or buy clothes made from 100-percent natural fabrics such as cotton or linen, as they are cooler. When in doubt, you may follow smart casual to a formal type of dressing (depending on the occasion). Carry a small portable umbrella. The weather in the archipelago is unpredictable, even during the so-called wet and dry seasons. Use it to protect yourself from either the sun or rain.

All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.