



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Combined, the more than 7,600 islands of the Philippines are about the size of Italy or the U.S. state of Arizona, but the islands are spread over a much larger territory. Most of the population lives on 11 main islands, of which Luzon and Mindanao are the largest. Many islands are mountainous, and there is potential for volcanic and seismic activity throughout the country. Less than one-fourth of the country's fertile soil is under cultivation. About 24 percent of the land is covered with forests (down from 40 percent a decade ago). Located in the southern Philippines, the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to about 360 types of coral, 600 species of fish, and 100 species of birds.

The climate is generally tropical and humid. The Luzon highlands, near Baguio, have a mild climate with low humidity. The rainy season extends from June to October. Typhoons are likely from June to November, but they may occur during any season because the Philippines is in the typhoon belt.

History

Early Peoples and Kingdoms

The earliest inhabitants of the area now called the Philippines were various groups of pre-Malay peoples. They began settling the islands as early as 40,000 years ago, living as hunter-gatherers. Descendants of these early peoples live in the Philippines today and include the Aeta of Luzon Island,

the Ati of Panay Island, the Mamanwa of Mindanao Island, and many others. Over time, other people from around the region also settled the islands. From about the first century on, small kingdoms developed, and sea trade with China and other Asian societies became more common. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Muslim traders and missionaries arrived, and locals began to convert to Islam, mainly on the southern islands of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, where powerful sultanates developed.

Spanish Colonization

The first known contact with Europeans occurred in 1521, when Ferdinand Magellan landed in the Philippines, claimed the islands for Spain, and began a mission of converting islanders to Catholicism. He was killed while assisting a local chief in a battle with a rival group on the island of Mactan, and the Spanish quickly departed. Spain sent more expeditions, and in 1565, the first Spanish settlement was established on Cebu. The Spanish went on to conquer many of the islands but were successfully resisted in the largely Muslim southern islands. The new Spanish colony known as the Philippines continued to develop in the 17th and 18th centuries as an important trade hub. China, Japan, and other countries tried to conquer the Philippines—the capital of Manila briefly fell into British hands—but Spain successfully maintained its control.

Independence Struggle

By the late 19th century, Enlightenment philosophy and nationalism among Filipinos fueled a struggle for independence. Writer José Rizal's novels inspired revolutionary sentiments, and his arrest and execution in 1896 incited a revolt against Spain. After the United States went to

war with Spain in 1898, the rebels received assistance from the United States and took control of most of the Philippines. However, the United States did not recognize Philippine independence and instead made the islands a U.S. territory following its 1899 victory in the Spanish-American War.

Angered at the presence of yet another foreign power, Filipinos, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, began a war against the United States that cost tens of thousands of lives and ultimately failed to displace the Americans. At the conclusion of hostilities in 1901, the United States set up a new civil territorial government still largely under its control. Filipino politicians immediately began pushing for sovereignty and in 1935 secured U.S. approval of a new constitution and the promise of Philippine independence in ten years. The plan was jeopardized during World War II when Japanese forces defeated American and Filipino defenders in 1942 and carried out a brutal occupation. U.S. forces invaded the occupied territory in 1944 and regained control after Japan's surrender. Independence for the Philippines finally came on 4 July 1946, though with conditions favorable to the U.S. Navy and American business interests.

Insurgencies and the Marcos Presidency

Political turmoil, inequality in the early years of the country's independence, and longstanding tensions between the government and Muslims in the south spurred insurgency movements that have had decades of influence on the Philippines. Unrest over the wealth disparity between landowners and tenant farmers fueled an armed communist insurgency that began in 1969. Around the same time, another insurgency began with the aim of creating a separate Muslim state in the southern islands. The roots of the rebellion could be traced back hundreds of years to the resistance of Muslims (or Moros) to Spanish conquest. Only after decades and the deaths of more than 100,000 people would all of the major Moro armed separatist groups agree to peace in exchange for greater autonomy within the nation; the communist rebellion remains ongoing.

In 1972, in response to the insurgencies and citing plots against the government, President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law; critics, however, saw the move as an excuse to consolidate power, hide his own corruption, and stay in office past his legal term. Marcos ruled by decree, repressed political opposition, and carried out human-rights abuses against his enemies. He retained dictatorial power even after officially lifting martial law in 1981.

Return to Democracy

In response to Marcos's actions, a protest movement emerged that peacefully brought democracy back to the Philippines. The People Power Revolution was sparked by the 1983 assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, a senator who had been jailed by Marcos, and was fueled by anger over fraud and intimidation in the 1986 presidential election. Marcos declared himself the winner over Corazon Aquino, the wife of the assassinated senator. However, Marcos lost support of the military and fled the country after millions of people protested on Metro Manila's Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (commonly called EDSA) over three days. Aquino was sworn in as president, after which she formed a transitional government and began work on a new constitution that

limited presidential power and made way for an era of renewed democracy.

The Philippines Today

While the Philippines has maintained the democratic processes reestablished after the 1986 revolution, the 2016 election of President Rodrigo Duterte has raised concerns about a possible return to authoritarianism. Duterte has threatened to take over private companies, intimidated political opponents and the press, and carried out an aggressive war on drugs that has left tens of thousands of people dead in what human-rights groups have characterized as government-endorsed extrajudicial killings. Widespread corruption also continues to be a significant problem in the Philippines, despite the fact that Duterte promised to rid the government of it.

Political progress has been made, however, between the government and the Muslim separatist insurgency that began in the 1960s. In 2018, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the government signed an agreement calling for disarmament and the expansion of a Muslim autonomous region. Voters ratified the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Regional Government, and many hope that stronger self-governance will lead to improved economic conditions and resistance to the influence of outside terrorist groups such as the Islamic State.

Located in the Pacific Typhoon Belt and on the Ring of Fire, the Philippines suffers billions of dollars in economic damage each year from tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions. Nevertheless, the country has experienced years of robust economic growth fueled by a rise in manufacturing. This economic momentum has led to a growing middle class and a declining poverty rate.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Most Filipinos are of Malay descent, while some may claim mixed heritage, which is the result of the region's history of colonization. Nearly one hundred distinct ethnic groups formed along linguistic, geographic, and religious lines. The largest group is the Tagalog (24 percent), followed by the Bisaya (11 percent), Cebuano (10 percent), and Ilocano (9 percent). Descendants of pre-Malay peoples still live in the Philippines and include the Aetas who live around Mount Pinatubo. Other Indigenous groups include the Igorot and Ifugao of the Cordillera Central, a mountain range in northern Luzon, who are known for their stunning two-thousand-year-old rice terraces in Banau.

Language

English and Filipino (referred to as Tagalog) are official languages. English is the main language of business, government, and higher education; it is also the language of instruction for some schools and of math and science in all schools. Tagalog is a dialect that originated on Luzon. Many ethnic groups that speak one of more than one hundred other languages or dialects were hesitant to adopt Filipino when it was introduced in the 1960s because it was based on Tagalog.

But it is now a primary language for daily communication between speakers of different dialects. In Luzon, spoken English is heavily laced with Tagalog words in informal conversation. Speaking in a dialect that someone present might not understand is considered rude. However, some groups speak only their own dialect; this is particularly true in the Visayan region, where Cebuano dominates.

Religion

The Philippines is a predominantly Christian nation. About 80 percent of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, and 6 percent belongs to various other Christian churches. Six percent is Muslim. Muslim Moros live mainly on southern islands, particularly Mindanao. In remote areas, Indigenous groups are still heavily influenced by traditional beliefs, worshiping a variety of gods. A number of Buddhists also live in the Philippines. Even though religious participation tends to be stronger among older people, most Filipinos consider religion to be an important part of their daily lives.

General Attitudes

Filipino culture and values are largely impacted by the custom of *bayanihan*, a sense of community and shared purpose. Filipinos consider interdependence and cooperation more important than independence and individualism. For example, family and family traditions are highly regarded and respected. A person's actions reflect on his or her family; bringing shame to one's family and community is avoided at all costs.

Many Filipinos have a relaxed view of time (sometimes referred to as "Filipino time") and may not begin meetings or appointments promptly. Filipinos are generally casual and fun loving and value honesty and straightforwardness (called being *prangka*). However, Filipinos tend to be sensitive people who often try to avoid confrontation. Maintaining smooth social relationships is considered to be more important than expressing personal views, delivering bad or unwanted news, or displeasing others. Innovation, change, and competition are sometimes considered risky since they could result in failure. Changing social or religious habits may be regarded as ingratitude to parents.

Accepting a favor obliges a Filipino to repay with a greater favor, although never with money. Filipinos call this *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). During difficult times, Filipinos may rely on the fatalistic attitude *bahala na* (come what may) to get through, often saying "I'll do my best, but the rest is up to God." However, this mentality is dwindling among younger people, who prefer to believe they have more control over their lives.

Personal Appearance

Proper appearance for events such as parties and graduations is important; being over- or underdressed can be a cause for embarrassment. To avoid this, appropriate dress is often discussed prior to an event. Filipino formal clothing for men includes a *barong* a white or pastel embroidered shirt that hangs over the pants. Women wear a *terno*, a full-length dress with a scoop neckline and flat, oversized "butterfly" sleeves.

Manual laborers wear pants and long-sleeved T-shirts, often with a shirt wrapped around their heads to avoid getting sunburned on the head and neck. Farmers likewise wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to protect themselves from the sun. Some office workers wear long pants and a collared shirt; some may be required to wear corporate dress. Others wear denim jeans, business casual attire, or Western-style suits. Flip-flops are common footwear in casual situations.

Women generally wear Western-style dresses or skirts with blouses; they may also wear jeans and T-shirts. Government employees wear uniforms, although not necessarily every day; the uniform's style identifies the agency. Public-school teachers have a different uniform for each day of the workweek. People who live in highland villages and on outlying islands may wear traditional clothing when they perform rituals. A fair complexion is generally considered more beautiful or desirable than a darker complexion.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Initial greetings are usually friendly and informal. Handshakes are typical for men and women, but verbal greetings are acceptable alone. Some men may hold a handshake longer than normal, which is usually a sign of respect. To show additional respect or enthusiasm, one places the free hand on top of a handshake or uses it to pat the other person's shoulder. Between women or between men and women, a *beso-beso* (kiss to each cheek) is common. Common informal Tagalog greetings include *Saan ka pupunta?* (Where are you going?) and *Saan ka galing?* (Where have you been?). A typical response is *Diyang lang* (Just there, only). *Kamusta ka na?* (How are you doing?) is more formal. A common informal greeting such as *Anong balita?* (What's new?) is often used among friends. Just as common are *Hi* and *Good morning*.

Young people show respect to adults by addressing them with a proper title. If a professional title (doctor, manager, chief) is not appropriate, then *Sir*, *Ma'am*, or a familial title based on the age difference and relationship of the speakers is used. Young adults commonly address strangers of roughly their age as *ate* (older sister) or *kuya* (older brother). Older adult strangers are often referred to as *manang* (old lady) or *manong* (old man). The elderly might be called *lola* (grandmother) or *lolo* (grandfather). When speaking to the elderly or out of respect, Filipinos commonly use *po* (a marker used to show respect) and *opo* (polite form of "yes") in their speech. Similar titles exist in most dialects. Those equal in age and status usually address each other by first name or nickname. If individuals have a professional title, however, even peers may address them by that title to acknowledge their achievement or status.

Gestures

Hand movement is not excessive in conversation, but Filipinos do use various hand and body gestures to communicate. A head nod can mean "yes." To beckon, one

waves all fingers with the palm facing down. A shoulder shrug can convey "I don't know." Filipinos often point by puckering the lips. A shoulder shrug with open palms facing up means *Bahala na*, a common expression meaning "Accept what comes and bear it with hope and patience." A widely opened mouth means "I don't understand."

Men normally offer bus seats to the elderly or handicapped. Younger people, especially rural Catholics, "bless" an elder (particularly godparents) by bringing the elder's hand to their forehead, a practice called *pagmamano*. Women commonly walk arm in arm or hand in hand, and men may put an arm around each other's shoulders, but displays of affection between men and women, especially in rural areas, are considered inappropriate. It is increasingly more common for youth in urban areas to publicly show affection.

Visiting

Filipinos, especially those from the *barrios* (small villages or suburbs), enjoy visiting often. Rural visits are often unannounced, but urban visits are less frequent and more planned. Guests do not typically take gifts, since the visit itself is considered a gift. However, a guest who has been away for a long time or visits from a foreign province or abroad is expected to bring a small *pasalubong* (inexpensive gift) to the family.

Guests are treated with great hospitality and offered the host's best amenities, such as their finest utensils. They are typically offered something to drink. Common drinks initially offered during a visit include water, juice, and soda. Alcoholic drinks may be offered after a guest has stayed for a while. Food is also typically served, except during very short visits. Guests can decline refreshments, but hosts insist until the guests decline several times. The host may give guests something to take home, such as a simple meal or small token of appreciation. The woman of the house is referred to as *Maybahay*, as *Mrs.*, or (if on familiar terms with the host) with *Aling*- prefixed to her given name.

Although socializing in the home is the most popular leisure activity, Filipinos also enjoy meeting in public places, where drinking is often a primary activity. Urban neighborhoods often have a central park where schoolchildren can practice dance or other presentations. Youth like to socialize in malls or clubs. Villages nearly always have a plaza where political events, dances, meetings, and socializing occur and where basketball can be played nearby.

Eating

Filipinos usually eat three meals a day, with at least two snack periods (*merienda*) between meals. Rural Filipino families usually eat all meals together. Urban families eat weekday breakfast and dinner, as well as most weekend meals, together. Spoons and forks are the most common utensils. Typically, one pushes food onto the spoon with the back of the fork. Diners may use their hands in large rural gatherings, a practice that is less common in urban areas. Guests typically are seated nearest the head of the home and are always served first. No one eats until after the guests have had a bite or two. Guests show their appreciation by eating heartily; an empty plate indicates that the meal was enjoyed. Refusing any food

is also fine, especially for health reasons. Eating out in restaurants is common, especially for large family groups. Families in rural areas tend to host at-home parties for big groups instead of eating out at a restaurant. Tipping is not practiced in restaurants, except at finer dining establishments, which include the tip in a service charge.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The extended family is the basic social unit, and more than two generations often live together in the same household. The average rural family has about three children; urban families tend to be smaller. Family ties remain strong, even after children are grown and married. Single parenthood, although now more widely accepted, still carries a stigma. Many single mothers often struggle for financial and emotional support.

People support financially needy relatives (immediate or extended) when necessary. Many Filipinos work overseas to earn money for education costs or medical expenses of the extended family at home. Recipients of such aid are expected to return help when possible or necessary. Individuals may sacrifice much to help provide family members (especially children) with a better life. Within the country, people may help find employment or opportunities for relatives.

Parents and Children

When one or both parents work overseas, children are frequently left in the care of a grandparent or other mature family members. The primary responsibility of most children is to complete their education, but some families expect their children to work to help support the family. Some children continue to live with their parents, even after marriage. Both parents discipline their children, and children take advice from their parents and grandparents very seriously. Adult children are expected to take care of their ageing parents, and some married children may live with elderly or infirm parents.

Families with parents employed overseas can suffer strains on their relationships, as parents have limited interaction with their children. Single-parent families as a result of unwed pregnancy or separation are increasingly common. Most single-parent families are headed by women.

Gender Roles

The Philippines is traditionally a patriarchal society. Fathers are usually considered the head of the family and women are expected to take care of the children, but men and women work together to make major family decisions. Today, family responsibilities are becoming increasingly egalitarian, as both parents often work. Many women work outside the home, even working overseas. Rural women work alongside men in the rice fields. In addition to being co-providers, women are also expected to take care of the children and manage the household and family finances. Some wealthy and dual-income families hire a nanny or a maid.

Modernization has led women to play a greater role in society. More women are able to complete advanced

education and develop careers, and they are less likely to conform to traditional roles. Educated and experienced women tend to be competitive for jobs. Filipino women hold business and industry positions and have held high office in government, including the presidency. Several feminist groups have organized to help secure women's rights and promote women's issues such as single parenthood. Despite the institution of the Anti-Violence Against Women Act, domestic violence against women and children continues to be a major problem. Female desk officers are assigned at every police station to assure female victims that reports of crime or abuse will not be ignored.

Housing

Rural

In rural areas, families consider the changing weather conditions when choosing building materials. Typical rural housing is the *nipa* hut, a bamboo structure with a roof of dried palm fronds. These homes usually consist of one main room and one or two bedrooms. Rural families may rely on outhouses and outdoor kitchens, sometimes called "dirty kitchens," because they are often used for cooking dishes that have strong odors or that produce a lot of smoke.

The *sala* (living room) is a home's focal point, where the family spends most of its time. Other rooms could include the *kusina* (kitchen), bathroom, and two to four bedrooms. It is common for siblings to share rooms. For big families, the living room may also be turned into a sleeping space at night. Many rural homes have woven mats, called *banig*, that are used for sitting or sleeping. Common fixtures in rural homes include a radio, charcoal stove, paraffin lamp, and a water tank or drum to store water.

Urban

The designs of most houses in urban areas have a mix of traditional and Western influence—for example, using materials such as bamboo with wide windows and expensive wooden furniture. Homes are built of wood or concrete and have concrete foundations. Common types of housing include single-family houses, row housing (cheap, one-storey buildings in villages), and more recently, townhouses, condominiums, and apartment buildings. The wealthy live in large homes with modern architecture and design, often located in private developments. Homes in and around Manila, especially near the city center, are expensive and tend to be smaller than those in outlying provinces.

Apartments typically have one or two bedrooms, while houses may have two to four bedrooms. Urban kitchens usually have a stove, a sink, and electricity. The water supply in urban areas may be indoor plumbing, while in rural areas it may be a communal tap. Most urban families have a television, stove, telephone, and refrigerator. These appliances are often considered status symbols, an indication that the family has achieved prosperity.

Ownership

Most Filipinos consider housing an investment and home ownership a sign of success. The government has provided subsidized housing for the poor in some areas, but the program is not successful overall. Housing loans are available, though typically only middle-class families and

above can take advantage of them. Urban newlywed couples usually rent a studio-type apartment, while families with children may rent houses.

Due to urban migration and lack of affordable housing, an increasing number of families squat illegally in private or government-owned lots. Poor families also set up shanties beside railroad tracks, under bridges, or along riverbanks. Shantytowns are cramped and lack basic facilities such as plumbing and waste removal. These types of informal settlements are most prevalent in Manila but are also occurring in other large cities. Government programs seek to relocate the squatters to provide them with legal property and decrease the ecological toll squatting has on waterways.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Urban dating usually begins in the early teens. Young people often socialize through school activities such as dances and acquaintance parties (a party of peers hosted by a youth organization to acquaint youth with each other). They also meet people through social networking sites. Youth tend to date in groups and may socialize at malls or organize out-of-town trips over weekends or on vacations. In urban areas, speed dating and blind dates, set up through acquaintances or online dating sites and apps, have increased in popularity. Dancing, hiking, singing karaoke, eating at restaurants, and going to movies are also popular dating activities.

In rural areas, dating habits vary according to religion and tradition. Casual dating is not common. Usually, parents must know or be introduced to the young man before the young woman is permitted to go on a date with him. In the past, suitors would stand outside a young woman's house and serenade her with love songs. While this traditional courting ritual, known as *harana*, is no longer widely practiced, many older Filipinos remember this era of courting fondly.

Engagement

Pamanhikan, a visit of the suitor and his family to the family of his prospective bride, traditionally started the engagement process. The man and his family brought gifts and food to persuade the girl's family to accept the suitor. When the family accepted the offer of marriage, both families began preparations for marriage. More commonly today, especially in urban areas, *pamanhikan* is a formality where the parents of the couple begin talking about wedding preparations; the engagement may have already happened.

Marriage in Society

Most Filipinos value marriage as an important institution, and legal rights such as property ownership and health benefits are legally guaranteed to married people. Common-law marriages are acceptable if the family cannot afford a wedding, but rights like healthcare benefits extend only to the children. Same-sex marriage is illegal in the Philippines. It is common for Filipino women to marry foreigners; many men come from the United States, Australia, and, increasingly, the Middle East and South Korea. Although the legal marriage age is 18, some Filipino women marry younger; these marriages are not legally recognized. As education levels among women have increased, the average marrying age has

also increased. Most Filipinos marry before they are 30 years old. Filipinos in rural areas tend to marry at a younger age than urban Filipinos.

Weddings

A traditional Filipino church wedding is often elaborate and costly. In the past, the groom's family paid for the wedding, but it is more common for families to share expenses. Some families save for months or years to afford a wedding. Most couples choose a traditional religious wedding, but some opt for a simple civil wedding performed by a government official. The families plan the wedding together. In urban areas, couples may also hire wedding planners to help with preparations. In rural areas, couples are assisted in wedding preparations by their immediate relatives and friends. Catholic wedding ceremonies are held on church premises, but other religions may hold the ceremony in an outdoor setting or hotel function rooms. Grooms in rural areas often wear a *barong* (a lightweight, embroidered shirt, similar to a dress shirt) made of pineapple or banana fiber; most grooms in urban areas prefer to wear a suit and tie. Brides usually wear a white gown with a veil, chosen by the bride. Couples are also expected to buy gowns and suits for the bridal party.

At the reception, which usually follows the wedding ceremony, parents and close friends deliver speeches and the couple cuts the wedding cake and makes toasts. The bride and groom dance their first dance while guests pin money to the clothes of the couple to wish them prosperity in their marriage. Generally, guests bring practical gifts such as household appliances, but in recent years, money is also a common gift.

Divorce

Divorce does not exist in the Philippines, except for limited cases involving Muslims. Legally, marriages must be ended through annulment; however, the cost and extended time frame of annulments make them difficult to obtain for most Filipinos. Separation is the alternative for those who cannot afford annulment, but there are significant disadvantages. For example, separations do not legally dissolve a marriage, so neither spouse is able to remarry.

Life Cycle

Birth

Traditional beliefs surrounding pregnancy are still prevalent in the Philippines. Some common superstitions include beliefs that a woman's appearance or her food cravings may determine the sex of her baby. For example, if a woman looks pretty during pregnancy, some Filipinos believe that her baby is more likely to be a boy, and if she craves sweets, the baby will be a girl. During the early pregnancy phase known as *paglililihi*, many Filipinos believe that the foods a woman eats will affect her baby's physical traits. After a woman gives birth, her mother usually stays with her and the family to help take care of the newborn. Paid maternity leave in the Philippines lasts 105 days; most women take about two months.

Catholic parents plan the baptism of their baby, through which the child will become a member of the parents' faith. Parents choose close friends and relatives to serve as godparents, who will assist the parents in raising the child, be

involved in the personal development and discipline of the child, and act as the child's guardian in the case of the parent's death. After the ceremony, a reception follows where family and guests share a meal together. Baptisms can be expensive events (since they are a private Mass), and several families may plan a baptism together. Parents celebrate their children's first and seventh birthdays as significant birthdays and invite friends and family for a party. The first birthday serves to welcome new life to the family. The seventh birthday marks the first sign of independence, as this is the age that children start primary school. Other birthdays are celebrated within the immediate family.

Milestones

The legal and voting age is 18, but while legally adults, most young Filipinos remain dependent on their parents. No formal rite of passage exists for boys, though high school and college graduations are much-celebrated achievements. Filipino parents feel obligated to finance their children's entire education, and children usually must finish tertiary education before they are given independence in major life choices. Most children are between 20 and 21 years old and have graduated college when they start being more independent. In rural areas, some teenagers as young as 16 are required to work to help support the family. Teenagers in urban areas may find part-time work when they reach high school, perhaps to supplement the family income or for job experience.

Wealthy families may throw a party called a debut when a young woman turns 18 to mark her transition to adulthood. This coming-of-age celebration includes the custom of "18 roses," in which the debutante dances with 18 different partners who present her with a rose, beginning with the father, followed by brothers and cousins, and ending with male friends. Additionally, a ceremony called "18 candles" involves 18 female family members and friends giving speeches to wish the young woman a bright future while holding a candle.

Death

In keeping with religious traditions, most Filipino families choose to bury their dead. Families with relatives buried in a cemetery are required to pay fees to maintain the grave. If a family fails to pay the fee, the remains will be removed from the cemetery. In recent years, however, cremation has become more popular. Families can rent a place to hold a wake, or they can arrange the wake at home. The wake usually lasts three to five days, during which religious services are held each night. Relatives and friends visit to express their sympathy and condolences and offer flowers or money. The body is never left alone during this time; family members take turns holding overnight vigils.

On the last night of the wake, close relatives and friends are expected to visit and spend the night with the deceased. The family usually requests a priest or religious leader to bless the body of their dead relative before it is buried or cremated. Family members may lead a procession to the cemetery on foot (in rural areas) or in cars (in urban areas). Additional prayer services are held at the home of the family of the deceased over the next 40 days. On All Saints' Day (1 November) and on death anniversaries, families visit the

cemetery and leave an offering at the gravesite, such as flowers, lit candles, or the person's favorite dish or drink. All Souls' Day (2 November) is a day of remembrance, marked by people lighting a candle in front of their doors for each family member who has died.

Diet

Rice, the main staple food, is prepared in a variety of ways and is often included in desserts. *Suman*, a sweet rice cake, is a popular dish. Fish, the primary source of protein, is accompanied by vegetables and tropical fruits. A typical meal might consist of boiled rice, fried fish, and a vegetable, with fruit for dessert. Fruit is also often eaten for breakfast. Pork, beef, and chicken are favorite meats. Seafood is common at restaurants and resorts. Popular for large celebrations is the *lechon*, a stuffed pig roasted over a charcoal fire. Meats are often roasted and served on skewers. *Kare-kare* is a stew of meats and vegetables served in a peanut sauce. *Adobo* is a stew of chicken and pork in garlic, soy sauce, and vinegar. Garlic is a common spice. Popular street foods include fried chicken skin, *isaw* (boiled and grilled chicken or pig intestines), and *tokneneng* (battered and deep-fried duck or chicken eggs). Street vendors also sell *balut*, a fertilized duck egg with an embryo. This delicacy is usually sold at night, when vendors may visit different neighborhoods and shout "balut" to alert potential customers. A favorite snack is *halo-halo*, made from sweetened beans, milk, and fruits served in colorful layers with crushed ice. *Pulutan* is a deep-fried snack (like pork rinds, but it may also be made of goat or dog meat) often served with beer.

Recreation

Sports

Basketball is the most popular sport. People often gather for professional, intercollegiate, and local basketball games. Most towns have basketball courts, where young men play. Basketball classes for boys as young as primary school age are offered during summer break. Occasionally, basketball games are held between city *barangays* (districts). Other favorite sports include badminton, boxing, and only very recently, soccer. Recent successes by the national soccer team, known as the Azkals, have made it an increasingly popular spectator and participant sport.

Leisure

Filipinos love to entertain, and most have free time to do so during weekends or holidays. Singing karaoke is a popular activity when friends or families get together. At home, they watch TV and play chess or card games. In big cities, people often spend time in malls to window shop, eat, watch movies, or hang out at coffee shops. Young people enjoy using the internet for social networking and playing video games. Women spend their free time visiting friends, shopping online or in person, or enjoying TV shows and movies. They may also take yoga or Zumba classes. Men in rural areas enjoy playing billiards and watching cockfights with friends, while men in urban areas often enjoy playing online games, playing basketball and golf, and going to bars.

Relatives and friends enjoy celebrating occasions such as birthdays, graduations, and homecomings. In rural areas,

town feasts celebrate the town's patron saint. These feasts are characterized by elaborate preparations and additional events sponsored by the local government, such as parades, talent contests, and fairs in the town plaza.

Vacation

During the summer season (March–June), families and groups of friends plan trips to the beach. Many people take advantage of inexpensive airfare to many destinations within the country. Visiting relatives is a very common activity.

The Arts

Government patronage revived interest in traditional Filipino arts in recent years. Concerts featuring modern, classical, and folk music are well attended. Native instruments include drums, gongs, woodwinds (such as the flute), and the *kutyapi* (a two-stringed lute). Western cultures, especially Spanish and U.S., have also greatly influenced Filipino music.

Folk dances vary according to region. The *Tinikling* is the national dance. While dancing between bamboo poles, performers mimic the quick actions of *tikling* birds (herons). Dances share the stories of the Spanish conquest, festivals, harvest, and courtship. Folk dancing is often seen during town festivals, in which folk groups may be hired to perform in parades. Filipino crafts include wood carvings, marble sculpture, pottery, and weaving. Folklore, myths, and legends are still passed down orally in the more remote regions. While they vary by religion and region, they generally focus on nature, Filipino history, and daily life.

Holidays

Filipinos celebrate several national holidays and dozens of local *fiestas*, which are events for recreation and visiting family. Public holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), Easter Sunday, Day of Valor (also known as Bataan Day, 9 April), Labor Day (1 May), Independence Day (12 June), National Heroes Day (last Monday in August), All Saints' Day (1 November), Bonifacio Day (30 November), Christmas (25 December), and Rizal Day (30 December).

New Year's

New Year's celebrations are an extension of Christmas festivities, and Christmas decorations generally stay up until after the first week of January. Windows, doors, and drawers are opened to let out the bad spirits and to welcome the good. For luck, many people hang 13 ripe, round fruits around their doorway, wear clothes with polka-dot prints (the roundness symbolizes eternity and prosperity), and carry money in their pockets. Families get together on New Year's Eve and enjoy food as they wait for the clock to strike 12. Men spend their time at the parties chatting with friends and drinking, women prepare food and gifts, and children play. Everyone watches a fireworks display at midnight. Fireworks displays, traditionally thought to banish the bad spirits of the previous year, are held in parks and town plazas. New Year's Eve parties, often featuring musical performances, are held in major cities in the country.

Lent

Lent (a period of fasting for Catholics) extends from Ash Wednesday (46 days before Easter Sunday) to Easter Sunday. Most people are given Maundy Thursday (the Thursday

preceding Easter Sunday) through Easter Sunday off from work. During Lent, devout Catholics refrain from eating meat and doing physically strenuous activities. Many religious traditions are followed during Lent such as *Visita Iglesia* (visiting seven churches while performing Catholic rituals) and *Pabasa* (chanting biblical passages). A few towns reenact scenes from the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. On Easter Sunday, people attend Mass and afterward enjoy a special meal served for lunch or dinner. People might also take advantage of this time to travel or relax at home.

Christmas

Christmas is the most celebrated holiday. The Christmas season extends through 6 January (Three Kings Day) and is a time of family parties and great merriment. Most Filipinos working overseas come home during this season, and people commonly visit their hometowns to attend family or school reunions. People begin decorating for Christmas and listening to Christmas music as early as September. Families in both urban and rural settings buy and decorate artificial Christmas trees. Although Christmas shopping begins early in urban areas, it is limited in rural areas, as people tend to limit their gift giving, preferring instead to simply spend time with family and neighbors. Christmas parties are organized at work and school, and friends usually have lunch or dinner parties in the weeks before Christmas.

Catholics attend a series of Christmas Masses called *Simbang Gabi*, held from 16 December to Christmas Eve. Mass is held at dawn each morning. Many Catholics believe that if one faithfully attends *Simbang Gabi*, a wish will be granted. From the beginning of *Simbang Gabi* until Christmas Eve, children in many areas go door to door singing carols and receiving money and sweets. On Christmas Eve, known as *Noche Buena* (which means “good night” in Spanish), urban families gather to exchange gifts and enjoy a large feast featuring pork, beef stew, casseroles, and traditional desserts such as *leche flan* (caramel custard) and coconut salad. Rural Filipinos also enjoy a large meal, but exchanging gifts is less common.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

The Philippines is a presidential republic composed of 81 provinces. Each province is divided into *barangays* (“districts,” similar to counties), which are made of several *barrios*, or *sitios* (small villages or suburbs). The national government is led by a president, who serves as head of state and head of government. A vice president is elected on a separate ballot. The legislature, the bicameral Congress (*Kongreso*), consists of a 304-seat House of Representatives (*Kapulungan Ng Mga Kinatawan*) and a 24-seat Senate (*Senado*).

The president and vice president are directly elected to six-year terms, senators to six-year terms, and representatives to three-year terms. Most government offices are either in the capital city of Manila or in Quezon City, the former capital, named for the country’s first president, Manuel Quezon. The

Philippines is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Political Landscape

Many political parties function in the Philippines, and alliances shift often. Major parties include the rightist Nacionalista Party, which is the oldest political party in the country, the centrist Liberal Party, and the leftist PDP-Laban. The political landscape is controlled by several wealthy families. Most elections are won by individuals with strong family ties in politics, widespread fame, and large private funds. Corruption is widespread throughout all levels of government.

Government and the People

Filipinos expect their government to provide efficient social services, including affordable housing, accessible health care, and cash grants. Some government-assistance programs, such as conditional cash grants, prioritize Indigenous groups and the impoverished. Overall, many Filipinos express disappointment in their government because of corruption and lack of transparency.

Although the constitution guarantees freedoms of expression, speech, and the press, these rights are often limited in practice. Civic activism through demonstrations and organized rallies is common but requires a permit. Elections in the Philippines have been marred by irregularities such as vote buying and violence in recent years. The voting age is 15 for *Sangguniang Kabataan* (youth council) elections and 18 for national elections.

Economy

After years of economic reforms and political stability, the Philippines has experienced strong and rapid economic growth. The economy is dominated by services (making up about 60 percent of the gross domestic product, or GDP) and relies on remittances, or money sent home from Filipinos working abroad. The Philippines is also a major center for outsourcing businesses that serve mainly U.S. companies. Agriculture employs 25 percent of the labor force. Cycles of drought and flooding can seriously hamper production. Important crops include rice, corn, coconut, sugarcane, hemp, and tobacco. In addition to agricultural products, the country exports electronics, clothing, minerals, and chemicals. Income distribution is fairly unequal; almost a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. The economy faces many additional challenges, including corruption, underemployment, the emigration of highly skilled and educated Filipinos, and underdeveloped infrastructure. The currency is the Philippine *peso* (PHP).

Transportation and Communications

Some middle-class Filipinos own cars, but others rely on public transportation. Metro Manila has numerous modes of public transportation, including buses, taxis, *jeepneys*, and a metro. A *jeepney* is an elaborately decorated minibus built on the frame of an old U.S. military jeep. They travel on relatively fixed routes and stop when waved at from the sidewalk. They carry 10 to 20 passengers for a low fare; passengers tap or pound on the roof when they want to stop. Traffic is heavy, and driving habits are aggressive. Rural

transportation is less developed, often employing animals, bicycles, motorcycles, or *motorelas* (a motorcycle version of the *jeepney*). In addition to a domestic airline, ferries and *banca* (local outrigger) boats provide interisland transportation.

Although the communications system is generally good, service is not extensive in rural regions and between islands. Most homes have landline phones if service is available in the area. Cellular phones are used throughout the Philippines, although there are some rural areas that lack mobile phone coverage. The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and expression. Though journalists and newspapers cover an array of topics with relative freedom, violence against journalists is common. Most print media outlets are privately owned and reflect the views of their owners. Internet access is not restricted, but a cybercrime prevention law, which is intended to defend users against identity theft, child pornography, and spam, limits online freedom of expression through its libel provisions. Libel, a false statement published for defamation, is a criminal offense in the Philippines and is punishable by long prison sentences. This law is often used to target critics of prominent figures. Television and radio stations are numerous. Social media is popular and available to all.

Education

Structure

Education is highly valued in the Philippines and is compulsory for 13 years, but attendance is not enforced. Primary school begins at age 6 and lasts until age 11, but young children can attend kindergarten at age 5. The school year runs from June to March. Students start secondary school at age 12 or 13 and graduate at age 17 or 18. Students attend four years of junior high school and two years of senior high school. While the majority of children enroll in primary school, secondary school enrollment is much lower.

Public education is free. A variety of private schools exist for those who can afford the tuition. Most students go to public schools, but some middle- and upper-class families enroll their children in private institutions, which generally offer better quality education. The majority of private schools in the country are run by religious organizations.

Access

The education system faces a variety of challenges. In recent years, the government has struggled to fund education for the growing population. Much in the education system reflects the country's economic disparity. Ongoing problems include a lack of teachers, classrooms, and facilities, especially in rural areas, where some students attend classes in three daily shifts to compensate for a lack of facilities and materials. Some families cannot afford the extra costs, including school uniforms, transportation, and food allowance, which contributes to the number of elementary school and secondary school drop outs. Educational reform continues, as do calls for increased public-school funding.

School Life

School uniforms are worn by almost all students in both public and private schools. Classes are taught in English and Filipino. Proficiency tests are given at the end of third and sixth grades and the final year of high school to assess the

students' skills in English, Filipino, mathematics, science, and social studies. Secondary private schools may include civic volunteering programs, including military training, teaching in public schools, or cleaning the *barangays* (districts).

Higher Education

A senior high school student who wishes to enter a certain college or university must take the admissions test administered by the school. Some universities require the applicant to pass an interview as part of the admissions procedures. Prominent universities located in Metro Manila include University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, and University of Santo Tomas. Students are required to participate in the National Service Training Program or the Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC) to increase their civic engagement and defense preparedness. State colleges and universities mandate uniforms, as do some private universities. Vocational training at private institutions is an option for students who do not enter university. Commonly studied vocations include nursing, culinary arts, and hospitality and restaurant management.

Health

The Philippines has a universal health insurance program, which is paid for mostly through taxes and other government funds. Some private companies may register their employees in this program, while enrollment for government employees is mandated. Despite this, social, economic, and geographical barriers limit access to health services. Overall, medical service in Manila is good. Urban areas have more hospitals than rural areas, where people must often travel to a city to receive quality health care provided by a doctor. Rural areas usually have a health unit, but it may lack supplies. Underserved areas may also receive health care from a privately subsidized mobile health delivery system. The government sponsors free vaccinations for children. Poverty, poor sanitation, and superstition (particularly the use of folk remedies in place of medical care) still contribute to a high infant mortality rate. Pollution and conditions in slums, especially in Manila, are serious health hazards.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of the Philippines, 1600 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone (202) 467-9300; web site <https://philippineembassy-dc.org/>.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Manila
Population	110,818,325 (rank=13)
Area (sq. mi.)	115,831 (rank=72)
Area (sq. km.)	300,000
Human Development Index	106 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	98 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$8,000
Adult Literacy	96% (male); 97% (female)
Infant Mortality	21 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	67 (male); 75 (female)
Currency	Philippine Peso

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