



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

The 7,107 islands of the Philippines cover a combined area of 115,830 square miles (300,000 square kilometers), about the size of the country 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 earthquake activity throughout the country. More than one-fourth of the country's fertile soil is under cultivation. About 25 percent of the land is covered with forests (down from 40 percent a decade ago).

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

Negritos and Indons were already living on other islands when Malay peoples migrated from Borneo to Panay Island in the 13th century. Malay fiefdoms spread throughout the islands, including Luzon, and were often at war with one another. Muslim missionaries gained a presence in the 14th and 15th centuries among Malays who had spread south to the island of Mindanao.

Magellan, the islands' first Western contact, encountered in 1521 the warring fiefdoms of the north and the Islamic

society of the south. He claimed the entire area for Spain. China, Japan, and other countries tried to conquer the Philippines, but Spain maintained control for nearly four hundred years. José Rizal, writer and patriot, helped inspire a revolt against Spain in 1896. Spain lost a war to the United States and turned the Philippines (not a part of the original conflict) over to U.S. control in 1899. Preferring self-rule, the Filipinos, led by Emilio Aguinaldo (the first president of the First Philippine Republic), tried to repulse U.S. troops. Internal strife continued until 1901, when U.S. control formally began. Japan invaded the Philippines in 1941 and remained until U.S. forces returned near the end of World War II.

On 4 July 1946, the Philippines became an independent republic, but the United States maintained a military presence until 1992. Through the 1960s, unrest over inequality between landowners and tenant farmers threatened government stability and inspired revolutionary movements that remained active well into the 1990s. In 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and ruled by decree, effectively controlling all opposition until 1986. Corruption increased and the standard of living for the poor remained low.

The peaceful People's Power Revolution drove Marcos from power in 1986. His elected rival, Corazon Aquino, took office and implemented reforms of the government and the economy. She did not run for reelection in 1992, but elections were peaceful and democratic. Aquino's successor, Fidel V. Ramos, inherited a weak and inefficient system during a time when the country was plagued by natural disasters. However, his success at meeting these challenges allowed candidates loyal to him to win majorities in both houses of Congress in

1995. Ramos negotiated a 1996 peace agreement with the Muslim separatist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), ending 26 years of conflict; however, fighting with other splinter separatist groups continues.

Elections in 1998 brought Joseph Estrada (a former action star) to the presidency, but charges of corruption forced him to relinquish his position to the vice president, Gloria Arroyo, in January 2001. Arroyo was reelected in May 2004 and withstood the opposition's attempt to impeach her on charges of corruption and electoral fraud in 2005. Other challenges that faced her administration included a lackluster economy, hostage crises, natural disasters, and separatist and religious violence. Arroyo was succeeded in mid-2010 by Benigno Aquino, son of former president Corazon Aquino (who died just prior to the election).

In late 2011, a typhoon struck the southern Philippines. Flooding and mudslides resulted in the deaths of over 1,200 people, and waterborne illnesses threatened the health of survivors. Natural disasters continued in early 2012 when a 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck near Cebu City, resulting in more than 20 deaths.

## THE PEOPLE

### Population

The Philippines' population of 101.8 million is growing by 1.9 percent annually. About 66 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Filipinos are predominantly of Malay and Spanish descent. Further divisions formed along linguistic, geographic, and religious lines. The largest group is the Tagalog (28 percent), followed by the Cebuano (13 percent), Ilocano (9 percent), and Bisaya (8 percent). A few tribes of indigenous descendants of pre-Malay peoples still live in the Philippines. The Aetas live around Mount Pinatubo, while Negritos inhabit the uplands of islands around the Sulu Sea. The Igorot and Ifugao of the Cordillera Mountains, in northern Luzon, are known for their stunning two-thousand-year-old rice terraces in Banaue.

### 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 70 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 81

percent of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, 2 percent belongs to the Philippine Independent (or Aglipayan) Church, and 10 percent belongs to various other Christian churches. Five percent is Muslim. Muslim Moros live mainly on southern islands, particularly Mindanao. Violent clashes between Christians and Muslims can occur. In remote areas, people are still heavily influenced by traditional beliefs, worshipping a variety of gods. A number of Buddhists also live in the Philippines.

### General Attitudes

The influence of Chinese, Malayan, Spanish, and U.S. cultures is evident in Filipino society. Individualism is considered less important than the family. Bringing shame to individuals reflects on their family and is avoided at all costs. Interdependence is more important than independence. Although generally casual and fun loving, Filipinos are sensitive people and consider maintaining smooth social relationships to be more important than expressing personal views or delivering bad or unwanted news. To avoid hurting or displeasing others, Filipinos may use a third party to deliver bad news or might say "maybe" when they mean "no." "Yes" can mean "maybe." Confrontation is usually avoided. Frankness can signify a lack of culture. In general, Filipinos have a relaxed view of time (sometimes referred to as "Filipino time") and may not always begin meetings or appointments promptly.

Accepting a favor obliges a Filipino to repay with a greater favor, although never with money. Filipinos often show admiration by imitation. 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. Fatalism is common—success may be attributed to fate rather than ability or effort. The Latin concept of *machismo* (proving one's manliness or superiority) is evident in the Philippines; the ideal man is a macho man. Men often make comments about women passing by on the street, and although such comments are often ignored, they can be distracting to some women.

### Personal Appearance

Proper appearance for an event is important; being over- or underdressed can be a cause for embarrassment. To avoid this, appropriate dress is often discussed prior to an event. 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; others may be required to wear corporate dress. Some men, mostly professionals, wear the traditional *barong*, a white or pastel-colored embroidered shirt that hangs over the pants. Others wear denim jeans, business casual attire, or Western-style suits. Women (including Muslim 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. Teachers have a different uniform for each day of the workweek. Flip-flops

are common footwear in casual situations. Filipino formal clothing includes an elaborately embroidered *barong* for men. Women wear a *terno*, a full-length dress with a scoop neckline and flat, oversized “butterfly” sleeves. Ethnic minorities in highland villages and on outlying islands sometimes wear traditional clothing. A fair complexion is considered the sign of someone who does not have to labor in the fields and is therefore considered more beautiful or desirable than a darker complexion.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

Initial greetings are friendly and informal. Handshakes are typical, 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 *Diyan lang* (There, only). *Kumusta ka na?* (How are you doing?) is more formal. *Anong balita?* (What's new?) and *Ayos ba tayo 'dyan?* (Is everything all right?) are 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 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 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. Raising the eyebrows can mean “hello” or “yes.” To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm facing down. A quick head nod can mean “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 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. 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. They are always 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 three times. 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 are seated nearest the head of the home and are always served first. No one eats until after the guest has had a bite or two. Likewise, no one leaves the table until everyone has finished eating. Guests show their appreciation by eating heartily. Refusing any offers is impolite, except for health reasons. Tipping is not practiced in restaurants, except at finer dining establishments, which include the tip in a service charge.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family

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 four children; urban families are

smaller. Family ties remain strong, even after children are grown and married. Some children continue to live with their parents, even after marriage. Fathers are responsible for major family decisions. Both parents discipline their children, and children take advice from their mothers very seriously. Adult children are expected to support their parents, and some married children may live with elderly or infirm parents.

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.

When one or both parents work overseas, children are left in the care of a grandparent or other mature family member. The primary responsibility of most children is to complete their education, but some families expect their children to work to help support the family. 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.

Filipino women play significant roles in the family. Most 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. In 2004, the Filipino legislature passed the Anti-Violence Against Women Act, which criminalized domestic violence against women and children. Female desk officers are also assigned at every police station to assure female victims that reports of crime or abuse will not be ignored.

## Housing

Most Filipinos consider housing an investment, and the ability to afford a house is a sign of success. The government offers subsidized housing for the poor, and there is a growing trend in rent-to-own townhouses (two-storey buildings found in cities) and condominiums for the emerging middle class. 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. Apartments typically have one or two bedrooms. Families with children rent houses that have two to four bedrooms.

The designs of most houses in urban areas have a mix of traditional and Western influence—for example, using materials like 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 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.

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," which are often used for cooking dishes that have strong odors or that produce a lot of smoke. 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.

The *sala* (living room) is a home's focal point, where the family spends most of its time. Other rooms are the *cucina* (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. Most urban families have a television, radio, stove, telephone, and refrigerator. These appliances are often considered status symbols, an indication that the family has achieved prosperity. Common fixtures in rural homes include a radio, charcoal stove, and paraffin lamp.

Due to urban migration, 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 river banks. Shantytowns are cramped and lack basic facilities like plumbing and waste removal. 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

Urban dating begins in the early teens. Young people socialize through school activities like dances and acquaintance parties (a party of peers hosted by a youth organization to acquaint youth with each other). They also meet friends through social networking sites and chat rooms. 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 (through acquaintances or, increasingly, online matchmaking sites) have increased in popularity. Dancing, 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. In some rural areas, the tradition of *harana* is still practiced. *Harana* is a courting ritual wherein a boy stands outside the house of a girl who he

intends to court and sings folk love songs. When the girl hears him, she expresses her interest by looking out from her window. With her parents' permission, the boy may be invited in to chat and eat light snacks.

*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. Although the 1997 Family Code mandates the minimum marrying age as 18, some Filipino women marry younger. As education levels among women have increased, the average marrying age has also increased. Most Filipinos marry before they are 30 years old.

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 often wear a *barong* (a lightweight, embroidered shirt, similar to a dress shirt) made of pineapple or banana fiber. 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 a waltz 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.

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. It is also common for Filipino women to marry foreigners; many men come from the United States, Australia, and, increasingly, the Middle East and Korea.

Divorce does not exist in the Philippines, except for limited cases involving Muslims. Legally, marriages must be ended with an 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.

### Life Cycle

Family members visit a relative within a few days after she

gives birth. 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 service), 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. Other birthdays are celebrated within the immediate family.

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. Well-off parents throw a party when their daughters turn 18 to mark her transition to adulthood. The party includes 18 waltzes, which the birthday girl dances with different partners, beginning with the father, followed by brothers and cousins, and ending with male friends.

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.

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 Souls' Day (2 November) and on anniversaries of the death, families visit the cemetery and leave the person's favorite dish or drink as an offering at the grave site.

### Diet

Rice, the main staple food, is prepared in a variety of ways and is often included in desserts. 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. Street vendors sell *balot*, a fertilized duck egg with an embryo. 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

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.

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 or enjoying TV shows and movies. Men enjoy playing billiards with friends.

Relatives and friends enjoy celebrating occasions like 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.

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. 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, Easter Sunday, Day of Valor (also known as Bataan Day, 9 April), Labor Day (1 May), National Heroes Day (6 May), Independence Day (12 June), All Saints' Day (1 Nov.), Bonifacio Day (30 Nov.), Christmas, and Rizal Day (30 Dec.).

Christmas is the most celebrated holiday. The Christmas season extends through 6 January (Three Kings Day) and is a time of family reunions 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*. From 16 December to Christmas Eve, a 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, urban families gather to exchange gifts and enjoy a large feast featuring pork, beef stew, casseroles, and traditional desserts like *leche flan* (caramel custard) and coconut salad. Rural Filipinos also enjoy a large meal, but exchanging gifts is less common. On Christmas, people light fireworks to celebrate. Windows, doors, and drawers are opened to let out the bad spirits and welcome the good. For luck, people hang 13 ripe, round fruits around their doorway, wear clothes with circular (which symbolizes eternity) prints, and carry money in their pockets.

New Year's celebrations are an extension of Christmas festivities, and Christmas decorations generally stay up until after the first week of January. 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 (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.

## SOCIETY

### Government

The Philippines is a democratic republic comprised of 81 provinces. Each province is divided into *barangays* ("districts," similar to counties), which are made of several *barrios* (small villages or suburbs). The national government is led by a president (currently Benigno Aquino), who serves as chief of state and head of government. A vice president is elected on a separate ballot. Congress consists of a 240-seat House of Representatives and a 24-seat Senate. The president and vice president are elected to six-year terms, senators to six-year terms, and representatives to three-year terms. Most government offices are in Quezon City, the former capital, named for the country's first president, Manuel Quezon. The voting age is 15 for local elections and 18 for national elections.

### Economy

The Philippines' economy is based on agriculture, which employs 35 percent of the labor force and accounts for about 15 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Cycles of drought and flooding can seriously hamper production. Important crops include rice, corn, coconut, sugarcane, abaca, and tobacco. In addition to agricultural products, the country exports electronics, clothing, minerals, chemicals, and furniture. Income distribution is fairly unequal; one-third of the population lives below the poverty line. Economic growth has been hindered by government policies and the emigration of highly skilled and educated Filipinos. In 2008, world demand for exports fell as a result of the global economic crisis. Remittances from overseas workers provide vital support but have also slowed as a result of the crisis. The currency is the Philippine *peso* (PHP).

### Transportation and Communications

Many Filipinos in the middle class own cars, but others rely on public transportation. Metro Manila has numerous modes of public transportation, including buses, taxis, and *jeepneys*. 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 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 generally is good, service is not extensive in rural regions and between islands. Middle-class

homes have phones if service is available in the area. Mobile phones are increasingly popular.

### Education

Education is highly valued in the Philippines and is compulsory for 10 years, but a lack of enforcement and other factors affect attendance rates. 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.

Young children can attend kindergarten at age five and preschool before that. Primary school begins at age six or seven and lasts six years. Some schools offer a seventh year of primary school. The school year runs from June to March. While about 90 percent of children enroll in primary school, only about 60 percent enroll in secondary school, which begins at age 12 or 13 and lasts four years. Secondary school includes one year of civic volunteering, including military training, teaching in public schools, or cleaning the *barangays* (districts). Plans are underway to implement a program, called K+12, that will modify the current educational system by adding two more years of secondary school.

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 sixth grade and the second year of high school to assess the students' skills in English, Filipino, mathematics, science and social studies.

Senior high school students who wish to enroll in university must take the admission exams administered by the school to which they are applying. Universities may require the applicant to interview as part of the admissions procedures. Some colleges and universities require their students to wear uniforms. 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.

The education system faces a variety of challenges. Students often have difficulty keeping up with the curriculum in a short timeframe (10 years rather than 12). In recent years, the government has struggled to fund education for the growing population. Ongoing problems include a lack of teachers, classrooms, and facilities, especially in rural areas. Students sometimes 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. Recent educational reform has attempted to address these challenges; however, it is expected to take several years for all changes to take effect.

### Health

Overall, medical service in Manila is good. Rural areas usually have a health unit, but it may lack supplies. A universal health insurance program is paid for mostly through

taxes and other government funds. The government also 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**

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### **Contact Information**

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### **POPULATION & AREA**

Population	101,833,938 (rank=12)
Area, sq. mi.	115,830 (rank=73)
Area, sq. km.	300,000

### **DEVELOPMENT DATA**

Human Dev. Index* rank	112 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	75 of 155 countries
Adult literacy rate	93% (male); 93% (female)
Infant mortality rate	19 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	69 (male); 75 (female)

\*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).