

Destination Philippines: Your next stop

The South Pacific's most **striking** destination is a tourism hotspot.

New Secretary of Tourism Wanda Corazon Tulfo-Teo is determined to build on the strong work of her predecessor and take Philippines' tourism to greater heights. With so much to visit, see and do on the nation's 7,641 islands, there is huge scope for exponential growth in the sector. Teo is therefore focused on building and improving on infrastructure to make travel easier, and on training local communities on how best to serve the industry of the future. Last year, some 154,600 UK tourists left the grey skies of Britain to visit this tropical paradise.

"We have everything you could wish for in a holiday destination: beaches, dive sites, historical sites, festivals and shopping," Teo says. "Tourists always try to come back because we have so much to offer and there is always more to see."

There really is something for everyone. Visitors can relax on the beaches of the silkiest white sand, gaze at aquamarine waters, indulge in the occasional mango shake and have a massage, or dive with incredible marine life, including whale sharks and chaotic sardine runs.

They can chase breathtakingly beautiful waterfalls, drive ATVs around vegetative domes, explore old churches and ruins, hike up volcanoes teeming with greenery and

version of Tuk Tuks — while bright flowers and greenery are everywhere in this UNESCO Heritage Site.

Located in south-eastern Luzon is Albay province, where tourists can take in the perfectly formed cone of the Mayon Volcano. Surrounded by bright green fields and palms, the brave can scramble up to the crater while the less adventurous snap away at the view. Nearby are the Cagsawa Ruins, which house a lovely church bell and all that remains of an eruption in 1814.

Iloilo, with its famed Dinagyang Festival, showcases the colourful history, rich heritage, passionate devotion and fun-loving spirit of the Ilonggo people. The place offers exquisite heritage sites and historical buildings, delicious signature dishes, like La Paz Batchoy or Pancit Molo, and fresh seafood. Picturesque beaches stretch from the islands of Gigantes and Concepcion down to the marine sanctuaries in San Joaquin.

Just seven kilometres long and less than a kilometre wide at its narrowest point, Boracay is a treasure island of Vegas-style fun. From the stunning White Beach to 25 different dive sites, tourists can indulge in sports or get a massage. They can experience parasailing, water-skiing, cliff diving or explore on a paraw, then dance the night away,

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wildlife, or embark on a shopping spree followed by dinner and cocktails at a sophisticated restaurant. Filipinos are invariably happy and hospitable.

In the bustling gateway city of Manila, visitors can enjoy a range of nightlife, munch on lechon and halo halo or try a number of cuisines. They can shop in cosmopolitan malls, book MICE events at one of the many luxury hotels, try their luck in the casinos, and so much more.

Situated in the northern part of Luzon is Ilocos Sur, a delightfully preserved slice of colonial Spain. Vigan, with its cobblestone streets and baroque architecture, combines its European roots with splashes of tropical colour and flair. Vintage horse-drawn carriages amble down the street alongside the ever-present tricycles — the Filipino side-car

wake up and do it all over again in the morning, or head to Puka Beach for tranquillity and relaxation.

Known as the fruit basket of the Philippines, Davao is skirted by the majestic Mount Apo, a large stratovolcano and one of the most popular climbing destinations in the Philippines. On the coast is a series of white-sand beaches and dive sites crowned by the gorgeous Pearl Farm Beach Resort. Adventurous activities in both the highlands and lowlands await the eager traveller.

Not far away is the rising jewel of the Philippines, Siargao. Home to the famous Siargao International Surfing Cup, the teardrop-shaped island has perfect barrels at Cloud 9 that attract surfers from around the world. The island is surrounded by perfect white beaches, diving spots,



Boracay's famous stunning White Beach is perfect for relaxing and is now the most popular tourism destination in the Philippines.

mysterious caves, enchanting lagoons, sand bars, rice fields, exotic wildlife, a mangrove forest reserve and other attractions.

Visitors can hop between Naked Island, Daku Island and Guyam Island for a perfect tropical delight in azure seas. Sugba Lagoon offers breathtaking views and the chance to paddle-board, snorkel or ride a boat. Bucas Grande, home of the unique Sohoton Caves, is just a day-trip away.

For sweet delights, organic food and some intensely beautiful eco-tourism, holidaymakers can also head to Negros Occidental. Bacolod City is filled with beautiful old houses such as The Ruins — the bones of an old mansion set in lush gardens, that was built for love after a tragedy. Driving further south, you eventually come to the Jewel of the Sugar Island, Sipalay.

Visitors can travel between the closest iconic islands via long swinging bridges, or venture to the others on a spider-sided boat under the watchful gazes of giggling local children. They can hop over to the hidden eco-paradise Danjungan Island, home to five lagoons, diverse wildlife, winding trails, a bat cave, and healthy coral reefs, sea grass and mangroves. This place really should not be missed.

Cebu offers wonderful restaurants, vibrant nightlife areas and beautiful historical sites. Beyond the city, tourists can hike to Osmena Peak, enjoy canyoning in the iridescent milky-turquoise



Blending breath-taking scenery with great hospitality and culture, the Philippines is a true paradise.

waters of Kawasan Falls, and explore the many beaches and small islands dotted around Cebu. Explorers can climb the Aguinid Falls and find solitude in a natural spa, surrounded by beautiful palm fronds, birds, butterflies and small frogs. They can splash in the Tumalog and Aso Falls, or dive with the whirling sardine run at Moalboal or thresher sharks in the only place in the world shallow enough to see them — Malapascua Island. They can see whale sharks at Oslob and jump on a boat across to Sumilon Island to enjoy a range of activities and watch spectacular white sandbar.

Neighbouring Bohol is the place to roam the beaches of Panglao Island or sample a wide

range of activities. Visitors can tour the Chocolate Hills in an ATV, visit the tiny frog-eyed tarsiers in their quiet sanctuary, jump on a zipline and see spectacular views. They can kayak through palm-fringed rivers at night where the trees twinkle with fireflies, island hop to see dolphins at dawn then snorkel or scuba-dive at Balicasag Island, crack a coconut on the strip of white sand of Virgin Island, lie in a hammock of their choice at the Bohol Beach Club and gorge on delicious seafood.

Finally, there is Palawan, a truly special place defined by its seascape

with towering green-covered limestone-cast cliffs that meet crystal-clear aquamarine waters.

The sublime Bacquit Archipelago and Busuanga Island are a checklist of beautiful sites and memories to be treasured. There is relaxation, coupled with exploring and adventure around hidden coves, secret beaches and mountain lakes. Visitors can enjoy Puerto Princesa Subterranean River, the longest of its kind in the world, and the National Park, then head back into the sunshine and sea to swim with remarkable marine life.