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Tour Notes

Philippines – Emerald Terraces of the Cordillera

Tour Duration – 15 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●●○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●●●○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Drink in the vivid colours of the stunning rice terraces of Banaue
- ✓ Savour the cool temperatures of the Alpine village of Sagada with its ancient burial caves and hanging coffins
- ✓ Marvel at the atmospheric and beautifully preserved colonial city of Vigan
- ✓ Sit back and relax while island hopping through the crystal-clear waters around Palawan





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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of Comfortable hotels and lodges
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size: Maximum 12
Start Point: Manila
End Point: Manila
Transport: Minibuses, buses, domestic flights, jeepney
Country Visited: Philippines



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Philippines – Emerald Terraces of the Cordillera

Comprising more than 7,000 islands scattered gracefully along the westernmost rim of the Pacific Ocean, the Philippines is a country known for its boundless hospitality and the friendly smiles of its people. A wealth of possibilities of discovery and adventure await visitors to these islands with their blend of picture postcard beaches, historic sites, natural attractions and the most important asset of all, the Filipino people. Among the many attractions, we will embrace the big city excitement of Manila; the breath-taking rice terraces of Banaue; and the atmospheric cobbled streets of Vigan. Added to this, we will sample life on the island of Palawan, with the opportunity to marvel at the stunning Underground River, and enjoy the crystal-clear waters and beaches of the beautiful neighbouring islands.

Tour Itinerary Notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully handpicked and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies, it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Manila

Arrive in Manila and transfer from the airport to your hotel. Depending on the time of your arrival, you will meet your tour leader at the hotel and have dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at The Bayleaf Intramuros Hotel or similar. (D)

Manila

Manila is the gateway to the islands of the Philippines and is the historical centre of government and history. Although sprawling and frenetic, the city offers a delightful mix of the old and the new, from centuries-old Spanish churches to gleaming high-rise structures, quaint street stalls to stylish shopping malls. With the old Spanish heart of Intramuros at its centre and its many varied sights, around every corner of Manila lies a discovery.

Day 2: Manila

After breakfast, take a tour around within Intramuros (the walled city of Old Manila) and discover more about the country's history through a guided. Lunch will be in a local restaurant from where we will begin a tour of Intramuros aboard a *kalesa*, a horse-drawn carriage. We will ride through the streets built by the Spanish conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, between the city walls, which once protected the most important homes, buildings, churches, and hospitals from attacks by the Chinese, Dutch, and the British. The most notable colonial structure is the baroque church of San Agustin, the oldest in the Philippines, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993. We will also drop by Rizal Park where Dr. José Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines, was executed. Overnight at The Bayleaf Intramuros Hotel or similar. (BL)



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Day 3: Manila - Gawad Kalinga Enchanted Farm - Pampanga - Abe's Farm

Today, we take a 1.5-hour drive north of Manila, to Gawad Kalinga (GK) Enchanted Farm. This is a prototype of a sustainable community dedicated to ending poverty by empowering people to develop useful skills. We spend time discovering how the lives of the residents here have benefited from the enterprise and have the opportunity to taste some of the organic farming produce when we take lunch. Continue one hour via the North Luzon Expressway to Bacolor, Pampanga, which is among hundreds of towns and villages devastated by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in June 1991. Tour the village and visit the San Guillermo Church, which is now half-buried in lahar (a debris flow composed of a slurry of pyroclastic material, rocky debris and water), and see the remains of houses, which were also covered. Mount Pinatubo's wrath continues to be a constant threat to the lives of the villagers every year as the monsoon rains carry more lahar down from the Pinatubo mountain range adding further layers. Our day ends with the chance of an afternoon dip in a warm pool in a garden setting. Overnight at Abe's Farm. (BLD)

Gawad Kalinga (GK)

Gawad Kalinga (GK), which means to "give care" in Filipino, is officially known as the Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation, a Philippine-based poverty alleviation and nation-building movement. The GK Enchanted Farm is Gawad Kalinga's platform to raise social entrepreneurs, help local farmers and create wealth in the countryside. The foundation provides homes, and harnesses the country's abundant resources (land included) with the aim of ending poverty for every Filipino.

Day 4: Pampanga- Banaue

We leave the farm behind and drive to Banaue, which will take 7-8 hours through the countryside, backroads, and rice fields of Nueva Ecija and Nueva Vizcaya. We make a short stop in San José City for lunch (payable locally) before continuing to Banaue. Along the way, we also visit Dalton Pass, a shrine to the Battle of Balete, before passing by Bagabag where picturesque mountains and rivers unfold. Arrive in Banaue late in the afternoon. Overnight at Banaue Hotel or similar. (B)

Banaue's rice terraces

The rice terraces appear to be "Stairways to Heaven" but these paddies were a way out of hunger for the Ifugao people who fashioned them in the mountainside by hand, some say 2,000 years ago. They appear on the UNESCO World Heritage list and are among the most spectacular sights in the Philippines.

Day 5: Banaue – Excursion to Batad

Board a local jeepney, which will bring you to Sadel, the jump-off point to start your hike to the terraces of Batad. Forming an amphitheatre, these rice terraces are truly stunning. Afterwards, visit an Ifugao village where most people still live a traditional lifestyle. Return to Banaue and overnight at Banaue Hotel or similar. Near the hotel is another village that continues to observe a traditional burial practice of keeping the bones of their dead in their homes. The bones of their ancestors are preserved and wrapped in indigenous weaving. (B)

Please note: To reach the rice terraces entails hiking up and down paths which are narrow and steep in places, without walls or rails. Those preferring not to hike may explore the very scenic area around Batad by jeepney and tricycle. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Day 6: Banaue – Excursion to Hapao

Today, we take a local jeepney to the Hapao rice terraces, which offer a breath-taking view over stonewalled rice terraces, bisected by the sparkling water of the Hapao River. We will walk across the terraces to see them close up, and visit one of the villages to admire the traditional houses and interact with the locals. We will stop at some of the viewpoints and call into a local market on the way back to our accommodation in Banaue. Overnight at Banaue Hotel or similar. (B)



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Please note: Today's walk across the rice terraces and along the stone walls follows paths that are narrow in places and offer no support. If you'd prefer not to walk it's also possible to view the terraces from the road. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Day 7: Banaue - Sagada (approx. 3 hours driving time)

After breakfast, we will visit the Bontoc Museum where exhibits from all around the Cordillera region are curated and an outdoor museum, which is a reconstructed Bontoc village showing original structures in the grounds that allow guests to experience their old way of life before modern times. Inside the museum, there are a number of black and white photographs, which offer a fascinating glimpse into the differences and similarities among the people of the Cordilleras also collectively known as Igorot (people of the mountains). We will continue our drive to the Alpine village of Sagada and in the afternoon we will visit the ancient burial caves and also view the unusual hanging coffins from Echo Valley. Overnight at Masferré Country Inn. (B)

Day 8: Sagada - Vigan (approx. 5 hours driving time)

After breakfast, we begin our drive to Vigan City in Ilocos Sur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Vigan, earlier known as "Ciudad Fernandina" from 1758 to the late 19th century, is the oldest surviving Spanish colonial city in the country with some of its finest architecture. After a typical Ilocano lunch at Café Leona located on the ground floor of a traditional Vigan house, we board a *kalesa* (horse-drawn carriage) for a tour of Vigan with its well-preserved old brick houses (*bahay na tisa*). We visit the Burgos Museum and the historic Syquia Mansion. In the evening, join the townsfolk in the main plaza for a light and sound performance. Overnight at Hotel Felicidad or similar. (BL)

Vigan

Vigan auspiciously escaped the bombs of World War II, unlike its sister cities, Manila and Cebu. This UNESCO World Heritage city is known for its fine colonial architecture, cobbled narrow streets and old-world atmosphere, a place where "time stood still". The old brick houses have spacious interiors, which showcase handcrafted-period furniture and accessories. The Burgos Museum was the official residence of one of the original martyrs of Bagumbayan, Father José Burgos, whose martyrdom in 1872 planted the seeds of the revolution against Spain. The Syquia Mansion was a former residence of Elpidio Quirino, a former congressman of the Ilocos province who later on became president of the country after World War 2. The Syquia Mansion was a wedding gift to Alicia Syquia, firstborn of the Chinese Tomas Syquia of Vigan and the Spanish Conchita Jimenez of Binondo. She married Quirino in 1921.

Day 9: Vigan - Laoag (approx. 1.5 hours driving time) – Manila (domestic flight)

After breakfast, we will continue our tour of Vigan before we depart for Laoag, stopping by to visit Sitio Remedios. This is a recreated village of traditional Ilocano houses that were sourced from different towns in the province of Ilocos Norte and are well maintained to their original glory in beautiful grounds by the coast of Currimao. Upon arrival in Laoag, we take lunch at Café Herencia to sample local cuisine before beginning our exploration of the city. We stop at the fortress-like Church of St. Augustine in Paoay and move on to Museo Ilocos Norte, housed in the old Tabacalera (tobacco factory) where government-controlled tobacco was stored in the Spanish colonial period. Drive past the Abolition of Tobacco Monopoly Monument at the town plaza and pause briefly at St. William's Cathedral and its Sinking Bell Tower. We will then drive to visit the Malacañang of the North, the former lakeside residence of ex-dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his family when they visited Ilocos Norte, his home province. Later, transfer to the airport for our flight back to Manila (PR 2199 2100/2200) where we will transfer to our hotel on arrival. Overnight at The Bayleaf Intramuros Hotel or similar. (BL)

Church of St Augustine in Paoay

Completed in 1710, the church is noted for its blending of architectural styles and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. It was built to withstand earthquakes and is probably the best known "earthquake baroque"



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church in the Philippines. One of its key features is its 24 buttresses (1.67 metres thick each) that support the church's structure during earthquakes.

Day 10: Manila - Puerto Princesa

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for a scheduled flight to Puerto Princesa (PR 2785 1315/1430), which has been acclaimed as the cleanest and greenest city in the Philippines. We will take a late lunch on arrival and then check in to our hotel. Later, we head out to the Baywalk boulevard where we'll take a boat to watch fireflies with a local guide (*subject to resumption of operations – currently unavailable due to the Covid-19 pandemic and travel bans in the city*). We will see hundreds of fireflies clustering on their favoured fragrant mangrove trees and performing their electric dances to attract mates. We then have dinner at a local seafood restaurant before returning to our hotel. Overnight at Hibiscus Garden Inn or similar. (BLD)

Puerto Princesa City

Puerto Princesa is the gateway to the island province of Palawan, previously rated by National Geographic Traveller magazine as the best island destination in East and Southeast Asia, and continuous to be recognized as one of the best islands in the world. Legend attributes the name "Puerto Princesa" to a princess-like maiden who in the early days was said to have roamed the area on certain nights of the year. On the other hand, some people attribute the name to its geographical advantages as a seaport—naturally protected the whole year round and with a depth that can accommodate any size of shipping. Among its sites is the Palawan Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Centre (formerly Crocodile Farming Institute) the showcase for a successful conservation project. The farm breeds two endangered species found in the country including the endemic Philippine Crocodile. There is also the unusual Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm- it is without walls and inmates tend vast farms instead of idly spending time behind bars.

Day 11: Puerto Princesa – Excursion to Underground River and Ugong Rock

After breakfast at the hotel, we drive about 2 hours to Sabang, where we proceed to the wharf, to take a motorized outrigger boat to the mouth of the Underground River. We will take a tour with a boatman who will take us inside. An audio-visual device is provided to all guests to avoid disturbing the river's delicate ecosystem. Later, we continue to the town of Barangay Tagabinet and the 110-meter high Ugong Rock, which has taken its name from the echoing sound the rocks produce when tapped. We climb up inside the rock with its caves, stalagmites and stalactites. Wooden stairs lead to the top from where we can choose to descend by zip line or reverse climb. This is a community-based tourism project spearheaded by the private sector. We return to our hotel in Puerto Princesa in the evening. Overnight at Hibiscus Inn or similar. (BL)

Puerto Princesa Underground River

Recognised as one of the "Seven Wonders of Nature" in 2012, the Puerto Princesa Underground River has an 8.2-kilometer area reputed to be the longest in the world, which winds through a spectacular cave before emptying out in to the South China Sea. Cathedral chambers, wide hallways, and interesting geological formations greet wide-eyed visitors to the grotto hidden beneath St. Paul Mountain. At the mouth of the cave, ancient trees grow right on the water's edge framing a clear lagoon. Large monitor lizards and macaques can be seen in the forest near the cave.

Day 12: Puerto Princesa - El Nido

Drive about 6 hours further north, amidst rice plantations and along the coast to the town of El Nido, considered a showcase of Palawan's geology and diverse wildlife. Its majestic limestone cliffs stand guard over clear waters, with hundreds of species of tropical fish and coral and three species of endangered sea turtles. El Nido's forests are host to more than 100 species of birds, a large number of which are endemic to Palawan. Later, you will have some free time to explore the town on your own. Overnight at Casa Kalaw or similar. (B)



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Day 13: El Nido

Today, we will take an island-hopping tour of the beautiful islands and beaches around El Nido. Our boat takes us through the crystal-clear waters to the enchanting lagoons of Miniloc Island, Shimizu Island and the Seven Commandos Beach with opportunities for swimming and snorkelling. We will take a picnic lunch on a picturesque beach before continuing our journey. We then return to El Nido. Overnight at Casa Kalaw or similar. (BL)

Day 14: El Nido – Manila (Domestic flight)

The morning will be at leisure to enjoy El Nido before we transfer to the local airport for the flight back to Manila (1600/1715). On arrival in Manila, transfer to your hotel and the rest of the day will be at leisure. Overnight at The Bayleaf Intramuros Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 15: Departure from Manila

Transfer to the airport at a time convenient for your onward flight. (B)

Inclusions and Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation
Transport throughout
Services of English-speaking guide.
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary
Domestic flights as shown in the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas
Drinks
Expenses of personal nature
Tips (discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are warnings against travel to certain parts of the Philippines, but not the parts that we visit. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.





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Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2:00 pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis, please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

On this tour you can expect to stay in clean and comfortable small-scale accommodation. Rooms are en-suite, with private bathroom and in general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; Breakfast (B), Lunch (L) and Dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements, you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch and/or Dinner from £2-£5

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Water 1.5L: £1 / Beer (imported): £1.50



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Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in Asia. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you. When tipping a driver, a guide or hotel staff a few dollars will always be gratefully received.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: It is best to restrict your use of ATMs to cities and tourist areas, as although there are some in the more rural areas, they are not reliable. There is a surcharge for foreign ATMs.

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are accepted by larger hotels and restaurants in cities and tourist areas but they may incur a surcharge in smaller hotels

Local Currency: Philippine Peso

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollar. You must ensure your notes are clean and crisp – many places will not accept notes with even small blemishes.

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Your Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals do not require a visa for a short-term tourist visit to the Philippines.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance. Contact details can be found by visiting the following websites.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>



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Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively, UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Asia, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. Anti-malaria medication will also be required and the use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

The best time to visit the Philippines is during the dry season, between November and April. January and February are the coolest months while March, April and May are very hot. In May, you can expect sunshine all day with short downpours in the evening. June is the beginning of the typhoon season.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is recommended that lighter clothes are worn as it will be warm and humid. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet. When visiting churches and religious sites suitable clothing that covers legs and arms should be worn.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have.



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Footwear

A pair of comfortable walking shoes is recommended for the walking parts of the tour and light and waterproof footwear for the beach areas.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V although there may be some establishments where it is 110v. Plugs have two flat rectangular pins. We recommend that you bring a multi-adapter. The power supply can be irregular so if you are worried about using electrical equipment you should plug it into an automatic voltage regulator (AVG).

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 15 December 2022.

