



# Palawan

Discover

 IT'S MORE FUN IN THE  
**PHILIPPINES**



## Welcome, Mabuhay!

Palawan province lies in the southwest Philippines. The main island of Palawan is 40 kilometres wide and 425 kilometres long, forming the border between the South China Sea in the northwest and the Sulu Sea in the southeast. The capital city Puerto Princesa occupies the central part of Palawan Island and is 500 kilometres from Manila. Palawan Island and the other 1,768 islands in the region are home to 740,000 inhabitants from 81 different ethnic groups.

Palawan is a green jewel, nature's paradise, with large areas of tropical lowlands and mountainous rainforest. The rainforest covers a majestic mountain range that stretches across the entire main island. Mount Mantalingahan is the highest mountain at 2,086 metres. It is the habitat of rare animals such as the wonderful pangolin.

Fine white sandy beaches, steep limestone cliffs and mangrove forests shape the charming coastal landscape of Palawan. Idyllic turquoise-coloured lagoons and countless small deserted islands guarantee holidays that are out of this world - full of romance, peace and relaxation. Most of the islands in the province are surrounded by coral reefs that are brimming with a wide variety of marine flora and fauna. Unique underwater gardens such as the Tubbataha Reefs and the El Nido Marine Reserve make this region one of the most popular and delightful diving areas in the world. The coastal waters are also home to the fascinating sea cows. The water here is incredibly clear and clean. Fish and corals are easy to spot in the indigo blue waters of the ocean, and can even be seen from the surface though the water is deep.



### **Calamian Islands**

The Calamian group of islands lies north of Palawan Island. This enchanting island world is a paradise for nature lovers and beach aficionados. The archipelago has countless snow-white sandy bays, magical footpaths through native rainforests and tranquil fishing villages. The emerald and azure channel between Coron Island and Busuanga Island is especially beautiful and graceful. The waterway is bordered on the Coron side by steep limestone cliffs, contrasting the soft green hilly landscape of Busuanga. The scenery seems to have come out of a dream.

### **Calauit Island**

Calauit has become popular around the world because of its unusual animals. Since 1976 African hoofed animals such as zebras, giraffes, gazelles and waterbucks have lived in the unique Calauit Game Preserve & Wildlife Sanctuary. In the 1970's, the International Union for the Conservation of

Nature took it upon itself to do more to protect African wildlife. Nowadays alongside these exotic animals many endangered native animals also live on the island, such as the Palawan Hornbill, the Balabac Chevrotain and small leopard cats.

### **Coron Island**

The wildly romantic island of Coron is defined by high limestone rocks, lush greenery and secluded bays. Inland there are seven mountain lakes, including a beautiful crystal clear lake surrounded by rugged rocks. Nature lovers enjoy the walks across the interior of the island. Many native species of animal and plant can be spotted from the wayside. Very few people live on Coron. The island inhabitants include the semi-nomad Tagbanua who live in a protected area that is not accessible to visitors. The Tagbanua Cultural Center in the town of Coron on Busuanga Island provides information as to which lakes and beaches are accessible to visitors.

## El Nido and the Bacuit Archipelago

El Nido, a tranquil harbour town on the Northwest Coast of Palawan, is surrounded by a wonderful coastal landscape. Offshore is the Bacuit Archipelago, a group of 45 islands with impressive limestone cliffs, secluded idyllic beaches, picturesque bays and secret lagoons. Crystal clear water surrounds this exotic ocean oasis. The region is one of the most beautiful and spectacular travel destinations in the whole of Asia – the Gods must have been enamoured during their creation! The peace, the quiet and the fabulous feeling of being completely at one with nature make this island world a desired destination for romantics and those seeking relaxation. Above water tropical vegetation and an array of flowers grow, and beneath

it lies one of the most attractive and specie-rich ocean gardens in the Philippines. The protected El Nido Marine Reserve is home to magnificent corals in all shapes and colours, as well as countless fish and marine mammals that can be spotted in the glistening sea from the deck of a boat. The resorts offer a wide range of relaxing and adventurous activities. Glide on the calm turquoise waters in a kayak or canoe and enjoy the breathtaking nature around you, or relax on the warm, powder fine, white, sandy beaches on one of the islands with the occasional spot of snorkelling. You can also go on exciting diving excursions. El Nido is medicinal for the soul and is a real paradise on earth. Allow yourself to be enchanted!





## St. Paul Subterranean River National Park

The St. Paul Subterranean River National Park is situated on the West Coast of Palawan, 81 kilometres from the centre of Puerto Princesa. In 1999 UNESCO declared it as a World Natural Heritage Site. The park features a spectacular limestone karst landscape under which St. Pauls Underground River flows through an impressive system of caves known as St. Pauls Cave. The river is over eight kilometres long and one of the longest navigable underground rivers in the world. It meets daylight through a gorge-like opening in a steep limestone karst and opens out into the South China Sea. Mangrove-, mountain- and lowland forests with many endemic animals and an impressive variety of plants make this national park a particularly valuable ecosystem that even without the underground river would be an attraction in itself.

Sabang is usually the departure point for boat trips to the underground river through the sensational system of caves. The idyllic fishing village with tasteful hotel facilities sits in a picturesque bay on the side of a forested mountain range. The boat trip takes just 20 minutes to reach the entrance to the cave. Many types of bat live in the system of caves made up of channels, chambers and halls with bizarre rock formations, huge stone pillars and countless stalactites. Those who wish to discover the beautiful coastal and mountain forest can do so along the Monkey Trail and the Jungle Trail.





### **Tabon Cave Quezon**

The famous Tabon Caves are a gigantic cave system with over 200 caves, which lies on the West Coast of South Palawan in a small fishing village called Quezon. It is known as the "cradle of Philippine civilisation" as it is here that the oldest human skeletal remains in the Philippines were found. According to this, Tabon Man lived over 22,000 years ago. Stone tools and other relics were also found, some of which date back even further. Some of the findings are exhibited in the Palawan Museum in Puerto Princesa. Twenty-nine of the caves have been explored so far, and seven of these are accessible to the public. The journey by outrigger boat from Quezon to the cave entrance takes about 30 minutes.



### **Puerto Princesa**

For most visitors, Puerto Princesa is the gateway to Palawan's tropical wilderness. The province capital is in the centre of the main island and covers an area of 200,000 hectares from the East Coast to the West Coast. It is an important commercial centre with a large harbour. Around 100,000 people live in the city centre itself on the East Coast. The pleasant city is extremely clean. Puerto Princesa has won awards for environmental protection thanks to the excellent waste management system that is operated by the city council as well as the inhabitants who set a fine example in terms of waste disposal. Palawan Museum is in the city centre and features interesting exhibits on the natural and cultural history of the province.



### **Honda Bay**

If you travel around 12 kilometres north from Puerto Princesa's city centre, you arrive at Honda Bay, which is a bathers' paradise and tempts visitors into island hopping. There are numerous smaller islands in the bay with picturesque sandy beaches surrounded by fantastic spots for diving and snorkelling. Intact coral reefs in an impressive blaze of colours and variety of forms border the idyllic beaches and make day excursions to the islands an unforgettable holiday experience. The coral reef between Pandan Island and Canon Island and the reef off Snake Island are especially stunning. There are romantic lodging places to stay on the islands of Meara Marina and Starfish. It takes between 15 to 20 minutes to travel from the departure point in Sta. Lourdes to the islands.





### **Palawan's diving grounds – a cosmos under water**

Palawan province is famous around the world for its many spectacular diving grounds. Alongside manta rays and sharks you might even spot the extremely rare sea cows if you are lucky. Aside from the breathtaking Tubbataha Reef Marine Park in the Sulu Sea, around 12 hours from Puerto Princesa by boat, Palawan Island is surrounded by amazing underwater gardens full of different species at rather close proximity. Adventurers and explorers will also enjoy dives to the sunken shipwrecks.



## Tubbataha Reefs

Tubbataha Reef Marine Park spreads over 33,200 hectares and contains two small coral islands as well as two fabulous atolls with large internal lagoons. At low tide, lots of sand banks and chains of reef can be seen at the water's surface. The park is in the middle of the Sulu Sea and those who are lucky enough to dive there agree that it is the most beautiful and spectacular diving area in the world! Thanks to its numerous extraordinary types of species and its importance for sea birds and sea turtles, UNESCO declared the national park a World Natural Heritage Site in 1993.

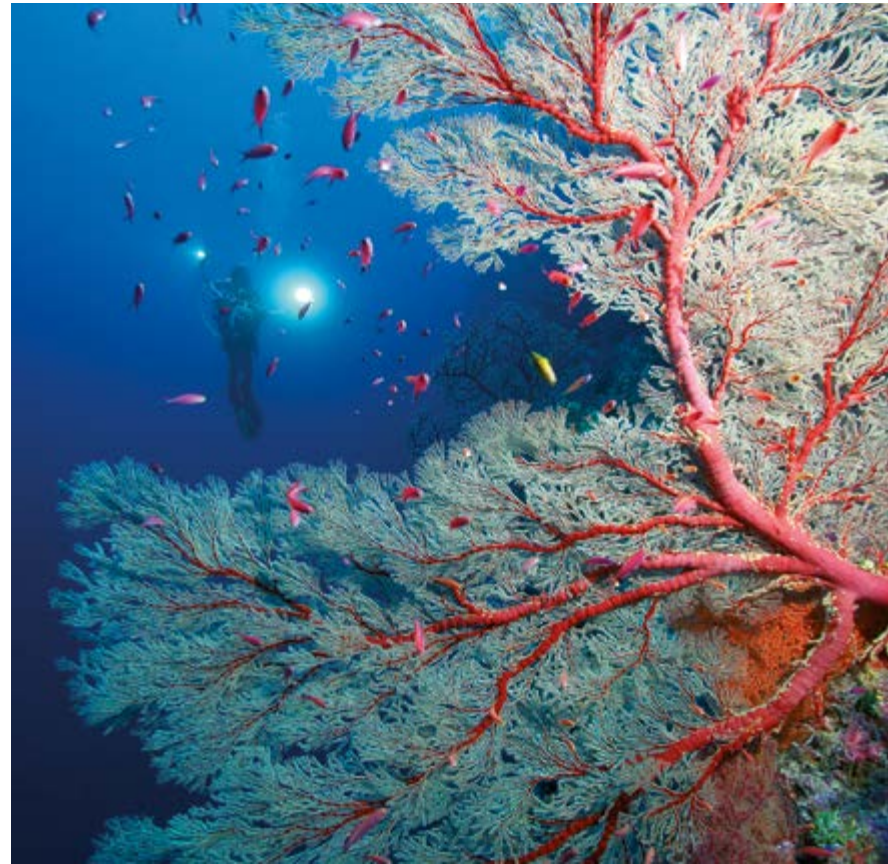


## Diving grounds of the Calamian Islands

The group of islands in the northern Palawan region has beautiful beaches and original nature as well as some of the most diverse diving grounds. The area is famous for its many shipwrecks that lie on the seabed offshore. They are mostly war ships, victims of the Second World War. Off Tagnet Island alone, south of Busuanga, there are 12 wrecks from the Japanese fleet that was sunk here in 1944 by the US Navy. The approach from Calauit and Coron allows better visibility. The variety of underwater flora and fauna make diving here a thrilling and enjoyable experience.

## El Nido Marine Reserve

The El Nido Marine Reserve is not just a paradise for beach aficionados but also an Eldorado for divers. Different types of shark and manta ray regularly visit the remarkable coral reefs and their extravagant variety of species. Here even the boldest divers' wishes can come true. Such as those who would like to swim alongside a sea cow or "dugong" in the wild at least once in their lifetime. These rare marine mammals that live solely off plants are classified as sirenian animals, and if you believe the old sailors' tales they have been known to lure some sailors to destruction with their beautiful singing. Even the image of the mermaid supposedly leads back to the dugong. Similarly they have a forked tail fin although their body is shaped like a torpedo and can weigh over half a ton.



# Travel Tips

## Arrivals

Palawan, like the other main islands in the Philippines, can be reached by air or water. Philippine Airlines (PAL) and Airphil Express fly from Manila to Puerto Princesa. Flights are also available to El Nido and the islands of and Busuanga. Those who have more time to spare might opt for the 20-hour boat trip from Manila to Palawan. Visitors coming from Cebu or Panay can also travel by plane or ship to Palawan.

## Weather

There are two climate zones in the province that are separated by the mountain range on Palawan Island. The first determines the weather on the West and North Coasts and the surrounding islands to the south. The rainy and dry seasons are equally defined. It rains for six months of the year from June to November and then the dry season starts and lasts for another six months. The second climate zone stretches along the east coast and the southern tip. The dry season here only last for three months from March to May. As the rain showers across the whole region during the wet season are only brief and relatively light, Palawan is also the best travel destination in the Philippines during the rainy season. The province is also outside the typhoon belt therefore only rarely experiences strong winds.

## Accommodation

Palawan has accommodation to suit any budget, from the extraordinary six-star resort through to the basic bed and breakfast, often located by the sea or on the edge of a romantic lagoon. No matter how comfortable and stylish the hotels and resorts are, the real luxury lies primarily in the natural surroundings.

## Getting about

It is easy to travel from A to B in Puerto Princesa. There are many motorbikes with sidecars (tricycles) on the streets as they are the main form of transport in the city. Every day several buses and jeepneys travel from Puerto Princesa to the attractions on the island. Many holidaymakers choose to travel by outrigger boat along the coast to their desired destination, which is often quicker and guarantees fabulous views of the wonderful coast. However it is easiest to organise your tours in the resort and use its local transport service.



