

PROFILE OF THE PHILIPPINES

SIZE: 115,831 square miles of land and water, more than 7,000 islands. Total area is slightly larger than Arizona.

POPULATION: 91.1 million (*CIA 2007*), with 12 million living in the capital city of Manila. By comparison, Arizona's total population is 6.2 million, in a region of about the same size. The Philippines have the highest birthrate in Asia; by some estimates, the population could double within 30 years.

RELIGION: Roman Catholic, 80.9%, Muslim, 5%, Evangelical, 2.8%, other Christian, 4.5%, others and unspecified, 6.8%

ETHNIC GROUPS: Tagalog, 28.1%, Cebuano, 13.1%, Ilocano, 9%, Bisaya/Binisaya, 7.6%, Hiligaynon Ilonggo, 7.5%, Bikol, 6%, Waray, 3.4%, other, 25.3% (2000 census)

LANGUAGES: Filipino (based on Tagalog) and English are official languages. There are 8 major dialects: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pampango and Pangasinan.

LITERACY: 92.6% (2000 census)

INDUSTRIES: More than a third of employed Filipinos work in agriculture, farming sugarcane, coconuts, rice, corn, and fruits such as bananas and pineapples; nearly half work in the service sector; 15% work in industries such as microchip assembly, food processing, clothing, petroleum refining and fishing.



Physical map of the Philippines. Created and copyright (2003) by [seav](#), released by [Wikimedia Commons](#) under the [GNU FDL](#) common license.
URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Ph_physical_map.png

POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY: More than 40% of the population lives in poverty, most in rural areas. The Philippines has not benefited from international debt relief programs because the country's overall economic outlook is above participation thresholds. Recent tax initiatives on food and fuel have put additional pressure on the poorest households; attempts to alleviate suffering through poverty reduction programs have not successfully relieved suffering among the country's poorest families.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE: The Philippine islands are volcanic, with mountains bordered by lowlands and coastlines. The climate is tropical and governed by two monsoon seasons; the northeast causes a cool, dry season from December to February, and the southwest, bringing a hot, rainy season from May to October. The Philippines stretch across a typhoon zone that can create as many as five strong typhoons a year, bringing landslides, flooding and coastal erosion. The Philippine islands are also part of the Pacific "Ring of Fire," a region susceptible to volcanic eruptions, frequent and unpredictable earthquakes and the potential for tsunamis.

BACKGROUND: THE PHILIPPINES

"Malay in family, Spanish in love, Chinese in business, American in ambition," the cultural identity of the Philippines is a tapestry of traditions woven through centuries of trade, migration and conquest. The earliest arrivals probably sailed from Malaysia and Indonesia to the southwestern island of Palawan, about 30,000 years ago. They formed communities called *barangays*, named for their outrigger boats, several of which have been excavated on the northern coast of Mindanao. *Barangay* communities formed throughout the islands, with successive waves of Malay and Indonesian settlers. Hindu and Islam influences date from the 9th century AD, introduced by traders from India and Arabia. Chinese traders and settlers established commerce in silks and other treasures, especially on the island of Luzon.

Europeans first reached the islands in 1521, on Spanish ships led by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan. Like Christopher Columbus, Magellan was convinced that the Spice Islands could be reached from the west, by sailing around the southern tip of the New World. He could not convince his own government to finance his voyage, in part because the Portuguese dominated existing routes around the southern tip of Africa, and eastward across the Indian Ocean. However, the King of Spain was eager to acquire his own routes to the valuable nutmeg, cloves, ginger and cinnamon that grew only in the Spice Islands. Magellan convinced the King that a western route might be shorter, and therefore cheaper, and he set sail with five ships under the flag of Spain. The voyage took much longer than Magellan expected, and many of his sailors died of starvation or disease. After 18 months at sea, three of Magellan's ships reached what they thought were the Spice Islands, landing on a tiny island north of what is now Mindanao. Magellan was killed a few weeks later during the Battle of Mactan, an event that is still celebrated in the Philippines today. Only one of his ships returned to Spain, laden with spices, completing the first ever, round-the-world voyage, in three years.

Spain and the Galleon Trade Subsequent expeditions claimed the islands as the Philippines, for King Philip II of Spain, who ruled the islands through his viceroy in Mexico. For more than two hundred years, trading galleons sailed from Acapulco to the Philippines, exchanging the wealth of the New World for the silk, spices and porcelains of Asia. Galleons brought settlers and missionaries from Mexico, who established Catholic communities throughout the Philippines. Over the centuries, the Philippines developed a thriving trade in its own products. From seeds introduced by the Spanish, tobacco became a major crop and important export, along with abaca (Manila hemp) and sugar.

Nationalism and José Rizal In the late 19th century, the Spanish built public schools, universities and hospitals in the Philippines, in response to criticism of colonial abuses and social unrest among poor and ethnic groups. One of the leaders calling for independence was José Rizal, a nationalist and intellectual who had studied in Spain. During a populist uprising against Spain in 1896, Rizal – who was not involved – was nonetheless arrested and executed, a martyr and hero to the Philippine people.

Spain was relieved of its colonial holdings in Latin America and the Philippines with the loss of the Spanish-American War. The war was provoked, in 1898, by events in Cuba, and the widely-publicized furor against Spain in the United States. The Treaty of Paris, signed at the end of that war, granted independence only to Cuba; the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico were ceded as colonies to the United States.

An American Colony From the outset, the United States planned for an independent Philippines. Political parties were formed, and a two-part legislature was instituted, with popularly-elected representatives in the lower house, the Philippine Assembly, and US-appointed members in the upper house, the Philippine Commission. Resistance movements continued to gain strength, however, especially among tenant farmers seeking redress against wealthy landowners. Populist groups were supported by the growing Socialist and Communist Parties, especially during the difficult Depression years.

The Philippines in World War II The Philippines were drawn into World War II with the Japanese attack on US air bases on the northern island of Luzon. The Japanese drove American and Filipino forces south to the Bataan Peninsula, which shelters the harbor at Manila. If they held the Peninsula and nearby island of Corregidor, the Americans and Filipinos might prevent the Japanese from entering the harbor until US reinforcements could arrive. They held out for 150 days before being overwhelmed by the Japanese, who occupied the Philippines until the American invasion in October 1944. The Japanese surrendered in September, 1945, and the United States granted independence to the Philippines on July 4, 1946.

Independence Resistance movements that thwarted the occupying Japanese had gained strength during the war. After the war, with Filipinos suffering severe shortages and rampant price inflation, resistance groups joined the Communists in opposing the newly-constituted government of the Philippines, which was heavily supported by US military installations. Government assistance to tenant farmers in the north aggravated resistance groups in the south, and it was the early 1960s before the Philippines began to see growth, stability and economic development. Ferdinand Marcos, elected President in 1965, began his twenty years in office with a slate of public works programs that promised prosperity and jobs.

Early in his second term, with economic growth slowing and political unrest gaining strength throughout the country, Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. Far from a temporary measure to bring public order, martial law was maintained for nine years. Marcos called on Filipinos to make sacrifices while he and his flamboyant wife, Imelda, spent lavishly on friends and loyalists. In the early 1970s, the Philippines was one of the wealthiest countries in Asia, profiting from highly-successful forestry and mining industries as well as international trade. With the imposition of martial law, the Philippine economy entered a long period of decline, while neighboring Asian countries began to experience boom times, building their own economies and raising living standards throughout the region.

Ninoy Aquino and the end of the Marcos Regime President Marcos lifted martial law in 1981, declaring a “New Republic” and easily winning re-election, but little changed for Filipinos as the economy continued to decline. In 1983, the return of long-time Marcos enemy Benigno

(“Ninoy”) Aquino set in motion the end of the Marcos government. Aquino had been jailed soon after martial law was declared. A military court found him guilty of what were widely believed to be false charges of murder and subversion, and he was sentenced to death. After seven years in prison, mostly in solitary confinement, Aquino had a heart attack which was quickly followed by a second heart attack. He was allowed to travel to the United States for treatment, and he quickly recovered; however, the Marcos government encouraged him to postpone his return home.

When Aquino learned in 1983 that Marcos was ill, he decided that he must make his case for democracy to the president, whatever the risk to his own life. As he walked off the plane in Manila, Ninoy Aquino was shot to death by a man in a military uniform. Aquino’s funeral was followed by a procession of two million people, to José Rizal Park, where the Philippine flag was lowered to half-mast for its most recent, beloved martyr. Aquino’s death brought opposition forces together behind his wife, Corazon, who was persuaded to run for president in the elections Marcos called for 1986.

People Power and the EDSA Revolution The National Assembly declared that Ferdinand Marcos had won the 1986 election, despite the apparent majority vote for Corazon Aquino. Leaders from the Catholic Church and the military supported “Cory”, encouraging her People Power Movement of ordinary people, children, clergy and defecting soldiers to rise up against Marcos on the day of his inauguration, February 25, 1986, in a populist uprising that came to be known as the EDSA Revolution.

The EDSA Revolution was led by Jaime Cardinal Sin of the Catholic Church. It was named for *Epifanio de los Santos Avenue*, a main highway in Manila that saw most of the demonstrations during four days in February 1986. When an independent watchdog organization reported that the popular vote had been won by Cory Aquino, the Catholic Church condemned official reports of the Marcos victory, and two senior military leaders declared that they could no longer support President Marcos. Cardinal Sin spoke by radio, encouraging Filipinos to take to the streets; when the government cut down the main transmitter, people came to EDSA anyway, by the hundreds of thousands. On February 25th, two presidents were sworn –Cory Aquino, surrounded by throngs of supporters wearing her campaign’s signature yellow, and Ferdinand Marcos, at the presidential palace, where he was thronged by a huge crowd of loyalists. But Marcos knew his power was gone. Late that evening he and Imelda Marcos left the country for Hawaii and self-imposed exile.



Statue commemorating the People Power revolution, at the entrance of Camp Aguinaldo (EDSA) in Manila, January 15, 2007. Photograph taken by Eternal Dragon, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Edsa_People_Power_monument.jpg

Years of instability After twenty years of Ferdinand Marcos, the government of the Philippines was in disarray. Cory Aquino tried to root out corruption, but the country's economy continued to sag and there were several attempts to overthrow her government. Aquino was followed as president by former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Fidel Ramos, who continued her efforts



Joseph Estrada. Photo: Reuters, courtesy The Age. URL: http://www.theage.com.au/ffximage/2007/09/12/jmWORLDphilippines_wideweb__470x359,0.jpg

to stabilize the government and improve living conditions for the poor. In 1998, Ramos declared that he would not run again, and his vice president, the popular actor Joseph Estrada, was elected president.

Joseph Estrada and the Second People Power Revolution Joseph Estrada is an actor who portrayed tough guy heroes of the downtrodden in more than 100 films. He is also a Hall of Fame producer, responsible for more than 70 films.

Estrada, whose nickname, *Erap*, is a play on the Filipino word for “buddy” or “pal”, was mayor of the San Juan community in Manila for 16 years, and was elected to a term in the Senate.

During his campaign for president, Estrada was accused of gambling, drinking and womanizing, but his wide popularity and “Robin Hood” promises to serve the poor assured his victory. After less than a year in office, Estrada's popularity fell sharply as he faced charges of accepting bribes from illegal gambling businesses. He was impeached by the Philippine House of Representatives, but an impeachment trial in the Senate was aborted when a group of senators refused to proceed.



EDSA II protest against Joseph Estrada, courtesy the Honolulu Star Bulletin. URL: <http://starbulletin.com/2001/02/10/editorial/special.html>

January 2001: EDSA II, the setting for *Wretched Lives* Once again, Filipinos thronged the streets, calling for a president to step down, with huge crowds amassing near the site of the 1998 EDSA Revolution. Once again, the withdrawal of military support led to a Philippine President's downfall. On January 20, 2001, Joseph Estrada stepped aside, and his vice president, Gloria

Macapagal-Arroyo, was sworn in as President of the Philippines. Once again, People Power caused a peaceful change in leadership in the Philippines; as the radio reporter announces in *Wretched Lives*, EDSA II proved that “what happened in 1986 was no accident of history.” In 2004, President Macapagal-Arroyo was elected to her own six-year term, on a platform of economic reforms. Joseph Estrada’s criminal trial lasted for six years, concluding in September 2007, when he was convicted of plunder and sentenced to life in prison. One month later, he was pardoned and released by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

The Philippines today More than 90 million people live in the Philippines, in an area about the size of Arizona. More than 10% of Filipinos live in the metropolitan area around Manila, which includes Quezon City. Challenges facing the Philippines are daunting, from natural and human-made sources. In recent years, the Philippines have been raked by typhoons, the named, hurricane-like storms of the region, which cause severe flooding, structural damage and loss of life. As part of the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” the islands are subject to earthquakes and tsunamis, the most recent in 1976 and 1990. Manila has been plagued by drought, aggravating existing problems of water pollution and inadequate access to water resources for the region’s poorest people. According to Philippine government agencies and the World Bank, air pollution and poor sanitation and hygiene practices are major environmental health risks, accounting for nearly a quarter of disease in the Philippines, and nearly a sixth of all deaths.

Overseas Filipino Workers Salaries in the Philippines – even for highly-skilled workers – are depressed as the economy struggles to gain momentum. Educated Filipinos in large numbers leave the country, finding better-paying work elsewhere in Asia, in Europe and America. The government estimates that 10% of the workforce is classified as OFWs, Overseas Filipino Workers, who send money home to support their families. These remittances account for as much as 12% of the domestic economy of the country, an asset so important that special courses are provided to train OFWs, and there is a government agency to assist them. Many OFWs remain overseas for years, with grandparents and other family members raising their children back home. While their remittances provide crucial support for families at home, this “brain drain” of skilled workers and professionals hampers growth in important economic sectors.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, an economist, has spearheaded programs to encourage foreign investment in industries such as microchip manufacture, and to encourage the growing number of call centers. Following a recent court decision, copper mines – once the cornerstone of the country’s exports but shut down following a pollution disaster – are slated to reopen. Despite these encouraging signs, 40% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day, with most of the poor living in rural areas; severe income disparities continue to fuel ethnic unrest, particularly among insurgent groups in the southern region of Mindanao.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Country Profiles:

BBC News / Country Profiles, The Philippines

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asiapacific/country_profiles/1262783.stm

The Economist, The Philippines

<http://www.economist.com/countries/Philippines/>

The CIA World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>

Maps:

University of Texas libraries: The Philippines

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands_oceans_poles/philippines.gif

National Geographic: Philippines

http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_philippines.html

Websites:

Library of Congress Country Study: Philippines

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/phtoc.html>

United Nations Development Program: Human Development Report, Philippines

http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_PHL.html

The Manila Times

<http://www.manilatimes.net/>

The Manila Standard

<http://www.manilastandardtoday.com/?page=index>

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