



Free & Easy Traveler - Travel Prep Guide

20 Days in the Philippines: Step off the Beaten Path

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The Basics

Duration: 20 Days

Start/Finish: Cebu or Manila Philippines.

Adventure Type: Backpackers (age 18 to 27)

Trip Size: 15 – 22 (+2 group leaders)



Epic Experiences

Included in the Price

- Travel through the Puerto Princesa underground river
- Have a tropical island all to yourself
- One Filipino style dinner
- Viewpoint/lighthouse hike in Malapascua
- Viewpoint in Coron
- Hot Springs in Coron

Optional Activities

- Scuba Diving
- Fishing
- Boat trip
- Kayaking
- Parasail
- Yoga

Trip Details

What's included?

- All Taxes (GST, PST, Airport tax)
- Return international flights and airport transfers***
- Accommodations for your 40-day Free & Easy experience
- Group travel between destinations
- 2 knowledgeable and fun Free & Easy leaders
- Free & Easy Travel Guidebook
- 15 years of trip leading experience
- ***Land Only prices do not include your international flight, airport taxes or transfers

What isn't included?

- All meals and drinks (except those mentioned above)
- Activities outside of the ones listed above
- Any Visa or Visa fees

Travel Budget (Canadian \$)

Philippines is a very cheap place to travel, which is just one of many reasons that makes it so much fun! Your personal spending on the trip will include your food, drinks, shopping, entertainment and any activities outside of those included your FNEZ adventure.

For the entirety of our 20 Day Philippines Trip – “Step Off the Beaten Path”, we would recommend a budget of \$600 - \$1100. Any travel budget will fluctuate between personalities, so ask yourself: "What type of traveller are you?"

The Hippie:

Brings about \$500-\$700 for the 20 days. Eats local food, bargains well at the market, finds good prices on drinks and picks, and chooses their optional activities wisely! Often likely to continue travelling after their FNEZ trip is complete.

The Backpacker:

\$700-\$1000 spending money. A bit more frivolous, but is aware of their budget. Takes in most activities they are interested in, without going too extravagant. Likes to party, but always looking for a good deal.

The Rock Star:

\$1000-1300+ Spending money will allow for little to no worry about your budget. The Rock Star will do almost every single activity, including lavish amounts of shopping and partying often. There won't be too much holding them back from activities, as this is their trip and don't want to let anything pass them by.

To help you work out your budget, here are some examples to give you an idea what you will be spending in the Philippines.

Food & Drink:

- Bottle of Tanduay Rum: \$2
- Bottle of Beer: \$1
- Fruit shake: \$1.50
- Fresh fruit platter: \$2.50
- Filipino style breakfast: \$2.50
- Filipino meal at a restaurant: \$2-6
- Meal from a street vendor: \$1.50
- Western meal: \$6.50
- Fancy cocktail: \$4
- 1 litter water bottle: \$0.75

Entertainment & Activities:

- Boat trip/Island hopping (incl. lunch): \$22-50
- Open Water Scuba Cert: \$450
- Discover Scuba Open water: \$50
- 1 Fun Dive: \$42-70
- Full day Kayak rental: \$19
- Parasail (15 min.): \$38
- Yoga: \$10

Misc.

1 hour Massage: \$6-10

Laundry service: \$1/kg

Trip Leaders

Every Free & Easy trip is accompanied by at least two leaders. We like to call them “Leaders” and not “Guides” because they are essentially your well traveled, experienced friends! We hire local guides whenever knowledge of culture, history or safety are necessary (ie; temple tours or jungle treks). Our Leaders main goals are to ensure everyone on the trip is having the best time possible. Our leaders will arrange the group transportation between destinations, sort out rooms at the accommodations, plan any group meals or activities and assist in any additional activities that anyone may wish to take part in, and ultimately show you the best that each destination has to offer. They know the trip locations well, and have great relationships with all our contacts in each destination. Not to mention they are all extremely fun and easy going people who continue to showcase the essence of what makes us Free & Easy!

Flying to the Philippines

Upon registration you can chose between booking your own flights or requesting Free & Easy to book flights for you.

If you book flights with Free & Easy:

- A flight itinerary will be emailed to you approximately 2 – 3 months before your trip’s departure. (Assuming you have paid enough money on your account)
- One or both of your leaders will be at the airport in Manila to pick you up and arrange transport back to the guesthouse.
- Transportation will be arranged for you to get from the guesthouse at the end of the trip to get to the airport to catch your flight.
- You can also ask for any custom flights, and our flight team will give you a price quote for booking this for you.

If you don’t book flights with Free & Easy:

- You will be contacted with information on meeting up with your group for the start of the trip in Manila.

Meals

The ability to experience local food, whether it’s from a street vendor, a home stay, or a restaurant, is a huge part of travelling. You’ll be able to ask your guides for great options to check out at every destination we go, but for the most part, the journey finding the food, tends to be just as good as the food itself! There will be times that meals will be provided for you, if you have any allergies or food preferences, i.e. vegetarian, please let your guides know!

Allergies!

If you have any allergies, especially food allergies, it is good to be prepared before coming to the Philippines. Peanuts are the most common one and it is used a lot in Filipino cooking. When you try to make special requests when ordering at a restaurant it doesn't always go as planned. Luckily in the Philippines English and Filipino are their official languages. So it should be quite easy to communicate your allergies or any food concerns.

Types of Transportation on this trip

- Big buses: Private buses with A/C
- Mini buses. These are private A/C buses which we take quite frequently. Seat 8-13 humans.
- Airplanes: We take 4 flights. All with a 15 kg baggage allowance with exception to one flight with a 10 kg allowance.
- Boats & Ferries: Boat transportation is used very commonly as we are traveling through the islands. You will be on a wide variety of boats, from a 12 passenger catamaran to a ferry large enough to hold cars and trucks.
- Habal-habal: One of the more fun ways to get around the Philippines and have an experience at the same time! These motorized little vehicles provide a quick and cheap way to get around. Always make sure you barter!

Accommodations

We have a wide range of accommodations on this trip from beautiful, but slightly rustic, beach bungalows to hotel style rooms with A/C. We have chosen each of our accommodations based on quality, location, and relationships with the establishments. Plus there is so much to do on this trip you won't be spending much time in your room anyway!

All our accommodation is based on at least two-person occupancy. If you wish you have your own room you can pay an additional fee in order to do so. Please contact travel@fnez.com before your trip begins if you are interested.

Solo Travelers

Lots of solo travelers come on our trips and it's a great way to step outside your comfort zone and make lots of new friends. Since all our accommodation is based on at least two-person occupancy you will be rooming with other members of the same sex in your group.

Packing Suggestions

Keep in mind that the shopping is cheap in the Philippines, so you may want to only pack half of your backpack, leaving room to buy new stuff once you arrive. Clothing is very cheap, and you can always find a good variety of stuff that is ideal

for the tropical climate. Most people end up regretting how much they packed when they realize how easily they could have bought new clothes once they arrived.

It is good to properly prepare supplies for the trip, but don't stress out too much about having everything you think you might need because chances are that you will be able to find whatever it is during your trip. Good quality shoes and/or sports sandals are an exception to that as they are only really available in larger cities. There are also many pharmacies that have medications and first-aid supplies.

In general, you want to avoid packing things that you really don't need to have. There are definitely certain luxuries that are good to have, but you don't want to lug something around for 6 weeks unless you are going to use it. Also, consider that the weight of your bag will likely be **INCREASING** throughout the trip, and having a lighter backpack simplifies life immensely. Honestly, look at what you have and cut it in half and you're probably good to go. You're gonna buy lots of new stuff.

PLEASE NOTE: Boracay airport has a 10kg check baggage allowance, however you can carry on the excess. Which just means you need to move all of your heavier items into your carry on bags!

Here's some ideas for what you might want to pack:

Travel Essentials

- Passport (digital and hard copies)
- Travel insurance (digital and hard copy)
- Airline tickets (digital and hard copy)
- Credit or debit card
- Any entry visas, additional passport photos or vaccination certificates required
- Cover for backpack/ziplock bags for travel essentials
- Insect repellent

Electronics/Entertainment

- Alarm clock
- Headlamp
- iPods, tablets
- Books, eReaders
- Camera (bring a few memory cards)
- Speakers
- All chargers

Clothing

- Swim wear
- Walking shoes/sport sandals

- rash guard for surfing (t-shirts also work fine)
- Shorts
- Shirts/T-shirts
- Rain jacket for June-November (but good to pack no matter what)
- Underwear
- Sarong (travel towel)
- Pants (not jeans) and a long shirt or sweater

First-aid kit

- All can be purchased in the Philippines

Toiletries

- Deodorant is not nearly as good and often contains whitening agents. Bring some from home.
- Girls bring feminine hygiene products as they can be hard to find.

Laundry

Laundry facilities are offered by some of the places we stay. Ask your leaders to point out the best places to get laundry done. There will be times when there are no laundry facilities, however your guides will tell you this in advance.

Travel Essentials

There is nothing more important than your health and safety so make sure you read this carefully!

Passports

Everyone **MUST** have a passport for international travel. If you already have a passport, double check to make sure that it is still valid for at least 6 months from the return date of your trip. If it is not valid for a full 6 months from the day you plan on returning to your passport issuing country, you'll have to apply for a new passport before you leave.

The application process for getting a passport may seem simple, but for most people it ends up taking longer than it first appears. Sometimes it can take a few weeks to complete the entire process, so we definitely recommend not leaving it to the last minute.

For those of you who do not live close to a passport office, you can also mail your application but you should expect that this would take longer.

Insurance

Everyone **MUST** have Travel Medical Insurance of some kind and bring proof with you for this trip. You might not need to purchase a medical insurance policy though because you may already be covered through some other way:

- Your parent's work health plan.
- With a credit card.
- Through a student or work health plan.
- Through private insurance.

While you are away traveling with us, if you decide to extend your plane ticket, you also have the ability to purchase an extension to your insurance policy. PLEASE NOTE: It is your own responsibility to be making any extension to your insurance so you cannot expect this will automatically happen when you extend your plane ticket.

If you need to extend your TIC insurance please call 1-800-670-4426

Please Note: At this time we only provide Travel Medical Insurance for those with valid Canadian citizenship.

Immunizations

There are no immunizations that are 'required' for entry into the country. However, if you travel through (even an airport) of a country that has Yellow Fever, then an immunization record will be required for entry into the Philippines. Please check your flight itinerary before you go, as well as the link below. For your own safety, there are some shots that are always recommended for travel to tropical countries.

- Hepatitis A.
- Hepatitis B.
- Typhoid.
- Tetanus.
- Diphtheria.

We also want to warn you that sometimes travel clinics are over cautious to the extreme and try to sell you everything under the sun. If you want a second opinion about something, do some more research online or contact us. Often they will say that you should take malaria pills. We suggest you try to learn more about the exact locations of any malaria danger before you commit to taking the pills. We can say truthfully, that currently none of the Free & Easy staff or owners take malaria medication when we are on any of our adventures. The feeling amongst many people is that the side effects of the pills are not worth the minimal risk in the regions we travel to. Rather than subject ourselves to the medications we choose to be cautious with mosquito repellent whenever they are present. Since we are not medical professionals we urge you to do your own research and make your own informed decision.

Check out this [link](#) for more information about immunization requirements.

Banking & Money

The easiest way of getting and carrying your money is to simply use the bank machines in the country you are travelling. You can use your regular bank card, using your regular pin number, and the money will come out in the local currency (You need to make sure that you have “cirrus” or “plus” written on the back of your card). At nearly every destination on our trips, you’ll have easy access to a bank machine. This also means you won’t have to get local currency before you leave. Once you arrive, you can just use a bank machine right there at the airport.

Every time you need to make a transaction your account will be charged approx. \$5 fee from your bank and then a possible fee from the local bank. It can get a bit pricey if you’re making withdrawals every few days—so it makes more sense to take out a large sum and then just watch your spending! Although theft does happen sometimes we have found that it is quite rare. So we, ourselves, practice this method.

Be aware that if you are pulling money out on your credit card that this counts as a “cash advance” and you will immediately be charged interest on this amount and not have a grace period or get reward points like you typically would with other credit card purchases. Additionally, you will still be charged those \$5 fees from your bank and the local bank. With this in mind the best option is always to pull out money using your debit card instead of your credit card.

Another suggestion we would like to reinforce is that we highly recommend that you have online banking during the trip. It allows you to check your balances, transfer money, and monitor your transactions from any internet café. In case of any issue with your bank card, online banking always simplifies a situation since you can easily transfer money to another traveler in your group who could then pull out money for you.

Another little helpful hint is signing over power of attorney to someone you trust (i.e., a parent). This means that they can have access to your accounts while you are away. This can help if you lose your bankcard, or there is a problem with it while overseas. It is also useful if you need someone to pay your bills, or make money transfers while you are away.

Philippines Travel Visas

Upon entry into the Philippines most countries (please double check your country) are automatically granted a 30-day tourist visa.

<http://philippines.visahq.ca/>

Visas for other Countries

****If you plan on traveling to other countries surrounding the Philippines, there is a chance that you will need to get a visa before traveling there. These visas can all be obtained in Manila or Cebu. We are not in Manila or Cebu for long enough to process a Visa, therefore we would recommend applying for any needed Visa's before you leave your home country. Depending on the country, it will cost between \$15 and \$80.****

Communication + Payment

Questions

Contact us at any of the below methods!

Phone: 1-800-403-5208

Email: travel@fnez.com

Communication

So you have signed up for a Free & Easy adventure and we hope to help make this the easiest travel experience of your life. We want to help you out with anything you need help with. However, there are always things that you will need to take care of yourself and we will make it as easy as possible to explain these things. So we need to have a bit of cooperation from your part and it start with actually READING our emails :). Please, make sure you read the emails we send leading up to your trip because we are sending them to make sure that you are as ready as you can possibly be for this travel adventure.

Most of the information we send will be coming through your "Your Trip" account. Please make sure that you have all of the requirements taken care of prior to your trip as well you can also view your account and balance owing and a place for us to give you your downloads and hear news of the upcoming trip. You should receive an email in your inbox notifying you when we do post something on there. Please notify us if you find that you're not getting the notifications.

Making Payments

Follow this link for a full outline of our payment options.

Check here for the payment schedule for all our trips.

The \$200 deposit reserves your placement on a trip. For all the trips, we have arranged the payment dates to allow you the maximum time to pay for your trip. If you would prefer to pay for the entire trip all at one time, that is no problem. You can also make larger payments earlier whenever it is convenient for you. The

payment dates that we have listed are just guidelines that state the last possible date by which payments should be made.

We would greatly appreciate that all payments be made on time. Meeting this simple request makes our job much easier because it allows us to always be looking forward preparing for the trips, rather than figuring out who and where we need to collect money from. If you expect that a payment will be late, please email us to explain when we can expect the payment. Payment schedules for each of the trips can be reached by clicking the link above.

PLEASE NOTE: All additional costs (for flights, insurance, fees & extras) will be added to your statement of account on the 'your trip' page. Please, ensure that you add any additional charges to your final payment unless we require it sooner.

Cultural

Quick Facts on the Philippines

- The Philippines flag is the only flag in the whole world that is displayed differently in times of peace and war. In peace-time, the blue side is put on top; in war time, the red.
- The country is the "texting capital of the world," as 350 to 400 million text messages (SMS) are sent daily by 35 million cellular phone users, more than that of the United States and Europe combined.
- There are 175 languages and dialects in the Philippines, and 171 of these are actively used in the country.
- The Philippines has the largest diaspora network in the world, with over 11 million Filipinos living and working overseas.
- The largest eagle in the world is the Philippine Eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi*). It is formerly known as Monkey-eating Eagle.
- The Philippines is the only Christian nation in Asia.
- The Philippines has 7,107 islands but only approximately 1,000 of its islands are populated.
- The Philippines has the world's longest discontinuous coastline (Canada has the world's longest continuous coastline).
- Karaoke machines were invented in the Philippines and not Japan as commonly believed.

Philippine's History

The Philippines is a Y-shaped archipelago south of China in Southeast Asia. Its 7,100 (1898), the first to be decolonized partially by a Western colonial country (The United States)(1935), and the first in Southeast Asia to be granted full independence after the Second World War (1946). Because of its strategic location

it has been a bridge between the East and West, a rampart of Christianity, and a showcase of democracy in Asia.

Named after Philip II of Spain, the Philippines is a beautiful country and has been called “Pearl of the Orient”. With a fertile soil, healthy climate, rich and natural resources and fishing grounds, it is poised on the brink of an agri-business and aquaculture revolution. The chief agricultural products are rice, coconut, corn, hemp, tobacco, sugarcane and tropical fruits. It ranks first in world production of coconut oil, second in sugarcane, and fifth in tobacco. It is the greatest gold-producing country in Southeast Asia, ranks third in chromite, and has one of the world’s largest deposits of nickel, deuterium and copper.

Of the total population of 56 million, 93% are Catholics or Protestant Christians, the next largest religion is Islam. Thus, it is Asia’s only predominantly Christian country. The National Language (Filipino-Tagalog) has become dominant, although English is still widely-used in education, commerce and communication. The Philippines has the world’s third largest English-speaking population.

Trip Locations

Day 1: Cebu

Day 2-4: Malapascua

Day 5-8: Boracay

Day 9&10: Puerto Princesa

Day 11-14: El Nido

Day 15-17: Coron

Day 18-20: Manila

PLEASE NOTE: The above itinerary is tentative. You will receive your confirmed Free & Easy Traveler trip itinerary with the exact routing at least 30 days prior to your departure.

Please be advised we are constantly keeping an eye out for warnings and are well informed on the happenings in the places we go. Our ground team is frequently sending us first hand updates, ensuring the destinations we bring our groups to are safe!

Community Forests International (CFI)

Free & Easy Traveler has joined forces with Community Forests International (CFI) to turn the joy of world travel into an act of global conservation. Travel is an extremely important part of our lives, getting to see and experience the world is what keeps us all connected and reminds us that we all live in the same world and deal with the same problems. But traveling around the world comes at a price and we are well aware of the many buses, planes, ships, etc. that we use to travel that harm the environment. Greenhouse gas emissions are driving increasingly dangerous climate change to the point that some of the places we love most are under threat and we don't want to contribute to the continuing destruction. So we decided to take action.

We Travel Carbon-Free

By tracking the flights of our staff members and calculating the resulting greenhouse gasses, we support CFI to go out and protect and manage a forest in Canada to pull those gasses back out. These emissions become securely stored at CFI's Whaelghinbran Farm. Read more about how CFI offsets our carbon here.

One Traveler, One Tree

But we didn't stop there. Much of the work that CFI does supports community tree planting efforts in Africa and Canada. This work is having incredible results, and we wanted to strengthen their efforts so we decided that for each traveler that comes on a trip with us, we'll provide CFI with the support to plant a tree to help offset that traveler's carbon emissions.

These trees are being used as tools of environmental and social restoration. In Canada, some of these trees were planted along a degraded watercourse and will go on to provide habitat for salmon, trout, hawks and king fisher, just to name a few. In Africa, where CFI was born, these trees were planted as a part of ongoing restoration of degraded lands on the island of Pemba, Tanzania. These trees rebuild the soil that was too poor to grow crops, allowing for trees like mangoes and cassava to thrive and produce food.

We look forward to continuing our relationship with CFI and, along with your help, making the world a greener place to live and travel in! If you want to offset your travel emissions with CFI, or want to support tree planting around the world, find out how here.