

Background Information on the Philippines



Geography

The Republic of the Philippines – the name derives from the Spanish King Philip II – is located in the western Pacific Ocean and belongs to Southeast Asia. The Philippine Archipelago forms the fifth largest island nation after Indonesia, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea and Japan. The Philippines consist of some 7000 islands, of which only about 880 are inhabited. The climate of the Philippines is largely determined by the proximity to the sea: no place is further than 300 km from the coast. The year over, it enjoys a balanced tropical climate with an average temperature of roughly 26° C. Most precipitation falls during the Southwest Monsoon between May and November.

Basic facts

Official languages: Filipino/Tagalog, English

Capital: Manila; 12 million inhabitants (by comparison: Berlin: 3 million)

Government: presidential constitutional republic

Chief of state and of government: President Gloria Macapagai Arroyo

Area: 300 000 km² (Germany: 358 000 km²)

Population: 85 million (Germany: 83 million)

Population density: 293 inhabitants per km² (Germany: 231)

Currency: Philippine Peso

Per person income per year: ca. 933 Euros (Germany: 27 253 Euros)

Independence from Spain on 12 June, 1898 (unofficial), from the USA on 4 July, 1946 (official)

Religious affiliation:

83% Catholic Christians

9% Protestant Christians

5% Muslims

2% Buddhists

Historical benchmarks

Since **prehistoric times**, the islands have been inhabited. Around 3000–2500 BCE, Austronesian tribes moved in from Taiwan.

7th to 13th Cent.: parts of the Philippines came under the influence of the indianized kingdoms of Sri Vijaya (Sumatra) and later of Majapahit (Java). Sanskrit words thus found their way into the Philippine languages. South Chinese traders also exercised substantial influence in the region.

14th Cent.: Muslims arrived in the southern Philippines, establishing several sultanates, among them the influential Sultanate of Jolo. Until the arrival of the Spaniards, extensive regions especially in the South, Palawan and the Manila area, were progressively islamized under the influence of Malayan Rajahs.

16th Cent.: In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan claimed the islands for Spain; but only in 1565 did the Spaniards begin permanent settlement, establishing their colony as a province of New Spain. After their defeat by the Spaniards in 1571, the Rajahs of Manila converted to Catholicism. They and many native chiefs were integrated into the Spanish colonial system. This system of indirect rule helped create a Filipino upper class, who enjoyed local wealth, high status, and other privileges. Serving as middlemen and beneficiaries, they became the principal supporters of the colonial system over the centuries. The Spanish priests and religious formed the other supporting pillar of the system. As missionaries, they moved throughout the country, learning the local languages and settling for decades among the local people, for whom they served as go-betweens. Only in the South, where Islam had taken deeper roots before the advent of the Spaniards, did the people remain Muslim.

May to August, 1998: the Spanish American War: In the Battle of Manila Bay on 1 May, 1898, the American naval squadron defeated the Spanish squadron. The Philippine revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo was allowed to return. On **June 12, 1898**, he proclaimed Philippine independence. But the USA failed to recognize the new republic. By the Treaty of Paris, 1898, the Philippines were handed over the United States.

1899–1902: the Philippine-American War: After defeating the Philippine insurgents, the American established a colonial civil government in 1901. In the following decades, more and more political responsibility was granted to the Filipinos.

1904–1913: Moro-American War: After the defeat of Muslim insurgents in the South, the Islamic regions were annexed.

1920's to 1950's: government supported settlement programmes brought Christians into the Muslim territories in the South, thus laying the grounds for the current conflict in that area.

1942–1945: in the course of World War II, the Philippines were occupied by Japan.

4 July, 1946: the Philippines were granted independence after more than 400 years of colonial rule. The USA continued to enjoy special economic privileges and to maintain military bases on Philippine soil.

1960's: increasing conflicts between Christian settlers and Muslim natives in the South led to the rise of separatist movements.

1965: Ferdinand Marcos became president.

1969: Marcos's "bought" re-election led to student unrest.

1972: In the wake of bombing attacks, Marcos declared martial law. Governing by decree, he restricted civil liberties and aspired to a third term presidency prohibited by the constitution. The closing of opposition newspapers and broadcasters and the arrest of opposition leaders strengthened the opposition movement.

21 August, 1983: the murder of opposition leader Benigno Aquino evoked protest demonstrations by the opposition.

1984: under church sponsorship, seminars are organized as "schooling for non-violent resistance".

February 1986: in a snap election, Marcos claimed victory on the basis of widespread electoral fraud. The real victor was Corazon Aquino, the widow of Benigno.

22–25 February, 1986: a military putsch supported by the "Rosary Revolution" overthrew Marcos. Corazon Aquino became the new president.

11 February, 1987: a new constitution came into effect, establishing a presidential republic as the form of state. The president is endowed with broad executive powers. The parliament consists of a house of representatives and a senate.

Ethnic groups, languages and religions

The population consists of diverse ethnic groups speaking Malayo-Polynesian languages, who came in successive waves from Taiwan, mixing with later immigrants from South China. The present population is roughly divided into three groups:

- Christian inhabitants of the lowlands, culturally stamped by Spanish colonial rule, making up more than 90% of the population;
- Muslim Filipinos mostly in the south, making up some 5% of the population – only since the 1970's has Islam again assumed a significant role in Philippine politics;
- highland inhabitants, who have not been touched by the Spanish Christianity or by Islam, and thus continue to practice animism.

English is the second official language, serving as the language of teaching in schools and universities and the commercial language of the business world. In day-to-day affairs and in the media, a mixture of English and Tagalog is in common use.

Unlike Malaysia and Indonesia, the Philippines were hardly touched by Buddhism or Hinduism. Instead, Catholicism prevails. It plays a decisive role in the daily life of the majority of the populace. Religious images have prominent place in public and private ambients, including most means of transportation. Especially in rural areas, the Catholic Church continues to exercise a strong influence in Philippine politics and society.

Islam reached the southern Philippines towards the end of the 14th Century and spread throughout the country until the 16th Century. Today, however, it is found principally in Mindanao. Some 4 million Filipinos are Muslims.