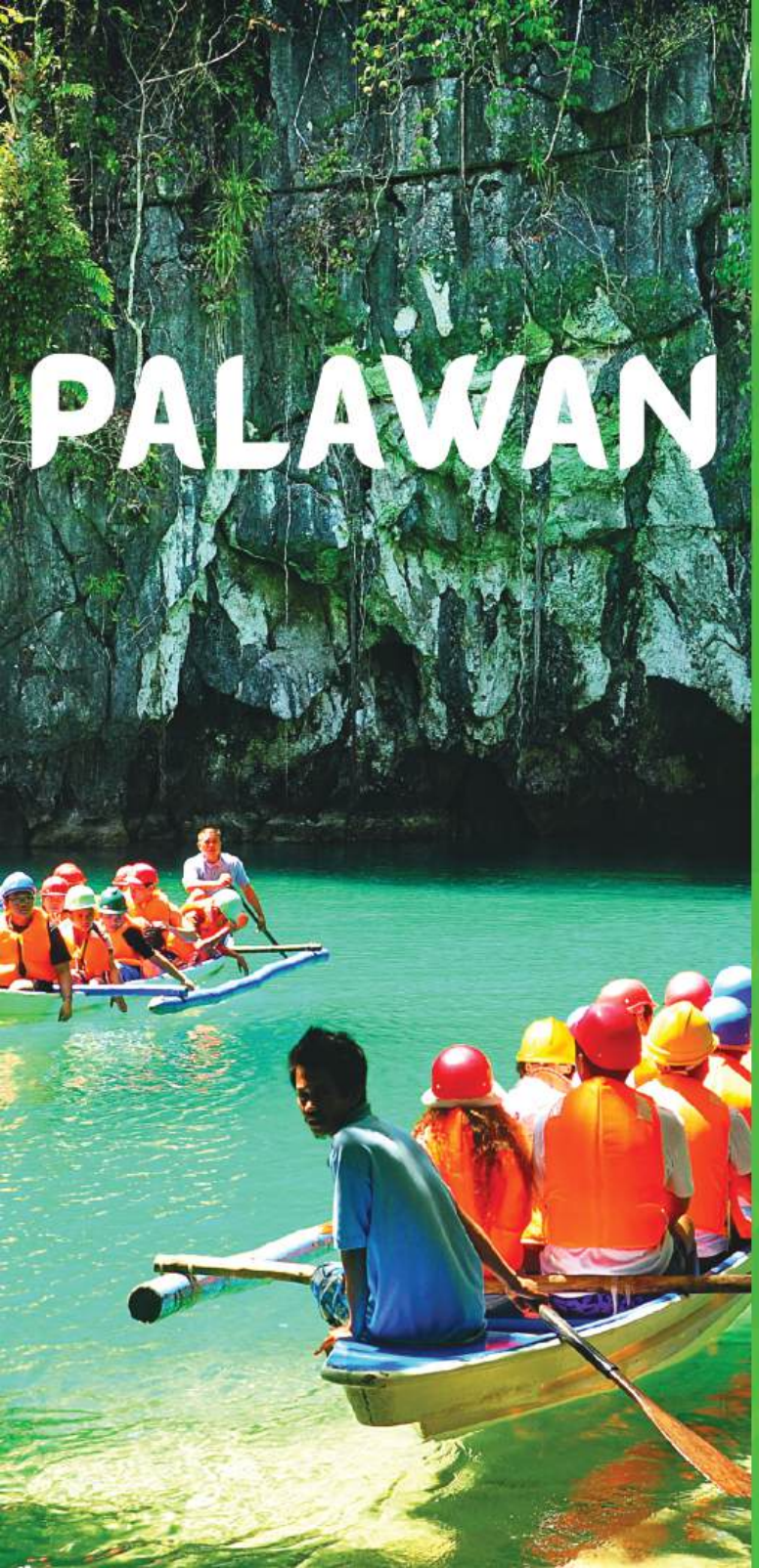

INTRODUCTION TO PALAWAN

You can't speak of paradise without mentioning Palawan at least once, or twice, or maybe more than a hundred times. Forged with various rock formations, lush mountains, clear turquoise waters, talcum sand, and kingdoms of flora and fauna, the country's last frontier is probably Mother Nature's favorite Philippine province.

Located in the MIMAROPA Region of the Philippines, Palawan is an archipelagic strip bounded by the West Philippine Sea in the east and the Sulu Sea in the south. It is world-renowned for its beaches and natural wonders and has until now kept beach mega-developers at bay.

Puerto Princesa, its capital city, is commonly a jump-off point to popular destinations, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, and is not without its own charm and sites: seafood restaurants, conservation and adventure parks, small beaches, and Iwahig—a vast mountain-flanked penal colony that really feels more like an outdoor staycation.

Farther out of the 'city in the forest,' the islands and islets of El Nido, Coron, and San Vicente, await. Here, it's all about nature and the great outdoors, a haven with something to offer both extreme sports enthusiasts and the hammock-loving crowd.

Twin Lagoons

CORON

A municipality comprised of Coron Island, half of Busuanga Island, and 50 islets, Coron is one of the last bastions of unspoilt natural splendor where castaway holidays are still possible. Here, white sand beaches, mountains, lagoons, rock formations, and a thriving marine life (especially the endangered dugong) all make for an unforgettable island getaway.

FOOD

Palawan's food scene is an immense assortment of tropical island fare, which includes lobsters and other seafood, classic Vietnamese dishes from the city's days as host to a Vietnamese refugee camp, cosmopolitan offerings with European flare, and exotic delicacies like tamilok (woodworm mollusk ceviche) and crocodile meat.

ECOTOURISM

Travel guilt-free by choosing green alternatives from your accommodations to your island activities. Check-in at the Bird House, kayak or ride a sailboat to your next destination, or tour a Mangrove Forest where you can be enchanted by the wildlife, moved by the locals' songs, and do your share of preserving Palawan by planting your own mangrove tree.

PUERTO PRINCESA SUBTERRANEAN RIVER NATIONAL PARK

More commonly known as the Underground River, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a globally relevant biodiversity conservation area and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Spanning over 22,200 hectares, the park is home to cathedral-like caverns through which the river, about 8 kilometers long, partially runs and flows directly to the sea. To protect this national treasure, a permit is required to visit and to book a guided boat tour.

PALAWAN BINTURONG

The Palawan binturong or bearcat, an endangered mammal species, is endemic to the island province. They belong to the civet family and are nocturnal, with eyes that seem to glow when you shine a light upon them. They are known to hang out on tree branches and while mild-mannered, have claws and teeth capable of tearing flesh. Cute—just don't cross it.

Jonathan Ternoy

TUBBATAHA REEF NATURAL PARK, CAGAYANCILLO

Experience extraordinary snorkeling and diving at this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Professional divers visit this two-atoll reef to witness a heart-stopping underwater piece of cinema with an all-star cast of marine inhabitants that include manta rays, sharks, whales, barracudas, sea turtles, over 500 species of fish, and over 300 species of coral.

Eric Beltran

KAYANGAN LAKE

The clear and refreshing waters of Kayangan Lake in Coron can be enjoyed after a steep stair-trek of about 700 steps (total, up and down), which can take anywhere from 15 minutes to half an hour. A cave opening awaits at the top, from which you can have a postcard-perfect view of the lake and rock formations, before descending to swim in waters so clear you can see underwater rock formations and marine life from the surface.

K-Howard Hall

DUGONG

The coast of Busuanga, a municipality in northern Palawan, is the last stronghold of the dugong, a marine herbivorous mammal closely related to the manatee. While there are dive centers offering dugong-sighting trips, travelers are urged to do their research and pick those that adhere to environmentally respectful practices, as dugongs have become critically endangered.

Gunther

HANDICRAFTS

While "take nothing but pictures" is a strong code in the islands, you can still bring back something to remember your trip by. Palawan is known for artisan handmade crafts, most commonly wood carvings—from animal figurines to rain sticks. An interestingly unique item is the Binuatan weave, which still uses traditional looms.

Erwin Lim

SAN VICENTE

The longest stretch of powdery white sand in the country awaits you in this emerging tourist destination in Palawan – all 14.7 kilometers of it! Go camping on the beach grounds, spot different species of the pawikan (sea turtle), admire a marvelous sunset, or ogle at starfishes scattered on a sandbar. This peaceful fishing village has a lot of attractions for visitors to bask in.

FUN THINGS TO DO

Erwin Lim

GO SANDBAR HOPPING

Palawan's vast islets presents a number of beautiful sandbars, or strips of sand in the middle of the water. They often disappear in time of high tide, so hanging out in these places becomes a rare, opportune experience. Most of these can be experienced in Coron and El Nido in the north, or far South in Balabac.

El Nido Resort

PADDLE THROUGH LIMESTONE CLIFF TOWERS

Lagoons provide safe harbor from tenuous conditions at open sea, largely due to their established high island barriers or geological walls. Palawan's limestone cliffs are Mother Nature's stately sentinels against violent winds and tides. In them dwell all sorts of flora and fauna, even some caves. Take a moment to admire these towering phenomena and the teeming wildlife while you're there.

Gunther

UNLEASH YOUR INNER BIRD NERD

Palawan is a refuge to over 250 species of exotic birds, including cockatoos, kingfishers, owls, and hornbills. There are enough bird conservation sites that make it possible to observe the interesting things these creatures of flight do—build nests, do mating calls, feed their young. Watching exotic and often elusive bird species in their natural habitat, with their colorful plumage and patterns, can be quite the treasured moment.

Marcello Di Francesco

DIVE INTO A WAR ZONE FROZEN IN TIME

Deep underwater in Coron Bay lies a good portion of a Japanese navy fleet decimated during World War II. Go on a wreck dive around and within these ships' well-preserved remnants and explore the Irako Maru – all 9,000-plus tonnes of it which have stayed almost intact and upright on the seabed. Like many of its fellow wartime vessels, its decks are beautifully sheathed in coral and brimming with sea creatures.

Paco Guerrero

FILM YOUR OWN WILDLIFE DOCUMENTARY

The 40-year-old Calauit Safari Park in Busuanga is a game reserve and wildlife sanctuary that holds the distinction of being a remarkable continental animal relocation and one of the few places where African wildlife is able to thrive outside Africa. Give your best David Attenborough voice impersonation while stalking a small zeal of grazing zebras or a tower of giraffes lunching on tree leaves.

THINGS TO KNOW

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly in to Puerto Princesa International Airport which accommodates both local and international flights. From Puerto Princesa, you can then take a shuttle van or bus or commute to other parts of Palawan. You may also fly directly to El Nido or Coron from Manila and other major cities in the country.

HOW TO GET AROUND

In lieu of taxicabs, tricycles and multicabs are commonly used to go around the city, even from the airport. Jeepneys ply fixed routes within the city and to its outskirts. In popular destination municipalities, like El Nido, San Vicente, Coron, and Balabac, tricycles are the common mode of transport. Rental motorcycles are also an option. Sabang, the gateway to the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River, is a small village that can be explored on foot.

WHERE TO STAY

Most travelers use Puerto Princesa as a jump off point to El Nido, Coron, Sabang, Balabac, and other parts of the province that highlight Palawan's reputation as an environmental wonderland. It might be practical to stay within the city center to easily access shops for last-minute provisions, tourism offices for information, ATM, and notable foodie places. Resorts and lodging beyond the city run from luxe to budget-friendly. Check the accommodation's capacity and plan your itinerary in advance before you book.

INTERNET

Many hotels and resorts offer WiFi connection, with varying fees—from free to partially free to paid; but a number of accommodations without internet access also exists. For on-the-go internet connection and a more viable option compared to pocket WiFi devices, all local mobile carriers offer bundled mobile data plans even for prepaid SIM cards. Some remote areas may not have mobile signal, and some resort towns have available electricity only at certain times of the day.

LANGUAGE

Filipino, the national language, spoken in Manila and other parts of Luzon island, is widely spoken throughout the province, with Cuyunon, previously the lingua franca, coming in second. As a melting pot of various local cultures, Palawan is also home to some indigenous dialects. Locals are used to tourists and can transact in Tagalog and English (in varying levels of fluency).

CURRENCY

Philippine Peso
USD 1 = Php 55.00
as of April 2023

TIME ZONE

UTC/GMT +08:00

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