

Mindanao & Sulu



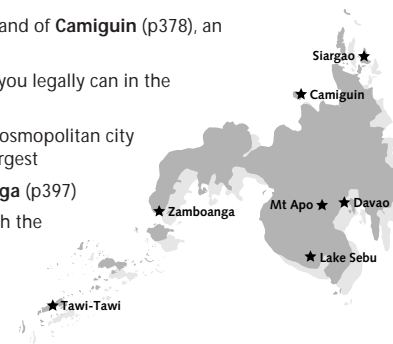
Mention Mindanao or Sulu to most Filipinos not living in either of these two island provinces and you will see a look of mild befuddlement which quickly turns to genuine surprise when foreigners say they want to travel there. Because of its now exaggerated reputation as the wild west of the Philippines, almost everywhere you go will feel as if it's 'off the beaten track', and the lack of other travellers means a better chance of experiencing Filipino culture and indigenous peoples unmediated by the tourism industry.

At 95,000 sq km, Mindanao is big and bulky. It's an island of contrasts, maybe most readily felt by journeying from the high-rise downtown of modern Davao to the nearby towering peak of Mt Apo and the surrounding primitive villages. Volcanic Camiguin Island is an adventurer's paradise, and the surf breaks around bucolic Siargao Island are some of the best in the country. Vast cattle ranches and pineapple and banana plantations on a scale that must be seen to be believed sit alongside tiny plots managed by struggling farmers. The eastern coastline is long and remote and the swamps around the Agusan River and Rio Grande de Mindanao (Pulangi River) valleys offer opportunities for animal and bird-viewing.

Muslims, who have been a minority in Mindanao since the 1950s, are the majority in only four of the 21 provinces and just 12 sq km of the 90,000 sq km of the island are given over to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), an area that includes the mainland provinces of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, and the hundreds of islands of the Sulu archipelago that stretches towards Malaysia and Indonesia. Predominantly Muslim areas include Marawi and the area around Lake Lanao, and Cotabato city.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Thriving on the gnarly surf break and surfer dude vibe on **Siargao** (p373) off the northeast coast of Mindanao
- Experiencing the beautiful and volcanic island of **Camiguin** (p378), an outdoor-adventurer's playground
- Climbing **Mt Apo** (p392) to get as high as you legally can in the Philippines
- Visiting **Davao** (p387), not only the most cosmopolitan city in Mindanao but also one of the world's largest
- Reaching the end of the road in **Zamboanga** (p397)
- Celebrating T'boli culture in November with the people of **Lake Sebu** (p395)
- Getting closer to Borneo than Manila by visiting the seafaring people of **Tawi-Tawi** (p404)



History

Mindanao's history diverged early on from that of the rest of the Philippines simply because of geography, more specifically its proximity to centres of Arab influence. Islam was introduced in the Sulu archipelago in the early 1300s, and was soon after brought to Cotabato and the Lanao area. Afterwards it was united by the sultanate under a supreme council and most of the population converted to Islam. When the Spaniards arrived in 1527, their dominance was stymied by an already entrenched and semi-organised power, and they were only able to establish outposts in northern Mindanao and Zamboanga.

It was only in the middle of the 19th century that the Spaniards, with the advantages of superior firearms and steam power, were able to make substantial inroads in Mindanao and assert their sovereignty. The US became the next colonial power in 1898, but its presence in Mindanao wasn't felt for years and it wasn't until a decade or so later that the province was formally incorporated as an administrative region under the suzerainty of the government in Manila.

From the beginning the rights of tribal minority groups and traditional property rights were violated. The peoples of Mindanao were economically and demographically threatened by the influx of Christian Filipinos from the north, who were encouraged by the government to settle in less populated Mindanao. Some argue that the policy simply opened up a sparsely populated region to immigration and created a more diverse ethnic mix.

Armed resistance developed in the late 1960s as a response to what some claimed was the occupation and annexation of their homeland. Soon after, large multinational agricultural companies entered the region en masse, invariably impacting small-scale farming and traditional ways of life regardless of ethnicity or religion. Less militant groups argue that the crux of this armed conflict is not simply the inevitable result of Muslim and Christian populations living as neighbours but the result of the exploitation of the island's resources without insuring that the people are fairly compensated or see the benefits of development.

In the late '60s, Presidents Macapagal and Marcos both hoped to add a large chunk of

territory to the archipelago by taking advantage of its historical independence, which was causing so much conflict. They made a bid to annex Sabah, a part of North Borneo recently incorporated into Malaysia. After an unrealistic proposal to include the region in a superconfederacy called Maphilindo fell flat, Marcos initiated a programme to train Muslim commandos from Mindanao with vague plans to promote unrest in Sabah, but the secret was exposed and ended with most of the guerrilla recruits being killed under mysterious circumstances.

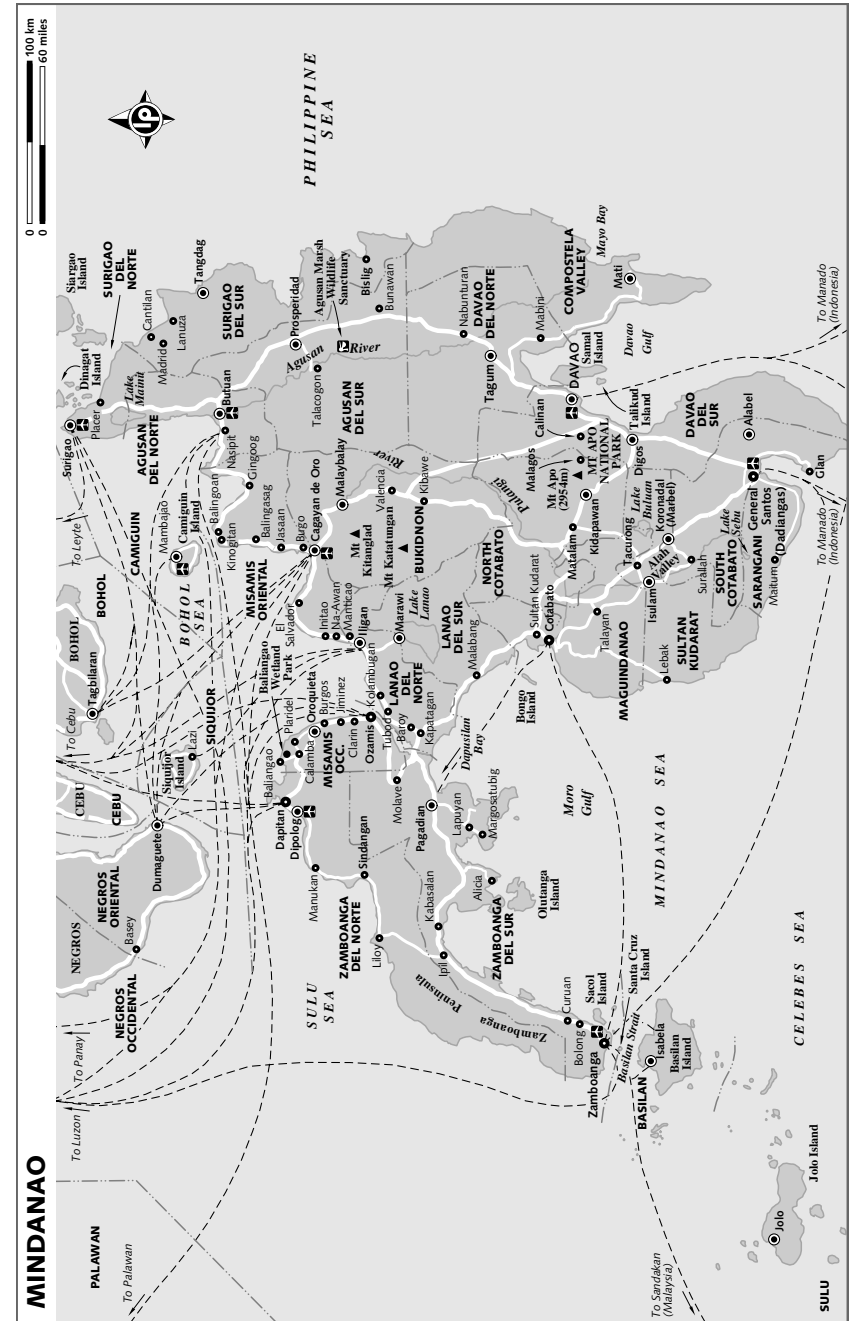
In 1976 an agreement was struck between one of the rebel groups, the Moro Islamic National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the government established the ARMM; in 1996 the MNLF was legitimised as a political group by Manila. Other groups didn't agree that limited autonomy within a federalised system was adequate when for all practical purposes most significant issues are resolved in Manila, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which is now in peace talks with the government, broke away from the MNLF in 1978. The most radical and threatening of the groups is the Abu Sayaf, a small group of former MILF members dissatisfied with the drift towards compromise; they continue to call for a separate Islamic state in the southern Philippines.

Successive government regimes have tried to assert their control through different means; Marcos tried through a combination of military action and amnesty offers but it was talks between Cory Aquino and Nur Misuari, the founder of the MNLF, which finally led to a reduction in violence in the late '80s. Unfortunately, most of the outstanding issues were never resolved and in the late '90s and early 2000s the violence resumed.

In August of 2005 Zaldy Ampatuan was elected the new governor of the ARMM; he is the first leader not to be a member of a rebel group. It was enough to provide the optimistic with hope that the conflict could be brought to an end. Since the late 1960s about 120,000 people have died as a result of the conflict between government troops and rebel groups.

Climate

The entire island is outside of the typhoon belt, but the wet and dry seasons are not as distinctive in most of Mindanao as they



are in other parts of the country such as the Visayas. There's hot and humid weather throughout the year with consistent rainfall, especially from May to October. In northern Mindanao the dry season is from November to April and temperatures at night can get downright cold in mountainous areas like Mt Apo.

National Parks

The highest mountain in the Philippines is Mindanao's Mt Apo (p392) in a national park on the border of Davao del Sur and Cotabato provinces. Mt Malindang National Park (p401) is a forested region near Ozamis on the Zamboanga Peninsula, consisting of four main peaks, gorges, grasslands, trekking, birding, and is the tribal homeland of the Subanon people. The Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary (p378) is the largest freshwater marsh in the Philippines.

Dangers & Annoyances

Despite a lull in the violence at the time of research and a subdued sense of optimism because of a renewal of peace talks between the Arroyo administration and leaders of the MILF, incidents still do occur and the situation could flare up at any time. There are breakaway elements of both the MILF and the MNLF that are still fighting for an Islamic state in the southern Philippines and the latter has issued threats against US and Western interests in the region. From 2001 to 2003 there were over 500 incidents of armed conflict between government forces and rebel groups every year; the number dropped precipitously in 2004 and 2005. The government also claims that Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesia-based organisation, infiltrated Abu Sayyaf and other separatist groups and is using remote parts of Mindanao to train dozens of recruits.

Embassies of many nations, including the US, Britain and Australia, are actively discouraging travel to Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. Attacks against transportation and commercial targets (buses, ferries, shopping malls etc) have resulted in significant loss of life. Miamis Occidental is considered risky, especially the jungles around Maguindanao. In the Sulu group of islands, only Tawi-Tawi is considered safe; the island of Jolo is a no-go zone. In March 2002, American and Philippine

armed forces began operations against Abu Sayyaf on Basilan Island off the coast of Zamboanga. Check with your embassy, or better yet with Filipinos who know specific parts of Mindanao well, before venturing into any potentially dangerous areas.

All of these caveats aside, you are more likely to be exposed to violence in any large Western city than you are while travelling in the region. Any active rebellion is primarily contained to Jolo, Basilan and pockets of the jungle in Mindanao, especially the area between Cotabato and Lake Lanao and isolated portions of the Zamboanga Peninsula. More widespread fighting did occur in Sulu in February 2005 between government forces and MNLF-related groups, leaving 100 people dead. At the same time, the MILF began to allow government troops to operate in areas considered under their control, and even actively participated in the hunt for Abu Sayyaf members. Northern Mindanao, including the islands of Siargao and Camiguin, are peaceful and at least as far as the last several years are concerned should probably be considered a separate region, mostly excluded from the troubles elsewhere.

However in the interests of full disclosure and to allow you make your own informed decision regarding travel in the area, the following is a list of some of the more high-profile attacks in the previous several years: in February 2000 a bomb planted on an interisland ferry that was about to dock in Ozamis killed at least 45 people; a bombing at a bus terminal in Surigao in 2000 killed four; in April 2002 at least 15 people were killed in a blast in a shopping mall in General Santos city; the March and April 2003 bombings in Davao, at the wharf and airport, killed dozens; a bombing in 2003 in a shopping mall in Zamboanga city killed three; a December 2004 bomb at the public market in General Santos killed 15; a February 2005 bombing killed three and wounded dozens in General Santos, and a same-day bombing at a bus terminal in Davao wounded several; and there were two bombings in downtown Zamboanga in August 2005 in which no-one was killed but more than two dozen were injured.

As an ironic rebuke to the national government in Manila, at the height of impeachment and coup talk in 2004, some

political leaders in Mindanao said they would secede from the rest of the country if the instability in Manila continued. Asking Filipinos anywhere outside of Mindanao about advice regarding travel in the region will usually elicit the same exaggerated reaction in which you're made to think that only crazy people would even consider holidaying there. Take all of this with a large grain of salt. James Hamilton-Paterson, in his book *America's Boy: A Century of Colonialism in the Philippines*, says this reaction is at least in part due to centuries of rhetoric in which all Islam was cast as the natural enemy of Christian Filipinos and all of the south was seen as the refuge of pirates, who once did ravage shipping and seaside communities further north.

Getting There & Away

There are flights from Manila to Butuan, Cagayan de Oro, Cotabato, Davao, Dipolog, General Santos and Zamboanga; from Cebu to Davao, General Santos and Zamboanga; and from Panay to Davao. Bouraq Airlines and Air Philippines fly between Davao and Manado in Indonesia and South Phoenix Airlines between Zamboanga and Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. Silk Air flies from Singapore to Davao via Cebu City.

You can get to Mindanao by boat from Bohol, Cebu, Leyte, Luzon, Manila, Negros, Palawan, Panay and Siquijor in the Philippines, and directly from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Specific travel information is given under the relevant destinations in this chapter, but transport schedules and prices should be taken as guidelines only.

Believe it or not, it's even possible to get to Mindanao by bus, but the trip involves multiple ferry transfers, frequent stops and the chance that drivers on this seemingly endless route aren't as alert as you'd like them to be.

Getting Around

Northern Mindanao is easily traversed by buses and the new highway linking Cagayan de Oro and Davao provides an inexpensive and convenient way to reach the south instead of the more expensive option of flying. Most people choose not to travel overland on the Zamboanga Peninsula and fly (or less commonly take a boat) to Zamboanga city.

NORTHERN MINDANAO

Relatively untouched by the conflict that periodically afflicts other parts of Mindanao, this stretch of coastline from Surigao and the islands off the northeast tip to Cagayan de Oro sees more foreign tourists than the Zamboanga Peninsula and southern Mindanao. Most visit the beautiful islands of Siargao and Camiguin; the latter is close enough to the southern Visayas that they are visible on clear days. The major cities of Cagayan de Oro and Butuan aren't so appealing in their own right but are necessary stopovers when visiting the offshore islands. Fewer people travel west of Cagayan.

SURIGAO

☎ 086 / pop 118,534

Unless you fly directly to Siargao Island you will have to transit here in the capital of Surigao del Norte province. Surigao is an unremarkable little city, with not much to hold a traveller's interest. If you do overnight here, what little activity there is centres around the town plaza and the people are likely to be curious and friendly.

Attractions close by include: **Silop Cave**, 7km away, with its 12 entrances leading to a big central chamber; **Day-asin**, a floating village, 5km from the city; and **Mati**, to the south, where the Mamanwas people have created a 'village' to showcase their culture. There are OK beaches nearby.

Information

There are several Internet cafés around the plaza including **Café Conrado** (r 8am-midnight; per hr P20), which is easily the most comfortable of the lot.

Equitable PCI Bank (San Nicolas St), **Metrobank** (Borromeo St) and **Landbank** (Borromeo St) have ATMs and change US dollars. **PNB** (Philippine National Bank) and **BPI** (Bank of the Philippine Islands) have branches in Rizal St.

For information about travel elsewhere in the region, the provincial **Department of Tourism** (DOT; Rizal St) is located by the city grandstand.

Sleeping

Lemondée Hotel (☎ 232 7334; Borromeo St; r with fan P200, s/d with air-con P400/500) This hotel is a good deal for a night or two. It's not the most



cheery place from the outside (or, for that matter, the inside), but the simple, clean rooms have cable TV and modern bathrooms plus the occasional mouse. Ask for a room at the back, off the noisy main road.

Tavern Hotel (☎ 231 7300; www.surigaostands.com/tavernhotel; Borromeo St; r from P875) The once and probably future classiest place in Surigao, this hotel on the way to the ferry terminal for Siargao boats was under renovation at the time of research. Judging by a few rooms yet to go under the knife, once the work is completed, rooms here will likely be the nicest around. Some have sea views and the Marco Polo bar and restaurant overlooks the sea.

Gateway Hotel (☎ 826 1283; fax 826 1285; r from P900; a i) The chandelier in the atrium

lobby of this three-storey building of concrete and reflecting glass, about 3km from the wharf along the airport road, signals the Gateway's pretensions to luxury. The carpets in the large rooms are worn and not as well maintained as you'd expect. It has a good restaurant (meals around P200).

Garcia Hotel (☎ 231 7700; San Nicolas St; r with fan P350, s/d with air-con P400/600) Best considered a last resort, the basic Garcia is only a block from the town plaza. Cheaper fan rooms have shared bathrooms.

Eating

Café Conrado (Borromeo St; sandwiches P35; h 8am-midnight; a i) The place to hang out in Surigao, Café Conrado, with its colourful,

modern paintings, reggae music and floor cushions, feels like a remarkable find for this city. The bohemian flavour is served with burgers, sandwiches, good coffee drinks and the Internet.

Marv's Garden Grill & Restaurant (☎ 826 2003; barbecue P30; h 9am-midnight) Live music and barbecue, always a heady combination but even more so when there isn't much else going on. Marv's, an outdoor pavilion next to the City Hall, gets the show started every night after 9pm. Dishes like calamari (P90) are also on the menu.

Frank Lloyd Jazz Bar (Borromeo St; dishes P160; a) Frank Lloyd looks like a restaurant – that is it has white tablecloths – though the Filipino food is unremarkable. Music is sometimes on.

JC Seafoods (Mama Aida's Seafood Grill; ☎ 826 0364; dishes P40; a) A modest little family-run place, JC's has super-value barbecue meals (P30) and a daily happy hour from 5pm to 8pm.

Jollibee, Chowking and Greenwich are clustered on the west side of the plaza and there are masses of barbecue stalls along the wharf. Fruit stalls are opposite the cinemas on San Nicolas St.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Asian Spirit (☎ 826 1571) has daily flights to Manila (1½ hours) and flights to Cebu (40 minutes) several days a week. Philippine Airlines has an office in Borromeo St next to Café Conrado. Catch a taxi or tricycle to the airport, 5km west of the town centre.

BOAT

Boats to Siargao (P220, three hours) and Dinagat depart from the wharf a little over 1km south of the plaza. Tickets should be purchased in advance from the ticket booth serving both Fortune Jet and Aska Queen (and whatever other company may be in operation at the time) across the street. Schedules are unreliable, though there should be a morning and early-afternoon departure; avoid Sunday travel, as cancellations are more likely.

Sulpicio Lines runs a weekly boat to Davao.

For Manila, SuperFerry leaves every Wednesday (P2100, 31 hours), while Cebu Lines and Sulpicio Lines have a regular weekly service.

For Cebu City, Trans Asia has boats leaving twice weekly; Cokaliong Lines has regular trips three times weekly; and Sulpicio Lines also makes the trip three times a week.

There are a few daily departures for Liloan (P120, four hours), on the southern coast of Leyte.

BUS

The bus terminal is about 5km out of town towards the airport. Air-con and ordinary Batchelor Express buses run throughout the day to Butuan (P150, two hours) and Cagayan de Oro (P300, six hours), along the west coast; to Davao (P485, 11 hours) in the south; and to Tandag (P126, six hours) in the east.

SIARGAO

After several days of either riding the waves or simply watching others take them on, your mission to decompress and take it easy accomplished, it's still difficult to pack up and leave. Siargao (shar-gao) is the kind of place that seems to give off a magnetic force, transforming weekend-long stays into weeks or for the handful of foreign surfing lifers now calling the island home, forever. Time spent here makes you ask the existential question, 'Why can't I do this every day for the rest of my life?'

Until recently, when Siargao was plucked from relative obscurity by officials hoping to make it one of the shining stars in the Philippines' tourism firmament, the only visitors were Filipino day-trippers and seriously laid-back and committed Aussie and American surfers. Land values have gone up tenfold in the last ten years and the Cloud Nine surf break is now on the international surfing trail map. Siargao has plenty of natural attractions for nonsurfers too: beaches and rock pools, extensive mangrove swamps, inland forest and waterfalls. Wildlife includes tarsiers, flying lemurs and monitor lizards. Attractive islands are nearby, especially Bucas Grande with Sohoton Cave. This is not the island for people seeking an active nightlife, but the resorts are enough for a quiet sunset drink or two.

The **Siargao Cup surfing competition**, one of the largest international sporting events in the country, is held in late September or

early October every year. Surfing can be good from April to October and is great on the northwest coast during the northeast monsoon, but as with many places in the Philippines, surf can't be guaranteed. Surfboard rentals can be found in resorts around the island. Booties are highly recommended to protect your feet since the break is along a reef and not the beach.

Deep caves like the Blue Cathedral and strong currents mean experienced divers only – for diving trips try the bootstrap Siargao Island Diving Inc on General Luna St, or go to the Pansukian Tropical Resort (right).

The port is in the main township of Dapa. On arrival you'll probably want to head straight over towards General Luna (known locally as GL) and 'Cloud Nine', where the low-key beach resorts are located.

Wherever you are on the island, room rates increase during surfing tournaments and Holy Week. There are no banks and only two places to access the Internet: Patrick's on the Beach (opposite) near GL and the Siargao Institute of Technology (per hr P30; 11 8am-8pm) in Dapa.

General Luna

pop 12,347

More foreign visitors choose to stay at one of the resorts on Cloud Nine than in General Luna (or GL), a small township on the southeast coast. But for what it's worth GL has a few eateries and bars, and some of the resorts in the area have beachfront.

There are several breaks south of GL reached by *bangka* including a few around offshore islands. A river perfect for swimming during high tide is near the village of Union between GL and Cloud Nine.

SLEEPING & EATING

Some of the earliest established resorts on Siargao are to the south of the township. They're quite popular with the locals, drawing large groups of students and budget conventioners.

Pansukian Tropical Resort (☎ 0918 903 9055, in Cebu 32 234 1282; www.pansukian.com; r US\$200) This architecturally inspired five-star resort is a couple of kilometres further along the coast. The nine villas are stylish and luxurious but in a low-key way. Rates include all meals,

which tend towards the spectacular, and use of snorkelling equipment, windsurfing boards and kayaks.

Cherinicole Resort (☎ 0918 244 4407; www.cherinicoleresort.com; cottages from P1400; a s) Cherinicole's deluxe cottages have great ocean views, air-con and TV; other attached nipa huts are more ordinary though all are well maintained. There's a bar, restaurant, games room and plans for a pool in the future.

JadeStar Beach Resort (☎ 0919 234 4367; r with fan/air-con from P600/1000) Concrete or thatched, the cottages at this resort have nice little touches like bright curtains, and all have private porches.

Pansangan Beach Resort (r P500) Although not directly on the beach, this small resort, 200m from Cherinicole, is owned by a lovely elderly couple, and is an easy walk into General Luna.

Other places to eat are Maridyl's Eatery on the main street or at The Pub near the school.

Cloud Nine

The picturesque rickety wood pavilion running out to the surf break is Cloud Nine. Groups of young Filipinos sporting the international signifiers of surfer dudes – Billabong boards, Quicksilver shorts and the lingo to match – hang out here. There are several other breaks for the experienced accessible by *bangka*, including Rock Island, visible from the Cloud Nine beach, and at least a dozen good beaches are within an hour by boat or road. The newer resorts and surf camps here are mostly run by some seriously relaxed expat Australians. All resorts have big bamboo pavilions for hanging out over the water.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

All the resorts here can help organise day tours and boat trips. A half-day trip visiting the Guyam, Dahao and Naked Islands costs around P1200 for four to six people. Contact Ross Robinson (☎ 0919 501 0101), a genial and laid-back Aussie for surf lessons; he can put you in touch with local Filipino hotshots as well. Magapunko, a superclean swimming hole at low tide, is only a half-hour boat ride (per boat P800) from Cloud Nine.

SLEEPING & EATING

Sagana Beach Resort (☎ 0919 809 5769; www.cloud9surf.com; r US\$50; s) The Sagana resort may not

be as exclusive as the Pansukian but the six Balinese-inspired and beautifully designed cottages are as much luxury as most people need. Jerry Degan, one of the owners, is a fount of information. It also has some of the best food on the island though its generally reserved only for guests; the creative menu changes daily, but is generally a mix of Asian fusion and European dishes (meals P400). There's a saltwater pool.

Cloud 9 Resort (cottages P400-800) Next door to Sagana, Australian-owned Cloud 9 has several basic cottages with private porches set in a nicely landscaped garden facing the beach and surf break. There's a pleasant open-air restaurant, though management and service is indifferent.

Jungle Reef Resort (☎ 0919 809 5774; r P250-500) The cottages at the Jungle Reef are similar in quality to Cloud 9 though the location isn't as fortunate.

Patrick's on the Beach (☎ 0918 725 7728; www.patricksonthebeach.com; r from P1100; j) While Patrick's is situated on a nice spot on the beach and can arrange any and all boat trips, the cottages with mismatched furniture, matted bamboo walls and toilets without seats, are a disappointment. It also changes money, accepts most credit cards and has Internet access (11 7am-9pm; per hr P50) available to nonguests as well.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

It's easy to get a motorbike from the wharf at Dapa (P150) or GL (P30) directly to any of the resorts at Cloud Nine, though the road turns to dirt past GL.

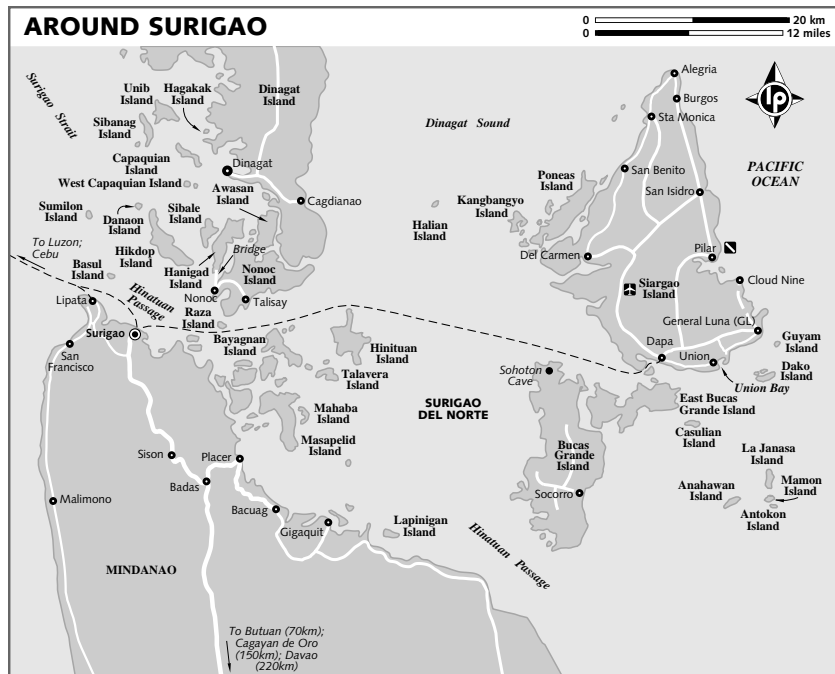
Pilar & Burgos

Barangay Pilar is largely built on stilts over mangrove flats; to visit you can hire a pumpboat from Cloud Nine or rent a motorcycle (P500 return) and go yourself. Blue Cathedral is a dive site off the coast.

You can take a motorcycle around the island and up to Burgos, a lovely little town with a pretty beach on the northeast coast.

Islands near Siargao

Just off the southern section of Siargao are the tiny white-sand-and-palm islet of Guyam (Giligian's Island; pumpboat from GL P800); the bigger Dako (pumpboat from GL P1000) with its beautiful beach, snorkelling and diving; and Bucas Grande, with Sohoton Cave, not to be confused with the park



of the same name in southern Samar. This inland lake with all kinds of weird marine creatures and nonstinging jellyfish has Chocolate Hills–like mounds rising like the humps of an underwater monster and is accessible only during low tide. An all-day trip from GL or Cloud Nine, arranged through one of the resorts, costs from around P2000.

You can take a boat around to the mangrove swamps of Caob on the island of Kangbango and look for crocodiles though you'd have better luck stopping by the DNR office in Del Carmen which usually keeps a few in a cage – you can hire a *bangka* from Del Carmen for around P200, depending on how deep you want to go into the mangroves and how long you want to stay out.

There are surf breaks around La Janosa and Mamon Islands and it's possible to paddle a surfboard between the two. You can spend the night at Jerry's on the Beach, a very primitive resort on La Janosa Island with a couple of rooms. To get here you can hire a *bangka* from the pier at GL. Prices depend on which islands you visit and how long you want to stay.

Getting There & Away

SEAIR has a flight from Cebu to Siargao every Tuesday and Saturday (P3700, 40 minutes), and in the opposite direction on the same day.

Siargao is serviced by Fortune Jet and Aska Queen boats every morning and early afternoon (P220, three hours) from Surigao. Fortune Jet boats are generally more comfortable. Check times at the wharf, as schedules can change or boats may be out of service. The same boats return to Dapa on Siargao daily.

If you're encamped out around Cloud Nine it's a good idea to book your return ticket a day in advance. You can ask a motor-cycle driver to do this for P100.

Getting Around

Jeeps run from Dapa to GL (P10, one hour). Alternatively you can hire a motorcycle and driver to take you there (P100, 30 minutes). The going rate for motorcycle hire is around P300 for half a day to P800 for the day depending on your destination. These motorcycles are big enough to seat large families at one hit and are known locally as *hubel-hubel*.

DINAGAT

☎ 085 / pop 10,000

Though it's much larger than Siargao and closer to the mainland, the island of Dinagat (*nah-gat*) sees few visitors, primarily because accommodation is very limited. However, the rugged and wild coastline is certainly striking enough to warrant more attention. The island is home to several fishing communities and the northwest coast is especially picturesque – featuring jungle-clad karst formations jutting up out of turquoise waters. It's possible to explore the island as an (expensive) package tour with Pansukian Tropical Resort (p374) on Siargao; otherwise you can try your luck hiring a private pumpboat or taking the daily public pumpboat (P150, three hours), which leaves from pier 2 in Surigao at noon – note, however, that it returns from Loretto town on Dinagat daily at 5am, which means you must spend the night. A few basic huts on the beach are available at Bahay Turista.

BUTUAN

☎ 085 / pop 267,280

Butuan's favourable location – sprawled along the banks of the Agusan River 9km south of the northern coast – is mooted by the intensely traffic-clogged streets, which are impressive even by Filipino standards. It is, however, a logical stop if you're travelling between the islands of Siargao and Camiguin, and the city, which has been a major port to a greater or lesser degree since at least the 4th century, boasts several important historical sites.

Widely recognised as the earliest known place of settlement and sea trade in the Philippines, by the 11th century Butuan was the commercial and trade centre of the country. In 1976 the oldest boat in the Philippines was discovered here – a carefully crafted *balangay* (sea-going outrigger) that has been carbon-dated to AD 320. This find, along with discoveries of extensive wooden coffins of tribal peoples who practised skull deformation, has made Butuan a centre of archaeological and ethnographical importance.

Information

BPI (Montilla Blvd) Changes US dollars and has an ATM.
Philippine Airlines (PAL: Villanueva St) An agency office for the airline.

INFORMATION	
Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI).....	1 A4
Rocks Net Café.....	2 A4
Tourist Office.....	3 B4
Vivo Internet Café.....	4 A3
World Net Café.....	5 A4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Diocesan Ecclesiastical Museum.....	(see 6)
St Joseph Cathedral.....	6 A4
SLEEPING	
Almont Hotel.....	7 B4
Butuan Luxury Hotel.....	8 A3
Embassy Hotel.....	9 A4
Emerald Villa Hotel.....	10 A3
Imperial Hotel.....	11 A3
Royal Plaza Hotel.....	12 A3
EATING	
Big Bowl Restaurant.....	(see 7)
Chowking.....	13 B4
Greenwich.....	14 B4
Jollibee.....	15 A4
New Narra Restaurant.....	16 B4
TRANSPORT	
Negros Navigation Agent.....	17 A3
PAL Agent.....	18 A3
WG&A Shipping Lines Agent.....	19 B3

PNB (Montilla Blvd) Changes US dollars and has an ATM.
Rocks Net Café (Montilla Blvd) One of a bunch of Internet cafés on Montilla Blvd.

Tourist Office (☎ 9am–7pm) On the southeast corner of Rizal Park, has good maps of the city and a small souvenir shop selling locally made crafts.

Vivo Internet Café (T Calo St; ☎ 8am–10pm) Near the river.

WG&A Shipping Lines (Lopez Jaena St) An agency office.

World Net Café (Montilla Blvd; ☎ 9am–11pm)

Sights & Activities

About 6km or so north of the town centre, the **Butuan Regional Museum** (☎ 342 5328; ☎ 9am–noon & 1–4.30pm Mon–Sat; admission P15) has a small but excellent collection. It stands in

a quiet garden of lily ponds; take a picnic and enjoy the surroundings.

Towards the airport, at barangay Libertad, is the **Balangay Shrine Museum** (☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat), where the remains of the several boats discovered are on display, along with coffin burials. The word 'barangay' in fact derives from '*balangay*', as the boats were big enough to move whole communities of settlers in one journey. A tricycle (per hour P100) will take you to the discovery site; the ride out here is worthwhile in itself.

There is a **Diocesan Ecclesiastical Museum** (☎ 6am–8pm; admission free), the only one in Mindanao, at the convent of St Joseph Cathedral (E Luna St). It commemorates missionary work in the region. Butuan, like Limasawa in Leyte, claims the honour of the first mass held by Magellan on Philippine soil at nearby Magallanes; a memorial marks the spot.

Festivals & Events

Balangay Festival runs the entire month of May. It honours St Joseph, the patron saint of Butuan, and involves parades, sporting events and cultural shows.

Sleeping

Almont Hotel (☎ 341 5010; almont@skyinet.net; San Jose St, Rizal Park; s/d P850/1000; a) This is the best choice in the city centre; reservations are recommended since it's often booked. Rooms are modern, clean and well kept. There's free airport transfer, breakfast at the attached Big Bowl restaurant and, strangely enough, complimentary pressing of one suit.

Almont Inland Resort (☎ 342 7414; almont@pltdsl.net; JC Aquino Ave; r P2500; s a) Though the rooms aren't especially good value, this resort just west of Gaisano mall is a refuge from the smog and noise of the city. The swimming pool and open-air restaurant and bar are the best places to while away a day in Butuan even if the landscaping could use some work. It's a large complex/convention centre and the service is professional. Complimentary breakfast and airport transfer.

Royal Plaza Hotel (T Calo St; r from P750; a) Rooms here are large, so big in fact that the images from the small TV are difficult to make out from the beds. It's a nice problem to have though and the front desk staff is helpful.

Embassy Hotel (☎ 342 5883; Montilla Blvd; s/d with air-con P500/600) On the main north–south thoroughfare lined with Internet cafés,

the Embassy has wooden floors and basic rooms furnished in grey. There's a restaurant and videoke bar attached.

Also recommended:

Butuan Luxury Hotel (☎ 342 5366; Villanueva St; r from P600; a)

Emerald Villa Hotel (☎ 342 5377; Villanueva St; s/d P500/650; a) Small rooms, small TVs and wood floors.

Imperial Hotel (☎ 341 5319; San Francisco St; r with fan/air-con P220/500) Toilets don't have seats.

Eating

Big Bowl Restaurant (☎ 341 5010; San Jose St, Rizal Park; dishes P120; h 6am-10pm; a) This cosy restaurant on the ground floor of the Almont Hotel is the best place to eat in the city centre. Breakfast is served most of the day and the menu has a wide range of choices from European mains like pastas (P130) to rice and noodle dishes (P125).

New Narra Restaurant (E Luna St), around the corner from Rizal Park and **Roldan's Eat All You Can** (Montilla Blvd) have good Filipino food.

There's a Jollibee, Chowking and Greenwich around Rizal Park, and Gaisano Mall, a few kilometres west of the city centre on Jose C Aquino Ave, has a number of fast-food joints. There are several eateries across the street around the Lynzee Bowling Centre.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 10km west of the city centre. Cebu Pacific Air flies from Manila to Butuan (P3200, 1½ hours) and back daily.

BOAT

Butuan's main port area is at Nasipit, about 10km west of town. Jeepneys run between Nasipit and Butuan (30 minutes).

SuperFerry has boats running twice a week between Manila and Nasipit (P2300, 36 hours). The Negros Navigation boat to Manila runs once a week. Its agent has an office on Lopez Jaena St.

Cebu Ferries has boats to Jagna on Bohol once a week. For Cebu, SuperFerry has boats twice weekly.

Negros Navigation has a weekly service to Negros. It also has boats going via Cebu to Palawan once a week.

BUS

The bus terminal is about 1km from the city centre. There are frequent services between

Butuan to Surigao (P150, two hours), Balingoan (P150, two hours), Cagayan de Oro (P210, 3½ hours) and Davao (P315, seven hours). These times and prices are for air-con buses; the more frequent fan buses are less direct and slower.

AROUND BUTUAN

Inland and a little south from Butuan is the floodplain of the Agusan River and the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, the largest freshwater marsh in the Philippines. There are villages of houses floating on bamboo poles and tree trunks around the township of Bunawan, and the swamps around Talacogon are a prime habitat for bird life and a good number of crocodiles. The forested area north of the Agusan River remains the habitat of the tarsier, the tiniest primate in the world.

Unless you have the time (and assistance) to go about hiring transport and a guide for the trip – which could take several days to arrange – you're best off going through the Balanghai Hotel in Butuan.

BALINGOAN

pop 8197

About two-thirds of the way from Butuan, heading west towards Cagayan de Oro, this is the only port serving Camiguin Island by ferry. Boats run hourly from early morning to around 4.30pm (P70, one hour).

Regular bus and jeepney services run between Balingoan and Cagayan de Oro (P85, 2½ hours) and Butuan (P80, two hours).

CAMIGUIN

pop 70,000

In a country of thousands of islands it's hard for one to stand out. Camiguin (cammee-gin) manages to distinguish itself, at least in part because of its fortuitous location. It's far removed from any threat of violence, but because it's part of Mindanao, many people scratch it off their itinerary. Because it's uncorrupted by large numbers of tourists, those who do come tend to feel proprietorial about this little jewel and guard news of its treasures like a secret.

The landscape is lush and varied like other islands, but volcanic Camiguin rises more dramatically from the sea like a Hawaiian island, managing to be both imposing and inviting, a less menacing version of

Jurassic Park. The island is only 33km long and 14km at its widest, and it's possible to see the islands of the southern Visayas on clear days. Besides the usual diving, snorkelling, sandy beaches, waterfalls and hot and cold springs, Camiguin offers the chance for jungle trekking, volcano climbing, rappelling as well as the general opportunity to figure out your own way around the many natural attractions.

Islanders are mostly fishing folk, and they are extremely warm and friendly to tourists who are increasingly important to the economy. No wild nightlife here, and no-one seems to mind.

Orientation & Information

Mambajao (mah-bow-ha) is the capital of Camiguin, about half an hour's ride from the port at Benoni. There are shops, a market, government buildings and a few places to stay here, but most visitors prefer to stay closer to the northern beaches.

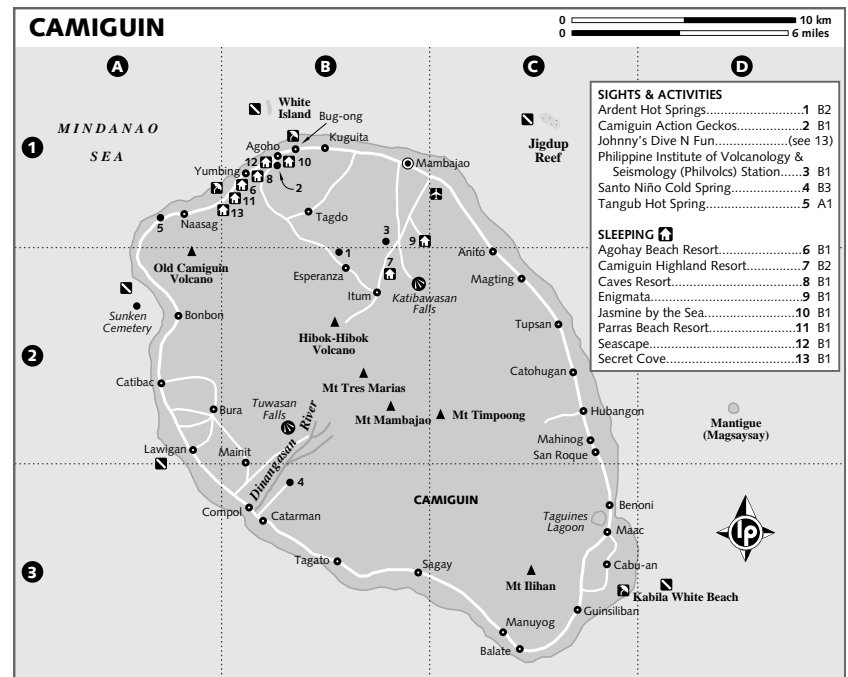
There's a modern **Internet café** (h 7am-11pm; per hr P30) in Mambajao down by the waterfront.

There's a PNB, DBP and Landbank in Mambajao. PNB and DBP change US dollars but not euros, and PNB changes travellers cheques. At the time of research there were no ATMs for foreign credit cards or banking cards.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 387 1097; www.camiguin.gov.ph; 2nd fl, Provincial Capitol Bldg) in Mambajao. The staff here have a list of homestay accommodation for those who prefer to stay with a local family.

Sights & Activities

The waters surrounding Camiguin are good for diving, especially for beginners who can see interesting rock formations in shallow waters, a result of the lava flow from Hibok-Hibok's previous eruptions. There are over 10 sites of note, including Jigdup Reef, with a coral-covered slope and wall to explore, and 'Old Volcano', an eerie moonscape of sunken lava flows. The best diving is probably off White Island, a tiny islet off Agoho. Diving can be arranged through **Camiguin Action Geckos** (☎ 387 1266; www.camiguinaction.com), located on the beach at Agoho



between Jasmine's and Caves resorts (next to the cemetery; it also has a small office in Mambajao) or **Johnny's Dive N Fun** (☎ 387 9588; www.johnnysdive.com), based at the Secret Cove resort (opposite). If you're already a diver, expect to pay about US\$20 for a boat dive plus US\$5 for equipment rental. Snorkelling equipment is rented out for P250 to P300.

Climbing, trekking, mountain biking, horseback riding, rappelling and any other action adventure can be booked through Camiguin Action Geckos; ask for the knowledgeable and energetic Barbie Fernandez. Trips up Hibok-Hibok cost around US\$35 per person, and a trek across the island is US\$35 per person. Barbie can tailor trips to any specifications, for beginners or experienced, and easy to difficult.

BENONI TO MAMBAJAO

Benoni has an artificial lagoon to the south of its wharf and is a fish-breeding area.

Between Benoni and Mambajao you'll see **Mantigue Island** – sometimes called Mag-saysay – offshore. A few fishing families live here and there's still good coral. From the Islet Beach Resort at Mahinog a return trip to the island will cost P500.

Hibok-Hibok volcano (1320m), which last erupted in 1951, provides a dramatic spark – no pun intended – to the island's interior. About 500m off the main road is the Philippine Institute of Volcanology & Seismology (Philvolcs) station, which monitors the volcano's activity. A hired motorcycle or multicab will take you there to see the equipment and memorabilia of past eruptions. It's possible to climb the volcano, but be warned that it's a steep climb and you should be reasonably fit. Most resorts have a list of local guides who will take you up the trail; aim to leave around daybreak if you want to get up and down in a day.

Less energetic is the trip to **Katibawasan Falls** (admission P10). This is a beautiful clear stream of water dropping about 70m to a plunge pool. You can swim here but the changing rooms and picnic tables have seen better days. A special trip by jeepney or multicab from Mambajao will cost about P300 return; from the resorts around Agoho it's about P350 return.

Nearby are the very hot – about 40°C – **Ardent Hot Springs** (♣ springs & grounds 6am–10pm); head out late in the afternoon when the air

temperature has cooled down a bit. The **big pool** (admission P20) is emptied for cleaning on Wednesday and takes the best part of the day to refill. The springs are in a lush setting and get very busy on weekends.

NORTH COAST TO KABILA

Kuguita, Bug-ong, Agoho and **Yumbing** are the most developed of the northern beaches and are where much of the accommodation is located.

Tangub Hot Spring is a completely undeveloped spring that wells hot under the sea bed, a few metres offshore at Tangub, just beyond barangay Naasag. It's fun to sit in the water at low tide as cold sea water and hot spring water mix.

All these resorts give easy access to tiny, uninhabited **White Island**, a pure, white-sand bar a few hundred metres offshore. A return trip should cost around P300.

Just before **Bonbon** you'll pass the Old Camiguin Volcano, whose slopes have been turned into a steep and beautiful **Stations of the Cross**. There are great views from the top and a bunch of souvenir stalls selling cheap T-shirts and the like clustered at the bottom of the steps. Between the hillside and Bonbon you'll see an enormous white cross floating on a pontoon in the bay; this marks the spot of the **Sunken Cemetery**, which slipped into the sea following the earthquake of 1871; it's now a snorkelling and diving spot teeming with fish and coral. The same earthquake destroyed the 17th-century **Spanish church** in Bonbon; its quiet ruins still stand, with grazing cattle and a makeshift altar inside.

About 10km further along the island road from Bonbon is **Catarman**. Near **Catarman** is the little visited and unspoiled **Tuwasan Falls**. The road here is impassable after rain, but if it's dry a jeepney or multicab can take you to the start of the path. From there it's about a 15-minute hike to the falls, walking twice through the river (this is also not possible after heavy rain as the river is too high). The falls thunder into a pool which may be too rough to plunge into, but it's nice to see the tree ferns and rainforest created by the spray.

Also near Catarman is the **Santo Niño Cold Spring** (admission P10; ♣ 8am–noon & 1–5pm, closed for cleaning 8–10am Mon), a terrific huge pool, 40m long, filled by the spring.

HOT SPOT

Camiguin has the most number of volcanoes per square kilometre than any other island on earth. It has more volcanoes than towns, and more than 20 cinder cones over 1000m.

Guinsiliban is an alternative port to Benoni, and some ships from Cagayan de Oro dock here. Behind the elementary school by the wharf are the remains of an old **Spanish watchtower**, used to watch out for possible Moro invaders from the mainland. A pretty shrine is maintained here.

Soon after rounding the southern end of the island and turning north you come upon **Kabila White Beach**, nestled in a cove; four species of giant clams are cultivated in a protected nursery offshore.

Festivals & Events

Camiguin is widely recognised for having the sweetest **lanzones** (small, yellow fruit that tastes like a mix of lemons and lychees) in the archipelago. The annual **Lanzones Festival** takes place around the third week of October, when you can join in with everyone else and make an unashamed glutton of yourself on these truly delicious fruit.

Sleeping & Eating

MAMBAJAO & AROUND

Enigmata (formerly Tarzan's Nest; ☎ 387 0273, 0918 230 4184; www.geocities.com/enigmatagalari; r P250–350; Ⓢ) As the name may suggest, this is a hippy-trippy lodge/arts collective built around a huge old hardwood tree. It's located up a hill off the main road about 3km southeast of Mambajao. Beads and bottles and fabrics and wood are everywhere, and one whole unconventionally designed floor sleeps four for only P800. There's also a good restaurant (pizza P150, Thai chicken P120, vegetable curry P150). Look for the sign and turn south off the main road when you reach **Balbagon**. Tricycle from Mambajao is around P25.

Camiguin Highland Resort (☎ 387 0515; www.camiguinhighlands.com; r from P2000; a Ⓢ) Definitely a fish out of water, the Highland Resort looks like the Imelda Marcos version of a Mediterranean villa except it's perched half way up a mountain nowhere near the

ocean. The large, clean, bordering-on-garish rooms are easily the nicest on the island and the service the most professional. There's a good restaurant, coffee shop, pool, Jacuzzi and horseback riding, and all manner of hikes and water activities can be arranged. It's located past the capitol buildings and the turn off for the **Katibawasan Falls**.

Casa Grande (☎ 387 2075; r P800) and **Tia's Pension House** (☎ 387 0103; r P200) offer simple accommodation in Mambajao.

NORTHERN BEACHES

Jasmine by the Sea (☎ 387 9015; melindawidmer@yahoo.com; r/cottage P300/500) It's difficult to leave Jasmine's. This idyllic, friendly little place on the beach at Bug-ong is one of the best-value places in Mindanao. There are several large, clean wood-floored rooms with modern bathrooms, and a few small individual cottages. Though the latter have their own private porch, the main building has its own attractive veranda and there are hammocks on the lawn. There's an open-air restaurant and bar serving good Western and Filipino food, and motorcycles and mountain bikes are available for hire.

Seascape (☎ 0920 823 8602; r/cottage P600/800) Next door to Jasmine's, Seascape has a very nice, huge bamboo and nipa hut with wood furniture and private porch with a hammock; the concrete rooms are less attractive. In the middle of the lawn, set off from the beach, is a two-storey restaurant, a good place for a sunset meal or drink.

Secret Cove (☎ 387 9084; tomsolski@fastmail.com; r with fan/air-con P600/1000; Ⓢ) There's no real beachfront at the Secret Cove though there is a little artificial sandy area and the nicely decorated air-con rooms have cable TV. It's the headquarters of Johnny's Dive N Fun and it has a good restaurant serving such delicacies as ostrich meat in cream sauce (P330). The pool overlooks the sea (nonguests P50).

Caves Resort (☎ 387 0077, 0920 424 5345; cavesresort@yahoo.com; r P300–700) This resort on a wide part of the beach at Agoho has small (but nice) concrete cottages on the grounds behind the big, airy restaurant and bar on the beachfront. Rooms in the main bamboo building are simple and clean but the common bathroom is not in the best condition.

Parras Beach Resort (☎ 387 9008; r from P1700; a Ⓢ) Parras has the facilities of a high-end resort, but also the lack of privacy and the

concrete all too typical in the Philippines. This complex at Yumbing has a souvenir shop, billiards, pool, bar, restaurant and conference facilities. You can hire kayaks (P200) and speed boats (P500).

Agothay Beach Resort (Camiguin Seaside Lodge; % 387 9031; cottages P500) The Agothay dormitory nipa cottages cater particularly to large groups; some have private bathroom. There's a big restaurant area.

Getting There & Away

SEAIR (% 387 0035; www.flyseair.com) has flights from Cebu to Camiguin (P1500, 45 minutes) on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday; return flights are on the same days. The airport is near Mambajao.

Ferries cross from Balingoan (P70, one hour), about 80km north of Cagayan de Oro, to Benoni. Boats run about hourly from early morning to 4.30pm.

See p378 for information on getting to Balingoan from Cagayan de Oro and Butuan.

Getting Around

The road around the island is 64km long, so it's possible to make the circuit in a few hours. For ease of travel and access to places that jeepneys don't go, think about hiring a motorcycle (P300 to P500), or a multicab that can comfortably seat about six people (P1000) and take you around for a day.

Public jeepneys and multicabs ply the road from Benoni to Mambajao (P25, 40 minutes). A special ride to Mambajao costs P150; to the resorts north of Mambajao you'll pay P250. There is a flat rate of P5 for local rides.

CAGAYAN DE ORO

% 088 / pop 461,877

Endowed with an impressive name (the 'Oro' part, after all, refers to the gold discovered by the Spanish in the river here), the city unfortunately has the usual traffic-clogged streets and is primarily a stop to or from Camiguin Island or the departure point for the road journey south to Davao. That it is comparatively wealthy becomes obvious when you're inching forward on the northern access road lined with new car lots. Today, much of the city's economic activity centres on the vegetable gold of the Del Monte pineapple processing plant a few kilometres north of town, and the compa-

ny's plantations in the hills above Cagayan. Every Friday and Saturday night Divisoria or Golden Friendship Park is closed to street traffic and lined with food stalls and street cafés. The presence of Xavier University explains the significant student population cramming the Internet cafés.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Cindy's Internet, Clickwork Internet, Moon Computer Station and Pegasus Internet are all on T Chavez St between Apolinar Velez St and Pabayo St. Cyberlink and Netopia are within a few blocks. Most charge around P30 per hour.

MONEY

All the major banks are here and will change US dollars and have ATMs.

BPI (JR Borja St) There's another branch on RN Abejuela St.

Equitable PCI Bank (JR Borja St) There's another branch on Apolinar Velez St.

Landbank (A Luna St)

PNB (Corrales Ave)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Department of Tourism Office (% 272 3696; dotr10@yahoo.com; Apolinar Velez St; h 7.30-noon & 1-6.30pm) At the front of the Pelaez Sports Centre complex across the street from the Polymedic General Hospital.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Air Philippines (Apolinar Velez St)

Cebu Pacific Air (Apolinar Velez St)

Limcon Travel & Ticketing Services (% 857 5704; 47 Tirso Neri St) Can book all onward transport.

Sleeping

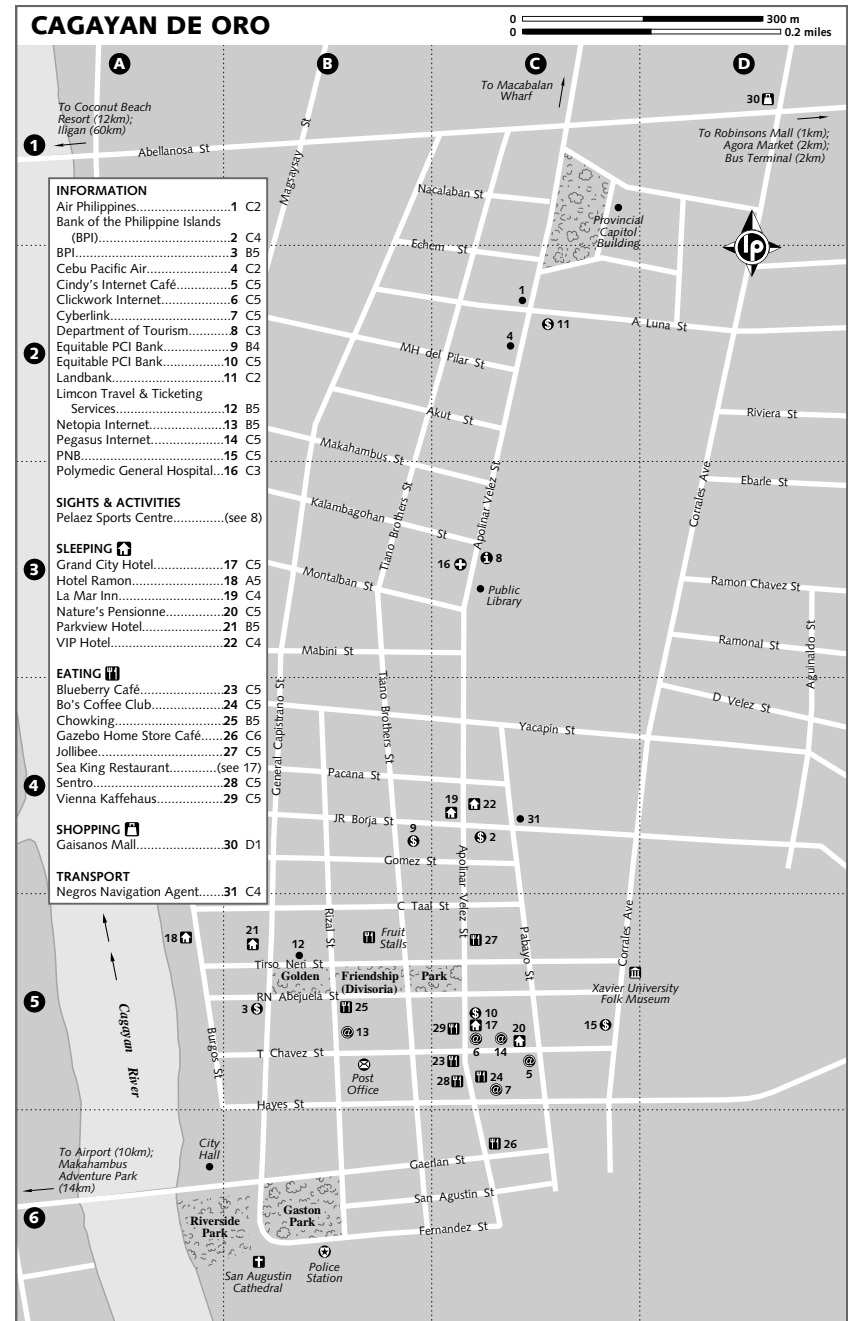
BUDGET

Parkview Hotel (% 857 1198; r P285-600; a) This hotel overlooking Friendship Park has a very professional-looking lobby and small, basic rooms with old furniture.

Hotel Ramon (% 857 4804; Burgos St; s/d P600/700; a) The downstairs lobby is nice enough but some of the rooms here should have been decommissioned years ago. The hallways aren't always kept as clean as they should be, though if you're fortunate some of the river-view rooms are OK.

MIDRANGE

Nature's Pensionne (% 857 2274; T Chavez St; r P580-870; a) Easily the best value in the city,



centrally located Nature's Pensionne is unusual in that it makes tasteful aesthetic choices and pays attention to detail. The bright new wing rooms are especially attractive, decorated with wooden furniture and artwork.

Grand City Hotel (☎ 857 1900; Apolinar Velez St; r from P770; a) The Grand City shares a parking lot with Nature's Pensionne next door, but has little of the latter's sense of style, though the standard motel rooms are well looked after.

La Mar Inn (☎ 231 4342; Apolinar Velez St; r from P700) Across the street from its sister hotel, the VIP, La Mar Inn is a good midrange alternative even if the carpeting is slightly worn. Ask for the large semicircle-shaped suite-like room on the corner.

Coconut Beach Resort (☎ 855 2702; cottages from P680; a s) Cagayan's beach option, the Coconut is a few kilometres north of town (taxi P80) with fine air-con cottages, private bathrooms and cable TV. Weekends at the beach and swimming pool can be very busy.

TOP END

VIP Hotel (☎ 856 2505; viphotel@mozcom.com; Apolinar Velez St; s/d P960/1080) The VIP is the downtown choice for business travellers. It has doormen, well-trained and professional staff and comfortably furnished rooms, though some of the windows open only to the alleyway. There's a good coffee shop attached.

Eating

Sentro (50 Apolinar Velez St; a) Easily the hippest and most cosmopolitan place in the city, Sentro feels like a slice of Manila or Cebu. The menu is Asian fusion with delicious dishes like the kamikaze burger (P95), Thai beef salad (P85) and baby back ribs (P185).

Gazebo Home Store Café (☎ 856 8640; cnr Apolinar Velez & Gaerlan Sts; sandwiches P85; h 9.30am-8.30pm) Don't think that you've walked into a crafts and homewares store; there are a few Italian garden-style wood tables towards the back and the meat and vegetable sandwiches are excellent. Espresso and cappuccino are served.

Sea King Restaurant (Grand City Hotel, Apolinar Velez St; dishes from P130; a) The Sea King is probably the city's most upscale restaurant in terms of vibe though not prices, with uni-

formed waiters, gold-plated statues and ice sculptures. It has good Chinese and Filipino seafood dishes, and there's a dinner buffet (P135) every Wednesday and Saturday.

Vienna Kaffehaus (Apolinar Velez St; dishes P130; a) A half-hearted attempt at a theme restaurant: the waitresses are dressed like Swiss misses and Wiener schnitzel (P150) is on the menu. But this restaurant is friendly and modern and does good grilled meat, cakes and shakes.

Blueberry Café (dishes from P75; a) A model train runs on an overhead track and a fake blueberry tree guards the entrance, the combination of which somehow produces a homey atmosphere. The menu includes pastas (P70), chicken cordon bleu (P165), burgers (P75) and chocolate mousse (P40), however the service is rather desultory.

Bo's Coffee Club (Apolinar Velez St; h 7am-midnight; a) Branch of the Starbucks imitator.

There are several fast-food joints including Chowking and Jollibee around the Golden Friendship Park area. Gaisano City Mall, only a few kilometres north of the city centre, has cinemas, shops, Internet cafés and the usual range of fast food. Robinsons Mall is a few kilometres further east.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 10km west of town, and it will cost you around P100 to get there by taxi. Jeepneys also meet the planes. There are daily flights to Cagayan de Oro from Manila with Cebu Pacific Air, PAL and Air Philippines (1½ hours).

BOAT

Macabalan Wharf is 5km from the city centre. You can get there by jeepney; a taxi will cost about P50.

Between Manila and Cagayan, SuperFerry has four weekly trips (P2400, 35 hours); Negros Navigation and Sulpicio boats both run twice weekly. For boat details from Manila, see p110.

There is a boat to Cebu City five nights a week. Boats to Dumaguete on Negros leave twice a week and to Jagna on Bohol once a week.

Negros Navigation has boats to Iloilo on Panay twice a week. The Negros Navigation agent in Cagayan has an office on JR Borja St.

BUS

There are regular Rural Transit buses from around 4am to 4pm northbound to Butuan (P210, 3½ hours) and Surigao (P300, six hours), southbound for Davao (P400, seven hours) and westbound for Iligan (P100, 1½ hours). The bus terminal is by the Agora fruit and vegetable wholesale market, a couple of kilometres out of town.

AROUND CAGAYAN DE ORO

Tribal 'theme parks', the kind that aren't uncommon in China and other Southeast Asian countries, are always dubious propositions. Native peoples perform in authentically native ways which unfortunately can't be seen in any authentic setting. **Malasag ecovillage** (☎ 855 6183; admission P20), about 20 minutes to the north of the city, is supposed to showcase the ecology and ethnic cultures of northern Mindanao. Set in acres of botanical gardens with a small wildlife collection of butterflies, birds and deer, it is a theme park of sorts, featuring tribal houses, a museum and an education centre. Locals who come here seem to enjoy themselves. There's camping, cottages, a swimming pool (P50) and a good restaurant. Take a jeepney to Cugman and get off at Malasag, then take a motorcycle up the hill to the ecovillage. A taxi will cost about P200 one way.

Pineapplephiles rave – those who simply like the fruit are more tepid in their reactions – about the free tours offered by Del Monte (reservations ☎ 855 4312, ext 2591/2; h 8am-1pm Sat) of the company's enormous pineapple processing factory and plantation at Bugo, approximately 15km north of Cagayan. Regardless of the level of your passion, the sight of pineapples as far as the eye can see in advance to book. The pineapple plantations, all 95 sq km of them, are about 35km north and east of Cagayan, on the Bukidnon plateau at Camp Phillips (where General Douglas MacArthur fled after the battle of Corregidor Island in 1942). Jeepneys run to Camp Phillips (P10, one hour) but the plantations lie behind the complex, so it's best to hire someone on site to drive you on a looping back road through the plantations to the Del Monte Clubhouse and Golf Course about 5km away. You can then pick up a bus to Malaybalay or back to Cagayan

from the main road there. A special return trip by taxi will cost around P500.

For an adrenalin rush head out to the **Makahambus Adventure Park**, only 14km out of Cagayan de Oro beyond the airport. There's a 120km-long sky bridge tethered over 40m above the jungle, a zip line, rappelling, and rafting. Contact **Sinkhole Inc** (☎ 856 3972, 0917 712 1990; rverguide@yahoo.com; entrance per person incl use of skybridge, zip line & rappelling P500, kayaks P1000, whitewater rafting per person P1200) or **Cagayan de Oro Whitewater Rafting Adventure** (☎ 857 1270, 0919 358 8328; www.cagayandero.net.ph; per person from P800). January to June is the dry season when the water is clearer and the runs more technical. Inside the park is the **Makahambus Cave**; take a torch (flashlight) and there's a viewing deck over the river. From here you can walk down the steps to the gorge; depending on the depth and force of the river, you may be able to plunge in the pools here. From Cagayan, take a jeepney marked **Dansolihon/Talakag**. A return taxi ride will cost P200 to P300.

MALAYBALAY & AROUND

pop 123,672

In the mountains above Cagayan de Oro is Malaybalay, the capital of Bukidnon, a topographically dramatic province, interspersed with canyons and huge plantations of bananas, carrots, pineapple and sugarcane. There are several tribal groups that call the region home, including the Bukidnon, Higonon, Matissalug and Umayamnon.

From mid-February to late March, Malaybalay is the setting for the annual **Kaamulan Festival**, a celebration of unity between the tribal people living in the area. Activities include dance, song, storytelling, local food and wine, and ritual enactments.

Impalutao reforestation centre offers hiking in one of the only untouched forests in the area, about 40 minutes north of Malaybalay. Waterfalls and rivers throughout the reserve offer a cool place to swim. Take a bus from Cagayan to Malaybalay, but ask the conductor to let you know where to get off.

Just north of Valencia (south of Malaybalay) off the highway is the **Monastery of the Transfiguration**, worth a visit if only for the gorgeous drive into the hills. On Sunday at 8am there is an English service with a lovely boys choir, and you can buy coffee

and peanuts grown by the monks. You will need a motorcycle or a friend to take you as there is no public transport.

Driving up to Malaybalay from Cagayan you'll see the impressive 3000m Mt Kitanglad in the distance; it's one of the highest mountains in the Philippines and still a habitat of the Philippine eagle.

Pine Hills Hotel (☎ 841 3211; r from P1000), on the highway in Malaybalay, is at the top of the scale. It has good food, as does the Zion Ranch on the plaza. **Haus Malibu** (☎ 221 2714; Bonifacio Dr; r P200-700) has a range of rooms.

Malaybalay is on the Cagayan to Davao and Cotabato run, and buses travel regularly every day. The journey normally takes about two hours.

ILIGAN

☎ 063 / pop 325,000

Although it's promoted as the 'City of Magnificent Waterfalls', the inevitable first impression one has of Iligan is of a sprawling industrial park with countless cement and food-processing factories. Hydroelectrical power harnessed from the water of Lake Lanao in the hills above the city has meant the city has outstripped its neighbours in terms of development, though it still lags in terms of charm. **Tinago Falls** is the most accessible and shares the grounds with a resort and mini-zoo, but the cold **Timoga Springs** is probably a better place to cool off.

Late September is **Ang Sinulog** fiesta time, when the streets into town are lined with fantastic bamboo and nipa arches to honour San Miguel, the city's patron saint.

Information

Computer Cafe (MH del Pilar St) One of several Internet cafés in town.

Equitable PCI Bank (Luna St) Has ATMs and will change US dollars.

PNB (cnr B Labao & San Miguel Sts) Has ATMs and will change US dollars.

Tourist Office (☎ 221 3426; ABC Bldg, Quezon Ave; h Mon-Fri) Near City Hall.

Sleeping & Eating

Cheradel Suites (☎ 223 8118; fax 221 4926; Jeffery Rd; r from P1000; ☎) The top-end choice in Iligan, Cheradel Suites offers comfortable rooms, with stand-out bathrooms. It's located five minutes east of town and there's a pool for guests.

Tinago Residence Inn (r from P700; a) Definitely a more picturesque option to staying in town, the inn and restaurant here overlook the Tinago Falls; however the roar of the caged lion in the mini-zoo can be disconcerting. The bamboo and nipa cottages have balconies and clean, private bathrooms.

Elena's Tower Inn (☎ /fax 221 5995; r P600-1200) Street noise is slightly muffled here since the Elena, which has clean and brightly painted rooms, is just off the main drag.

There's a good line of halal food stalls on Tomas Cabili Ave, and Filipino food is served at Patio Alejandra and at Enrico's, one of the oldest restaurants in Iligan. Jollibee and Chowking are centrally located.

Shopping

Iligan is a good place to look for Islamic crafts, especially if you're not going to the market at Marawi. Both **Jolo Iligan Trading** (Quezon Ave) and **Hiyas Trading** (Fortaleza St) have a good selection of weavings, traditional motif batiks and brassware.

Getting There & Away

The nearest airport is north at Cagayan de Oro, serviced regularly by buses (P100, 1½ hours). There are also buses to Ozamis (P100, 1½ hours) and south to Pagadian. The terminals are on Roxas Avenue.

SuperFerry runs boat services twice a week for Manila (P2300, 50 hours). Cebu Ferries departs for Cebu twice weekly (P800, 11 hours).

George & Peter Lines' boats leave once a week for Lazi on Siquijor (five hours).

MARAWI & LAKE LANAO

☎ 063 / pop 131,100

Marawi, where the population is over 90% Muslim, is considered the Islamic centre of the Philippines and its daily rhythms follow the beat of religious worship. The city's residents have preserved aspects of their traditional royal-heavy system of government, replete with a sultan, queen, Datus (pre-Hispanic tribal chieftain) and princess, though leaders are mostly focused on social rather than administrative issues, and mediate conflicts between families – the downside to strong family ties, these feuds can sometimes produce bad blood that lasts for generations and is as substantial a threat to the peace of the region as political

HERITAGE OF VENGEANCE

The southern Philippines' honour code called *rido* is much like that of the American mafia, in which personal affronts can lead to generations-long rifts between families and clan groups. Important to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, according to USAID and the Asia Foundation, this bad blood has led to over 1220 clan conflicts, 4512 deaths, and 3000 missing persons since 1920.

grievances or terrorism (see the boxed text, above). A new road around the circumference of nearby Lake Lanao means all the communities are now easily accessible by road. Maranao, originally 'Maranaw', is derived from the two words 'taw' and 'ranaw', which literally means 'man of the lake'.

The city sits prettily in a bowl of hills on Lake Lanao's northern shore, the country's second-largest lake. Places to visit include the **Aga Khan Museum** (h 9am-noon & 1-4pm) at Mindanao State University (MSU) campus on the eastern edge of the city; the **palitan** (market) for carved wooden chests, fabrics, and brassware crafted in Tugaya township across the lake; **Dayawan weaving village** outside the city proper; and in barangay Tokah, the ceremonial wooden **Torongan** buildings, an example of how early Maranao royalty lived.

Marawi Resort Hotel (☎ 0919 847 358; cottages P850-1000; ☎) is the only hotel in Marawi. It is on the MSU campus and has huge grounds with lots of trees, a restaurant and a good view of the lake. The cottages have balconies, but are in need of a makeover.

Jeepneys and buses run regularly to and from Iligan and Marawi. A return trip by taxi (if you can find a driver to take you), with a couple of hours' waiting time, will cost at least P2000. Alternatively there are buses from Cagayan de Oro which pass through Iligan on the way to Marawi (P220, 3½ hours to Marawi).

SOUTHERN MINDANAO

Davao, a fairly cosmopolitan city, is usually as far south as most visitors venture and is the most common gateway for hiking Mt Apo, the highest peak in the Philippines, as well as the jumping-off point for several

nearby islands. The area around Lake Sebu is inhabited by indigenous tribal groups. The region has seen its share of violence, though in general the cities themselves are considered safe, as is the road bisecting the island from Cagayan de Oro, which is a good way to experience the varied topography of Mindanao.

DAVAO

☎ 082 / pop 1,147,116

This sprawling city – the second-largest in the world in terms of land area – is an interesting mix of Muslim, Chinese and tribal influences, all trumped perhaps by the inexorable march of modernity and development. While Davao (dah-bow, and sometimes spelt 'Dabaw') was able to hold out against the invading Spaniards until the mid-19th century, the city has embraced its role as the engine of business and commerce in the southern Philippines. Predominantly Christian, the city has seen its share of hard times: urban guerrilla warfare was endemic here in the '80s, and more recently there was a devastating bomb blast at the airport in 2003. But there are enough late-model cars and expensive imports on the roads as proof that this relatively wealthy city has rebounded. Of course, they share the streets with the much more numerous peddlers and ordinary Filipinos struggling to make a living.

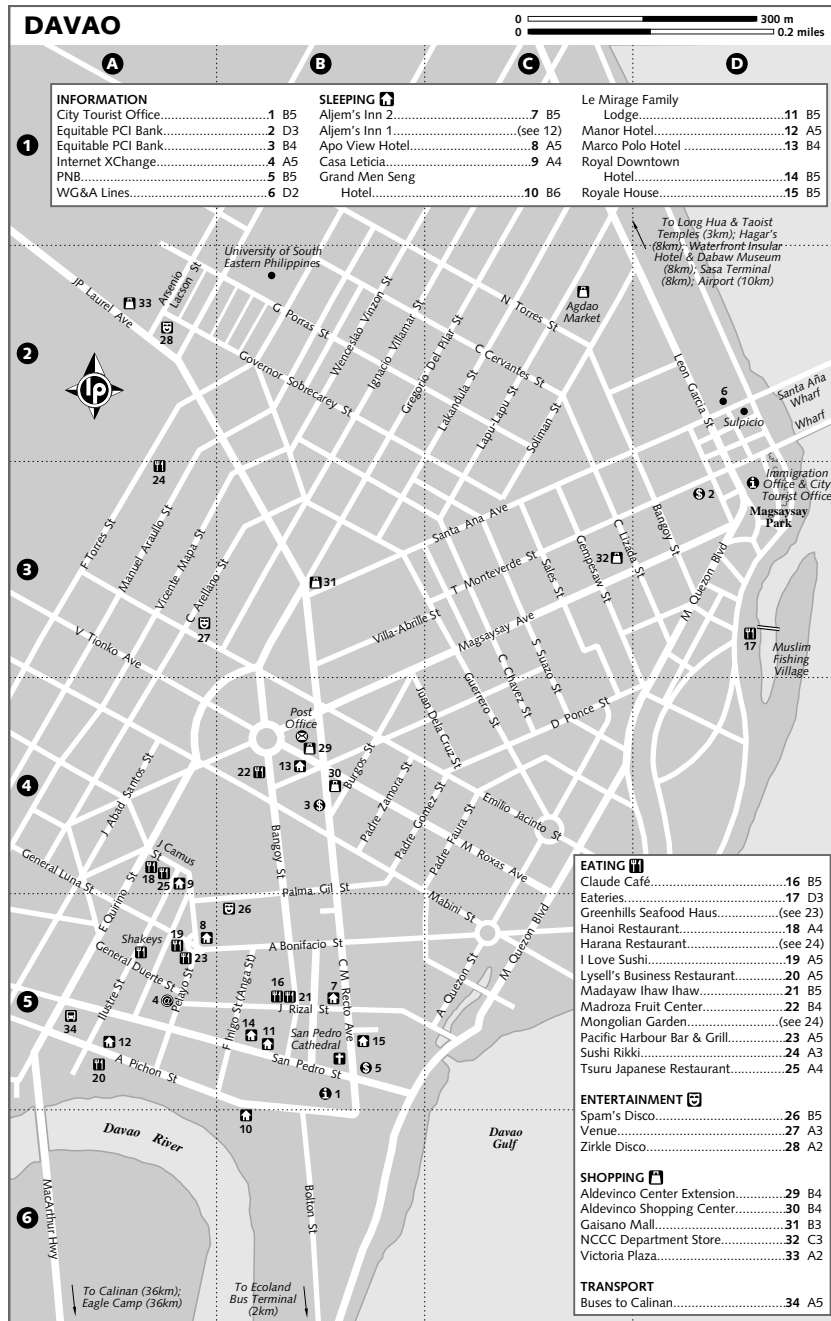
Davao also has a long-standing Japanese history, which is associated with early abaca-processing warehouses in the area and, less happily, with WWII, when the thriving Japanese community dispersed. There are still strong ties between the mother country and 'little Japan', as Davao is also known.

Outside the city, export quantities of pineapples, bananas and citrus are produced, and plantations can be visited. For the natural-history enthusiast, there are walking tracks around nearby Mt Apo and there's a breeding programme for the endangered Philippine eagle at nearby Eagle Conservation Centre.

Mt Apo looms majestically in the distance and the nearby islands of Samal and Talikud offer clear water, good corals and wreck-diving.

Orientation

Some key streets are confusingly referred to by both old and new names. The city



sprawls along the Davao Gulf to the south and is bounded by the Davao River to the west. Gaisano Mall and Victoria Plaza, the two large flagships, are along CM Recto Ave, the major thoroughfare that cuts through the centre of the city.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

There are several cafés clustered north of the intersection of San Pedro St and Pelayo St plus at least one each in Gaisano Mall and Victoria Plaza.

Internet XChange (Pelayo St; per hr P15)

Lysell's Business Restaurant (A Pichon St; per hr P15; h 24hr)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Davao Doctor's Hospital (% 221 2072; E Quirino Ave)

San Pedro Hospital (% 224 0616; Guerrero St)

MONEY

All of the major banks have branches here, most change US dollars and have ATMs. Equitable PCI Bank (CM Recto Ave) There's another branch near the wharves.

PNB (CM Recto Ave)

TOURIST INFORMATION

City Tourist Office (% 222 1956; www.davaotourism.com; City Hall) Opposite San Pedro Cathedral. There's another branch near Maysaysay Park.

Indonesian Consulate General (% 297 2930; fax 297 3462; Ecoland Dr, Ecoland Subdivision, Matina) To make a ferry trip from General Santos to Indonesia (see p394) you will need to come here for your visa requirements.

Sights & Activities

You can easily fill a pleasant half day in the north of the city towards the airport. Coming from the city, take a jeepney in the direction of Sasa and get off at the Long Hua Temple (Cabaguio St; h 7.30am-4.30pm), about 2½km from the city centre. It's an easy landmark, a huge Chinese Buddhist temple with beautiful wooden floors and carved walls and doors.

Walking back towards the city for a couple of hundred metres, you'll see a sign on a small sidestreet on the right to the Taoist Temple, with its fantastic red pagoda. Ring a bell on the gate if you want to go inside.

Continue north by jeepney or taxi to the Dabaw Museum (admission P20; h 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), next to the Waterfront Insular Hotel. It has

a good collection of local historical interest, and a selection of tribal weavings and artefacts from most of the Mindanao tribes.

Festivals & Events

Tribal cultures, agriculture and craftsmanship are showcased during the third week of August each year, during the Kadayawan sa Dabaw Festival. There are costumed street parades, dances and performances, along with fantastic displays of fruit and flowers.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Manor Hotel (% 221 2511; manor@skynet.net; A Pichon St; s/d P680/850; a) Although the rooms here are small, they are cosy and efficient and have modern bathrooms and cable TV. Despite the lack of windows they feel bright and sunny.

Aljem's Inn 2 (% 300 8255; J Rizal St; s/d P700/850; a) Slightly nicer than its sister hotel Aljem's Inn 1, No 2 has sunny bright hallways with wooden floors and tiled rooms, though the beds and mattresses are a little thin.

Aljem's Inn 1 (% 227 9629; fax 221 3059; A Pichon St; s/d P600/730; a) This is a good alternative if the above two places are full, though the rooms are older and the furniture is not as nice.

Royal Downtown Inn (% 226 2180; San Pedro St; s/d P400/500; a) This friendly and well-maintained hotel is next door to Mercury Pharmacy. The wood floors are kept spotless as are the small but cosy rooms.

Le Mirage Family Lodge (% 226 3811; San Pedro St; s/d with fan P250/300, s/d with air-con P500/600; a) On the other side of Mercury Pharmacy on bustling San Pedro St, rooms at Le Mirage have wood floors but are too small to include much else beside a bed. Cheaper rooms have a common bathroom.

Royale House (% 227 3630; royalehouse@skynet.net; 34 CM Recto St; s/d from P350/500; a) The rooms at the Royale are clean and well maintained though only some of the toilets have seats. There's a good café in the lobby.

Sunny Point Lodge (% 221 0155; fax 244 0562; A Pichon St; r P250-600) Sunny Point has a nice café on the ground floor and basic rooms.

TOP END

Grand Men Seng Hotel (% 221 9040; grand@menseng.com.ph; A Pichon St; r P1500-2800; a s) Like the doormen out front, the Grand Men Seng

comes sharply dressed, putting on its best face in the large, marble lobby, usually a hive of activity, and the nice roof pool (non-guests P100) behind the complex. Rooms here are certainly good value but not as nice as others in the top end.

Marco Polo Hotel (☎ 221 0888; www.marcopolo-hotels.com; CM Recto St; r from P4800; a i s) The modern and elegant Marco Polo anchors the centre of the city opposite the Aldevinco Shopping Centre. It has all the facilities and room standards of a top-end international hotel, including a rooftop lap pool, gym, several restaurants and a nice lounge in the marble-floored lobby. There's a good travel agency on the ground floor.

Waterfront Insular Hotel (☎ 233 2881; www.waterfronthotels.net; r from P3600; a) An enormous ageing complex 8km out of town on the way to the airport, the Waterfront Insular attracts large groups and conventions with extensive grounds and a small private beach. It has seven restaurants and can arrange just about any watersport and transport to Samal Island. Wireless Internet is available.

Also recommended, both with wireless Internet:

Apo View Hotel (☎ 221 6430; www.apoview.com; 150 J Camus St; r from P4000; a)

Casa Leticia (☎ 224 0501; www.casaleticia.com; J Camus St; s/d P1600/1720; a)

Eating

Locals tell you that once you eat Davao durian you'll always come back to the city, though you may have to work at acquiring the taste for it. It's in season from September to December – the rest of the year, try durian ice cream as a substitute.

Claude Café (☎ 222 4287, 0918 574 0527; 29 Rizal St; dishes P250; a) Claude's feels like a romantic Parisian bistro. This classy and sophisticated restaurant has aged wooden floors, dining by candlelight and an extensive menu and wine selection. Some of the delicacies are frog legs (P175), grilled porterhouse (P450) and salmon pâté (P350).

Tsuru (☎ 221 0901; Pelayo St; meal P200; a) Next to Casa Leticia and the Hanoi Restaurant, Tsuru serves quality, authentic Japanese cuisine like sashimi, sushi, *shabu shabu* and tempura (P250).

Hanoi Restaurant (☎ 225 4501; dishes P200; J Camus St; a) Sharing a kitchen and the building with Tsuru, Hanoi is a stylish Vietnam-

ese restaurant. The ginger duck (P220) is especially tasty.

I Love Sushi (☎ 225 1800; dishes P85; a) A small joint serving delicious Japanese fast food like sizzling tofu (P50) or a sashimi platter (P95). There's another branch at Victoria Mall.

Madayaw Ihaw Ihaw (☎ 227 2445; dishes P80; h 9am-2pm & 6pm-2am) You'll feel like you're at a beach barbecue at this restaurant on the second floor of an open-air balcony. Eat barbecue meat skewers (P16) and seafood at bamboo picnic tables.

Lysell's Business Restaurant (☎ 227 3582; 2nd fl, Gillamacs Bldg, A Pinchon St; dishes P100; a) Directly across the street from Manor Pension House and Ajem's Inn 1, Lysell's is on the second floor and serves continental breakfast (P55) and Filipino dishes. Very clean and connected to an Internet café.

Greenhills Seafood Haus (Pelayo St) and next door **Pacific Harbor Bar & Grill** (Pelayo St) have lunch and dinner buffets and grilled meat, seafood and Filipino mains.

On F Torres St, off Laurel St, there are several international restaurants including Harana Restaurant, the Mongolian Garden and Sushi Riki Japanese restaurant.

The eateries around Santa Ana Wharf and the Muslim Fishing Village are lively – especially in the early evening – and cheap places for fish.

Entertainment

Most of the top-end hotels offer live music nightly and dancing at least once a week.

Venue (☎ 224 4150; Jacinto Extension) is a 2500-sq-m club/concert hall with regular high-profile acts from Manila and Cebu.

Zirkle Disco (JP Laurel Ave), behind Victoria Plaza, and **Spam's** (Palma Gil St) are dance clubs for 20-somethings. There's also dancing at Calzada restaurant.

If you need a dose of Western company and food, there are a couple of expat bars around town, including **Hagar's** (☎ 233 1018) a block before the Waterfront Insular Hotel (coming from the direction of the city), which is famous for European sausages, salamis and cheese. There's good bar food, a restaurant upstairs and live music on Friday.

Shopping

If you're looking for handicrafts, shop around at the **Aldevinco Shopping Centre** (CM

Recto Ave), a rabbit warren of stalls with fabric, batik, weavings, carvings etc. Take your time and bargain – almost every day is a slow day for vendors. The stallholders are also keen to change your US dollars or Japanese yen.

Victoria Plaza, Gaisano Mall and New City Commercial Centre (NCCC) department store are the big malls in town.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 11km north of the city centre. Air Philippines, Cebu Pacific Air and PAL fly several times a day to Davao from Cebu (one hour).

Air Philippines flies to Iloilo City (two hours) via Cebu.

Presently **Bouraq Airlines** (☎ 233 0016) flies between Manado and Davao once weekly.

Silk Air (☎ 221 6430) flies to Davao from Singapore (four hours) via Cebu on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Cebu Pacific Air runs flights to Zamboanga on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday (one hour).

BOAT

Big interisland boats use the terminal at Sasa, by the Caltex tanks 8km north of town. This is also where boats to Paradise Island Beach Resort on Samal Island leave. Jeeps run here, or take a taxi for about P70.

Other boats to Samal and Talikud Islands go from Santa Ana Wharf in town.

To Cebu City, Sulpicio Lines has boats going via General Santos at 8pm on Sunday, and via Surigao at 7pm Wednesday.

There is a scheduled boat from Davao to Indonesia via General Santos every Friday from Sasa pier, but details change often; check with the city tourism office.

SuperFerry has vessels leaving for Manila at 11pm Monday and Wednesday (P1680 to P5840, 31 hours); in the opposite direction boats leave Manila for Davao at 2pm on Monday and 10am Saturday.

Sulpicio Lines leaves Davao for Suriago every Wednesday at 7pm.

SuperFerry has boats going to Zamboanga (P1400, 22 hours) once a week.

BUS

There are several buses daily between Davao and Cagayan de Oro, Butuan and Surigao

(P220, eight to 10 hours to each destination), south to General Santos (P95, 3½ hours) and west to Cotabato city. All long-distance bus transport is based at the Ecoland terminal 2km south of the city centre. Manila-bound buses also leave from here.

Buses to Eagle Conservation Centre at Calinan leave from a small terminal on the corner of San Pedro St and E Quirino St.

Getting Around

The airport is 12km north of the city. A taxi to the city will cost around P100. From the city, jeepneys in the direction of Sasa go towards the airport; you'll then need to take a tricycle to the terminal.

The station for long-distance buses is at Ecoland, 2km south of the city centre. A taxi there will cost about P50, a jeepney about P5.

AROUND DAVAO Samal Island

This sizeable island only 900m east of Davao makes a convenient weekend beach getaway for city dwellers. Unfortunately most of the resorts are overpriced and face the unsightly refineries and shipping terminals just across the busy channel. A bumpy road, only partly paved, runs along the west coast, best navigated on the back of a motorcycle. Pearls are cultivated on a small scale near the site of a once-lucrative pearl farm near Kaputian, but most communities rely on fishing for their livelihoods.

If you just want to escape the city for a day, it's easily enough arranged on your own or through the Waterfront Insular Hotel (opposite). There are snorkelling and diving opportunities around the island – including two Japanese wrecks just off Pearl Farm beach. All of the resorts charge day fees (P50 to P75) even if you eat at their restaurant.

SLEEPING

Pearl Farm Beach Resort (☎ 221 9970; pearldav@webliq.com; r US\$110-600; s) Pearl Farm's villas are five-star versions of the stilt houses of the seafaring Samal people, set in lush grounds with private beaches and swimming pools. Diving and other water sports can be arranged.

Paradise Island Beach Resort (r from P750) and **Chema's Resort** (r from 800) offer a combination

of concrete and nipa hut cottages on a fairly ordinary stretch of beach; these places can get noisy and crowded on weekends. Ask to be taken to these resorts when you first arrive on the island.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pumpboats go regularly to Samal from the big Caltex tanks near Sasa pier (P7.50, 15 minutes); walk through the village market to reach the departure point in Davao. Pearl Farm Beach Resort can organise transfers for their guests from Santa Ana Wharf in Davao.

Talikud Island

This little undeveloped island is more of an escape than Samal which lies just to its northeast. There are some spectacular coral gardens off its west coast and several caves worth exploring including Bat Kingdom cave in barangay Tambo, which affords a bat's-eye view of hundreds of these nocturnal and smelly creatures. Visit at dusk just before they wake in search of food.

SLEEPING

Pacific Little Secret (☎ 235 1325, 0917 747 7637; r from P700) A rustic private resort just north of Isla Reta. The two beautiful, breezy houses are decorated with ethnic art and sleep from two to seven. There is a gazebo on the edge of the water, and secluded sitting areas and verandas. The bathroom is outside and there's no electricity at night unless you choose to pay for some petrol for the generator. Bat Kingdom cave is only a few minutes away.

Isla Reta (cottages P400-500) On the east coast of the island, these are simple bamboo cottages where you can get equally simple food (or bring your own and the staff will cook it for a small fee). There are extensive grounds and beaches to explore, and a fish sanctuary for snorkelling just offshore. Ask to be taken there when you first arrive on the island.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Boats run to Talikud five times a day from Santa Ana Wharf in Davao (P20, one hour, from 7am). The tiny township and jetty at Santa Cruz is a couple of hundred metres from Isla Reta, though most boats will drop you off at the resort.

Eagle Conservation Centre

A must for nature lovers, the **Eagle Conservation Centre** (☎ 221 2030; phileagl@info.com.ph; admission P25; 10am-5pm) at Malagos, 36km from Davao, is the headquarters of the Philippine Eagle Foundation, which is dedicated to conserving these endangered birds (also known as Monkey-Eating Eagles), the largest eagle in terms of wing span in the world.

The camp is set in a pocket of native forest, and there are enough wild birds flitting around to keep the most avid bird-watcher happy. There is an informative video about eagles in the wild – there are about 500 in the Philippines – and the threats they are facing through deforestation and hunting. The average eagle lifespan in the wild is 20 years, but it's much longer at the centre.

Volunteer guides are around at weekends to answer questions. It gets very busy though, and if watching animals among hordes of noisy groups isn't your thing, plan to get here at opening time to beat the crowds.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Take a bus to Calinan (P15, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes) from the bus terminal on the corner of San Pedro and Quirino Sts in Davao. Jeeps going in that direction (southbound) can be caught anywhere along CM Recto Ave or Pichon St. In Calinan, take a jeepney or tricycle (P5, 10 minutes).

A special ride up to the camp from Calinan will cost around P80.

Mt Apo

Literally the 'grandfather' of all mountains, Mt Apo is a volcano that has never blown its top and at 2954m is the highest peak in the Philippines, most mornings clearly visible towering above Davao. Local tribes believe deities reside near the summit and worship it as a sacred mountain, but it's the environmental stress caused by too much human traffic that makes permission sometimes difficult to obtain. The situation is fluid and should be sussed out in the tourist office in Davao or in Kidapawan, 110km from Davao and the closest municipality to the starting point for hikes to the summit. The hikes take in primeval forests, rushing waterfalls, and the possibility of spotting endangered plant and animal species such as the carnivorous pitcher plants and the Philippine eagle.

Since the climb is strenuous and the path almost impossible to follow on your own, you'll have to visit one of these offices anyway to hire a guide. There's no other reason to be in Kidapawan except to arrange treks up the mountain; the office of the Kidapawan Tourism Council (☎ 238 1831) is in the City Hall on the north side of the plaza. Experienced climbers recommend allowing a minimum of four days, and you'll need warm clothes and sleeping gear since temperatures drop at night near the peak. Hiking permits cost P200, guides cost from P200 to P300 per day excluding porter fees and necessary equipment you haven't brought along.

Most people actually begin their climb after a jeepney ride to Ilomavis and Lake Agko where they overnight and arrange porters before heading for Lake Venado and the summit.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Davao, take a bus from the Ecoland bus terminal to Kidapawan (P70, two hours, every 30 minutes).

From Cotabato, take a bus from Magallanes St terminal to Kidapawan (P75, three hours, every 30 minutes).

To jump-off points for the trek, take a jeepney from Kidapawan bus terminal to Ilomavis, 17km away (P45, one hour, or special trip P500).

GENERAL SANTOS (DADIANGAS)

☎ 083 / pop 411,822

Huge ships dock at the port here on Sarangani Bay, loading up freshly caught tuna for the journey to dinner tables all over Asia. This southernmost city in the Philippines, formerly called Dadiangas, was renamed in 1965 in honour of General Paulino Santos who, with accompanying Christian Visayans and Tagalogs, established a settlement here in 1939. Now known as 'Gensan' to locals, it's a congested, bustling city and while it's the tuna capital and the centre of the canning industry, the city itself doesn't boast much to hold the interest of travellers besides some spots of scattered greenery and surrounding asparagus farms and cattle ranches.

Prior to the city's establishment the area was inhabited mostly by Maguindanao Muslims and B'laan tribespeople, and this history is showcased in two small museums: at the Notre Dame Dadiangas College

(NDDC), there is a museum of memorabilia about General Santos (the person); and at the MSU campus, near the airport, there's a museum of Muslim and tribal culture. Both are open during school hours.

Information

There are Internet cafés along Sergio Osmeña St, and near the church on Osmeña St. The PNB by the city hall and Equitable PCI Bank next to the Sydney Hotel on the corner of Pioneer and Pendatunares Sts both have ATMs and will change US dollars cash.

Festivals & Events

Kalilangan Festival Taking place from 22 to 27 February, this festival includes demonstrations of local dance, arts and cooking, as well as a 'trade fair' where locally produced handicrafts are sold.

Tuna Festival Runs from 1 to 5 September when, among other things, there is a competition for the best-dressed tuna.

Sleeping

East Asia Royale Hotel (☎ 553 4119; royale@gslink.net; r from P1500) Easily the best place to stay in the city, the East Asia is a first-class business hotel along the highway. Some of the carpets in the rooms are deteriorating but otherwise it's hard to find better in the city.

T'boli Hotel (☎ 552 3042; National Hwy; r P450-650) The rooms here are good value and come with their own private sitting rooms. A restaurant is attached.

Tierra Verde 1 (☎ 552 4500; National Hwy; r P410-810; s) Next door to T'boli Hotel, the Tierra Verde has reasonable, clean and simple rooms, an outdoor bar and a decent-sized swimming pool (nonguests P50).

Cambridge Farm Hotel (☎ 553 6310; fax 554 5614; r P400-1000; s) If originality equalled comfort then Cambridge Farms would be a five-star hotel; unfortunately the rooms are cluttered with knick-knacks and showing their age. There is a garden bar and restaurant, pool and – not so great – a mini-zoo. It's about 10 minutes out of town on the road to Koronadal (taxi P50).

Eating

NR Lechon House (Quirino St) Offers good barbecue meals.

Billabong Café (cnr Pioneer & Pendatunares Sts) Beside the Sydney Hotel, bakes good sugar-free 'Australian' bread and serves Filipino food.

Fiesta sa Barrio, near the Gaisano Mall, is a seafood place specialising in Filipino fish dishes. In the same area is the Ni-moshi-be, a good Japanese restaurant. The upscale Oriental Garden Restaurant serves high-quality Chinese fare.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tambler airport is a 20-minute taxi trip (P100) west of the city centre. PAL flies daily from Manila to General Santos (two hours). Air Philippines also has flights from Manila (three hours) via Cebu.

BOAT

Makar Wharf is 4km from town beyond the airport. A taxi will cost around P100 and a tricycle P50.

Negros Navigation has boats bound for Manila via Zamboanga and Iloilo on Panay, leaving at 10pm on Thursday.

Sulpicio Lines leaves for Manila on Friday at 6pm, and for Cebu City on Monday at 10am.

EPA Shipping Line (☎ 380 3591; Makar Wharf) has boats leaving Monday and Thursday for Bitung (Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia; 36 hours). Schedules do change. Officially, there is no problem with foreigners making this trip but you will need to finalise any Indonesian visa requirements with the consulate in Davao (p389) before leaving.

BUS

There are regular bus services running between General Santos and Davao (P95, 3½ hours), Cagayan de Oro (eight to 10 hours), Koronadal (Marbel; one hour) and Butuan (eight to 10 hours).

The integrated bus and jeepney terminal is at Bula-ong on the western edge of town, about 1km from the town centre.

OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE – OR DO THEY?

In May 2005, two Japanese soldiers who had supposedly been holding out since the end of WWII were said to have been found in the mountains north of General Santos city. It was unclear from news reports whether the grizzled veterans of Japan's Imperial Army's 30th division – now in their 80s – were aware that an armistice was declared almost 60 years ago or whether they were in fact hiding from Allied patrols seeking to push the Japanese off the island (at the height of its occupation Japan had over 16,000 troops in Mindanao).

Hundreds of journalists from around Asia and a small contingent of diplomats from Japan and Manila descended on General Santos city. The fact that city officials said this sudden influx of guests would dramatically improve the economy and that hotel occupancy rates were at their highest in years, says something about the tourism industry in the area. News of the holdouts caused such a sensation in Japan that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi even commented publicly on the survivors.

But the story aroused suspicion from the start. After all, even if there were in fact two former Japanese soldiers living in the jungles of Mindanao, and in addition they had started families as it was reported, it was more than likely that they simply chose to not return home and had made their lives in the Philippines, well aware of the twists and turns of history and war. Instead of risking a court martial, they chose to keep quiet about their status as former combatants.

But the fact that there have been several confirmed cases of just such holdouts in the past was enough to excite hope and curiosity. The last case was of Hiroo Onda, who was found on Lubang Island in the Philippines in 1974, and another soldier was discovered on the island of Guam in the Northern Mariana Islands in 1972.

The Japanese national who reported contacting the two in Mindanao was in the area to collect the remains of war dead, something of a national pastime, but embassy officials were reluctant to fork over any cash to him to arrange a meeting, especially because of concerns rebels were operating in the area outside the city where the meeting was to take place. Some reports said the two men were living with a Muslim group, but facts were confusing and inconsistent from the start. Reporters were reluctant to venture outside the city and most left after four days and fruitless attempts to verify any aspect of the story, willing to write it off as an aborted shakedown and deciding that what goes on in the jungle stays in the jungle.

LAKE SEBU

The watery bottom of a beautiful bowl, Lake Sebu sits at an altitude of 300m, surrounded on all sides by hills and forests, interrupted by the spokes of bamboo fish traps and the occasional dug-out canoe slowly skimming its placid surface. The town of T'boli, blessed by cool mountain air, is the ancestral home of the T'boli people who still dress in their thickly woven traditional clothing for ceremonial occasions. Tribespeople from surrounding communities descend on the town for the Saturday market, and the T'boli Museum (admission P5; 7am-5pm) on the road to Punta Isla has a small collection of locally made handicrafts, especially brassware, beadwork and weavings. For purchasing any of these items browse in the many roadside souvenir stalls. You can hire a boat for a trip on the lake, bird-watch, and hike to nearby Seven Falls or Trangikini Falls. A motorcycle will take you to within about a half-hour walk of each.

The annual Lem-Lunay Festival, celebrating T'boli culture, takes place in the second week of November, culminating in horse fights – the sport of royalty in local culture – when two stallions fight over a mare in heat; it's neither as bloody nor fatal as cockfighting (see the boxed text, p396).

There are several resorts with cottages overlooking the lake, the best of which is Punta Isla (☎ 0919 485 2910; dm/cottage P150/400), which has several rooms and one bungalow with a terrace. The hillside restaurant specialises in fresh-cooked *tilapia* fish, however the daytime tranquil air is sometimes marred by music blasted from the thatched-roof huts used for picnics during the day. All the resorts have restaurants and get busy on weekends.

Motorcycle rides from T'boli to the local resorts cost between P5 and P10 depending on distance. You can negotiate special-trip rates of between P75 and P100 per hour.

Getting There & Away

Koronadal (Marbel) is the junction for trips to Lake Sebu. Get there by bus from Cotabato or General Santos (P45, one hour).

Buses drop off in Koronadal on General Santos Dr at their respective terminals; from there make your way to the L300 minivan terminals near the junction of General Santos Dr and Alunan Ave.

You can take an L300 minivan (P20, 45 minutes) or a jeepney to Surallah. At the terminal in Surallah take a jeepney (P25, 45 minutes) or hire a motorcycle (P120, 30 minutes) to Lake Sebu.

KORONADAL (MARBEL)

pop 133,786

Most people refer to this city, the provincial capital of South Cotabato, as Marbel – a B'laan word meaning 'murky waters' – the name you will see on most public transport heading here. Historically, it's linked to the animist B'laan people and Maguindanao Muslims, though now the population is predominantly Christian. There's a small museum (Alunan Ave) in the Gymnasium and Cultural Centre showcasing T'boli culture and the museum's benefactors equally. Koronadal is the jump-off point for trips to Lake Sebu.

Marvella Plaza (☎ /fax 228 2063; General Santos Dr; r P550-950; ☎) is easily the best hotel in town, though this isn't saying a whole lot since the basic rooms are crying out for attention. Noise can be a problem because of the KTV bar attached.

There are regular bus services from General Santos (P40, one hour) and from Cotabato (three hours). Make a connection here for Lake Sebu via Surallah.

COTABATO

☎ 064 / pop 150,450

Rarely visited even by residents of nearby Davao, Cotabato has a reputation, considered unjust by locals, that owes as much simply to its location in the middle of the ARMM as to the disproportionate number of violent incidents. Though it has seen its fair share, the incidents are few and far between. This city of the Maguindanao people lies on the Rio Grande de Mindanao, often called the Pulangi River. 'Maguindanao' is a compilation of the local words for kin, country and lake, so literally they are 'people of the lake country'. Islam is the oldest religion here, introduced in 1475, with Christianity a comparatively recent arrival, brought in by Jesuits in 1871.

Around the city itself, head up Piedro Colina Hill for good views of the city and coast. At the foot of the hill lies Kutang Bato Cave, which is, bizarrely, right in the middle of a busy road intersection; inside are saltwater pools, an underground river and bats.

WHEN HORSES FIGHT

What do Guangxi in China, southeast Sulawesi in Indonesia, Cheju Island in South Korea and Mindanao have in common? They are the only places left in the world where horses still fight – or more accurately where two stallions are provoked into fighting for an audience. While defenders say this is merely a tradition in the southern Philippines, part of the culture of indigenous peoples like the Bagobo, others (like the producers of the *Free Willy* movies, who have sent letters of protest to the Department of Tourism) say the rampant gambling that takes place at the fights points to more mercenary interests than the preservation of tribal culture.

The mayor of Davao banned the contests from the city's annual Kadayawan sa Dabow Festival in 2005 (they were still held at the Pangapog festival on Samal, the Dorong festival in Digos city, and in Padigian, among other places), though in general the government has shown a lack of resolve in addressing the issue. Of course, it would certainly open itself up to charges of hypocrisy as long as cock fighting is still allowed, since the latter is more violent, at least in that the horses aren't killed, but just kick and bite until the other refuses to continue. The victor wins the opportunity to mate with a mare in heat.

The Cotabato City Hall has an interesting façade of mostly Islamic influence.

A couple of kilometres out of town you'll find the Regional Autonomous Government Centre, which houses a museum (11 9am-4pm) and is the seat of government for the ARMM.

Information

The PNB has an ATM and will change US dollars.

Infotech (S Pendatun Ave; per hr P30; 11 8am-8pm)

Internet access.

Tourist Office (96 421 7804) In the old Provincial Capitol Building on Piedro Colina Hill.

Festivals & Events

Araw ng Kutabato Festival Held in mid-June; with its mammoth dance parades it's a cultural highlight.

Shariff Kabungsuwan Festival A December event that commemorates the arrival of Islam in the region and involves river parades of decorated boats.

Sleeping & Eating

City Plaza Hotel (96 421 9148; Makakua St; r P300-700) Newer and brighter than El Corazon Hotel, but a bit noisy.

Hotel Castro (96 421 7523; fax 421 6404; Sinsuat St; r P550-850) Has small rooms, but friendly staff and a small, quiet coffee shop. There is a good Filipino fast-food restaurant and there are fruit stalls opposite.

Estosan Garden Hotel (96 421 6777; fax 421 5488; Governor Gutierrez Blvd; r from P1440; 5) A couple of kilometres out of town, next to the Regional Autonomous Government Centre. There is a pool (nonguests P100) and a pleasant coffee shop.

Mami King (Don Rufino Alonzo St) Tasty Filipino fast food, with a good bakery attached.

Also recommended is the **Pacific Heights Hotel** (96 421 2249; Don TV Juliano Ave; r from P1200).

Getting There & Away

AIR

PAL (96 421 2086) has flights daily to and from Manila (1½ hours). The airport is around 10km south of town.

BOAT

There are two wharf areas in Cotabato. Boats to Pagadian (P185, six hours, nightly) go from the wharf right in the centre of town. Interisland boats, and boats to Zamboanga (several times a week), leave from Polloc Pier, 24km away. A jeepney there costs P15.

BUS & MINIVAN

Regular buses run daily between Davao and Cotabato (P170, five hours). There are no direct buses from General Santos and Koronadal. You have to take a bus to Tacurong (P20, 45 minutes) and then an L300 minivan to Cotabato (P70, 1½ hours).

ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA

Considered risky for foreign travellers (as much because of common robbery as the threat of violence connected to fighting between government troops and separatist groups or kidnapping), this long append-

age to the bulk of Mindanao is shaped like a downward-pointing finger. Only Zamboanga city at the very western tip sees a trickle of travellers, almost all of whom fly here from other parts of the islands.

ZAMBOANGA

96 062 / pop 700,000

Despite an exotic-sounding name and the fact that it's usually the dateline foreign newspapers use for any incident in Mindanao, Zamboanga city resembles, physically at least, most other Philippine cities. There's a downtown mall, fast-food restaurants and a bustling market and waterfront. The differences are slight, even though the city is 70% Muslim, most women – according to an informal study, they are the tallest in the country – don't wear headscarves and modern fashions are as strong here as elsewhere. The most commonly spoken language is Chabacano, a Spanish-Creole made up of Malay grammar and unconjugated Spanish verbs, and Spanish speakers will find themselves understanding much of what they hear.

The city is a magnet for migrants from the Sulu archipelago which means Zamboanga is constantly absorbing an eclectic mix of peoples and cultures, just as it has done for its long history since Islam arrived in the 1400s. There are three possible derivations of the city's name. It may come from the 16th-century Malay word *jam-bangan*, meaning 'land of flowers', or from *samboangan*, a 'docking point', identified in an early Spanish map. Its origin may also lie in *sabuan*, the wooden pole used by local tribespeople to navigate their *vintas* – shallow draft sailboats – over the coastal flats.

Zamboanga, which has seen its fair share of violence, is the headquarters of Southcom, the Philippine Army's Southern Command post, and the military and police presence is noticeable.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

There are a bunch of Internet cafés in the city centre.

RMH Internet (Almonte St) Near the town centre.

Sip & Surf Internet (11 7am-10pm; per hr P15) The nicest of the Internet cafés, on the second floor of a building in the bustle on La Purisma St.

Zalo Web Point (11 Mon-Sat) If you're staying near the airport, use this place, at the top of Mayor Jaldon St.

MONEY

The PNB and BPI around the plaza area and the Metrobank on La Purisma St have ATMs and change US dollars. The Mindpro City Mall also has an ATM.

BPI (Valderosa St) There's another branch on Mayor Jaldon St.

Landbank (Valderosa St) There's another branch on Pablo Lorenzo St.

PNB (cnr Valderosa St & Pablo Lorenzo St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

City Tourism Office (96 992 3007; www.zamboanga.com; Valderosa St; 11 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Sat) Next to the Lantaka Hotel; ask for Bernard C Gregorio. There's a less helpful **second office** (96 992 3007; 11 8am-noon & 1-5pm), just a desk with maps, a block from Rizal Park.

Sights

Fort Pilar (at the southeastern end of town near the waterfront) is a solid and squat building, partially and sympathetically restored, and its chequered history reads like this: founded by the Spaniards in 1635; attacked by the Dutch in 1646; deserted in 1663; reconstructed in 1666; rebuilt in 1719; stormed by 3000 Moros in 1720; cannonaded by the British in 1798; abandoned by the Spaniards in 1898; occupied by the US in 1899; seized by the Japanese in 1942; and, finally, claimed by the Philippines in 1946.

Inside is a museum (11 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sun-Fri), with several impressive galleries, an exhibition of 18th- and 19th-century prints and contemporary paintings, and another with drawings of churches around the country. The **marine exhibit**, where you can learn about marine ecosystems and animals, includes some sophisticated displays. Across the inner courtyard of the fort is a terrific **ethnographic gallery** concentrating on the boat-dwelling Sama Dilaut (otherwise known as the Badjao, or sea gypsies) of the Sulu archipelago. Walk around the ramparts for 360-degree views of Zamboanga city and the busy ocean. On the fort's outer wall is an altar and shrine to the Virgin of Pilar and candle-sellers providing the individual 'bunches' of thin, coloured candles that are burned at the shrine.

East of Fort Pilar is the Muslim stilt village of **Rio Hondo**; its mosque is a clear landmark visible from the ramparts of the fort. The village is built out over the edge of the water, and the houses are joined by

Sunflower Food Centre, between La Purisma and Urdaneta Sts, is a bustling Filipino fast-food restaurant. There is a food court and several fast-food joints in the Mindpro City Mall and a Jollibee and Chowking on Mayor Jaldon St.

Shopping

Zamboanga Home Products store (cnr San José & Mayor Jaldon Sts) Sells lots of rather ordinary souvenirs and some interesting, good-quality carvings, basketwork and woven fabrics.

The market on the waterfront has cheap clothing and batik from Malaysia and Indonesia. The Mindpro City Mall is in the centre of town.

About 7km out of Zamboanga heading west, the Yakan Weaving Village is really no more than a collection of six or seven stalls selling some good Yakan weavings like table runners and place mats, a little brassware, and lots of ordinary Indonesian and Malaysian mass-produced batik. Yakan are the indigenous people of nearby Basilan Island, and their woven designs are characterised by bright colours and geometric designs.

Getting There & Away

Though it's a part of the peninsula of the same name, few travellers venture to Zamboanga overland and most arrive by plane. However, for the intrepid and patient who want to travel throughout northern Mindanao before visiting the city, it's possible to get either a fast ferry (four hours) or bus (eight hours) in the town of Pagadian in the far north of Zamboanga del Sur; though neither is recommended, the boat likely presents fewer safety risks.

AIR

PAL flies from Manila to Zamboanga (1½ hours) at the ungodly hour of 5am daily, and there is another flight at 3pm daily. Other flights are with Cebu Pacific Air and Air Philippines.

Air Philippines and Cebu Pacific Air flies to/from Cebu five days a week (one hour).

Cebu Pacific Air also flies to and from Davao, on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

South Phoenix Airlines (☎ 991 5688) has a direct flight every Thursday and Sunday between Zamboanga and Kota Kinabalu and Sandakan, Malaysia.

SEAIR flies to Jolo (daily) and Tawi-Tawi (daily except Friday and Sunday). South Phoenix Airlines also services the same destinations.

BOAT

George & Peter Lines leaves for Cebu City via Dumaguete on Negros once weekly, and to Cebu weekly via Dapitan on Mindanao and Dumaguete.

SuperFerry has weekly runs to Davao (P1400, nine hours) and General Santos (P1400, 12 hours). Smaller boats also run daily to Cotabato. **Sulpicio Lines** has boats leaving for General Santos weekly.

SuperFerry leaves every Monday for Iloilo (P1400, 12 hours).

SRN Fastcraft (☎ 992 3765) has Weesam Express boats leaving every Monday and Thursday to Sandakan (P5400, eight hours). **Aleson Lines** (☎ 991 2687; Veterans Ave) is a slower, cheaper option. Boats leave Zamboanga for Sandakan in Malaysian Borneo twice weekly (cabin P3600, 16 hours).

SuperFerry has boats leaving for Manila (P2400, 48 hours) twice a week. **Negros Navigation** and **Sulpicio Lines** boats leave for Manila once weekly, going via Iloilo on Panay. The trip takes about 32 hours.

BUS

If you must travel by road, buses to Zamboanga run several times daily until late morning from Dipolog (air-con P220, eight hours) and Iligan (12 hours). But it really is not advisable to travel to Zamboanga by road (see Dangers & Annoyances on p370).

Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 2km from the centre of Zamboanga. Walk out of the arrivals hall and catch a public tricycle for P7, or take a special trip for P30 to P40. Taxis cost around P50. From town you can take a jeepney marked 'Canelar-Airport' for P5.

TRICYCLE, JEEPNEY & BUS

The flat fare around town is P5 by tricycle and jeepney. Special trips by tricycle cost around P100 per hour.

If you're determined to travel north by bus, the terminal is near the Santa Cruz market on the outskirts of town.

AROUND ZAMBOANGA Taluksangay

pop 6783

This is a Muslim settlement about 20km northeast of Zamboanga city. Like Rio Hondo, it's built partially out over the water and a mosque with red minarets (the oldest on the Zamboanga Peninsula) dominates the skyline. Though it's considered less problematic for visitors than Rio Hondo, the same sort of unwritten rules for visitors apply here; wear appropriate clothing and ask if you want to take photos. **Taluksangay** is on the organised day-tour route from Zamboanga, so local people are used to visitors and can be quite forceful in asking for money. **Jeepneys** go to Taluksangay (P25, 35 minutes).

Santa Cruz & Sacol Islands

Great Santa Cruz Island is around 7km off the Zamboanga waterfront, and is home to small fishing communities. Visitors come to see the 2km-long pinkish beach, coloured from finely crushed red coral, the actual red colour only really visible if you scoop up a bit in the palm of your hand. You can swim here, but it's on a busy shipping channel and currents are strong. There are a number of good reef dives and snorkelling spots in the area; the optimal time is from April to October. Contact **Freedom Dellos of Coral Divers Den** (☎ 0919 567 3772; coraldiver@hotmail.com; 749 Farmer's Dr, Governor Ramos Ave, Santa Maria, Zamboanga).

Boats for the island leave from the waterfront between the **Lantaka Hotel** and **Fort Pilar** in Zamboanga; a return trip costs about P600 in a pumpboat (one way 20 minutes) for up to six people. Bring your own food and water.

Sacol Island is not generally visited by tourists and is undeveloped except for fishing villages. If there are security concerns with NPA or MNLF splinter groups, they are focused on the hinterlands and not on the coastal areas, though you'll find that the beaches are often guarded by armed soldiers. You must get permission to visit the island from the tourist office in Zamboanga (p397) and boats for Sacol leave from the wharf in the barangay of Manikan (jeepney P50).

Little Santa Cruz Island is a military base that is occasionally open to the public.

OZAMIS

☎ 088 / pop 110,420

While Ozamis is not the provincial capital of Misamis Occidental, it has a capital-city feel to it and is bigger and busier than the capital, Oroquieta.

It has a busy port area and compact central commercial area, but not much else to hold a traveller's interest. **Royal Garden Hotel** (☎ 521 2888; fax 521 0008; r from P750) is the best choice in town, with a good restaurant and Filipino fast-food outlet attached. **Palace Hotel** (☎ 521 0573; fax 521 3240; r P500-900; a) has decent rooms with TVs.

Ozamis is the starting point for trips to **Mt Malindang National Park**, which boasts excellent hiking through gorges, rivers, grasslands and dense forests and the chance to spot tarsiers, flying lemurs and rare birds in the wild. There are four peaks in the park, the highest is 2404m, though no trails reach this summit. The ranger station is near Tangub from where it's only a few kilometres to the park entrance at Hoyohoy.

Getting There & Away

Buses run every 15 minutes to and from Iligan (P45, 1½ hours), Pagadian, Dipolog and Oroquieta (P35, 1½ hours). All buses go from an integrated transport terminal, which is a tricycle ride (P10) from the port.

Ferries run constantly between **Kolambugan** (an hour's drive south of Iligan) to Ozamis, and all buses use this service. The cost of the boat ride (P8.50, 25 minutes) is in addition to the bus fare and is collected on board the ferry. **Negros Navigation** boats leave for Manila via Iloilo, Panay, once a week (43 hours). **Cebu Ferries** depart for Cebu daily (11 hours), except Monday and Friday. There are boats from Bacolod to Ozamis.

OROQUIETA

pop 59,850

Oroquieta is a sleepy riverside town and seems an unlikely setting for the provincial capital of Misamis Occidental. The market comes alive in the late afternoon, when the fishing fleet has delivered the day's catch.

If you do overnight check out **Sheena's Hotel** (☎ 531 1158; Barrientos St; r with fan/air-con from P250/650; a), a rambling old house with a garden and restaurant, but on a noisy stretch of road. **Casa Kristina Hotel** (☎ /fax 531 1272;

Barrientos St; r P400-600) is 200m further along from Sheena's. The hotel has direct river frontage and a good restaurant with a balcony over the water.

Getting There & Away

All buses from Ozamis to Dipolog (and vice versa) go via Oroquieta (P30, one hour). Get off the bus at the petrol station in town on the way through, rather than at the bus terminal on the outskirts.

BALIANGAO WETLAND PARK

This small but great spot is way off the beaten track, with mangrove-lined river estuaries to explore, good snorkelling off-shore beside the marine protected area, and white-sand beaches a short boat ride away. The only noise you'll hear is birdsong and the occasional fishing boat.

This is a community-based initiative of four simple bamboo and nipa cottages and a meeting and eating shelter, all powered by solar energy (not a radio or TV in sight). If you like your creature comforts, you may wish to just make a day trip, and overnighters should be prepared for lots of mosquitoes (nets are provided in the cottages).

There are four cottages (P300, or per person P75) that sleep up to six people each and a camp site (per person P20), though you have to bring your own tent. A boat to go snorkelling (bring your own equipment) costs P150 for half a day; a 30-minute tour upriver costs P150; and a boat ride to Sunrise Beach for swimming costs P200 for half a day. It's best to ring a day or so ahead, especially as the cottages can occasionally be full of students on field trips. Contact the NGO Pipuli (☎ 521 1928, weekends ☎ 0918 490 2476; fax 521 1992; Ozamis).

Getting There & Away

Get a bus from Dipolog (P30, 1½ hours) or Oroquieta (P25, one hour) to Calamba. Here, it's easiest to take a special trip by tricycle to the park, which with a couple of hours waiting time will cost about P200 return. Entrance to the park is about 2km down a bumpy track, impassable to vehicles when wet. At the end of the track walk 400m or so along a series of boardwalk bridges through mangrove forest to the park buildings.

DAPITAN

pop 68,180

A clean and relatively green city on the edge of a wide bay, Dapitan is a better choice than Dipolog if you're staying in the area. The city is full of memorials to its most famous temporary resident, the national hero José Rizal, who lived in exile here from 1892 until shortly before his death in 1896. During that time he designed the town's waterworks, practised as a doctor and natural scientist, and taught local boys. The Rizal Museum in Talisay, just over the bridge from Dapitan, is where Rizal lived. The main building houses a collection of Rizal memorabilia, and in the grounds are beautifully crafted, life-size bamboo and nipa replicas of the house, clinic, school and chicken house where Rizal lived.

Aliguay Island, a white-sand island with good coral, is a 45-minute bangka ride from Dapitan.

Sleeping & Eating

Dakak Park Beach Resort (☎ /fax 212 5932; r P8000-12,000; Ⓢ) On Dakak Bay, about 15 minutes from Dapitan by road or 40 minutes by boat, this is the absolute top of the range in terms of quality and price. It offers a private beach, golf course, horse riding, water sports and diving, and comfortable rooms and cottages. Guests are transferred to the resort by hotel transport, but other visitors need to ride an extended motorcycle (P100 return, depending on waiting time) from Dapitan. Nonguests can have day use of the resort beach – but not the swimming pools – for P200.

Dapitan City Resort Hotel (☎ /fax 213 6542; Sunset Blvd; r from P1200; Ⓢ) Has full water frontage and all rooms have balconies. There is a pool that nonguests can use for P75, and a nice-looking restaurant.

Aplaya Vida Lodge (Sunset Blvd; r P450; ⓐ) Consists of simple air-con rooms in a nice old wooden house. Across the road is a seafood restaurant affiliated with the lodge.

Corazon de Dapitan has very good Filipino dishes served on the ground floor of a beautiful old two-storey building on the corner of the plaza.

Getting There & Away

From Dipolog catch an RBS minivan (P12, 30 minutes) from the RBS stand on General Luna St, opposite the high school.

Palauan Port is halfway between Dipolog and Dapitan, about 2km off the highway. Ask the RBS minivan to drop you at the turn-off, and then take a tricycle (P5) to the port. The tricycles wait interminably for a total of eight passengers, so you might want to pay for an extra couple of places so that you can get going.

To Manila, SuperFerry and Sulpicio Lines have boats once a week (P2000, 40 hours).

Delta Fast Ferries services, George & Peter Lines and SuperCat leave daily for Dumaguete and Negros. SuperCat has connecting boats to Cebu.

DIPOLOG

☎ 065 / pop 99,860

Dipolog (dee-poh-loh) is the capital of Zamboanga del Norte, and has a busy town centre just off the waterfront. If you're in an energetic mood you can climb the many, many steps of the Stations of the Cross to Linabo Park. At 486m above sea level, this lookout gives a good view of Dipolog and its neighbouring city of Dapitan. **Sicayab Beach** is a fine grey-sand beach about 4km from town, and further out is the **Pamansalan Oisca Forest Park & Waterfall**.

A few hundred metres along General Luna St, heading out of town, is the **Hotel Camila** (☎ /fax 212 3008; r from P500; ⓐ), with well-furnished and comfortable rooms, but make sure you have a room on the opposite side from the church unless you want the early-morning mass for a wake-up call. A **Sunburst Chicken Restaurant** is attached. **Top Plaza Hotel** (☎ 212 5777; fax 212 5788; r P825-1540) is another option, also with a good restaurant.

Pizza Deli (Festival Shopping Arcade) in the fruit and vegetable market has a 'real' pizza oven and lots of tourist information on the walls.

Getting There & Away

PAL flies from Manila to Dipolog (P4000, two hours) several days a week.

Dipolog's Palauan Port is technically in the nearby city of Dapitan, though geographically it's halfway between the two. Details of boats to and from Palauan are on opposite.

Regular buses link Dipolog with Ozamis via Oroquieta (P85, 3½ hours). They drop off right in town on General Luna St. South-bound buses to Zamboanga (P220, eight to

10 hours) leave from the Satellite bus terminal on the southern edge of town.

SULU ISLANDS

Despite the mellifluous-sounding name, the 500 or so islands of the Sulu archipelago, stretching some 300km from Basilan to Borneo, have become synonymous with the conflict between government troops and Muslim separatist groups. The archipelago is divided into two provinces: Sulu, with its capital of Jolo (ho-lo), and Tawi-Tawi, with Bongao as its capital. It is further subdivided into the Jolo, Tawi-Tawi, Tapul, Papiantana and Pangutaran and Sibutu groups of islands.

The rather isolated Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi Group lies off the coast of Borneo, midway between Palawan and the Sulu archipelago. These are still dangerous waters for sailors, less because of the elements than because of pirates and smugglers. Smaller passenger vessels as well as cargo boats are regularly plundered in these seas.

About 94% of the archipelago's population is Muslim, and this area is part of the ARMM. However, culturally the region is dominated by the Tausugs, or 'people of the current'. In and around Tawi-Tawi, the Sama people live in stilt houses by the coast. Terminology for the people of the region can be confusing. Sama is a generic term covering four distinct groups of people, sharing the Sama language, who inhabit the islands south of the Jolo Group; the Sama Talon, Sama Gimba, Sama Laut and Sama Pala peoples. The Sama Laut, meaning 'sea Sama' and often referred to in English as 'sea gypsies', are generally referred to as Badjao, though they themselves do not use this term.

There are still communities of Badjao living on boats in the southern part of the archipelago, but many now live on permanent sites, either in stilt houses or on their boats at moorings. Although most Badjao are Muslim, animist beliefs and practices are still observed. Sitangkai, in the Sibutu Group, is known as the Venice of the Philippines, as many Badjao floating communities have settled there.

History

The people of Sulu were the first in the Philippines to be converted to Islam in the

14th century. It remained a stronghold of Islam during the Spanish era and in the early 20th century it was the scene of pitched battles between US forces and the tough local Tausug people. Later, during WWII, local people joined with the US liberating forces against occupying Japanese troops. During 1974 the MNLf, opposed to the imposition of martial law, fought fiercely against government forces in and around Jolo.

Climate

The islands are fortunate to be outside the typhoon belt, but precipitation is constant throughout the year and January to April is considered the dry period with relatively

WARNING

Most foreign embassies advise against any travel to the Sulu Islands, though Tawi-Tawi, Simunul, and Sitangkai are considered safe by those who know the region. Travel to Basilan and Jolo are cautioned against outright.

less rainfall. February is the coolest month, but temperatures average around 26°C.

Getting There & Away

All scheduled access to the Sulu archipelago is from Zamboanga.

SEAIR (☎ 062 991 2225; www.flyseair.com) flies between Zamboanga and Jolo daily. Sanga-Sanga airport in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, is also serviced by SEAIR with five flights weekly from Zamboanga (P2700).

SKT Lines and Sampaguita Lines (☎ 993 1591) are two of the bigger companies running vessels to the Sulu archipelago. Both run a similar schedule. Sampaguita Lines has boats twice weekly stopping at Jolo, Bongao, Siasi and Sitangkai, and twice weekly for Jolo and Bongao only.

TAWI-TAWI GROUP

This group of over 300 islands is about as far away as you can get from Manila and still be in the Philippines. More than half the land area qualifies as shorefront partially submerged during high tide, which is why most of the people live in homes on stilts linked to one another by narrow catwalks. Only declared a separate province from Sulu in 1973, the dearth of visitors journeying out here means you will likely receive celebrity attention.

Bongao

The capital of Tawi-Tawi province derives its name from the Tausug word *'bangaw'*, meaning 'heron'. Today Bongao's wildlife is less famous for herons than for monkeys in great numbers on Mt Bongao, a sheer mountainous outcrop behind the township. There's an hour's hiking trail to the summit at 314m, with a royal Muslim burial site at the top (dress appropriately if you want to visit) and good views across the island chain. This sacred mountain is the site of a festival celebrated by Muslims and Christians alike in

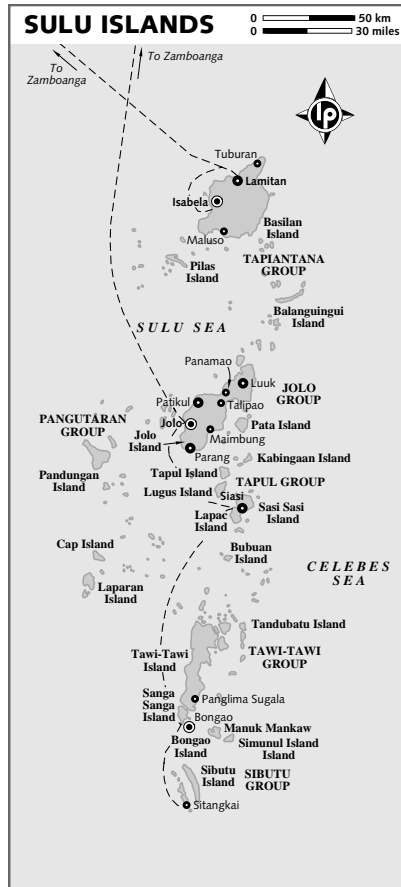
the second week of October. There is a small museum in the old Spanish fort near Bongao. Local people were instrumental in helping American forces to land and liberate the area from the Japanese in WWII, and Westerners here are called 'Milikan', a local distortion of 'American'. A busy market sells everything from bolo knives to turtle eggs eaten for their supposed powers as an aphrodisiac.

There are several simple lodgings in Bongao. Beachside Inn (☎ 268 1446; r P500) is near the harbour. Kasulutan Beach Resort (r P350) is 2km out of town.

Simunol Island

This island is only a few minutes away from Sitangkai Island, the 'Venice of the Phil-

ippines'. The Sheik Karimul Makdum Mosque, built in 1380, is one of the oldest mosques in the archipelago. All that remains from the original are four carved pillars while the existing modern version is c 1980. The residents of Simunol Island have multi-ethnic features, as they are descendants of the Arab and Japanese traders who found wives here. There are no hotels to stay in but you can contact the Provincial Tourism Office to arrange homestay accommodation. A private ferry from Bongao plus a jeepney tour around the island should cost around P2500. Regular ferries leave Bongao for Simunol daily around noon (P20, one hour); they return from Simunol to Bongao at 8am.



© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'