
I. THE COUNTRY

The Philippines is an archipelago comprising approximately 7,100 islands covering a combined area of 300,439 square kilometers. Luzon, located in the north, is the largest island of the chain and the most densely populated. The Visayas Islands in the center of the group and the island of Mindanao located in the south have smaller populations. Manila is the national capital and the seat of the government of the Philippines. Regional centers of importance include Bacolod, Iloilo and Cebu City in the Visayas; Iligan, Cotabato and Davao in Mindanao.

History and Government

The first European to visit the Philippines was Ferdinand Magellan who arrived in 1521. The islands were subsequently colonized by Spain in 1565 and named after King Philip II of Spain. Following the Spanish-American War in 1898, the islands were ceded to the United States. After being occupied by Japan during World War II, the Philippines was proclaimed independent in July 1946.

From 1946 until 1972, the form of government in the Philippines was based on the American democratic system. In September 1972, President Ferdinand E. Marcos proclaimed Martial Law.

In February 1986, Corazon C. Aquino was sworn in as the 11th president of the Philippines. A year after, the Filipino people ratified the New Constitution providing for a democratic republican state and a presidential form of government.

The People

The country's population is currently estimated at approximately 57 million, with an average growth rate of 2.7 %. By population size, the Philippines ranks 8th in Asia and 17th largest in the world. About 63 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. The Filipino people are predominantly of Malay origin with a history of Chinese, Indian, Spanish and American influence.