



Travel Guide: **3 days in Manila, Philippines**

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Planning your trip

Most travelers go to the Philippines for a taste of the archipelago's world-class beaches and tropical islands, or maybe to spend a couple of peaceful days in the mountain provinces or countryside. Whichever of the 7,107 islands you're heading to, the most important hub you'll be passing through is the Philippine's capital: Manila.

For the first-timer, Manila can be pretty chaotic. It's very different from the Philippines you see in travel websites and magazines. But before you dismiss Manila as just another chaotic city, take a moment to relax and regroup. The chaos is just one layer – there's much more to Manila than meets the eye.

While the famed tropical paradise spots are indeed just a few hours' bus ride or a short plane trip away from Manila, don't leave too quickly! There is actually so much to see and do in this dynamic, vibrant city. Manila is at the heart of everything. It is home to cultural and historical landmarks and it can give you a better understanding and appreciation of the Filipino psyche.

Getting there and around

- The majority of [international flights to the Philippines](#) go to the NAIA terminals in Metro Manila.
- You'll see A LOT of different kinds of transportation within Metro Manila – trains, taxis, buses, jeepneys, tricycles, pedicabs, motorcycles, etc.
- Public transportation can be a bit tricky, especially for first-time visitors. Taxis are relatively cheap – just make sure to ask the driver to use the meter. You can also use [Uber](#) within Metro Manila.
- The metro rail lines are convenient and fast: [here's a map](#) to help you find your way around.

Where to stay

If you only have a couple of days to spend in Metro Manila, it's best to stay in Manila city proper, especially if you're going to visit Intramuros and Binondo. I highly suggest that you book your first few nights' stay in advance, as walking around Manila in search of a place to stay isn't a very fun experience.

- Highly-rated hotels in Manila include [New World Manila Bay Hotel](#) (double rooms start at USD 160) and [Pan Pacific Manila](#) (double rooms start at USD 120).
- For budget options, check out [Tambayan Capsule Hostel](#) (double rooms start at USD 25) and [Hop Inn Hotel Ermita](#) (double rooms start at USD 25).

Overview: Tourist map

This guide covers the following areas: Intramuros, Binondo, Makati, and Quezon City. To help you plan your trip and find your way, [here's a handy Google map](#).



Intramuros

Intramuros (“Walled City”) is the oldest district in Manila and the historic center. Presently, it’s the only district of Manila where you can still see the old Spanish-era influences.

Most tourists who come to Manila after traveling around other South East Asian countries find the Intramuros scene a welcome break from all the shrines and temples that most East Asian cultures have in common.

It’s a perfect place to learn a bit more about the country’s history and to try out traditional Filipino cuisines.

You can ride a kalesa (horse-drawn carriages) for a quick tour of Intramuros, but you can also walk around. Start at Fort Santiago then make your way to San Agustin Church. Have a Filipino lunch at one of the traditional restaurants, before resuming your walk towards the Baluarte. If you want to catch the sunset, head to Manila Bay. Otherwise, the rooftop bar of Bayleaf Hotel (Sky Deck View Bar) is a great place for an evening drink.

Points of interest:

Fort Santiago

One of the most important historical sites in Manila: a citadel first built by Spanish conquistador, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, and used as the former military headquarters of the Spanish colonial government. Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero, was imprisoned here before his execution in 1896. The Rizal Shrine museum within the fort displays the hero's memorabilia.

Intramuros, Manila / +63 2 525 2000 / Open: Daily from 8 AM to 6 PM including holidays / Entrance fee: PhP 75

Plaza Roma

Rest by the fountain and admire old Spanish-era buildings including the Manila Cathedral, Ayuntamiento, and Palacio de Gobernador.

General Luna corner Andres Soriano, Intramuros, Manila

Casa Manila Museum

The museum depicts colonial lifestyle during the Spanish colonization of the Philippines. It is the typical house of the Filipino “ilustrado” or the affluent class during that time.

Plaza San Luis Complex, Gen. Luna cor. Real St., Intramuros, Manila / +63 2 527 4084, +63 2 527 4088 / Entrance fee: PhP 75

Silahis Center

An antique and artifacts store with a vast collection of cultural items including woven baskets, wooden statues, and other crafts from around the country.

744 Gen. Luna, Intramuros, Manila / +63 2 527 2111 / Opening hours: Daily 10AM-7PM

San Agustin Church and Museum

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this Spanish Baroque church is said to be the oldest stone church currently standing in the Philippines. It has magnificent ceilings and a splendid high altar, and a very popular venue for weddings. The museum displays religious artifacts from the Spanish colonial era.

Gen. Luna corner Real St., Intramuros, Manila / +63 2 527 2746, +63 2 527 4052 / Entrance fee: PhP 100

Baluarte de San Diego

A bastion in Intramuros, formerly the Fort Nuestra Señora de Guia, and one of the oldest known structures in Intramuros. Visitors can admire and rest in the gardens within the baluarte

Santa Lucia corner Muralla, Intramuros, Manila / Opening hours: Daily 8AM-5PM / Entrance fee: PhP 75

Restaurant recommendations:

- [Ristorante Delle Mitre](#) – Religious-themed restaurant serving Filipino and international dishes
- [Barbara's](#) – Traditional Filipino food in an old traditional stone house
- [9 Spoons](#) – Modern Filipino dining with a panoramic view of the Manila skyline



Binondo

There's a reason I started this 3-day itinerary with Intramuros – it's actually one of the most tourist-friendly areas in Manila. Now it's time to see the real grit of the city. Get your gut ready, literally and figuratively. You'll need to come with an empty stomach and an open mind to enjoy Binondo.

Binondo is the world's oldest Chinatown, established in 1594 by the Spanish government to contain the Chinese migrant community in one area. It was built across the river from Intramuros – outside the Spanish community so that they don't intermingle – but near enough to keep a close eye on and within firing range of the cannons. Just in case. (And indeed, there were many instances that cannons were fired towards the Chinese town.)

Thanks to the Filipino-Chinese community's entrepreneurial mindset, Binondo quickly became Manila's commercial and economic center, even outliving the colonial period and persisting until the 1970s. Now, it is home to bustling street markets and hole-in-the-wall joints serving up the best of Filipino-Chinese cuisine.

Don't be fooled by the dusty streets and broken down buildings – you're about to be treated to some really good eats.

Suggested itinerary:

Let's start with a couple of historical sites:

Binondo Church (Minor Basilica of Saint Lorenzo Ruiz)

Soon after the Binondo district was founded by the Spanish government for the Chinese immigrants in 1594, the Binondo church was constructed to encourage the Chinese community to convert to Catholicism. Since then, it has been reconstructed many times due to calamities and wars, and only the Bell Tower remains of the original structure.

Plaza San Lorenzo Ruiz

Across the Binondo Church is Plaza San Lorenzo Ruiz, Binondo's major public square, around which Binondo's major structures are erected. Several historical markers are installed in the plaza, commemorating various moments in the region's history.

Now, it's time to eat! From Binondo Church, walk along Ongpin street to get to the first two food destinations.

Eng Bee Tin

650 Ongpin street

Eng Bee Tin was established in 1912, making it one of the oldest manufacturers of hopia. The founders claim to have started the "hopia revolution" – from two traditional flavors (mung bean and pork), they now sell more than 25 flavors like pandan and custard.

Try the hopia ube (purple yam) and if you like sweets, the custard one is like a hopia-version of éclair.

Café Mezzanine

2F 650 Ongpin street

Above the Eng Bee Tin is Café Mezzanine, a restaurant dedicated to donating funds to the volunteer firefighters of Binondo. It is particularly famous for kiampong or “poor man’s rice,” which is salted sticky rice mixed with mushrooms, various meat, and soy sauce. Pair it with lechon kawali for that Tsinoy (Filipino-Chinese) flavor.

Continue along Ongpin street then turn left at Yuchengco street. Walk forward until you see –

Dong Bei Dumplings

642 Yuchengco street

For dumplings, locals go to Dong Bei where you can see your order made fresh right in front of you. Try the leek (kuchay) pork dumplings.

Go back along Yuchengco street, going past Ongpin street –

Ho-land Hopia and Bakery

551 Yuchengco street

Ho-Land is known for its Fujianese hopia. Get a box for takeout and munching later on.

Sincerity

497 Yuchengco street

I hope you’re still hungry because this next restaurant is one of the finer establishments in Binondo (relatively speaking of course). Locals go here for fried chicken, but also try the oyster cake and if you’re up for it, the frog legs.

Walk back along Yuchengco street, turn left into Carvajal street (itself an interesting market alley), then turn left on Quintin Paredes Road.

New Po Heng Lumpia House

531 Quintin Paredes street

The last stop is the New Po Heng Lumpia House, an open restaurant serving Hokkien-style fresh spring rolls made with vegetables, pork, and shrimp, served with a variety of dipping sauces.

To walk off all the calories, head further down Quintin Paredes Road (turn right when you exit New Po Heng Lumpia House) towards the Pasig River then turn left on Escolta street just before you reach the river.

Escolta Street

This old downtown street houses several historical buildings by several of the country's national artists: the neoclassical Roman-Santos Building, the Capitol Theater by Juan Nakpil, and the BPI Escolta building by Jose Maria Zaragoza, to name a few.

End the day on a sweet note at the Escolta Ice Cream, then ride the Pasig river ferry or LRT out of downtown Manila.



Beyond Manila: Makati

If you've managed to survive Intramuros and Binondo, you probably already know whether you love it or hate it. If you're ready for more, there are still loads of sites to check out. But if you only have one more day in the metro, it's good to see what lies beyond the capital.

Makati is Metro Manila's business and commercial district and a good destination if you're looking for a modern, cosmopolitan vibe. The city mostly caters to professionals so you'll find bars, high-end restaurants, and shopping malls here. There are also several museums and green spaces.

Suggested itinerary:

- Start your day with brunch at Legazpi village: if it's Sunday, check out the Legazpi Sunday Market. If you're feeling fancy, check out Wildflour Café and Bakery or Kitchen 1B. But if you'd like to try the common Filipino's breakfast

fare, order tapsilog (cured beef served with fried rice and egg) at Rodic's Diner.

- Walk towards Dela Rosa street and appreciate the murals along the walkway.
- Continue until you reach Ayala museum, where you can view Filipino contemporary art. [Visit the Ayala Museum website for more information.](#)
- Check out the Greenbelt mall complex for some shopping – the complex is huge and you can cross over to Glorietta or Landmark.
- Then depending on your mood, you can either head to Ayala Triangle Gardens for a quiet evening and dinner, or head to Poblacion for a pig-out night-out with local young professionals and the expat crowd.
- In Poblacion, check out Tambai Yakitori for pre-dinner tapas, El Chupacabra or Senor Pollo for Latin American meals, then end the night at A'toda Madre Tequila Bar.



Beyond Manila: Quezon City

If you prefer to experience a younger, fresher version of Makati, head to Quezon City instead.

The Katipunan area in Quezon City caters to students and families, so there's none of the slightly sketchy spots you'll come across in Makati. There are several schools in the area, which has encouraged all sorts of cafes, kitschy shops, and concept restaurants to pop up around the area.

Suggested itinerary:

- Take a morning stroll around the acacia-lined campus of UP Diliman. Start at Quezon Hall to see the Oblation, walk around the academic oval to see the buildings reflective of various architectural styles, then visit the Carillon Plaza.

- Still within the campus, check out the Parish of the Holy Sacrifice which houses the works of four National Artists. While you're there, look for Mang Larry's Isawan and try the local delicacy: barbecued pig or chicken intestines (isaw).
- Walk to the Sunken Garden and chill with the university students (maybe watch a Frisbee game or witness a public proposal).
- For afternoon snacks or dinner, you can walk to the UP Town Center. You can also do a bit of shopping there, as well as people/dog-watching.
- If you have more time, check out the following food parks: [The Yard at Xavierville](#) (near Katipunan area) and [Crave Park in Marikina](#) (a 30-45-minute cab ride from Katipunan).

About this guide

Thank you for downloading this guide! I hope you find the information here useful and I wish you happy travels to Manila, Philippines. Feel free to forward it to your friends.

You (or your friend) originally downloaded this guide from the [Little Holidays travel website](#). The information is current as of January 2017 – check the website for updates or visit the relevant links listed in the guide for current information.

If you have more questions about travel in the area, send me an email (hello@littlesholidays.net) and I'll be happy to help you!

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