

## **Squiz the World goes to... The Philippines**

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting a country where nature likes to keep everyone on their toes. Where earthquakes shake the ground, basketball hoops seem to pop up on every corner, and family karaoke nights are serious business.

Can you guess? ... Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at The Philippines.

### **JUST THE FACTS**

The Philippines has been in the news recently after a powerful earthquake struck near the country's southern island of Mindanao. Earthquakes can be frightening and dangerous, and this one was strong enough to be felt across a wide area. But while the earthquake made headlines around the world, for many Filipinos, living with the forces of nature is simply part of everyday life.

The Philippines sits in Southeast Asia, between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea. Its capital city is Manila, and more than 110 million people call the country home. But what makes the Philippines really unusual is that it isn't one island. It isn't ten islands. It's made up of more than 7,000 islands scattered across tropical blue waters. Imagine trying to count them all from the window of an aeroplane!

Those islands are usually grouped into three main regions: Luzon in the north, Visayas in the middle, and Mindanao in the south. Living on so many islands means boats, ferries and even planes are an important part of everyday life. Some communities are separated by stretches of ocean, and in some places, children even travel by boat to reach school.

Now, remember that earthquake we mentioned at the start? The reason earthquakes happen so often here is because the Philippines sits on one of the most geologically active parts of Earth. It's located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, a giant horseshoe-shaped zone around the Pacific Ocean where tectonic plates, the enormous pieces of rock that make up Earth's surface, constantly push and pull against one another. The Philippines is also home to more than 20 active volcanoes. Some are quiet most of the time, while others occasionally rumble back to life.

And it's not just earthquakes and volcanoes. The country also sits in the path of powerful tropical storms called typhoons. Around 20 typhoons enter Philippine waters each year, bringing strong winds, heavy rain and flooding.

And while those forces have helped create an extraordinary landscape, they've also helped shape the people who live there. So now that we know a little about the place itself, let's find out what life is like for the people who call the Philippines home.

## LET'S GET CULTURAL

If there's one thing many visitors notice about the Philippines, it's the importance of family and community. In many Filipino households, it's common for grandparents, parents, children and other relatives to all play an active role in family life. Families often gather for celebrations, meals and special occasions, and respect for elders is considered very important. That strong sense of community is reflected in a Filipino value known as *Bayanihan*. The word describes the idea of people helping one another, especially during difficult times.

Long ago, some Filipino villages built homes from lightweight materials like bamboo and wood. If a family needed to move, neighbours would work together to literally lift the entire house and carry it to a new location. Today, *Bayanihan* is still used to describe people coming together to help one another, whether after a typhoon, an earthquake, or simply when a neighbour needs a hand.

The Philippines is also one of the most culturally diverse countries in Asia. At least 120 and possibly up to 180 languages are spoken throughout the country. The country's two official languages are Filipino and English. Filipino is based largely on a language called Tagalog, which originated around the capital, Manila. Because English is widely used in schools, government and business, many Filipinos grow up speaking two or even three languages.

"The Philippines has also been shaped by its history. It was named after King Philip II of Spain and was ruled by Spain for more than 300 years. That's one reason the country is now predominantly Catholic, making it one of the few countries in Asia where Christianity is the majority religion.

Now, if Australia has a love affair with footy, the Philippines has a love affair with basketball. Travel through a city, town or village and you'll spot basketball hoops almost everywhere. Some are attached to proper courts. Others are mounted beside roads, squeezed into narrow alleyways, or standing in small neighbourhood parks. And when the basketball game is over, there's a good chance someone will reach for a microphone."

Filipinos are famous for their love of singing. Karaoke is popular across the country, from birthday parties and family gatherings to community celebrations and festivals. You don't have to be a great singer to join in. In fact, that's half the fun. And that love of music has helped produce some world-famous stars. Singer-songwriter Olivia Rodrigo has Filipino heritage as does pop superstar Bruno Mars.

Like every country, the Philippines faces challenges too. Human rights groups have raised concerns about some government policies and anti-crime campaigns in recent years, and Filipinos continue to debate issues of fairness, justice and how their country should be governed.

"But, through good times and tough times alike, the values of family, community and helping others remain at the heart of Filipino life.

Now that we know a little about what life is like in the Philippines, let's see what a typical school day might look like as we head off, it's... "

## TIME FOR SCHOOL

"Just like in Australia, going to school is compulsory, and most children begin with kindergarten before moving through primary school and then high school. But getting there can be a very different experience.

While Australian kids might travel to school by car, bus or bicycle, many Filipino students ride in colourful bus-like vehicles called jeepneys. Originally made from old American military jeeps left behind after World War Two, today's jeepneys are brightly painted and decorated with all sorts of colours and designs. In some parts of the country, children might even travel to school by boat, hopping between islands before the first bell rings."

The school year is a little different too. While Australian students usually begin a new school year in January, Filipino students often start theirs around June, although the calendar has changed a few times in recent years as schools try to avoid some of the hottest months of the year.

One thing Australian kids might find surprising is that many lessons are taught in English. Students also learn Filipino, and because more than 180 languages are spoken across the country, many children grow up speaking two or even three languages.

"Schools can look quite different depending on where you live. In busy cities like Manila, some classrooms can be crowded, with forty or more students learning together. In remote mountain villages and on far-flung islands, schools are often smaller, and getting there can take much longer.

Of course, living in a country with earthquakes, volcanoes and typhoons means schools need to be prepared for emergencies. Many students regularly practise earthquake drills so they know exactly what to do if the ground starts shaking."

"And when lunchtime arrives, there's a good chance you'll hear the familiar thump-thump-thump of a basketball bouncing nearby. Basketball is hugely popular in the Philippines, and many schools have courts where students can shoot hoops with friends during breaks or after class.

Music is important too. School concerts, performances and singing competitions are common, reflecting the country's love of music and karaoke."

Now that school's out for the day, let's discover some of the Philippines' strangest, funniest and most surprising facts

#### BELIEVE IT OR NOT

"Let's begin with Christmas. Because, why not? In Australia, Christmas decorations usually start appearing around November. But in the Philippines, they can start appearing in September. That's right, September. The country is famous for having one of the longest Christmas seasons in the world, with festive songs, lights and decorations popping up months before Santa even starts checking his list.

Now, you might remember I mentioned that the Philippines is a predominantly Christian country. But like many places around the world, it also has plenty of old superstitions and folk stories."

"One of the most famous is a mysterious creature called the Aswang. Depending on which story you're listening to, it might be a monster, a vampire, a shape-shifter or something else entirely. Some Filipino folk tales warn against whistling at night because it could attract unwanted supernatural attention.

Would it really summon an Aswang? Probably not. But if you hear a strange noise outside your window later tonight, don't blame me.

And, speaking of strange creatures, let's move from imaginary animals to real ones."

"The Philippines sits in one of the most biodiverse marine regions on Earth, with thousands of species living in its rivers, rainforests and surrounding seas. And some of them are extraordinary. The waters around the islands are visited by whale sharks, the largest fish on Earth. Despite growing as long as a school bus, these gentle giants feed mainly on tiny plankton. Hidden beneath the waves are giant clams that can grow bigger than a bathtub.

Meanwhile, up in the rainforest canopy lives the Philippine Eagle, one of the largest eagles on Earth and the reticulated python, the world's longest snake, with some reaching more than seven metres in length.

But not all Philippine animals are supersized. At the other end of the scale is the tiny Philippine Mouse-Deer, one of the world's smallest hoofed mammals. Awww"

So, before we end up on the menu for a giant eagle or a giant python, let's go find something a little safer to eat because it's...

#### DINNER TIME

One thing you'll quickly discover in the Philippines is that food is often about bringing people together. Family meals, celebrations and special occasions usually involve lots of dishes shared around the table. One of the country's most famous foods is adobo. Often considered the national dish, it usually features chicken or pork slowly cooked in a mixture of vinegar, soy sauce and garlic. Every family seems to have their own special version.

But if you're looking for colour, the Philippines has plenty of that too. One of its most famous ingredients is ube, a bright purple yam that's used to make cakes, pastries, ice cream and all sorts of colourful desserts. It's so vividly purple it almost looks like somebody turned the colour settings up too high.

"And then there's halo-halo, which means ""mix-mix"" in Filipino. Imagine a giant dessert glass filled with shaved ice, fruit, jelly, sweet beans, milk and ice cream, all piled together into one colourful creation.

The fun part? You're supposed to mix it all together before you eat it. It might sound a little strange at first, but on a hot tropical day, it's one of the Philippines' favourite treats."

And if all that wasn't sweet enough, the Philippines is also famous for its delicious mangoes and coconuts, which many people consider among the best in the world. From savoury adobo to purple ube desserts and giant bowls of halo-halo, Filipino food is every bit as colourful, diverse and full of surprises as the country itself.

## THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Roughly how many islands make up the Philippines? [More than 7,000]

In which month of the year does Christmas start in the Philippines? [September]

What is the name of the purple yam used to colour many Filipino dishes? [Ube]

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to The Philippines.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.