



ILOILO & GUIMARAS

INTRODUCTION TO ILOILO & GUIMARAS

Located in the heart of the Philippines, the province of Iloilo lies in the Western Visayas Region of the country. Its capital, Iloilo City, was a merchants' hub pre-dating colonial times, and remained so even during Spanish and American colonization. It is a geographic ode to the country's richly storied past, with archaic heritage sites sprinkled sporadically between burger joints and smartphone shops.

Politically independent of provincial governance while not quite as industrialized as other metropolitan areas, Iloilo City has rapidly urbanized in recent years. It has big city aspirations with a charming small town sub culture, though traffic snarls now and then certainly foretell a steadfast pursuit of the former. Iloilo City also boasts of generations-old delicacies well-known throughout the country, making it one of the nation's food capitals and tourist hotspots.

While in Iloilo, cross its southeast coast to get to the island province of Guimaras, the nation's mango capital and an eco tourist's haven with its rugged coastlines, decidedly undeveloped beaches, islets, and mangrove forests.



Islas de Gigantes



Museo Iloilo

Museo Iloilo houses an extensive collection of heritage and culture, spanning prehistoric to modern times. Exhibits include houseware from the Stone Age, trade items from prehistoric merchants, remnants from a sunken British ship, life-sized diorama depicting ancestral lifestyles, pre-war photos, war mementos and weapons, and installations from contemporary artists.



Nelly Garden

Completed in 1928 by one of the city's prominent families, this 2-hectare estate within which a heritage mansion lies, is a testament to Iloilo's aristocratic past where uppercrust folk held parties and meetings were held by statesmen. It has survived World War II bombings and has been declared a National Historical Landmark by the National Historical Institute.



Batchoy

It is simply against natural law to visit Iloilo and not try batchoy, the city's signature dish. Egg noodles swim in a broth flavored with chicken stock, shrimp paste, chopped pork innards and liver, and are topped with chopped spring onion, fried garlic chips, and crushed pork crackling. Make like a local and have it at a public market.



Dinagyang Festival

The Dinagyang Festival, held every fourth Sunday of January, is a celebration of devotion of the Ilonggos to Santo Niño (Child Jesus). There is much pomp and fanfare even a few days leading up to the event. Lose yourself to the riotous revelry heralding both the Christian and the pagan during a parade where people in a variety of ornate tribal costumes dance and march through the streets to beating drums while holding up a statue of the Santo Niño in honor of him. Well-attended side events include food fairs, cultural shows, sports competitions, and activities that aim to marry the traditional with the new (like an art fest on hip-hop and folkdance).



Miag-ao Church

This UNESCO World Heritage site was also built on forced labor and served as a lookout tower for Moro rebels during Spanish times. Its two bellfries differ in design, owing to their having been commissioned by different priests. It is prominently Baroque in architecture, featuring intricate and dramatic bas relief on its facade.



Mangroves (Guimaras)

Mangroves are crucial to the environment whether as a shelter for marine life or a food source for mammals. The mangroves in Guimaras are lush and have prevailed after suffering an oil spill in 2006, but they still need conservation efforts. Nature enthusiasts are sure to enjoy the mangrove planting and maintenance activities held especially on Earth Day.



Calle Real

Calle Real is a time capsule of Spanish colonial houses, early trading quarters, and 19th to 20th century European and American architecture—including this iconic art deco street corner fixture, the Eusebio Villanueva Building. It was the heart of commerce due to the sugarland boom during Spanish times and was the main drag for the city's hip and elite. Calle Real was declared a National Heritage Zone by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) in 2004.



Iloilo Esplanade

This riverside linear park, opened in 2012 that knits river rehabilitation with energizing public space. Watch the sunset from a bench or nearby cafe with a view, take a Zumba class under the trees, or take a leisurely stroll around this 2.5-kilometer stretch. Skateboard enthusiasts can also practice their stunts at the Iloilo City Public Skateboard Park.



Mangoes

Purportedly the sweetest in the world, Guimaras mangoes are not only export-quality but have been served at the White House and Buckingham Palace. There are over 50,000 mango trees and over 7,000 growers in the island province. Bringing in non-Guimaras mango varieties is prohibited as a measure to keep the integrity of Guimaras' mango breed and quality.



Beach (Guimaras)

Beaches here have evaded commercial overdevelopment, offering pristine coastlines and seclusion - a refreshing break for those tired of beaches so crowded you have nowhere to spread your sarong.

FUN THINGS TO DO



The sweetest mango ever

When in mango capital Guimaras, try the mango pizza, mango bulalo, mango pasta. How does that work? Find out! Or earn some monks a few bucks by buying mango products at the Trappist Monastery. Make like an haciendero by “harvesting” your mangoes at a plantation (then paying for them on your way out). Some farms even offer mango trees for rent, where you pay to involve yourself in their upkeep and share in the harvest revenue.



Eat, digest, repeat

Batochey isn't the only food game in town. There's also puto, a rice cake made with coconut milk and wrapped in banana leaves, customarily eaten with batochey; pancit molo, a meat dumpling soup; native chicken inasal, a coal-roasted native Visayan chicken with a special marinade; and oysters, scallops, and diwal (angel wing clam) at jawdrop prices when in season.



Party like a local

After a day of heritage sites, museums, and churches, unwind with a cold beer and some grilled grub at Smallville Complex, Iloilo City's nightlife hub. Within close proximity to the Iloilo Esplanade, this complex offers bars, dance clubs, and restaurants where locals gather to relax, party, or shed the day's stress by belting out a few karaoke tunes.



Sail and Race with the Wind

The Iloilo Paraw Regatta is an annual sailboat race commemorating the arrival of Malay settlers in Panay during pre-colonial times. The paraws are double outriggers with sails printed with ornate designs and patterns—a facsimile of the traditional seacraft the settlers came in. The regatta is held every February and kicks off at Villa Beach, Iloilo City, down the Iloilo Strait, make a U-turn near Jordan, Guimaras and return to the starting point.



Hang out with corals and fishes

The Nueva Valencia town of mainland Guimaras is a common jump-off point for island hopping and snorkeling. While not exactly an exciting spot for experienced divers, Guimaras is perfect for beginner snorkelers and would-be divers with a sufficient underwater vista of coral and vibrantly colored fish—and the occasional sea turtle. During low tide, one can even spot coral and fish clearly throughout the water sans goggles.

THINGS TO KNOW



How to get there

The Iloilo International Airport is one of the country's busiest airports with direct domestic flights from Metro Manila, Davao, Cagayan de Oro and Gen. Santos; and direct international flights from Hongkong and Singapore. You can take a cab from the airport to the city center in 30 minutes; a cheaper option is to take a van shuttle from the airport to a terminal at the city center, from which you can take a cab to your hotel. You can also reach Iloilo via roll-on roll-off direct ferry from major cities in the country. Crossing to the island province of Guimaras is a 15-minute direct pump boat ride from Iloilo City harbor.



How to get around

Cabs are affordable enough for traveling within the city. Jeepneys ply fixed routes within the city. Terminals for commuter vans and buses are scattered all over for trips to other towns within Iloilo and even other provinces. In Guimaras, common modes of transport are tricycles and multicabs. As Iloilo and Guimaras are no strangers to tourists, locals can guide you on public transport routes.



Where to stay

Lodging choices in Iloilo City run relatively high, and while you can stay at the city center for easy access to various points of interest, you can also opt for more tranquil districts like Molo and La Paz to escape the urban bustle without leaving the city limits. There is a smattering of waterfront and river-view accommodations in Iloilo City, but Guimaras is the best place for lodging with a stunning seascape.



Internet

Most hotels, resorts, and coffee houses, as well as a handful of restaurants, have WiFi, all with different charging schemes—from free to partially free to paid. All local mobile carriers have bundled mobile data plans even for prepaid SIM cards. This would be the most commonly available option for on-the-go Internet access compared to pocket WiFi hotspot devices. Note, though, that in some far flung points of interest beyond the city proper, cellular signal can get spotty.



Language

The most widely spoken dialect is Ilonggo, uniquely marked by an amorous lilting sound and cadence, no doubt contributing to Iloilo's reputation as a “city of love.” When Ilonggos speak, even their expletives sound like romantic declarations. Dialects spoken in towns beyond the city include Kinaray-a, Capiznon, and Akeanon. Locals are used to tourists and can transact in Tagalog and English (in varying levels of fluency).



Currency

Philippine Peso
USD 1 = Php 55.00
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Time zone

Philippine Standard Time
UTC/GMT + 08:00

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