



# Bohol

Discover





## Welcome, Mabuhay!

Bohol is one of the most wonderful provinces of the Visayas region. The main island and 61 smaller islands make up this enchanting archipelago. Tagbilaran City, the province's capital, is located on the South West Coast. Over a million people live in the province and speak mainly Boholano, English and Tagalog. The Boholanos are extremely peace-loving and easy-going people, with friendliness and hospitality deeply engrained in their hearts.

Those who think of Bohol will undoubtedly think of the Chocolate Hills – the stunning hilly landscape in the centre of the island that has made Bohol famous across the world. The province has lots more to offer however. Many species of unusual flora and fauna can be found here, such as the tarsier whose tiny body and disproportionally large eyes astonish and enthuse both children and adults alike. The tropical island is home to

many stunning natural treasures. Wild river landscapes formed by the likes of the Loboc and Inabanga rivers, precious mangrove forests, numerous waterfalls and delightful cave systems make Bohol an Eldorado for nature lovers and hikers.

Bohol's beaches are also unique. The tropical waters around Panglao Island in particular lap gently against the idyllic beaches attracting sunbathers, snorkelers and swimmers from around the world. Even divers' aspirations are satisfied here. The territories in the west and south are spectacular and some of the most beautiful in the whole of Asia. Whale sharks, large schools of hammer sharks and manta rays move around the smaller islands along the coast providing divers with many unforgettable moments.



## Chocolate Hills

The famous Chocolate Hills of Bohol, 30 to 50 metres high, form a landscape in the centre of the island - a sight that is unrivalled around the world. Their well-proportioned shapes might lead you to believe they are the work of a talented landscaping artist, yet the 1,268 hills were created by nature itself. They originated from the sea and the eroded limestone's cone-shaped hills were formed thousands of years ago from coral and coralline algae. However, legend tells a very different story. According to the legend, a giant called Arogo cried when Aloya his loved one died and his tears turned into stone, creating the Chocolate Hills.

This strange hilly landscape is best viewed from two places in particular. One of these is in the town of Carmen to the east of the complex of hills, the other in Sagbayan on the western edge. There is a large viewpoint in Carmen with 214 steps leading to several platforms. The hills get their name from their colour during the dry season. They are covered with brown grass and some say this looks like chocolate from a distance.



## Tarsiers

Most visitors to Bohol will try to catch sight of the most curious creatures in the Philippines - the tarsiers, which attract lots of attention. They are about the size of the palm of your hand, yet in relation to their bodies their eyes are over 150 times larger than those of humans. This enables them to see well in the dark as these tiny nocturnal creatures hunt for insects, amphibians, small birds and reptiles after sunset. If you do not catch sight of tarsiers in the wild then you can see them in abundance at the tarsier sanctuary near Corella in South West Bohol. Trained guides take visitors on a tour across the widespread grounds and through the light secondary forest where the tarsiers live together in small groups.

## **Inabanga and Loboc river tours**

River bank vegetation that is rich in plant species and animal inhabitants make the river courses in the tropics an experience. Boat trips taking visitors on a tour through picturesque landscapes and past small delightful towns are a must. The river courses of the Loboc and the Inabanga are enchanting. The Inabanga is the largest river on Bohol. Up to 10 metres deep and 25 kilometres long, it snakes across the north west of the island. The natural parks, fishing villages and old churches that line the riverbanks can all be visited. Another interesting sight are the Macaban underwater caves whose entrance can be seen from the river. A trip along the Loboc River is one of the most popular activities on Bohol, alongside a visit to the Chocolate Hills. Floating restaurants or motorised bancas (boats) take visitors from the Loay bridge (around 20 kilometres east of Tagbilaran City) upriver towards the Busay waterfalls. Tropical vegetation such as coconut and Nipa palms flourish along the 20-kilometre stretch of river. The jungle surrounding the Loboc river is adored by cyclists and walkers.

## **A forest on stilts**

Bohol is one of the few provinces in the country that is covered by mangrove forests. They grow along the coastline and riverbanks. Mangrove forests are very special and are very different from other types of forest. The most obvious feature of these trees are their stilt-like roots that anchor them securely into the boggy ground and supply them with oxygen. Mangrove forests are a nursing ground for many types of fish, they hold back the mud in coastal regions and on river banks, thereby also providing the delicate coral reefs with protection.

Banacon Island Mangrove Forest in the north of the main island is particularly worth seeing. The area was completely deforested in the past but was reforested over the last 50 years. Many paths lead through this exceedingly interesting region that is steeped in natural and cultural history. The Candijay mangrove forest on the East Coast of Bohol is also a popular sight. Ecological tourism thrives today in this region that is reforested and protected by the Panadtaran Mangrove Association. Members of the association, mainly fishermen and farmers, offer educational walks, canoe trips and ornithological tours.







### **The churches of Bohol – history in stone.**

The Christianisation of the Philippines is an unusual and unique change to the religious and cultural history of an Asian country. The old churches on Bohol relate this history only too well.

#### **Immaculate Conception Church**

The Immaculate Conception Church is located by the sea in the town of Baclayon on the South coast of Bohol. It is the best preserved Jesuit church in the region. The impressive coral stone structure with its beautiful pillar arches was completed in 1727 and even has a dungeon where lawbreakers were punished by the Catholic Church. Antique Christian artefacts and relics can be seen in the adjacent museum as well as in the church's interior.

#### **Loboc Church**

During the early 17th Century, Loboc Church became well known as a pilgrimage site since this is where the saintly Alonso de Humanes found his final resting place. It has a baroque facade although the colonnade was built in a neo-classical style. The church is adorned with many delicate woodcarvings, ornate stained glass and a gilded ceiling. Tagbilaran City is within easy reach by bus or taxi. The church is located 24 kilometres east of the main town.

#### **Church of our Lady of the Light**

This church is found in Loon on the western coast of Bohol and is the most beautiful 19th Century church in the province. The adjacent convent is now used as a school. A grand stairway of 174 steps connects the church with Napo, the old town centre of Loon. It is the longest flight of steps in the country.

#### **Sta. Monica Church**

Sta. Monica Church in Alburquerque, southern Bohol, was built at the end of the 19th Century. Its magnificent bell tower and the imposing vaulted aisle connecting the church to the convent are striking.









## Panglao Island

Panglao is an island set in paradise, bordered by picture postcard beaches and full of amazing places of interest such as the mystical Hinagdanan Cave. Two bridges lead from Bohol, past Tagbilaran and onwards to Panglao Island. The island is divided into two districts – Daus in the north and Panglao in the south.

## Hinagdanan Cave

There are over 1,400 caves in the province of Bohol, and the Hinagdanan Cave in the Daus district is one of the most famous. The mighty limestone cavern is lit by two entrances and natural windows in the ceiling. The mystical shimmering lake where you can take a refreshing dip and the countless elegant stalactites are a particular attraction for passionate photographers.

## Bohol Bee Farm

Relaxation, wellness, healthy eating and rooms with fantastic sea views. Bohol Bee Farm is an unusual farm on a cliff in Daus on Panglao Island, surrounded by tropical plants, pretty gardens and many beehives. Hammocks between trees and loungers by the pool invite visitors to relax. In the restaurant, guests are treated to a selection of foods including fresh homegrown organic vegetables and tasty salads decorated with edible flowers. Experienced therapists provide body massages and spiritual healing methods in the open-air spa. The bee farm aims to show ways in which healthy goods can be produced in harmony with nature, that not only preserve the environment but ultimately also benefit mankind. The atmosphere at the farm is very relaxed and tranquil, a unique place for balancing the mind, body and soul.





**Palm trees and powdery sands**



Panglao Island is famous for its wonderful white beaches. The most well known beaches are Alona, Bolod, Bikini and Doljo. They are perfect places for restful family holidays and departure points for excursions to see the colourful marine life. There are many spots for snorkelling and diving close to the beaches.

### **Alona Beach**

Alona Beach stretches one and a half kilometres along the Southwest Coast. It is the most beautiful beach on Panglao, not least due to its powdery white sands. Different resorts are shaded by coconut palms and treat their guests to a wide variety of dishes. There are a few diving schools on the beach, offering courses and equipment hire. Alona Beach is a real Eldorado for those who want to watch the colourful goings-on in the sea close to the beach. Simple snorkelling equipment is all that is required for outstanding views of the nearby reefs. The more adventurous can hire boats to travel to the deeper reefs of neighbouring islands.

### **Dumaluan Beach**

Dumaluan Beach joins Alona Beach in the east and is the most popular beach with natives due to its calm light blue shimmering waters. However it is also ideal for families with children who enjoy beach holidays and has many pretty picnic spots. The exclusive Bohol Beach Club on Dumaluan Beach is a perfect haven for those seeking private relaxation.

### **Bikini Beach**

This pretty beach is located only eight kilometres from Tagbilaran City. Dreamy white sands with palm trees, Nipa huts and benches make Bikini Beach one of the most popular excursion destinations for holidaymakers and town dwellers.

### **Doljo Beach**

Deep tranquil waters, undisturbed coral reefs and a species-rich marine fauna all border Doljo Beach, making it particularly attractive to divers. There is an abundance of mussels in many shapes and colours.





### **Dolphin & whale watching**

Most people would love at least once in their lifetime to see the mighty tail fin of a sperm whale plunge into the vast ocean or watch dolphins as they leap acrobatically through the air. These wishes can come true at many spots across the Philippines where these animals live in their natural environment.

The sea around Pamilacan Island in the Bohol province is a popular playground for whales and dolphins. The tiny island was once used by the Spaniards as a lookout point for pirates and other enemies. Pamilacan means harpoon and as the name suggests, the inhabitants once lived off catches of shark, manta ray and whale. However, since the marine mammals became protected species they have proven to be far more precious alive than dead. On converted whaling boats, the islanders talk about the lives and behaviours of these animals and know where they can best be spotted.

### **Diving**

Bohol is an ideal destination for those who not only want to dive and see the marine animals but want to accompany them to great depths. The region is one of the best diving locations in Asia. Divers are treated to superior underwater views of impressive coral gardens and colourful marine estuaries along the coastline of Balicasag, Panglao Town and Cabilao in Loon. Overhangs, secret rifts and fragile barriers shape the underwater landscape.

### **Balicasag Island**

Travel to Balicasag from Alona Beach takes 30 minutes by boat. The area around the island is one of the most exciting diving spots in the Visayas. Black Coral Forest is an especially popular area where branches of black coral can be found at depths of 30 metres. The unusual reef inhabitants normally only colonize at depths of over 50 meters. Sea turtles can often be seen at Turtle Point where they seek shelter against the steep walls of cathedral-like caves. The Cathedral Wall is another excellent spot for diving. It is worth taking a torch along to light up the many rifts and cracks in the wall.

### **Pamilacan Island**

It takes around an hour to travel from Alona Beach to Pamilacan Island by boat. The small island is surrounded by impressive marine landscapes, also known as the "resting places of the mantas". Besides the impressive gorgonian fans, sea squirts, sponges and brightly coloured sea anemones, you might even be lucky enough to spot whale sharks and manta rays.

### **Panglao Island**

The coral gardens, steep walls and drop-offs around Panglao are rich in marine life. Alona Beach is the departure point for the nearby reef that is great for orientation and night dives. At Arco Point, two kilometres from Alona Beach, the reef has an adventurous tunnel with an 8m-deep entrance and 18m-deep exit. Here you can marvel at the many soft corals, sea snakes and moray eels.



# Travel Tips

## Arrivals

Air travellers flying from Manila arrive at Tagbilaran City Airport after a short one-hour flight. There are plans to build an airport on Panglao Island as an alternative to Mactan-Cebu International Airport. The port at Tagbilaran City is served by 12 shipping lines that travel from Manila and other regions across the Philippines. The transport connections between neighbouring Cebu and Bohol are excellent. The quick ferries run on a daily basis and take just one and a half hours. There are connections from Cebu City to Tagbilaran and Tubigon. Outriggers set sail from Argao on Cebu to Cabilao Island and Catagbacon.

## Climate

The climate in Bohol is very pleasant throughout the whole year. There are no extreme rainy and dry seasons. The most rain falls between June and October. The differences in climate are specific to geographic regions. It tends to be warmer and dryer on the coasts than inland where the air is colder and damper. The average temperature throughout the year is around 28°C.

## Accommodation

Bohol offers all types of accommodation. Most of the hotels and resorts are in Tagbilaran City and on Panglao Island.

## Getting about

Travelling around the province of Bohol by colourful jeepneys, public (mini) buses and taxis is both comfortable and reliable. Tricycles - motorbikes with a side car - are also very popular. Bancas, a form of motorised outrigger canoe, are used for island hopping and can be hired from tour operators and in many resorts.

## Festivals

Extravagant festivals are as much a part of Bohol as the Chocolate Hills. One of the most famous is the Sandugo Festival in Tagbilaran City. Celebrations continue through the whole of March. They commemorate the blood compact that was entered into by the Spaniards and the indigenous people of the Philippines. Sandugo means „one blood“.





