



## City profile

## Manila

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## ABSTRACT

Manila is a city that has been indelibly marked by phases of colonial and post-colonial urban development. As the capital city of the Philippines its significance economically, culturally, and politically to the evolution of the nation has been, and still is, unquestionable. Today as the chief port in a country that has one of Asia's fastest growing economies, and as the nucleus of Philippine commerce, banking, media, tourism, legal services, fashion and the arts, Manila's influence upon domestic affairs is unrivalled. Moreover as the site of a historic Chinatown, and as the hub of a bygone transpacific economic system borne in the late-1500s that connected Southeast Asia to the Americas, the city has long been its country's access point to regional and globalized mercantile activities. Yet as a city with a contemporary image grounded in it being largely unplanned, dense in terms of its built fabric, and blighted by slums, traffic jams, and polluted waterways, it is easy to neglect that Manila was once known as the 'Pearl of the Orient'.

## 1. Introduction

Manila, broadly referred to as Metro Manila and the National Capital Region (NCR) in the Philippines, is a large conurbation on Luzon Island and is one of the most populous urban places in Southeast Asia. With an official population in 2015 of more than 12.8 million people, and with a sizeable unofficial/squatter population too, its urban sprawl incorporates numerous municipalities: Caloocan; Las Piñas; Makati; Malabon; Mandaluyong; Manila; Marikina; Muntinlupa; Navotas; Parañaque; Pasay; Pasig; Pateros; Quezon City; San Juan; Taguig; and Valenzuela. With such a large number of persons within it Metro Manila has a population density over 60 times greater than the Philippine national average of 337 persons per square kilometre, yet as the urban sprawl over-spills into Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna, and Rizal (Ortega, 2016), that is to say the provinces situated in proximity to the metropolis' border, the total urban population is estimated to be in excess of 24 million people (Demographia, 2017). This enormous quantity of people thus makes Manila the fourth largest megacity in the world. Economically-speaking the city's importance should not be underestimated within its national context: per capita income in Metro Manila (in 2014 circa US\$8200) is almost three times higher than the Philippine national average; local property development is buoying national economic growth; and 37% of the Philippines' GDP, said by the World Bank in 2015 to be US\$292 billion, is centred within its bounds. Accordingly in the business district of Makati luxury condominiums, gated communities, multi-floor luxury

shopping malls, and skyscrapers accommodating international finance companies and banks define the cityscape. However, in contrast, within other localities are to be found abject living conditions and widespread poverty. With its countless slums an absence of adequate housing, sanitation, and clean water, plus a lack of access to education, public health provision, and skilled employment, accordingly defines the day-to-day life of millions of Manileños.

Although the term Manila is typically used to describe Metro Manila, the City of Manila refers to the historic core of the built-up area that presently extends over 1400 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1</sup> With a population of nearly 1.8 million people the City of Manila, with its sixteen districts, is renowned for being the densest urban settlement in the world. The [Philippine Population Census of 2015, n.d.](#), for instance, registered its density at more than 41,500 persons per square kilometre. Situated within the City of Manila is the district of Tondo. Once the centre of the pre-colonial Kingdom of Tondo this locality of just 5.6 km<sup>2</sup> is now the place of residence for more than 630,000 people, and has a standing as one of the Philippines' poorest neighbourhoods. Some of the nation's worst slums, see [Fig. 2](#), are found within the locality ([Figs. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9–11, 15, 16](#)).

## 2. Background

Consisting of an archipelago of more than 7000 islands situated southeast of the Asian mainland, as a geographical entity the Philippines is dominated by its 11 largest islands: Bohol; Cebu; Leyte;

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<sup>1</sup> From 2000 to 2010 the spatial footprint of Manila grew by more than 250 km<sup>2</sup>. Almost all of this growth, 94% to be precise, took place in peri-urban places outside of the official metropolitan boundary (which encompasses an area of about 615 km<sup>2</sup>). Moreover between 2000 and 2010 Metro Manila's population density increased from 15,417 persons per square kilometre to 18,402. By 2015 it had risen further to 19,988 persons per kilometre.



Fig. 1. Left: A map of the Philippines and (right) a map showing the municipalities within Metro Manila.

Luzon; Masbate; Mindanao; Mindoro; Negros; Palawan; Panay; and Samar. With 100.9 million persons recorded in the 2015 Philippine Population Census as inhabiting the archipelago more than half of this quantity, 53.3 million people, is found on Luzon. As the world's fourth

most populous isle (after Java, Honshu, and the British mainland) Luzon in terms of its terrain is characterized by undulant land in its northern and southern regions, and by a central plain. On this flat land is found Manila, it being sited along the shoreline of Manila Bay into



Fig. 2. Slum housing in the Tondo. Source: The author.

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