



PHILIPPINES CONSUL GENERAL

# Philippines: The #1 Luxury Travel Destination In Asia

To kickstart our spotlight on the Philippines as Asia's premium tourism destination of 2013-14, we present an interview with NOEL SERVIGNON, Consul General of the Philippines in Hong Kong, who welcomes uninitiated travellers from Hong Kong and China to his beautiful, tropical home country. *By RASHMI PILLAI*

**K**eeping the flame of Asian hospitality burning bright, the Philippines is rapidly emerging as the destination of choice for those seeking sun, sea, and sand in the far east, amidst fun-loving and down to earth locals.

The charismatic Consul General Noel Servignon embodies the drive, passion, and friendliness of the industrious and entertaining people of the Philippines. Arriving at the consulate for our interview, we are greeted with an endearingly warm welcome. He dons an elegant barong – a traditional embroidered shirt – and makes us laugh, cheerily confessing that as his wife was not there that morning, he had to choose his outfit himself.

As we talk about his current posting in Hong Kong, he is generous with praise saying, "It is so exciting because there are many opportunities, not only in the field of consular work but also in economic diplomacy. For the many Filipinos already residing here, job and business opportunities are plentiful. As they always say, Hong Kong is the gateway to the mainland and we are here to further develop the opportunities the city offers us."

Likewise, the Philippines is a market showing great potential for overseas investment and trade, with Hong Kong



Noel Servignon: "To all our tourists here, we say Mabuhay! Welcome to the Philippines, because it's more fun on our islands!"

being one of the top six investors. Servignon explains, "We are in the process of economic development and have recently stabilized our economy and currency. This has attracted so much attention from all over the world."

Servignon's long career at the consulate, now in its 22nd year, has seen him living and working in a multitude of elegant, sophisticated cities prior to Hong Kong, including Austria, Turkey, the Netherlands, Abu Dhabi, and Indonesia. But despite being so well travelled, his love for his home country shines through

as he describes its natural beauty and abundance.

## Pristine Island Nation

"The Philippines is made up of thousands of islands, each with its own characteristics and distinct attractions. When one would like to visit, we first ask them what interest they would like to pursue and can always provide them with a place to see," says Servignon.

May it be high-end shopping, eco-tourism, water sports, arts and culture, or pampering at a lush hotel,



the Philippines has it all and much more. According to Servignon, the most unique attraction that never fails to impress first time tourists are the unspoiled stretches of soft sandy beach, where one can partake in diving and other marine activities. From among the countless islands, visitors are spoilt for choice whether seeking a beach for tranquility and seclusion, or a loud, lively party.

"I myself was born in a seaside city – Iloilo. I have always loved the beach and have seen how foreigners are attracted to it." Servignon's personal favourite – the beach resort of Boracay – is rapidly emerging as one of the luxurious, must-visit destinations on the globetrotter's bucket list. It was even named 'the best island in the world' in the 2012 issue of Travel+Leisure magazine.

"For me, Boracay is a very memorable place. I first visited when I was very young and didn't realize at the time that it would become a major award-winning attraction. People loved the unusual shells there and took the beaches for granted, but now tourists from all over the world marvel at its white sand. I think it's a very special kind of island, just beside the mainland where I grew up."

## Legendary Hospitality

Idyllic landscapes aside, the genial, warm-hearted locals make the Philippines a truly irresistible travel destination. As

English is an official language alongside Filipino, there are no barriers to the great conversations to be had and friendships to be made. "Filipino people have always been known for their hospitality. Their attitude of welcoming strangers into their homes is a very attractive trait to foreigners. Even in Hong Kong, they are preferred by many employers because of it."

## Great Timing

To complete the package, Philippines is less than a two-hour flight away from



"There have been announcements for the improvement particularly of Manila airport as the gateway to the Philippines. There are also plans to build international airports to other islands and we anticipate more tourists coming when these airports are fully developed," says Servignon.

"Last year, one of our airlines opened a new route to my own home city, Iloilo. It was a very important milestone and Hong Kong was the first international flight made to that airport. This shows that our airlines have really considered the importance of travel between Hong Kong

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Hong Kong. Frequent connections on Cebu Pacific Air and Philippine Airlines to Manila, Cebu, Clark and many other cities make it a "very convenient tropical destination for Hong Kong people," notes Servignon. Whether for a weekend getaway or a honeymoon, you can travel in style with Philippine Airlines' Mabuhay Business Class.

## Mabuhay To All!

In a bid to boost tourism, the government of the Philippines is upgrading infrastructure and airport links to connect more of its islands to the rest of the world.

and the Philippines. Opening new routes to other cities also indicates that traffic has been very encouraging."

To the people of Hong Kong and China, Servignon extends his personal welcome to the Philippines by wishing them enjoyable travels and many wonderful memories. "When we greet people, we always say Mabuhay, which means 'long live'. So to all our tourists here, we say Mabuhay! Welcome to the Philippines, because it's more fun on our islands!"

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