WEEKEND AWAY

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North Luzon

The northern half of the Philippines' largest island offers a range of rewarding getaways: from island hopping and laid-back surf resorts to one of the country's most historically rich towns. Words by John Oates, illustration by Vesa Sammalisto

Most visitors arrive from either Manila or Clark airports, and it's easiest to visit attractions on the west coast. One of the closest of these is **Subic Bay**, the site of a sprawling former military base, which is now renowned for its scuba diving on Second World War wrecks.

Further up the west coast is Lingayen, the access point for the **Hundred Islands National Park**. The three developed islands can be overrun by weekend visitors from Manila, so it's best to hire a 'service boat' for the day and find your own isolated spot for sunbathing, picnicking, and swimming.

If surfing is more your thing then your best bet is further north at **Urbiztondo Beach** near San Juan. It's generally a low-key scene where beginners can get lessons from patient locals, although it gets busy during events such as October's 'La Union Surfing Break'. The waves are highest from July to February.

Further north still, and at the realistic limits of a weekend road trip, the Spanish-era ambience of **Vigan** is well worth the journey. Walk the hushed cobbled streets at dawn, take a bumpy ride in a *calesa* (horse-drawn carriage), and go shopping in dusty antique shops.

Many of the attractions inland are too remote for a weekend trip, including most parts of the Cordillera Mountains, which are at the heart of North Luzon. One exception is **Baguio**, which was the 'summer capital' during the US occupation thanks to its cooler climate. The former military base **Camp John Hay** is a leafy escape, and Baguio has an active cultural scene including the **BenCab** art museum and artist-run **Tam-awan Village**.

Rather closer to Clark and Manila is **Mount Pinatubo**, an active volcano, which last erupted in 1991. It's possible to take a 4WD from Tarlac, then a dusty two-hour hike up to the verdant crater lake.

FURTHER AFIELD IN NORTH LUZON

If you have a little more than a weekend, then your options multiply. North Luzon's very best beaches are on the north coast, near **Pagudpud**, while on the east coast you'll find **Baler** – famous as the location for the surfing scenes in *Apocalypse Now*. The **Cordillera Mountains** have UNESCO-listed rice terraces, enigmatic burial sites, and other pre-Catholic traditions, and activities such as caving and whitewater rafting.

WHERE TO STAY

Kahuna Beach Resort is the most upmarket accommodation on Urbiztondo Beach, opening up the surfing destination to those who want a few more creature comforts. The resort includes a spa and pool, and arranges surf lessons with local experts.

Kahuna Beach Resort
National Highway, Barangay Urbiztondo
San Juan, La Union
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Qatar Airways commences flights from Doha to Clark on 28 October.

Download the Qatar Airways mobile app for Android, iPhone, and BlackBerry.