



ACS *newsletter*

September 2015

U.S. Embassy, Manila

1201 Roxas Boulevard

Ermita, Manila

Philippines 1000

Tel: (632) 301-2000

Website: <http://manila.usembassy.gov>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/manila.usembassy>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/usembassymanila>

Blog: <http://blogs.usembassy.gov/philippines/>

REMINDER:

Phase-Out of Additional Visa Pages for U.S. Passports



On January 1, 2016, the Department of State will discontinue the practice of adding additional visa pages to U.S. passports. U.S. citizens who need additional visa pages will have to obtain a new passport instead. Instructions on how

to renew your passport or apply for a new passport can be found at: manila.usembassy.gov/service.passports.html.

Beginning October 1, 2014, all embassies worldwide began issuing 52-page passport books for full-validity passports. The thinner 28-page book is no longer available.

AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES

Consul General:
ACS Chief:
Office:
Fax:
Email:
Website:

Donna M. Blair
Robert J. Jachim Jr.
(63) (2) 301-2246 or 2567
(63) (2) 301-2017
ACSInfoManila@state.gov
manila.usembassy.gov



Emergencies

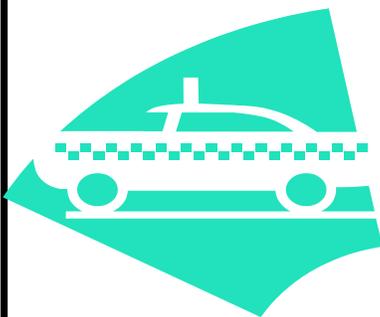
For emergencies after office hours, please call (63) (2) 301-2000 and ask for the Duty Officer.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

<u>HOLIDAY</u>	<u>LEGAL DATE</u>	<u>CLOSING DATE</u>
U.S. Labor Day	Monday, September 7	Monday, September 7
Columbus Day	Monday, October 12	Monday, October 12
U.S. Veterans Day	Wednesday, November 11	Wednesday, November 11
U.S. Thanksgiving Day	Thursday, November 26	Thursday, November 26
Special Non-Working Day	Thursday, December 24	Thursday, December 24
Christmas Day	Friday, December 25	Friday, December 25
Rizal Day	Wednesday, December 30	Wednesday, December 30
Last Day of the Year	Thursday, December 31	Thursday, December 31
New Year's Day	Friday, January 1	Friday, January 1

TRAVELING BY TAXI?

BELOW ARE HELPFUL TIPS TO STAY SAFE



- Never “share” a taxi cab with a stranger. If there are any other passengers in the vehicle, do not enter that taxi cab and wait for the next one.
- Before getting into any taxi, always check to see if the meter is functioning. If the taxi does not have a functioning meter (or if the driver refuses to use the meter), do not use that taxi and wait for a cab with a functioning meter.
- Always use extra caution when hailing taxis on the street. The safest way to travel using taxi service is to ask the hotel, restaurant, and/or business establishment to call a reliable taxi cab service for you.
- Consider using a mobile phone to text or call a friend and/or local contact to give the name and number of the taxi and driver upon entering the taxi cab.

EMBASSY PUBLIC SERVICE FORUM—SAVE THE DATE!

Representatives from all Consular Sections, Department of Homeland Security, Social Security Administration, Transportation Security Agency, and Veterans Affairs will be there to answer your questions. Please join us!

WHEN: Thursday, October 22 from 4-6 p.m.

WHERE: Elks Club, Corinthian Plaza, Makati

*****FREE ADMISSION FOR AMERICAN CITIZENS*****

EARTHQUAKES

Six Ways to Plan Ahead

1. Check for Hazards in the Home

- Fasten shelves securely to walls.
- Place large or heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Store breakable items such as bottled foods, glass, and china in low, closed cabinets with latches.
- Hang heavy items such as pictures and mirrors away from beds, couches, and anywhere people sit.
- Brace overhead light fixtures.
- Repair defective electrical wiring and leaky gas connections. These are potential fire risks.
- Secure a water heater by strapping it to the wall studs and bolting it to the floor.
- Repair any deep cracks in ceilings or foundations. Get expert advice if there are signs of structural defects.
- Store weed killers, pesticides, and flammable products securely in closed cabinets with

2. Identify Safe Places Indoors and Outdoors

- Under sturdy furniture such as a heavy desk or table.
- Against an inside wall.
- Away from where glass could shatter around windows, mirrors, pictures, or where heavy bookcases or other heavy furniture could fall over.
- In the open, away from buildings, trees, telephone and electrical lines, overpasses, or

3. Educate Yourself and Family Members

- Contact your local emergency management office or Red Cross chapter for more information on earthquakes. Also read the "How-To Series" for information on how to protect your property from earthquakes.
- Teach children how and when to call the police or fire department and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.
- Teach all family members how and when to

4. Have Disaster Supplies on Hand

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Nonelectric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards

5. Develop an Emergency Communication Plan

- In case family members are separated from one another during an earthquake (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), develop a plan for reuniting after the disaster.
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact

6. Help Your Community Get Ready

- Publish a special section in your local newspaper with emergency information on earthquakes. Localize the information by printing the phone numbers of local emergency services offices, the Red Cross, and hospitals.
- Conduct a week-long series on locating hazards in the home.
- Work with local emergency services and Red Cross officials to prepare special reports for people with mobility impairments on what to do during an earthquake.
- Provide tips on conducting earthquake drills in the home.
- Interview representatives of the gas, electric, and water companies about shutting off utilities.
- Work together in your community to apply your knowledge to building codes, retrofitting programs, hazard hunts, and neighborhood and family emergency plans.



For more information, please visit our website at:

<http://manila.usembassy.gov/disaster-preparedness.html>

CURRENT EVENTS:

El Niño and the effects on the Philippines and Pacific Islands

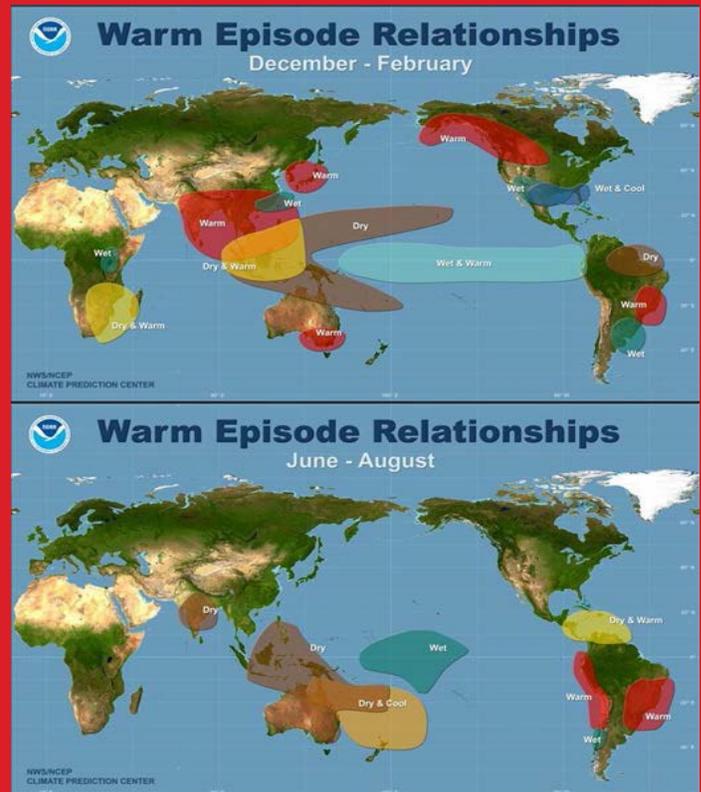
WHAT: El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), more commonly known as El Niño, is a large scale, natural oceanic and atmospheric phenomenon that develops in the Pacific Ocean and is associated with extreme climatic events. ENSO is characterized by unusually warm ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. This in turn impacts temperature gradients, ocean currents, sea surface temperatures (SST), and weather patterns globally. SST increases under ENSO are categorized by at least 0.5°C, occurring every two to seven years and generally lasting nine months to two years.¹

TODAY: ENSO conditions have already developed and SST increases of 2.9°C have already been reported as of July 2, 2015 by the National Atmospheric and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA is currently predicting a greater than 90% chance that the ENSO will continue until Dec/Jan 2015-16 and an 80% change that it will last until around March 2016.

Data show that the current ENSO could be the strongest since the 1997-98 event² that was linked to tens of billions of dollars in damages worldwide, as well as thousands of deaths.³

POSSIBLE IMPACTS:

- Agriculture: water shortages, drought, soil degradation, and disruption in planting season
- Forests and Grasslands: fires that threaten biodiversity, wildlife, and livelihoods of nearby communities
- Water & Energy: shortages in water supply and availability and degradation in water quality
- Urban Areas: power outages and power rate increases, higher migration that strains the social services, and a reduction in food security
- Weather Patterns: cyclones/typhoons shifting northward, cyclones/typhoons growing in intensity, and warmer temperatures than normal



ENSO global temperature and precipitation patterns (Source: <http://www.ncep.noaa.gov>)

1 http://www.prh.noaa.gov/peac/peu/2013_2nd/PEU_v19_n2.pdf

2 http://www.prh.noaa.gov/peac/peu/2014_SB1/PEU_v20_SB1.pdf

3 Nature 508, 20–21 (03 April 2014) <http://www.nature.com/news/el-niño-tests-forecasters-1.14972>

DOCTOR'S NOTE: MERS-COV

(MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME CORONAVIRUS)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause a range of illnesses in humans, ranging from the common cold to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The MERS-Cov, identified in 2012 in Saudi Arabia and believed to have come from bats and camels, is a strain of coronavirus that can be deadly. The symptoms typically include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Gastric discomfort and diarrhea have been reported by some patients. The virus spreads through close contact and is especially dangerous to the elderly, the immunocompromised, and those with chronic diseases. No vaccine is available to prevent MERS-Cov infection. Symptomatic and supportive therapy is done for the patients once infection sets in.

The Philippines has not been spared from this deadly virus. There have been 2 cases this year, one prior to, and one after an outbreak happened in the Middle East and South Korea. The Department of Health (DOH), Philippines, has aggressively battled against MERS-Cov. They have conducted a series of trainings in both private and government hospitals, and they have implemented protocols as hospitals prepare for all possible cases. Hospital personnel are trained to assess and triage patients and to refer them to the following hospitals capable of testing for MERS-Cov:

RITM (Research Institute for Tropical Medicine) in Alabang, Muntinlupa
San Lazaro Hospital in Manila
Baguio General Hospital in Northern Philippines
Lung Center of the Philippines, Quezon City
Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center, Cebu City
Southern Philippines Medical Center, Davao City

Recently, however, there were reports of Filipino health workers in the Middle East who tested positive for the virus. This prompted the Department of Labor and Employment to reiterate precautionary measures among OFWs and to encourage hygienic measures. **Presently, there are no known cases of MERS-Cov in the Philippines, and there are no known transmissions of MERS-Cov in the Philippines.**

Although the WHO has not recommended a travel ban or trade restriction to affected countries, the DOH has enforced quarantine precautions for passengers from affected countries. For more information on the countries affected by MERS-Cov, please visit www.cdc.gov. The DOH Secretary Janette Garin reiterated the importance of filling out the yellow health checklist honestly and completely upon arrival at the airport. The form provides an overview of the traveler's history as well as contact information in the event someone is infected. Therefore, the form helps ascertain the passengers' health status and helps contain the spread of infection.

Passengers from the affected countries who travel to the Philippines should seek medical attention if they experience flu-like symptoms within 2 to 14 days after their arrival. In addition, close family and contacts of the travelers should seek medical attention if they experience flu-like symptoms within 2 to 14 days after the passenger's arrival.

Remember that to help protect ourselves from virus infections, we must practice good hygienic measures such as: sneezing and coughing into a sleeve, a flexed elbow, or a tissue and discarding the tissue immediately into a closed waste bin; frequently washing your hands; and maintaining a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise, proper diet, and rest.

Congratulations to VA Manila!

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

VA Reaches Historic Milestone in Backlog Reduction

Disability Claims Backlog dips below 100K – Lowest Ever in VA's History

Manila, Philippines – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reached a significant milestone this week when the disability claims backlog fell below 100,000 – an 84 percent reduction from its peak 29 months ago in March 2013 and the lowest ever in our history. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Manila Regional Office has contributed to this reduction, by processing 4,908 backlog claims fiscal year to date. This means that Veterans with a pending claim are waiting, on average, 172 days less for a claim decision, from a peak of 282 days in March 2013, to 110 days today.

“These milestones simply could not have been achieved without the dedication of the VA Manila employees – or without the help of our Veterans Service Organization partners.” said Manila Regional Office Director RimaAnn Nelson.

The Manila Regional Office backlog peaked at 2,526 in June 2012. As of August 24, 2015, 320 remains – a 87 percent improvement. Today, Veterans are waiting less time for a rating decision as well, 121 days compared to 204 days in June 2012.

Since 2011, VBA has undergone the most significant transformation in its history to improve the delivery of VA benefits and services. This aggressive transformation involved people, process, and technology initiatives to streamline and modernize the way VBA processes claims so that Veterans do not have to wait more than 125 days for a high-quality decision.

VBA posts data on the disability claims backlog, the non-rating workload, and other publicly available data on our performance on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis through our reports web site: www.vba.va.gov/reports. For more information about disability and other Veterans benefits, visit www.ebenefits.va.gov.

Contact Information for the VA:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic
Embassy of the United States of America
1501 Roxas Boulevard
Pasay City, PI 1302

USDVA Website: www.va.gov
Email: <https://iris.custhelp.com/>

Business Hours:

7:30 am – 4:30 pm (Mon–Fri) Walk-Ins
8:00 am – 3:30 pm (Mon–Fri) Appointments Available

Call Center Hours: 8:00 am – 4:00 pm (Mon–Fri)

Tel. No.: (632) 550-3888
Toll Free: 1-800-1888-5252
For Audio Care: (632) 556-8387



ABSENTEE VOTING IS NOW EASIER THAN EVER

Now all U.S. citizens can receive their blank ballots electronically. Depending on the state in which you are eligible to vote, you may get your ballot by email, fax, or internet download.

- Go to www.FVAP.gov to complete a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA).
- Find your state and review your state's instructions and guidelines.



HINT! Some states deliver ballots only by fax and some states require a witness' signature on the FPCA form. Be sure to check your state to ensure you comply with all of the guidelines!

- Print, fill out, and sign the FPCA form.
- Return the form to your local election office in the United States.
- Remember to include your email address and/or fax number on the form.

After registering you should receive your blank ballot 45 days before general and mid-term elections and 30 days before special, primary, and run-off elections for federal offices.

HINT! Mark your calendar. If you want to vote in U.S. elections from overseas, plan to send in a new Federal Post Card Application in January of each year.

CALLING ALL WARDENS!

Wardens fulfill many vital roles in the assistance of U.S. citizens overseas, assisting the Americans in the Philippines who need it the most and serving as our eyes and ears across the country. Should you wish to participate and provide your services as one of our wardens, please contact us via e-mail: acsinfomanila@state.gov or (02) 301-2017.



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

HELPFUL REMINDERS FROM USCIS MANILA

We provide services for the following U.S. immigration benefits, which include filing, transfer, adjudication, and/or other processing:

- Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative
- Form I-360, Widow(er)
- Form I-407, Abandonment by Alien of Status as Lawful Permanent Resident
- Form I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition.
- Request for Humanitarian Reinstatement of a Form I-130.
- Request for Opt-Out/Reversal under Section 6 of the Child Status Protection Act (F2B Retention/Reversal)
- Fingerprint Request for some USCIS Application / Petition.
- Transportation Letter for lost, outdated, mutilated, expired Alien Permanent Residence card

Residency

USCIS Manila accepts applications and petitions from an individual who can establish residency in the Philippines. Section 101(a)(33) of the Immigration and Nationality Act defines "residence" as the "**place of general abode; the place of general abode of the person means his principal, actual dwelling place in fact, without regard to intent.**"

Website

USCIS's website (www.uscis.gov) answers many questions concerning how and where to apply for U.S. immigration benefits. The USCIS Manila page contains detailed information on local procedures.

Public Information Window (Window 25)

USCIS Manila maintains a public information window at the 2nd Floor of the New Office Building. Hours of public operation are Monday – Friday (except U.S. and Philippine holidays) from 8:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M. Arrive early to ensure a place in line. Take a number (one per family) and be seated in the waiting area. Inquiries are answered and requests processed in the order received.

The public may also register for an appointment thru INFOPASS at <http://infopass.uscis.gov>.

Contact Information Street and Courier Address:

Field Office Director
Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Embassy of the United States
1201 Roxas Boulevard
Ermita, Manila
0930 Philippines

Mailing Address (from U.S.):

Field Office Director
USEMB DHS USCIS
Unit 8600 Box 1575
DPO AP 96515-1575

Telephone: (63) (2) 301-2000 Ext. 2224

Facsimile: (63) (2) 301-2208