

single-handedly started a surfing craze. Since then, this place has been known as the cradle of surfing in the Philippines.

From the peaceful little **Baler Church** in the centre of the town, footsteps in cement lead to the nearby **Doña Aurora House**, a model of the house belonging to the family of former president Manuel L. Quezon's wife. Standing next to it is his restored Chrysler Airflow Limousine from 1936. From Burgos St you get to the barangay Zabali, where a picturesque, if rickety, hanging bridge spans the broad Tibag-Sabang River - a wobbly experience only for those who have a head for heights.

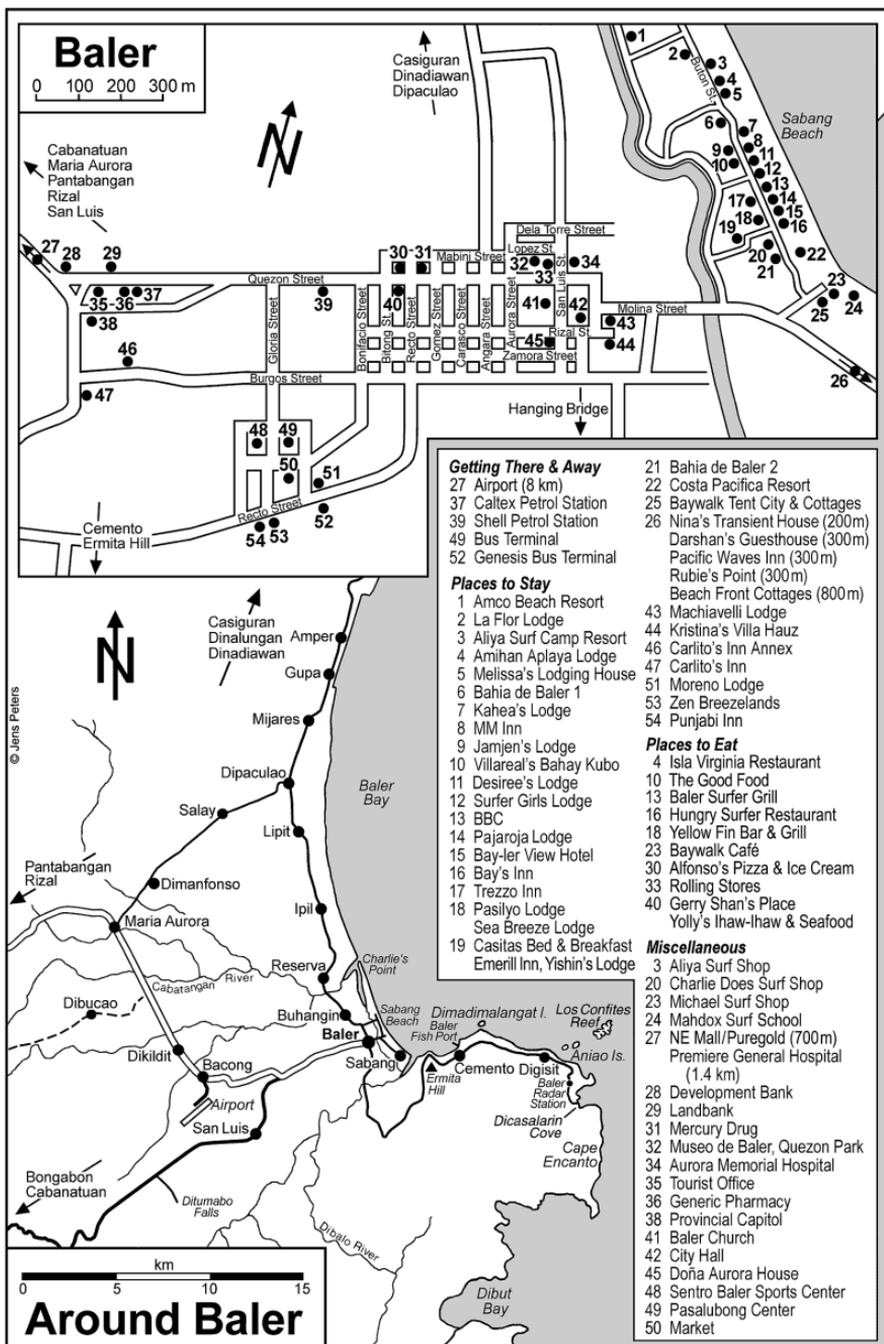
Surfing

In December the strong surf should be enough for the most avid of surfers. Surfing season is from September/October to February/March. The first event of the season is the **Surf & Music Festival** in October. Every February, the Philip-

pine Surfing Circuit season opens on the dark sandy beach at Sabang with the three-day competition for the **Aurora Surfing Cup**, further events taking place in Catanduanes, La Union, Mindanao (Siargao Island and Surigao del Sur) and Samar. Other popular surfing spots around Baler are the Cobra Reef on the beach at Cemento, and of course **Charlie's Point** at the mouth of the Aguayo River at the northern end of Sabang Beach where, in a surrealistic movie scene, Coppola has a village attacked accompanied by the stirring strains of Richard Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* while a few Marines show off their surfing skills in the background.

Surf Shops on the Baywalk along Sabang Beach rent surfboards (P200/hr) and provide surfing lessons (P400/hr).

Aliya Surf Shop, Cel 0939-9390929, Dehins Surf Shop, Cel 0939-9020227, Mahdox Surf School, Cel 0928-3797349, @, (also rents out rooms in its Backdoor Villa set back a bit from the beach



Cel 0998-8923232; from P2000), and Michael Surf Shop, Cel 0939-9390786. Charlie Does, Bution St (next to Bahía de Baler 2), Tel 7240117, in addition to surfing courses also offers surfing tours.

Museum

Museo de Baler, Quezon St. 8am-noon, 1-5pm. This museum in the little Quezon Park, graced by a decorative façade, contains a few historical artefacts from Aurora Province. The focal point of the park is provided by a bronze statue of the seated Manuel Luis Quezon, the city's most famous son, who was elected president of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935. For lovers of vintage cars: in front of the museum stands the restored original of a **Cadillac Cabriolet** (1937 Cadillac Series 90 V 16 Custom Town Car) that was built by General Motors for President Quezon, but given to General MacArthur in 1938 for the duration of his duty in the Philippines.

Shopping

Pasalubong Center, Recto St (at the bus terminal and market). Culinary and handicraft specialties of Aurora Province are available, including traditional clothing woven with fibres from the sabutan plant, bags, hats and mats.

Places to Stay

Along the beach in Sabang about 2 dozen places offer accommodation, most of them belonging to the basic category, some raise their prices at the weekends. There are a few alternatives in the town. It's 2 km from the bus terminal to Sabang Beach (tricycle P15 per person).

Baler

Carlito's Inn, Ong St, Cel 0908-8720816. P800-1100 (4 people). Basic, but by all means acceptable. Shared balcony for outside seating. On the western edge of town near the Capitol Building. Same pricing for rooms in the annex in Burgos St. **Machiavelli Lodge**, Molina St, Cel 0947-8919217. P1600-2200. Practically furnished hotel near City Hall.

Sabang Beach

Baywatch Tent City & Cottages, Cel 0939-9390786. P150 per person (tent, P100 if in own tent). Neighbours of Freddie's Place (Live-Music) and Michael Surf Shop.

Surfer Girls Lodge, Cel 0917-5715094. P800 (fan), P1300-2000 (4 people). Friendly little guest-house with only a few rooms. Beach location.

And...Action! Charlie Don't Surf

As the US Army attack at dawn a village controlled by the Vietcong ('Charlie') with helicopters swooping in from the sea, in order to protect a patrol boat approaching the river mouth, Colonel Kilgore finds out that the boat crew includes a former pro-surfer, Lance B Johnson. Surf-crazy Kilgore, played by Robert Duvall, challenges him to ride the waves together while mortars are detonating all around them. When Johnson points out that the nearby enemy are making the situation far too dangerous for that kind of 'R&R', Kilgore responds laconically: 'Charlie don't surf'. To clear out potential snipers, he has the whole area bombed with napalm and then utters one of the most famous sentences of any Hollywood movie: 'I love the smell of napalm in the morning'.

Bay's Inn, Cel 0918-9266697, @. P1000-1200 (fan) and P1400-2600 (4 people, hot water); incl. breakfast. Somewhat older accommodation with basic, quite good rooms, most however without hot water (if necessary, they'll give you a bucket with a portable immersion heater). Restaurant (Fr and Sa 24 hours).

Pacific Waves Inn, Cel 0928-8011888, @. P1200-4000 (10 people); discount possible if aircon not used. Basic and clean, the rooms in the main building are inviting and pleasingly furnished, some with veranda. Popular with local tourists. Located on a less busy section of the beach; entrance next to the Iglesia ni Cristo.

Pedervera Beach Resort, Buhangin, Cel 0918-9675958, @. P1500-2000 (4 people); incl. breakfast. Cosily decorated rooms in good condition. Peaceful resort with a long, sturdy stone building 4 km north of the main section of Sabang Beach at Charlie's Point, just north of the river estuary.

Bay-Jer View Hotel, Cel 0919-2863105, @. P1600-3000; incl. breakfast Pleasant, functional rooms for 2, 3 and 4 people, some with sea view. Restaurant.

Aliya Surf Camp & Resort, Cel 0939-9390929, @. P2100-4500 (7 people); incl. breakfast. Clean, practically furnished rooms with 2 basic beds. Restaurant, pool table, swimming pool.

Bahía de Baler 2 (Casa de Bahía), Cel 0917-8574424, @. P5900-6600 (at the weekends P600 surcharge); incl. breakfast. 3-storey building with immaculate, light rooms. Not directly on the beach.

Use of the swimming pool at the sister hotel Costa Pacifica Resort opposite.

Bahia de Baler 1 (Casita de Bahía), Cel 0917-8574424, @. P7200-10,900 (P600 surcharge at the weekends); incl. breakfast. Long, flat building with good, spacious rooms, all with small terrace. Attractive accommodation, although not right on the beach. Swimming pool.

Costa Pacifica Resort, Cel 0917-8448371, @. P8400-18,000 (P600 surcharge at the weekends); incl. breakfast. Light and friendly, with modern design, some of the roughly 100 generously sized rooms however with no sea view. Restaurant. Big resort with a sunbed area and 2 swimming pools.

Places to Eat

Baler Surfer Grill, Sabang Beach. Star attraction at this far from everyday barbecue station is a VW Beetle under whose bonnet the grill sizzles away. Barbecue every weekend in a fresh ocean breeze under the palms (chicken, fish, meat), as well as stacked Surf Burgers and delicious Surfer Meals served up on a wooden board (P200).

Hungry Surfer, Sabang Beach (in the Bay's Inn). Big menu, mainly local dishes (P150-230); amongst their specialties: spicy seafood pasta (P150) and pako salad (*pako* = fern, P125). The big plus at this restaurant is its beautiful location with gorgeous view of the Pacific. Always busy, as is the next-door **Bay-ler View Restaurant**.

Gerry Shan's Place, Quezon St. Tasty Chinese and Filipino food à la carte, mainly seafood (mixed seafood curry P180). Especially popular however for its sumptuous buffet for only P200 (10am-8pm).

Yolly's Ihaw-Ihaw & Seafood Resto, Quezon St. Scrumptious fresh *fruits of the sea* for little money, also lobster (from P300, depending on weight). Philippine breakfast (tapsilog plus 10 further silogs). Beside Gerry Shan's Place.

Rolling Stores, San Luis St (opposite the Aurora Memorial Hospital). Several really inexpensive food stalls at the side of the road (P50-100). Open round the clock.

Miscellaneous

Festivals: Araw ng Aurora (Aurora Day) and Suman Festival 13-20 February. Sabutan Festival in August.

Money: Bring enough cash with you, as the ATMs at the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP), Tel 7220065, and Landbank (only Philippine cards), Tel 7220002, are often empty.

Nearest ATMs in Cabanatuan at the BPI, BDO, Metrobank and PNB.

Kayaks: Charlie Does Surf, Tel 7240117, rents out 1, 2 and 3-person kayaks.

Tours: Half-day tour with a tricycle P500 (3 people), whole-day tour P800, the latter incl. Ditu-mabo Falls and Balete Tree. The Tourist Office organises knowledgeable drivers. Charlie Does Surf, Tel 7240117, offers bicycle, kayak and trekking tours besides surfing tours.

Tourist Office: Aurora Provincial Tourist Office, Capitol Compound, Quezon St, Cel 0921-3207015, @.

Getting Around

Motorcycle: P500-800/day, eg at Charlie Does Surf, Tel 7240117.

Bicycle: P100/hr and P300-650/day, eg at Charlie Does Surf, Mahdoo Surf School/Backdoor Villa, Cel 0928-3797349, 0998-8923232, and in the Pajaroja Lodge, Cel 0907-2231771.

Getting There & Away

By Air: Baler Airport in San Luis, 8 km south-west of the city is only used seasonally by commercial flights, if at all.

For Self-drivers: Three routes with gorgeous scenery run from the Maharlika Highway over the mountains of the Sierra Madre to Baler. See also the maps *Nueva Ecija* on page 193, *Isabela* on page 275, and *North-Luzon* on page 217.

Via San Luis: The former main route goes from Cabanatuan via Palayan, Bongabon and San Luis. It is only partially paved and very twisty between Bongabon and San Luis. After rainy days, only offroad vehicles and motorbikes can use it without difficulty.

Via Rizal: What has subsequently turned into the main route goes from Cabanatuan via Rizal, Pantabangan (at the reservoir of the same name) and Maria Aurora. For Rizal you have to go either via Pinagpanaan (turn-off on the Maharlika Highway about 10 km north-west of Cabanatuan) or via Palayan and Bongabon. The route via Rizal is also used by buses and vans that travel between Cabanatuan and Baler.

If you're coming from North Luzon, you can also drive from San Jose to Rizal (turn off left in the town centre at the Petron station, then left again 5 cross-streets further on, then after crossing a little bridge over the river drive another 400m, turn right at the second crossing in the direction of Rizal and Pantabangan).

Via Maddela: The route from Isabela Province to Baler takes you from either Cordon or Echague, both on the Maharlika Highway, and heads south into Quirino Province to Maddela and Nagtipunan. 7 km after barangay Dipintin (10 km north of Nagtipunan) the 400m long Abbag Bridge crosses the Cagayan River. From there it's off-road - only to be recommended for all-terrain vehicles - through the Sierra Madre to Dinadiawan on Baler Bay and further on a good coast road to Baler.

For Self-drivers from Manila & Angeles: From Manila to Baler it's best to go via Angeles and Tarlac, ie don't take the turn-off for Cabanatuan on the North Expressway (NLEX), but keep going straight to Mabalacat, where the North Expressway comes to an end. From Mabalacat continue on the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX) in the direction of Tarlac and Baguio, take the Tarlac City exit in the direction of Lapaz, Zaragoza and Cabanatuan. In Carmen, 5 km east of Zaragoza, turn left and over to the Maharlika Highway that goes to Northeast Luzon. The road from Carmen merges into the Highway between Cabanatuan and Talavera (so you don't drive through the Cabanatuan city traffic), turn off left there. In Pinagpanaan, about 1 km north, the road then branches off to Rizal and takes you via Pantabangan and Maria Aurora to Baler.

From Angeles

Van: From Dau (next to the Mabalacat bus terminal) to Cabanatuan (1½ hrs). Carry on from there by bus or van to Baler.

From Baguio

Bus: At 4.30 and 10am, and 2pm with Lizardo Trans via Carmen and San Jose (ordinary bus, 8 hrs).

From Cabanatuan

Bus/Van: With Aurora Bus Line, D'Liner or Maria Aurora Express (4 hrs). Vans take 3 hrs; last departure 4.30pm. Also with Genesis Transport (chance to join the bus, as it comes from Manila).

From Manila

Bus: At 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.30am with Genesis Transport from their Cubao terminal (7 hrs, regular aircon bus). Genesis' more comfortable Joy Bus (reclinable seating, blankets, toilet, snacks) does it non-stop (3-4 departures between midnight and 5am, 5 hrs). Genesis buses at 1 and 3 am to Casiguran also go via Baler.

Baliwag Transit and a few Five Star buses also go to Cabanatuan (3 hrs). Destination could be Aparri, Tuguegarao or San Jose. Departure for Aparri and Tuguegarao hourly from the Baliwag Transit Cubao terminal from 6 until 11am and 6 until 11pm. Carry on from Cabanatuan by bus or van.

From Santiago

Bus: Between 4 and 5am two rustic Samana Trans buses from Santiago via Cordon, Cabarroguis, Maddela, Nagtipunan and Dinadiawan to Casiguran (7 hrs). In Dinadiawan, change to a bus or van coming from Casiguran heading for Baler.

Around Baler

Ermita Hill

Halfway from Baler to the Radar Site high above on Cape Encanto you pass Ermita Hill. Steps and a road take you up to a small parking lot with a chapel and pavilions from where you can enjoy a wonderful panoramic view of Baler Bay, the Tibag-Sabang River estuary and the little fishing harbour at Cemento. At the foot of the hill, the **Tromba Marina Memorial** impressively depicts the scene in 1735 as a powerful tsunami surprised the settlers of Baler, when only seven families survived by managing to save themselves on Ermita Hill.

Dicasalarin Cove & Dibut Bay

A very steep and narrow road runs to the picturesque Dicasalarin Cove ('Dica') with the Baler Radar Site above. This beautiful corner of the world belongs to the family of Senator Edgardo Angara, who also own the hotels Bahía de Baler and Costa Pacifica. If you'd like to spend a few solitary hours at the cove, you'll need a gate pass (P300; available in these hotels). A path and a wooden bridge over the river will take you to the **Artists' Village**. At the architectural heart of this establishment is an airily elegant wooden house that is available to artists for studios. The larger Dibut Bay a bit farther south, also sporting a white sand beach, offers beautiful coral too. You can get there by boat, or on foot across the mountains.

Balete Park

About 12 km north-west of Baler, Balete Park is home to the 600-year old 'Millennium Tree', claimed to be the biggest balete tree in Asia.

Ditumabo Falls

From barangay Ditumabo near San Luis, 14 km south-west of Baler, a bumpy track leads in the direction of the Ditumabo Falls or the 'Mother Falls' of Aurora Province as this picturesque natural attraction is also known. The track can be driven as far as the first river, the remaining 2 km or so have to be covered on foot, some stretches over rocky outcrops and some through flowing water. Keep following the water pipeline till, after a 30-minute trek through overgrown jungle, you're at your destination, where you can reward yourself with a refreshing dip in the natural pool under the 40m-high waterfall.

Dinadiawan

A beautifully built coast road wends its way along Baler Bay via Dipalulao and Borlongan to Dinadiawan, 60 km north-east of Baler, where an endlessly long white beach appears to be just waiting for tourists to discover it.

Places to Stay

The handful of places to stay prefer to concentrate on local guests who occupy a room with several people and cater for themselves.

Diva Sunrise Beach Resort, Cel 0923-7358914. P1000-2000. Several houses with clean, practically furnished rooms, the more expensive with aircon. At the southern end of the beach, 3 km from the two following resorts.

Dinadiawan Agri Beach Resort, Cel 0921-6309107. P1200-3000. A few closely huddled, basically equipped cottages, some with fan, as well as rooms in a 3-storey building. At the northern end of the beach, 500m before Dinadiawan.

La Sunshine Beach Resort, Cel 0949-1377439, @. P4000-5000 (2 bedrooms). Solidly built cottages with and without aircon for up to 10 people. 500m west of the Dinadiawan Agri Beach Resort.

Casiguran

About 50 km north-east of Dinadiawan in Casiguran, there are plans for the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone (APECO) to be built with the help of Japanese and Korean investors. Comparable to the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, it will have a Ro-Ro terminal in Casiguran Bay, protected from the Pacific by the San Idefonso peninsula, and an international airport. A wind-park is to provide the necessary energy.

Tourist highlights are **Ermita Hill** with its shrine in the centre of the community, and the secluded

white **Casapsapan Beach** on the bay of the same name in the barangay Culat, 6 km north-east.

Getting There & Away

Bus/Van: From Baler to Casiguran from early morning until 2.30pm with D'Liner and Genesis Transport (4 hrs). Vans take 3 hrs.

Bataan Peninsula

The mountainous peninsula and province of Bataan achieved historical prominence through the torturous death march of American and Philippine prisoners of war. The **Bataan Death March** began on 9th April 1942 in the towns of Bagac and Mariveles after American and Philippine troops had recognised the futility of their battle against the superior force of the Imperial Japanese Army, and surrendered. In the history books this day appears as the 'Fall of Bataan', and is celebrated as 'Bataan Day' or as 'Araw ng Kagitingan' (Day of Valor, a national public holiday). About 70,000 already exhausted soldiers initially set off on the over 100 km long march to San Fernando, where they were crammed into rail trucks and transported on to Capas in Tarlac Province. The forced march was then continued to Camp O'Donnell, 10 km away, which was reached by a total of 54,000 remaining prisoners after two weeks of energy-sapping effort and unrelenting humiliation.

Day-to-day business in Bataan takes place on the east and south coast of the island, whereas the beaches of the west coast are reserved for holidaymakers. In this part of the island, where one beach resort after the other offers entertainment to leisure seekers, the Bataños were left with the responsibility for an unwelcome relic of a previous grandiose era. For it was here in the mid-1970s that former President Marcos gave the green light for the construction of an atomic power station south of Morong. Despite warnings from experts regarding the location (it's an earthquake zone, plus the Mt Natib and Mt Mariveles volcanoes are in the area) the **Bataan Nuclear Power Plant** was completed in 1984. However, it never came online, no doubt mainly because Marcos was deposed shortly thereafter.

Balanga

Pop 96,000 / Postcode 2100 / Tel (047)

The spread-out provincial capital of Bataan stretches from the Roman Expressway to the