

Places to Eat

Bigg's Diner at the plaza is a good clean place for inexpensive fastfood. The menu at the Iriga Plaza Hotel's **Café La Felicidad**, decorated with traditional elegance, includes Bikolano food.

Miscellaneous

Festivals: Tinagba Festival (thanksgiving festival) on 11 February, and Town Fiesta on 13 June in Iriga. Town Fiesta on 25 May in Buhi.

Money: ATM at the BDO, San Roque (at the Iriga Plaza Hotel).

Tourist Office: City Tourist Office, Colosseum, City Hall Complex, Tel 6551397. Open Mon-Fri 8am-noon and 1-5pm.

Getting There & Away

Jeepney: Several a day from Iriga to Buhi (30 min). Going back to Iriga, they leave from the entrance to Buhi, opposite the Petron petrol station. The last one leaves for Iriga at 7pm.

Legaspi

Pop 183,000 / Postcode 4500 / Tel (052)

Legaspi (aka Legazpi) is the capital of Albay Province and is actually divided into two parts: the centre or downtown area around the port and, further inland, the Albay District. The two areas are linked by Rizal St.

There are no outstanding sights in the town itself. The only ones worth mentioning at all are the headless statue in front of the post office, a monument to the unknown heroes who died at the hands of the Japanese in WWII, and the altar of the St Rafael Church, opposite the Plaza Rizal, which was made from a 10-ton chunk of volcanic rock from Mayon.

The harbour area is dominated by the **Embarcadero de Legazpi**, a popular shopping and leisure complex with a promenade, restaurants, boutiques, go-kart track, jetski and segway hire as well as a zipline from the little lighthouse all the way across the bay.

However, there are many interesting sights to see in the area around Legaspi, including the ruins of Cagsawa, the Hoyop-Hoyopan Cave in Camalig, and of course the mighty **Mayon Volcano**. In the rainy season the volcano is unfortunately often draped with clouds; however, even on days like this a full, clear view of it can be obtained at sunrise.

Getting There & Away

13 Legaspi Grand Central Terminal

Places to Stay

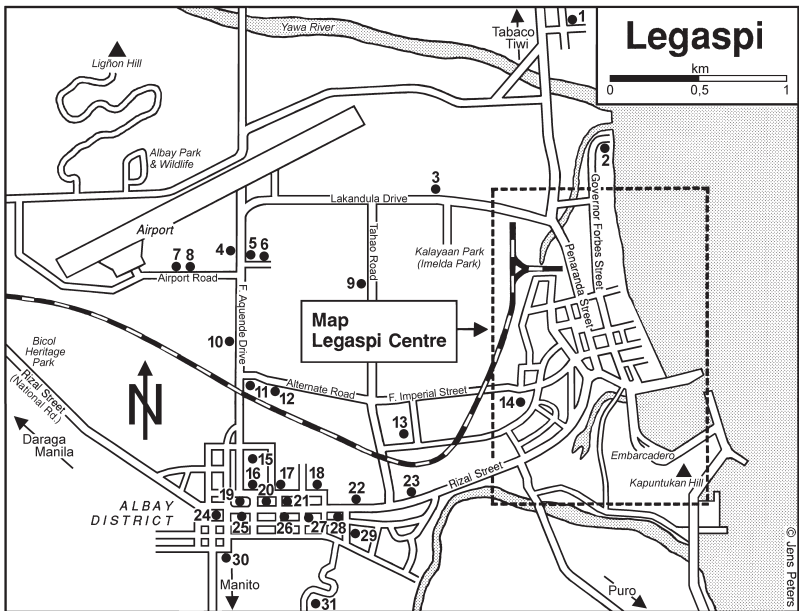
- 3 La Roca Veranda Suites
- 4 Alicia Hotel
- 6 Hotel Venezia
- 7 Pepperland Hotel
- 9 La Piazza Hotel
- 10 Vista Al Mayon Pensionne
- 12 Casablanca Suites
- 29 Jennifer's Apartelle
- 30 Hotel Villa Angelina
- 31 The Oriental Legazpi

Places to Eat & Entertainment

- 2 Tago-Tago Food Garden
- 3 La Roca Restaurant
- 5 Sikatuna Grill
- 8 Smoke & Grill
- 12 Willkommen Café & Restaurant
- 16 Chick'in Bar & Restaurant
- Gasthof Grill & Café
- Golden Boat Restaurant
- Silverbucks Café
- 17 D'Chef
- 18 Ninong's Bar
- 21 Bigg's Diner
- Chili Peppers
- La Mia Tazza Coffee
- Quick n' Hearty
- 23 Mr Crab Restaurant
- 26 Jollibee
- 27 Small Talk Café

Miscellaneous

- 1 Tourist Office
- 11 Aquinas University Hospital
- 13 Satellite Market
- 14 Pacific Mall
- 15 Albay Astrodome
- Provincial Tourist Office
- 16 Landbank
- 19 Peñaranda Park (Plaza)
- 20 Provincial Capitol
- 22 St Agnes Academy
- 24 Albay Cathedral
- 25 Legaspi City Hall
- Legaspi City Museum
- 26 Mercury Drug
- 28 Esteves Hospital



Shopping

The huge **Pacific Mall** with its many well-known shops and restaurant chains is the pride and joy of the Legaspiños. At the **Satellite Market** next to the Grand Central Terminal, you'll find trader after trader offering craftwork products and pili nuts.

Places to Stay

Town Centre

Sampaguita Tourist Inn, Rizal St, Tel 4806258. SR/fan P200, DR/fan P350, SR/fan/bath P250 and P300, DR/fan/bath P400, SR/ac/bath P475 and P525, DR/ac/bath P575 and P625. Nearly all rooms have TV and a few have hot water. Basic, but good-value accommodation on the road to the Albay District. Coffee shop.

Legaspi Tourist Inn, Quezon Ave corner Lapu-Lapu St, Tel 4806147, @. SR/fan/bath P560, DR/fan/bath P700, SR/ac/bath P900 and P1000, DR/ac/bath P1000 and P1200. Good, practically furnished rooms of various sizes, the aircon ones with TV. Coffee shop. On the 3rd floor of the V & O Building opposite the post office.

Casablanca Hotel, Peñaranda St, Tel 4808334, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P1700 and P2000, suite (refrigerator) P2500 and P3600. Quite good rooms with TV, some also with balcony. Restaurant, coffee shop (24 hrs).

Tyche Boutique Hotel, Governor Forbes St corner Rizal St, Tel 4807799, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P2700 and P2900, suite P3000 to P3900; including breakfast. New hotel, well-appointed rooms, all with refrigerator and TV. Restaurant. **Hotel St Ellis**, Rizal St, Tel 4808088. SR/DR/ac/bath P4100 and P4600, suite P8200; including breakfast. Immaculate rooms with refrigerator and TV. The best hotel in the town centre. Restaurant, fitness room, swimming pool.

Albay District

Hotel Villa Angelina, Rosario St, Tel 4806345, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P1800 and P3000, suite P3500 (with jacuzzi). Reasonable rooms with refrigerator and TV. Comfortably decorated, nice hotel in a quiet location. Restaurant.

Pepperland Hotel, Airport Rd, Tel 4818000, @. SR/ac/bath P2200, DR/ac/bath P2575 and

Getting There & Away

- 5 Airport (2.5 km)
- 6 Caltex Petrol Station
- 8 Railway Station
- 28 Legaspi Grand Central Terminal (800m)
- 35 Wharf
- 38 Petron Petrol Station
- 43 Airport (3 km)

Places to Stay

- 5 La Roca Veranda Suites (500m)
- 7 Casablanca Hotel
- 9 Magayon Hotel
- 16 Hotel St Ellis
- 17 Tyche Boutique Hotel
- 29 Dreams Inn
- 34 Legazpi Tourist Inn
- 39 Tachuling Hotel
- 41 Sampaguita Tourist Inn

Places to Eat & Entertainment

- 1 Waway Restaurant
- 3 Tago-Tago Food Garden (400m)
- 5 La Roca Restaurant (500m)
- 14 Chowking
- 15 Graceland
- 19 South Ocean Villa Restaurant
- 20 Four Seasons Restaurant
- 24 Boklan Food Center
- 30 Dunkin' Donuts
- 32 Golden Dragon Restaurant

- 42 Bigg's Diner
- Cisyd Bar Resto Paluto
- Gerry's Grill
- Harbour Wok, Kitaro
- La Mia Tazza Coffee
- Padi's Point, Tapa King

Miscellaneous

- 2 Tourist Office (1 km)
- 4 Post Office
- 10 Albay Doctors Hospital
- 11 A Bichara Silverscreen Entertainment Center
- 12 Plaza Rizal
- 13 St Rafael Church
- 18 PNB
- 21 Metrobank
- 22 Lepaspi Monument
- 23 BPI
- 25 LCC Department Store
- 26 BDO
- 27 Market
- 28 Satellite Market (800m)
- 31 Mercury Drug
- 33 Post Office
- Headless Monument
- 34 Bicol Adventure & Tours
- LBC
- 36 Pacific Mall
- 37 BDO
- 40 Immigration Office

P2875, suite P3500; including breakfast. Quite good rooms with refrigerator and TV, although fairly basically furnished for the money. Restaurant. Cobble courtyard. You can't miss the plain, yellow hotel building 300m from the airport.

Casablanca Suites, Alternate Rd, Tel 4810788, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P2500 and P2800, suite P3300 and P3800; including breakfast. Modern, tastefully decorated, comfortable rooms with refrigerator and TV. Restaurant. Complimentary airport service.

Hotel Venezia, F Aquende Dr, Tel 4810877, @. SR/ac/bath P1350, DR/ac/bath P3660, suite P4270 and P6100; including breakfast. Good rooms with TV. The ones in the main building and are better than those in the older annex. Restaurant, swimming pool, tennis courts. Located a little off the main road in the Renaissance Gardens subdivision.

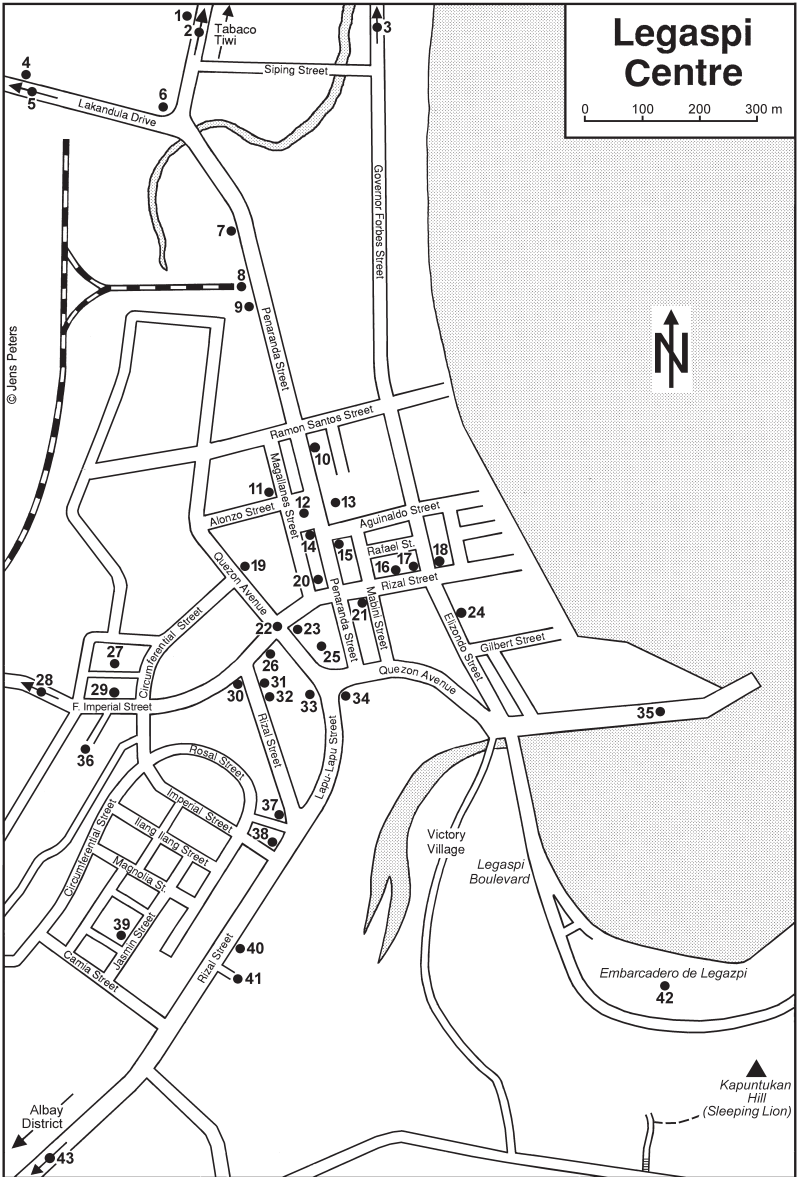
The Oriental Legazpi, Santo Niño Village, Tel 4353333, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P10,000, suites from P15,400 (ask for promo rates). Stylish, spacious rooms with refrigerator, TV and balcony. Restaurant, swimming pool, spa. Situated atop Taysan Hill, this modern, luxury hotel offers superb views of the city and the Mayon volcano.

Places to Eat

Many restaurants in downtown Legaspi shut their doors as early as 9pm, so don't hang around too long if you're hungry in the evening.

Good Chinese and Filipino food is served at the **Four Seasons Restaurant** in Magallanes St, in the **South Ocean Villa Restaurant** on Quezon Ave, and in the **Boklan Food Center** in Elizondo St.

The **Waway Restaurant** in Peñaranda St Extension in the north of town serves seafood,



everyday Filipino dishes and spicy local specialties à la 'Bicol Express'. The menu at the somewhat hidden **Tago-Tago Food Garden** near a river inlet at the northern end of Governor Forbes St, is practically identical. The rustic, village atmosphere of this extensive establishment is a bit different, with its collection of big, open huts of various sizes, some standing in the garden, some secured to rafts.

Mr Crab in Rizal St is another place for strongly spiced, tasty food, eg chili (sili) crabs. Curious gourmets might be tempted to try the **1st Colonial Grill** in the Pacific Mall and in the Villa Amada Hotel in Daraga, where you can enjoy sili ice cream and sili shakes.

The Albay District near the Provincial Capitol is home to a variety of good-quality restaurants, including the **Gasthof Grill & Café** with relatively inexpensive German and Bikolano food; their Deli Shop offers imported products. In the same building, the Capitol Annex, there's a choice of several more places to eat, eg the **Golden Boat Restaurant** (Chinese and videoke), **Chick'in Bar & Restaurant** (Mexican, live music in the evenings) and **Silverbucks Café**.

You'll find service round the clock at the popular fast food restaurant **Bigg's Diner** in Rizal St corner Maria Clara St. Direct neighbours are the inviting **La Mia Tazza Café** (coffee, cakes, sandwiches), **Quick n' Hearty** and the excellent **Chili Peppers** (seafood, steaks, pasta).

Diagonally across the road and a few steps into Doña Aurora St, the **Small Talk Café** will not only give you a taste of typical Bikolano dishes, but offer tasty morsels consisting of combinations of international and local cuisine, eg Pasta Pinangat.

Not to be missed is the European cuisine at the **Willkommen Café & Restaurant** next to the Casablanca Suites in Alternate Rd.

Entertainment

Legaspi's nightlife takes place mainly in the Albay District, where popular restaurants such as **Chili Peppers** and **La Mia Tazza Café** provide seating outside from late afternoon onwards. The **Chick'in Bar**, **Champions Bar** and **Ninong's Bar** have live music in the evenings.

A popular place to meet in the evenings is also the **Embarcadero de Legaspi** with its Celebration Plaza and places like **Padi's Point** and **Chill Bar**.

Miscellaneous

Festivals: Bicol Arts Festival from 21 to 28 February. Albay Fiesta on 2 and 3 September. Ibalong Festival in the second week of October.

Immigration Office, Rizal St, Tel 8205153. Open Mon-Fri 8am-noon and 1-5pm.

Medical Services: Esteves Hospital, Guevarra Subdivision, Tel 4802135.

Money: ATM at BDO, Lapu-Lapu St, BPI and BDO, both in Rizal St corner Quezon Ave, and Metrobank, Rizal St corner Mabini St.

Travel Agency: Bicol Adventure & Tours, Suite 20, V & O Building, Quezon Ave corner Lapu-Lapu St, Cel 0918-9102185, Tel 4802266, @. Their programme includes island hopping, diving trips, cave exploration, climbs up Mayon (two days P4500 if there are two participants, including guide and porters, not including food and supplies) as well as day trips to Donsol (whale shark watching; P4500 per person if there are two participants).

Tourist Office: Regional Center Site, Rawis, Tel 4820712, 4815593, @. Provincial Tourist Office, Albay Astrodome Complex, F Aquende Dr, Tel 4810250. Open Mon-Fri 8am-noon, 1-5pm.

Getting There & Away

By Air: Legaspi Airport is about three km north-west of the town centre. A tricycle costs P50, although they'll ask for P100. All the better hotels offer their guests free airport service.

Airphil Express, Legaspi Airport, Tel 4817917.
- Metroglass Marketing, Peñaranda St, Tel 4807515.

Destinations: Cebu City, Manila.

Cebu Pacific, Legaspi Airport, Tel 4809667.

- Casablanca Hotel, Peñaranda St, Tel 4812328.

Destinations: Cebu City, Manila.

Zest Air, Legaspi Airport, Tel 4805055.

- Metroglass Marketing, Peñaranda St, Tel 480005.

Destination: Manila.

By Bus: Buses, jeepneys and vans set off in all directions from the Grand Central Terminal about 1½ km west of the centre. A tricycle to there costs P20.

By Train: The railway station in Peñaranda St has been closed down. Train service to Manila will possibly be resumed after the tracks have been repaired - and that might take a while.

Donsol

Jeepney/Van: Jeepneys and vans from Donsol to Legaspi leave from the market (1½ hrs).

Manila

Air: Airphil Express, Cebu Pacific and Zest Air fly daily from Manila to Legaspi and back (50 min).

Bus: Several Eagle Star and Philtranco buses run from Manila to Legaspi (12 hrs).

Naga

Bus: From Naga, several buses go daily to Legaspi (two hrs).

Tabaco

Bus/Van: Buses and vans run frequently from Tabaco to Legaspi (45 min).

Tacloban

Bus: A few buses run daily from Legaspi to Tacloban via Matnog and along the west coast of Samar. They come from Manila, pulling in to Legaspi for a short stop. However, it is possible that they will be fully booked. It could be less stressful to make the trip in stages, eg changing in Sorsogon or Irosin.

Around Legaspi

Mayon Volcano

Mayon stands 2462m above sea level and is famed for its perfectly symmetrical cone. The name Mayon is a derivation of the Bicolano word *magayon*, which means beautiful. Beauty can also become dangerous, as the clouds of smoke rising from the crater indicate.

The last serious eruption was in February 2000 when the volcano spewed ash and steam seven km into the atmosphere. Rivers of glowing hot mud, rocks and stones rushed down the south-east slope, totally destroying villages and farmland on the way. Nearly 100,000 people had to be evacuated. Only after a series of smaller eruptions lasting until March did the volcano calm down again, but weeks later the glowing lava was still flowing, offering a fascinating spectacle at night. The most recent, albeit less dramatic, eruptions occurred in July 2000, February 2001, July/August 2006, August 2009 and December 2009.

Beautiful Views

From the top of **Kapuntukan Hill** ('Sleeping Lion') at the south end of Legaspi Blvd (promenade) you can get a fascinating panoramic view of the port area, with the impressive Mayon gracing the background. The best time to view the volcano is in the early morning hours and at sunset, which is also ideal for taking photographs.

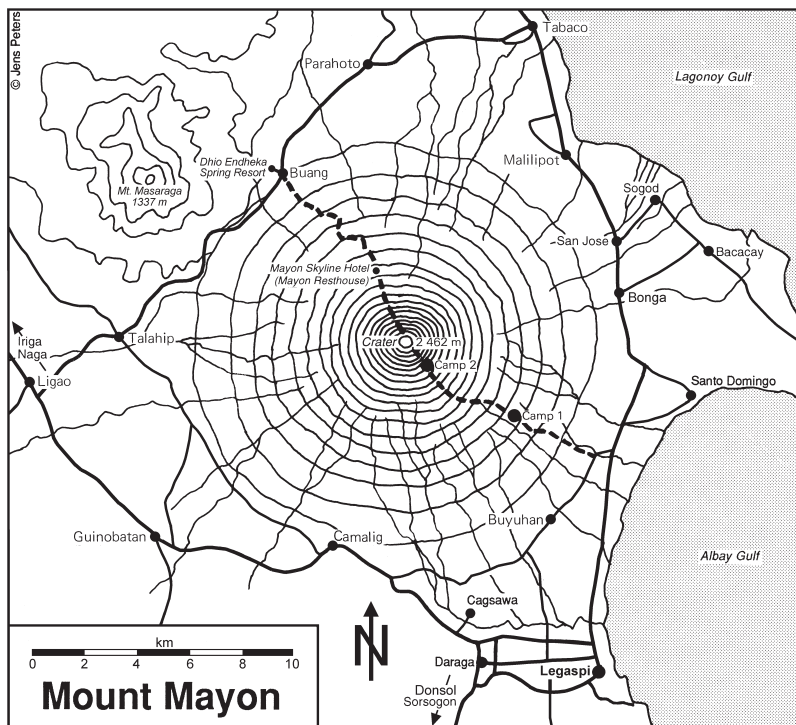
There's also a wonderful view of Mayon, 12 km away, from the 156m high **Ligñon Hill** north-west of Legaspi Airport. On the top of the viewing platform there's a big pavilion with a few small restaurants, and - inevitably - a zipline too (P200).

Enthusiasts for all things military will enjoy inspecting the little cave-like Pot-Pot Tunnel built at the foot of the hill by the Japanese in WWII to store weapons and ammunition. It's well-lit and historically decorated. A tricycle from the town centre to the road up to it costs P40, with another P20 for a motorbike to take you up there (on foot it takes roughly half an hour).

Not far from there, you'll find the **Albay Park & Wildlife**, a 17 hectare area with around 250 species of bird, over 60 species of reptile and more than 80 species of mammal, including lots of apes and even tigers. Admission: P20.

The most violent eruption to date took place on 1 February 1814 when many communities were totally destroyed, including those of Camalig, Cagsawa and Budiao. An estimated 1200 people lost their lives in this natural catastrophe. There were reports of ash raining down as far away as the Chinese coast.

If you want to climb Mayon, the tourist office will supply detailed information and they also organise two-day climbs, as will the travel agent Bicol Adventure & Tours. The usual cost for one or two people is P4500 for guide, porter, tent and food; each additional person costs P1500. Anyone thinking of saving a few pesos by carrying everything themselves would definitely regret the decision later, although it is normal in the Philippines for climbers to carry their own personal items. Take warm clothing, a sleeping bag and



provisions for two days. On some days you'll need sunscreen lotion as well.

You can save a few pesos and try hiring a guide in Buyuhan yourself. To try the ascent without a guide is reckless and irresponsible, as it's easy to get lost at the foot of Mayon. Many of the harmless-looking canyons turn out to be dead ends with sheer drops.

Getting There & Away

Bus/Jeepney: To get from Legaspi to the Mayon Skyline Hotel (still known locally as the Mayon Resthouse; temporarily closed) on the northern slope, where there is a beautiful view, take a bus or jeepney to Tabaco, then a bus or jeepney to Ligao. Get off at the turn-off about halfway to Ligao. From there you've got about an eight-km walk up to the hotel. You can hire a jeepney in Tabaco but it's cheaper to persuade

the regular Ligao jeepney drivers to make a small detour to the Mayon Skyline Hotel and drop you there.

The tourist office advises people not to climb the north slope of the volcano as it is apparently too dangerous.

Daraga & Cagsawa

Pop 116,000 / Postcode 4501 / Tel (052)

The magnificent baroque church in Daraga, built by Franciscan monks in 1773, offers an excellent view of Mayon from its vantage point on the top of a hill overlooking the town. Along the road between Daraga and Cagsawa you can find small workshops where they make whole furniture suites from used car tyres.

All that's visibly left of Cagsawa after the catastrophic eruption of Mayon on 1 February 1814

is the upper part of the church steeple. The rest of the village was buried under ash and lava. These days, plants, including orchids, are offered for sale near this solitary tower, and there is also a restaurant and even a little swimming pool. With the grandeur of Mayon in the background the scene is idyllic.

Places to Stay

Villa Amada Hotel, Rizal St, Tel (052) 4834251, @, SR/DR/ac/bath P1600 and P2000; including breakfast. Small, shipshape standard rooms with TV. Well run hotel with a modest entrance. Restaurant (1st Colonial Grill and Bikol Blends Café in the building). Complimentary airport service.

Places to Eat

To be recommended is **Balay Cena Uno** in F Lotivio St corner P Gomez St, a wonderfully restored old building with traditional capiz windows. It's a bit hidden away 350m from the main road (coming from Legaspi turn left into the first street after the Caltex petrol station at Bigg's Diner). Excellent international fare is served in a sophisticated ambience, and the prices are quite humane. Although there is no dress code as such, it would be a bit of a *faux pas* to turn up dressed for the beach. Open 10am-10pm, closed on Tuesdays; on Sundays only from 11.30am-2.30pm (lunch buffet).

Getting There & Away

Bus/Jeepney: From Legaspi, several jeepneys leave from the Grand Central Terminal daily for Daraga. The turn-off to the Cagsawa ruins is on the right, two km west of Daraga. A tricycle from Daraga to the ruins shouldn't cost more than P30. Buses and jeepneys for Camalig, Guinobatan, Ligao, Polangui and Naga also drive through Daraga, directly past the turn-off to the Cagsawa ruins where you can get out. (Don't forget to tell the driver in good time!) From there, it is about 10 min to the ruins on foot.

Camalig

Pop 64,000 / Postcode 4502 / Tel (052)

The town of Camalig is famous for the **Hoyop-Hoyopan Cave**, actually in Cotmon, about eight km to the south. The admission fee of P100 includes a half-hour tour and a lamp. The name Hoyop-Hoyopan means 'blow-blow' from the

sound of the wind rushing through. Bones have been found in the caves, as have potsherds which are over 2000 years old. They are now on display in a small museum in the Camalig Catholic church.

About two to three km (a 45-minute walk) away from the Hoyop-Hoyopan caves you'll find the **Calabidogan Cave**. A guided tour through the cave lasts up to three hours and costs around P500. Take swimming gear along as a few metres have to be swum. In the months from November to February it is possible that the water level will be too high, making a cave visit impractical.

Another attraction is the **Pariaan Cave**, also known as the 'Fountain of Youth', which is near Pariaan itself. To get there take a jeepney or a bus, either from Legaspi or Camalig to Guinobatan, where you can get a jeepney heading for Jovellar and get off at Pariaan. Ask the driver to drop you at the path for the cave and, after a 10-minute walk, you will come to a hut where the cave's 'owner' lives. For a few pesos he'll look after excess clothing - it's very hot and humid inside the cave. A strong torch or, even better, a kerosene lamp is necessary once you're inside. The cave contains a natural pool with warm water, watched over by ancient stalactites. After some time in stuffy subterranean surroundings, it's a pleasure to dip into the privately owned swimming pool on the left side of the road towards Jovella. The property is in an idyllic setting, in the midst of palm-covered hills. There are actually three pools, all at different heights.

Getting There & Away

Bus/Jeepney: Jeepneys and buses leave Legaspi for Camalig from the Grand Central Terminal, either directly or en route to Guinobatan, Ligao, Polangui or Naga.

Tricycle: From Camalig, you have to take a tricycle to the cave. Occasionally it is possible to find a jeepney in the market going to Cotmon. After 6pm the only way to return to Camalig is to arrange a Special Ride.

Santo Domingo

Pop 32,000 / Postcode 4508 / Tel (052)

About two km outside of Santo Domingo town, 15 km north-east of Legaspi, is a long, black,

lava-sand beach which occasionally has quite high surf. The beach resorts on the so-called 'Mayon Riviera' vary considerably in size and price. The Reyes Beach Resort (admission: P20) with its inexpensive restaurant is popular; the Sirangen Beach Resort is basic and nicely laid out.

Local day trippers like to use the beach at Santo Domingo for long, drawn-out picnics, but it is not really suitable for bathing and is actually quite disappointing.

Places to Stay

Costa Palmera Resort. Cel 0918-9098838, Tel (052) 4819175. SR/DR/ac/bath P900 to P1700, depending on size. Nicely furnished rooms with TV. Quite good value. There are also two rooms that share their own private swimming pool. Friendly accommodation. Pleasant restaurant on the water.

Getting There & Away

Jeepney/Tricycle: To get to Santo Domingo, take a jeepney from the Grand Central Terminal in Legaspi or ask if there's a direct bus to Santo Domingo, as some of the Tabaco buses take the route around the outskirts. Tricycles go from Santo Domingo to the beach resorts.

Malilipot

Pop 36,000 / Postcode 4510 / Tel (052)

For lovers of waterfalls in more or less unspoiled nature, a day trip from Legaspi to Malilipot can be warmly recommended. From here, on the north-east foothills of Mayon, there is a path leading in the direction of the volcano to the **Busay Falls**, also known as the Malilipot Falls; admission P5. These falls descend in stages from a height of 250m, flowing into seven pools on the way that tempt you to swim in them. If you don't want to jump straight into the first pool, then turn off onto the path on the right just before it. After about a 15-minute walk this will take you to the second pool. The waterfalls are popular with day-trippers at the weekends.

Getting There & Away

Bus/Jeepney: Go from Legaspi to Malilipot by a jeepney or bus travelling to Tabaco. Then it's about another hour on foot. It would be a good idea to have a guide show you the way.

Donsol

Pop 48,000 / Postcode 4715 / Tel (056)

Whale sharks seem to have taken a shine to the dreamy little coastal town of Donsol. Between February and May, but especially in the months of March and April, shoals of them cruise around the waters where the Burias and Ticao Passages meet. In 1998 the Philippine government declared this region to be a protected area for whale sharks, and since that time more and more friends of nature have visited Donsol to catch a glimpse of these gentle giants from close up. With the support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the so-called **Butanding Interaction Tours** were initiated - *butanding* is the local word for whale sharks - which take observers out to approach these imposing creatures with care. Only one boat is allowed per whale shark and no more than six swimmers with snorkelling equipment may approach a fish at one time. Swimmers should not come closer than three to four metres to an animal, and flash photography and touching the animals are not permitted at all.

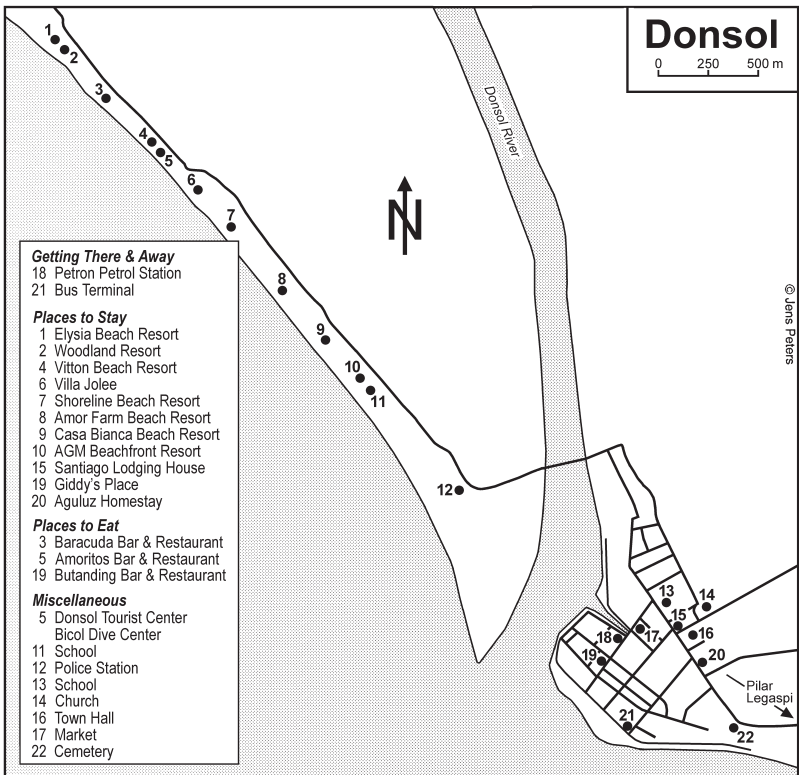
A day trip can be booked at the Donsol Tourist Center next to the Vitton Beach Resort. The price for a boat, crew, tour guide and spotter is P3500 (with a maximum of seven people per boat), plus P300 per person registration fee (P100 for Filipinos). Hiring snorkelling equipment costs P300.

As opposed to Whale Shark Interaction, **Firefly Watching** is possible all year round. Countless fireflies present an impressive natural display every evening in the mangroves of the Donsol River. One-hour tours take place between 6.30 and 10pm, leaving from the river bridge; they cost P1250 per boat (five people) and can be booked at any resort.

Places to Stay

Accommodation might be fully booked during the whale shark season. That applies especially to the beach resorts, which are all located a few km out of town in the Barangay Dancalan (tricycle P20 per person).

So it's a good idea to make a room reservation in advance. Some resorts are closed in the off-season from the beginning of June to the end of November. An alternative would be a day trip from Legaspi.



Santiago Lodging House, San Jose St corner Tres Marias Dr, Cel 0939-3108758. SR/DR/fan P500. Older building near the town hall with three basic guestrooms. Friendly owner. Use of the kitchen possible.

Giddy's Place, Clemente St, Cel 0917-8488881, @. SR/DR/fan P600, SR/DR/ac/bath P2500 and P4500 (four people); including breakfast. Basic, so-called backpacker rooms and good, pleasant rooms with refrigerator and TV. Restaurant, spa, swimming pool, diving. Located in the town, not on the beach.

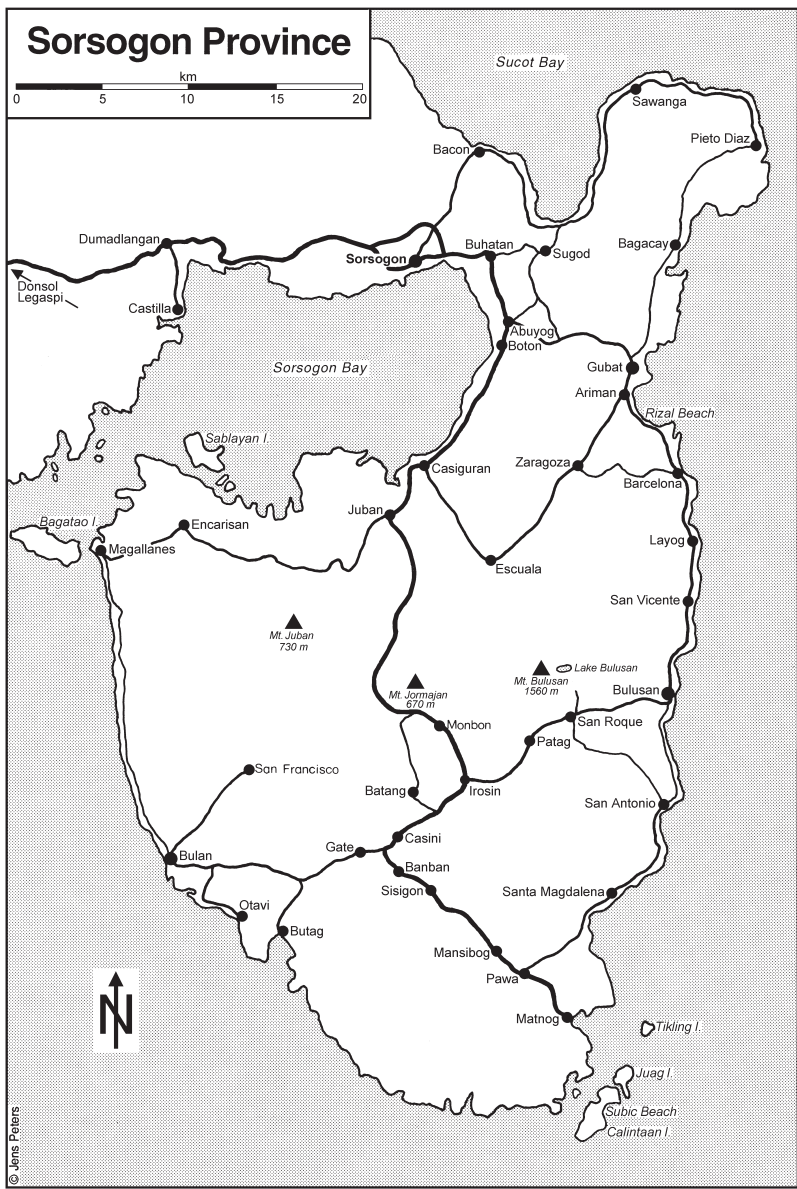
Casa Bianca Beach Resort, Cel 0906-3099372, @. SR/DR/fan/bath P800, SR/DR/ac/bath P1500 to P2000 (for up to four people). Basically decorated rooms in duplex cottages. Restaurant. Van service to and from Legaspi.

Amor Farm Beach Resort, Cel 0919-7998637, @. Cottage/fan/bath P1000, cottage/ac/bath P1500 to P1800; including breakfast. Popular, spread-out resort with cosy, comparatively inexpensive cottages. Restaurant.

AGM Beachfront Resort, Cel 0917-3813404, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P1900 and P2200. Basically furnished, friendly rooms with veranda. Restaurant.

Woodland Beach Resort, Cel 0927-9126313, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P2000; including breakfast. Neat, clean rooms with veranda. Pleasant resort with duplex cottages. Restaurant, diving. The swimming pool in the Vitton Beach Resort can be used. Diving.

Vitton Beach Resort, Cel 0927-9126313, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P2500 and P3500 (four people).



Whale Sharks - The Gentle Giants

Whale sharks are, funnily enough, sharks the size of whales. They grow up to 18 metres long and with a weight up to 40 tons are the biggest fish on the planet (whales are, of course, not fish but mammals). They swim their majestic way through all the oceans of the world, but prefer the warm waters of the tropics. They can best be recognised by the numerous white spots and stripes on their dark backs as well as several long, clearly prominent ridges on their bodies. In spite of their massive size, whale sharks are as harmless as house pets. They feed on plankton, krill and small fish, by sucking them into their huge mouths which can be as large as two metres across.



There has been a total ban on catching whale sharks in Philippine waters since 1998, after the animals had been mercilessly hunted down and cut up for years before. To this day, whale shark meat and fins are still considered a delicacy in some countries.

Depending on the region, whale sharks are known in the Philippine variously as *butanding*, *balilan*, *kulwano*, *tawiki* and *toki*. Their numbers have increased noticeably since the hunting ban was introduced. The prospects for these gentle giants in Philippine waters will make further progress if the eco-tourism industry continues to develop as it has been doing recently. Another positive spin-off of this is that it also provides former fishermen with a new way of earning a living and feeding their families.

Comfortably furnished rooms in stone houses, all with veranda. Restaurant, swimming pool. Right next door to the busy Tourist Centre.

Elysia Beach Resort, Cel 0917-5474466, @. SR/DR/ac/bath P3150. Good, albeit somewhat spartanly decorated rooms, grouped around the swimming pool. Korean management. Restaurant.

Places to Eat

Nearly all the resorts have their own restaurant, a good example being the Amor Farm Beach Resort with its good and inexpensive **Kawnkita Restaurant**, (look for its clever menu).

Right on the beach with a sea view there's also the **Amoritos Bar & Restaurant** with great Philippine food, and the **Barracuda Bar & Restaurant** with fresh seafood and mouth-watering cocktails.

Miscellaneous

Diving: Diving trips to San Miguel Island and to the Manta Bowl at Ticao Island are organised by

the Bicol Dive Center, Cel 0921-9293811, @, and Giddy's Place Dive Resort, Cel 0917-8288841, @.

Festivals: Arribada Festival (whale shark festival) on 28 and 29 January. Town Fiesta on 19 May. Gugurang Festival from 26 to 29 October.

Money: There's neither a bank nor a money changer in Donsol, so take plenty pesos with you.

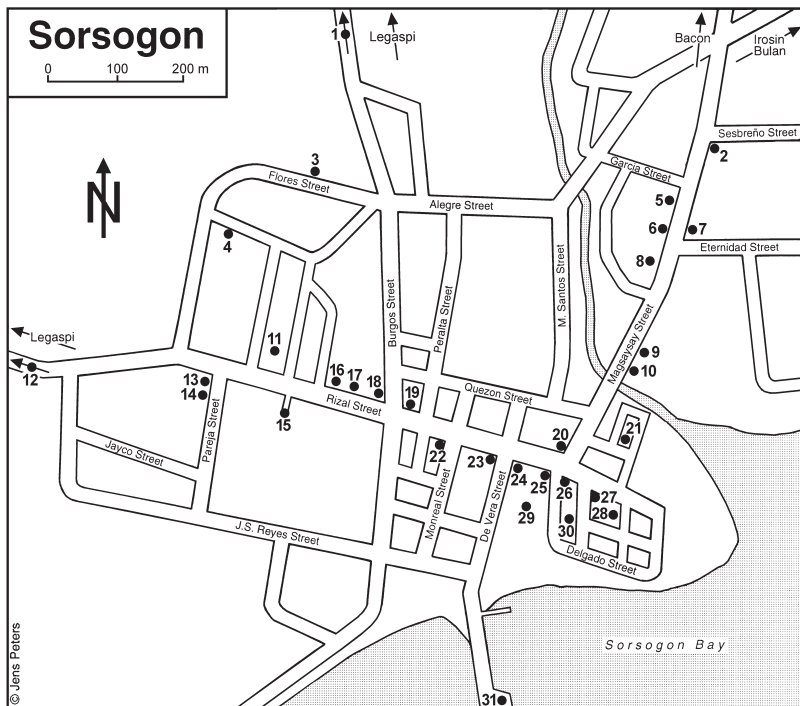
Wellness: Body Massage (P600), Hot Stone Massage (P1300) and further treatments at D'Spa in Giddy's Place, Clemente St.

Getting There & Away

By Boat: Fast ferries and car ferries of the Montenegro Shipping Lines leave Pilar, 12 km east of Donsol, for Masbate. Information on up to date departure times: Cel 0922-8897045 (Pilar office) and 0917-5971175 (Masbate office).

Legaspi

Jeepney/Van: Jeepneys and vans run from Legaspi to Donsol and Pilar, if they're full (1½ hrs).



Jeepneys run between Pilar and Donsol (30 min).

Special Rides by taxi, van or private car should be possible for P1500, even if they start off by demanding P2000 (one hr).

Info for Self-drivers: Leaving Legaspi, drive in the direction of Sorsogon via Daraga. Near Putiao, about 20 km south of Daraga, turn right and head for Pilar and Donsol. After 16 km of mostly twisting road, turn off right at the entrance to Pilar. From there, it's another 12 km to Donsol.

Manila

Bus: A Philtranco bus leaves Manila (Cubao and Pasay terminals) for Donsol daily at 6pm (13 hrs).

After the arrival of a boat, buses leave the wharf in Pilar for Manila.

Sorsogon, Bacon & Gubat

Pop 156,000 / Postcode 4700 / Tel (056)

Sorsogon is the capital of Sorsogon Province, an area at the eastern tip of South Luzon which is subject to frequent violent typhoons. The **Sorsogon City Baywalk**, part of the 500m long pier in the south of the town, is a beautiful place to while away the time.

From Sorsogon, you can make a little detour to Gubat for the long, broad **Rizal Beach** on the Pacific (jeepney 40 min). A tricycle will take you the five km south from Gubat to Rizal Beach for P50. Another popular local bathing destination is **Bacon**, about 10 km north-east of Sorsogon. The long, brown, flat beach with its offshore coral reef has become home to a plethora of beach resorts with picnic areas and almost always over-priced rooms. The jewel of this area is the very attractive Sirangan Beach Resort.