

You are here: [MFAT blogs](#) > [Andrew Matheson](#) > Malaysia, truly Asia. Incredible India. What about the Philippines?

## Andrew Matheson



I've been New Zealand ambassador to the Philippines since September 2008. Before that I worked on relations with Europe and on multilateral trade negotiations — and my previous posting was as deputy head of mission in Beijing.

I've been in the foreign ministry for less than 10 years. Earlier I worked in biosecurity policy, scientific information and agricultural extension, in the public and private sectors, in New Zealand and overseas.

I'm in Manila with my spouse, Sue Cotton. We are keen travellers, and while we're on posting we are trying to see as much of the country and the region as we can.

## Malaysia, truly Asia. Incredible India. What about the Philippines?

11th August 2010 by Andrew Matheson, Manila | [No Comments](#)

Sue and I are keen travellers, and in less than two years in the country we've managed to see many parts of the Philippines. This has been a lot of fun, but it has also brought us up against some of the problems facing Philippine tourism.

Numbers aren't everything, but visitor figures show the country is seriously underperforming compared with its neighbours. I think this is worth exploring further, and there might be some spin-offs for New Zealand companies. It's a big topic so I hope you'll excuse a blog in two episodes.



Rice terraces in the Philippine cordilleras, a UNESCO world heritage site

Last year I spent some time talking to the German technical cooperation agency [GTZ](#) about tourism here. GTZ has been [working to develop Philippine tourism](#) for at least five years now, through promoting the development of institutions such as a marketing agency and particularly by stimulating private businesses.

New Zealand played a small part in the 'Tourism Dialogue' last November that brought together a lot of GTZ's work. For background it's worth looking at Uwe Sturmman's [paper at the dialogue](#) on the competitiveness of Philippine tourism. As I said, numbers aren't everything, but the figures aren't pretty. The second-lowest number of tourist arrivals out of the seven Asean countries surveyed. And even then the Philippines' numbers are probably inflated by returning Filipinos. Remember there are millions of them living overseas, many on foreign passports, and they regularly return to visit family. There's even a special word for them: balikbayan.


Uwe's paper highlights what the real problem is for the Philippines. It's ranked a lowly 86<sup>th</sup> of 133 countries in the [2009 travel and tourism competitiveness report](#) of the World Economic Forum. Uwe goes on to dissect the elements of tourism competitiveness (regulatory framework; business environment and infrastructure; human, cultural and natural resources), and measures how the Philippines is doing on each.

Yesterday I heard the Secretary of Tourism in the new government, Alberto Lim, talk to a group of leading business representatives about the challenges facing the sector. I know Bertie Lim well from his time heading the [Makati Business Club](#), and we've talked about these issues before. He started his address rehearsing the same sort of disappointing figures we had talked about in the tourism dialogue last year.

There's no silver bullet for such a complex set of problems, but Secretary Lim set out some good ideas. I'll come to those in the next post.

Comments are moderated. Please read our [terms and conditions](#) before posting.

Leave a Reply

 [Andrew Matheson's RSS feed](#)



Our [terms and conditions](#)



 Be the first of your