VIGAN CITY

INTRODUCTION

Vigan is the finest place in the Philippines where time has stood still as it brings you back to the Spanish era with its every exquisite architecture. History and culture lie beneath each of those brick cream and gray walls that have been carefully preserved and maintained. It has been the living proof of Spanish colonialism which has withstood wars and climatic occurrences since 16th century. It was home for chivalrous heroes of the Philippine history. Diego and Gabriela Silang were probably the most notable among them.

Facing the South China Sea, Vigan was an island which was formerly separated from the mainland. Three rivers surround the island: the Abra River, the Govantes River, and the Mestizo River. It is named after the giant taro trees called “Bigaa” which are common along the riverbanks of the Mestizo River. The Spanish conquistador Juan De Salcedo was the one who named the place.

It is a nine-hour bus ride north of Manila. The trip may be a little tiring but witnessing the serenity of the roads to Vigan and the city itself will definitely ease the boredom brought by the stretch. There a lot of things to see in its ever corner that will make all cameras stand by for a number of pictures to be taken.

The fifth class city does not only boasts its sturdy historical edifices and houses but also its amusing feasts and celebrations, one-of-a-kind arts and crafts, exotic delicacies, and remarkable attractions. It is home to the Philippine's best-tasting longganisa, bagnet, and empanada that will surely leave you wanting for more.

Best Time To Visit

Vigan is open all year-round for those who simply want to unwind and find a sense of tranquility in their vacation. It is best to drop a visit during summer or dry season, which is May to October, to avoid the hassles that the rains can bring. Since it faces the South China Sea and is in the northern of the Philippines, typhoons are usually routed towards Ilocos Sur. For your stay to be totally fun, exciting, educational, and spoil-free, you can plan your trip with your friends during the most comfortable days of the year. You can also check their calendar for festivals you can catch to have a memorable and thrilling vacation.

Highlights

One of the most visited festivals is the Raniag, The Vigan Twilight Festival, a five-day feast celebrated during the last three days of October and lasts until the first two days of November. Also one of Vigan's forerunning attractions in which tourists can also join is their celebration of Semana Santa or Holy Week. Here, the Biguenos express their religious fervor and devotion with their parade of life-size statues in carroza. The colorful and delicious Longganisa Festival, celebrated every third week of January, is also a feast to catch. During this festival, they commemorate both the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul and their city-hood anniversary. Their celebration of the World Heritage Cities Solidarity Day is also a must-catch. It is celebrated simultaneously with the Feast of the Immaculate Concepcion every 8th of September. Various historical events are the highlights of this celebration as they join the rest of the world which are also considered World Heritage Sites.

Something to also look forward to in the little city is its preserved arts and crafts. Their traditional way of weaving called the Abel weaving, involves the creative hands of Biguenos who sustain this surviving traditional craft in Vigan. A wooden handloom acts as a sewing machine to create artistic Abel cloths that can be seen along Calle Crisologo and the city's public markets. The fabrics are made of sagut or cotton yarn making the cloths lovely to hold. The burnay is also a must-see handicraft in Vigan. It is an earthenware jar well-measured and crafted by Bigueno potters using a potter's wheel. The anay or fine sand is used as the raw material that will be molded in a huge brick-and-clay ground making it more durable than ordinary terra cotta. Another indigenous form of terra cotta is the damili, which can be seen in seven barangays around the Vigan hills surrounded by
Bantog clay, the raw material the *damili* potters use.

**Internet and Communication**

Since Vigan is already urbanized, Internet and cellphone connection is very accessible here. There are computer shops and loading stations located in the main district and even in souvenir stores. Communication is not a problem around the city as the signal works good here. Best advice would be to bring your own prepaid cards so you do not have to rush to the nearest stores whenever you run out of load. Before leaving for Vigan, check with your service provider if your network functions pretty well in Vigan areas. The mountainous areas may not cater the signal you need during travel.

**Money**

When you come to Vigan, there's no need to bring a lot of cash. A pocket money of Php3,000.00 to Php5,000.00 is enough to keep you going around Vigan for three days and two nights, inclusive of a budget accommodation, land transportation, meals, entrance fees for some attractions, and souvenirs. You do not have to worry about running out of cash since there's always an ATM machine nearby. Cirrus or Plus credit cards can also be used in ATMs. However, there is a surcharge for bank guests.

**ATTRACTIONS**

Because of its distinctive structure as the only surviving historic city in the Philippines and probably in Asia, Vigan has been declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in December 1999. Walking along its roads is like trudging the footprints of Filipinos five centuries ago. Its cobbled streets are paved with ancestral houses and other remnants with the touch of unique Spanish and European architectural designs. Witness the picture-perfect beauty of the little city that will captivate every photo enthusiast's eyes.

Here is a drop-down list of what you should not miss in your Vigan vacation:

- **Baluarte (Barangay Tamag, Vigan City)**
  If you want to experience a local safari in the country, Vigan's Baluarte is just the destination for you. Come and play with the animals as they interact with the visitors. Experience wildlife with a spectacular view of the scenic green horizon that awaits every eye. This is the chance to discover your inner childhood as the place is meant to educate people about the conservation and protection of different endangered species.

- **Calle Crisologo (Mestizo District)**
  Walking along the renowned cobblestoned street is like being transported back to its mercantile heyday. Feel the awe as you roam around while riding on a *calesa*. You can drop by the century-old houses and take pictures or videos or even buy souvenirs like antiques and authentic Ilocano weaving shown through the “Abel” cloth. Named after Don Mena Crisologo, the first Civil Governor of Ilocos Sur, Calle Crisologo takes pride as the compelling sense of ancestry in their pavements still survives the test of time. The thick brick-walled and red clay-plastered colonial houses are mostly built by rich Chinese traders even before the Spaniards came.

- **Cathedral of Conversion of St. Paul**
  Churches are also top visited sites in Vigan. One of these is the Augustinian-built distinctive structure of the Cathedral of the Conversion of St. Paul. This earthquake-baroque architecture has withstood wars and climate changes since 1790. Its 12 altars, 3 naives, and brass handrails define the fragility and grandeur of this massive church which is the setting of Vigan's feasts. Its octagonal bell tower is placed south of the cathedral. Looking closely inside the cathedral, you will find the tombstone of the great Ilocano poet Leona Florentino in the column near the entrance facing the Plaza Burgos.
• **Crisologo Museum**
When you pass through Calle Crisologo, make sure to pay a visit to the museum. The museum used to be a heritage house which turned into a sanctuary which houses the memorabilia of the late Congressman Floro Crisologo and Governor Carmeling Pichay Crisologo. Each room in this museum contains timeless antiques and repositories that tell different stories about the families. There is no entrance fee in the museum and taking pictures is definitely allowed.

• **Hidden Garden**
In this Ilocandia city, you will find the Garden of Eden coming into life in the characteristics of the Hidden Garden. Its romantic and nature-loving landscape located at the heart of the city once served as a therapy for its owner. After wandering around the area, you can stop by its coffee shop, have some favorite Ilocano dishes, and share a conversation with your friend in a very attractive view.

• **Pagburnayan (Jar Factory)**
Take a glimpse at the famous Ilocano jars or *burnay* in Pagburnayan and see how great Ilocano hands continues to mold their tradition with every clay and fine sand. These jars are containers or fermenting vessel for the popular Ilocos vinegar, *basi* or wine (from sugar cane extract). You can even experience creating a jar with your own hands.

• **Sinking Bell Tower**
Take a short stroll in Plaza Burgos and be hypnotized by the marvel of the surroundings with the 100-year old bell tower on top of the hill, much like Italy's leaning tower of Pisa. It's said to be subsiding into the ground by several centimeters every year—creepy but amazing.

• **Syquia Mansion**
Your Vigan trip will not be complete without dropping by this captivating mansion with untold interesting stories being housed in each memorabilia you will see. A curator shall guide you through each passageway to a fountain of knowledge and awe. For just Php20.00 (for adults) and Php10.00 (for children), be amazed by this beautiful yet haunting house as you come across its historical features. It also used to be the residence of the late President Quirino.

• **Vigan Heritage River Cruise**
Reinforcing the Vigan Heritage Conservation Program through the Mestizo River, the City Government of Vigan thought of having this River Cruise. Through a 45-minute river tour, you can travel back to the historical timeline of the city as a voice-over narrates the significant details of Vigan. You'll pass through five life-sized tableaus exhibiting the important parts of their history. This river cruise is worth Php100.00 for adults, Php50.00 for students, and Php70.00 for senior citizens. This is a great way to start your Vigan trip.

Feel the historical spirit and be a modern-day Maria Clara and Crisostomo Ibarra as you travel the streets and captivating attractions of the capital of Ilocos Sur.

### **EATING AND DRINKING**

Vigan does not only boast about its historical sites and lovely attractions but also its delectable delicacies that will make you come back here every chance you get. Nothing is more unforgettable than letting your tongue and stomach experience a place's heavenly cuisine.

Here are the must-try Vigan specialties that will surely delight your appetite:

• **Sinanglao**
If the weather seems a little cloudy and cold, having a sip of the *sinanglao* will surely make you feel warm. It is a beef innards and skin soup, enhanced with the combination of bile and sour *kamias* specialty of the city. This
dish can be found in street side eateries in the morning. Perfect for a waking up energy!

- **Empanada**
  Nobody's leaving the city without bringing home or having eaten an empanada. It is Vigan's authentic delicacy consisting of the filling of eggs, the ever favorite Vigan longganisa (sausage), and vegetables put together in a wrap made of rice flour and then deep-fried for a golden orange color and crispy hot flavor.

- **Vigan longganisa (local sausage)**
  Visiting Vigan is having a taste of its local sausage, the Vigan longganisa. It is well-known for its weird flavor combination of garlic and vinegar. Its meat is leaner than the ordinary sausages sold in the local market. You can find this in every street food stop in Vigan and can also buy some in the market. Grab one and have your indulge your taste buds.

- **Miki**
  Another soup recipe of the city is this flat noodles submerged in a thick soup with meat bits and drizzled by fresh eggs. Miki stalls can be found under the bell tower at Plaza Burgos. This flavored noodles can be eaten anytime of the day that you feel like having something delicious soup.

- **Bagnet (pan seared pork)**
  If you want some delicious dish, then bagnet is the best choice to try. The sweet and crispy-tasting pork will just taste as good as it sounds while chewing. The pork is boiled and double fried for double goodness. Make sure you are in your normal blood condition when you have a taste of this Vigan original.

- **Basi (sugar cane wine)**
  As you eat your favorite Vigan recipes, have a drink with your friends and enjoy the night away with Vigan's basi. It is a wine made of sugar cane which shares the same process of fermentation with the cane vinegar, which is also a favorite partner dip of empanada, bagnet, and longganisa.

Aside from the featured delicacies, you can also try other dishes under the Vigan cuisine like ukoy (fried flour with shrimp), tinubong (sticky sweet rice cake in bamboo tubes), arroz caldo (chicken porridge), dinengdeng (soupy mixed vegetables), and poqui-poqui (mashed eggplant with egg).

You can visit the following dine-ins for a taste of Vigan cuisine:

- **Cafe Leona**
  This is the most popular eating place in Vigan. Named after the Mother of Philippine Women's Literature, Leona Florentino, Cafe Leona can be found along the street of Calle Crisologo. The place was itself the house of the late poetess. Different variations of the Vigan cuisine can be eaten here like the Vigan pasta, Cafe Americano, and Longsilog (sausage, fried rice, fried egg).

- **Grandpa's Inn**
  For those looking for a cozy Spanish-style place to dine, Grandpa's Inn can suit your interest. It is located along Bonifacio Street. Here, you'll have the authentic taste and aroma of the irresistible Vigan longganisa which sizzles hot in the frying pan, its house specialty for just Php90.00 for two people. Also, order a crispy bagnet with steaming hot freshly cooked rice for a higher price of Php150.00.

- **Cafe Uni-Vigan**
  This little coffee shop serves pastries, beverages, pasta, and local Ilocano dishes which is perfect for travel snacks while you're taking a rest from your wandering. You can try its pancakes and green tea. But if you're hungry for a full meal, you can order their pinakbet and bagnet.

With this variation of cuisine, you'll surely love to go back to Vigan after your vacation.
GETTING THERE

The beautiful city of Vigan is approximately 400 kilometers north of Manila, located at the west coast of Northern Luzon. The trip will traverse through mountain ranges, rice paddies, residential areas, and bodies of water. It can both be travelled through air and land.

By Air

For tourists who will come from outside the Philippines, the fastest and most convenient way to get to Ilocos Sur is through the Laoag International Airport in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, just 80 km far from Vigan. The airport caters to international flights to and from nearby countries in Asia like Guangzhou China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. It also accommodates flights to and from the USA. International transports that fly directly to Laoag City are Far Eastern Air Transport, China Southern Airlines, and CR Airways.

From Manila, scheduled domestic Sea-Air flights every Friday and Sunday at 2:30 PM leave for Vigan. Alternatively, there are also Domestic flights which leave for Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. Philippine Airlines, Asia Spirit, and Cebu Pacific fly daily to Laoag. A one-way ticket from Manila to Vigan is approximately Php3,000.00.

From the Laoag International Airport, Vigan is just an hour and a half away by land vehicle ride (bus or arranged rides). It can be reached through the following bus lines from Laoag: Partas Bus, F. Franco Trans, Farinas Transportation, RCJ Bus Lines, Auto Bus, Maria De Leon Bus Lines, and Florida Transit. The bus ride usually costs Php150.00.

By Land

The 408 km stretch can be reached by bus for at least seven hours and nine hours at most. You'll get a glimpse of the scenic Manila-Ilocos highway.

When you pass by the famous Banaoang Bridge, you'll know that you are already near the historic city. It is officially know as Quirino Bridge, in honor of the late president Elpidio Quirino, who was born in the Filipino-Hispanic city. This hanging bridge is like the gate to Vigan as it connects two mountains across the Abra River and the two towns of Banaoang and Bantay. Beneath the bridge is a sparkling blue water and taking a peek to the panoramic scene is just breathtaking during daytime. It has even become a tourist attraction for its splendid spectacle of mountains, river, and the sky. A viewing deck has been built for those who want to snap photos of the 'gate' to Vigan.

If you'll be coming the northern part of Ilocos, a new bridge has also been built to ease the heavy traffic.

Bus lines that ply the Manila-Vigan route are Partas Co., Dominion Bus Lines, Martinez Trans, and the Philippine Rabbit Bus Line. The Partas Co. Dominion, and Martinez Trans bus terminals can be found in Cubao, Quezon City. Partas buses can also be found in EDSA-Taft, Pasay City; while the Philippine Rabbit Bus Lines can be found in Avenida, Manila. The cost of one-way land travel ranges from Php500 to Php700 per person.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Getting around the city is just as exciting as glancing through the capiz windows or ventanillas and seeing a whole city dated back to 16th century come to life. The best way to get around is by walking to let you discover the beauty of the city in every edge. But if you feel like going from town to town, transports are here to take you.

All local transport are by land and it's easy getting on and off for each ride. To get to other towns around Vigan, one can choose from a variety of public transport for convenience, affordability, and experience.
**Jeepney**

The Philippines' most famous mode of transportation is also available in Vigan City. But this time, it is customized to suit the atmosphere of the city. Famous for its artistic designs and unique horns, army jeeps were the legacy of World War II. They have been resized to cater more passengers, remodeled into a modern-day structure, and polished for longer usage. This vehicle can accommodate 20 to 30 passengers at a time and can transport you to other towns of Vigan and to other municipalities of the Ilocandia.

**Mini-bus**

For those who are quite in a hurry for the day's adventure and need a faster ride to take them to their destination, a mini-bus is the recommended mode of transportation. There are air-conditioned and non-air conditioned buses which are also used in transporting market goods. People from all walks of life can give in to a bus ride for an exciting sight-seeing.

**Tricycle**

This three-wheeled vehicle serves as local taxi cab and can be found in every corner of the city. For as low as Php8.00, nearby destinations are not afar and you can even take videos or photos as you go on with your ride. These vehicles can also be rented if you plan to roam just around the town.

**Calesa/Karitela**

Your Ilocandia vacation will not be complete if you do not hop up the horse-drawn carriages—the *calesa* or *karitela*. Renting it for just Php150.00 per hour, you'll get to take a full view around the city with the friendly ‘*mamang kutsero*’ (the one who guides the horse) as your tour guide. This is also perfect for romantic dates along the narrow-lined streets of the quaint little city. Each *calesa* is designed artistically different from another. It is a total escape from a urban life of vehicular smokes. Having a *calesa* ride can let you choose which attractions you wan to visit. Your ‘*kutsero*’ can even suggest places to visit. It is green-and-clean and ultimately fun and exciting to get a lift with Philippine's finest *calesa* in Vigan.

**Rent-a-van**

If you're going on a trip with the whole family or a bunch of friends, you may also consider renting a van for more convenience. You may either drive the van or hire a driver for it. There are accredited car rental services all around the city. For sure, a deal can suit your budget.

**SHOPPING**

After days of wandering through the walls of the heritage city, taking home something that can make you remember the place forever or something that you can give to your friends and family as souvenir is the next thing that comes to your mind. Little, simple items can be unforgettable enough for what you really take home is the experience you had.

For your souvenir go-to's:

- **Vigan Public Market**
  
  This is probably the best place where you can find what you look for and can haggle for it for a good deal. It is located near the Partas Bus Station. So before you get on your trip back home, you can take a look at the items being sold in the market. This is advisable for those who don't have much time to go to souvenir shops and buy items before they travel back. The public market can be reached through a tricycle or a *calesa*. It houses local
crafts, Vigan delicacies, merchandise items, and just everything you're looking for. You must put in mind, though, to only bring cash since credit cards are not accepted here.

• **UNESCO Heritage Village**
When looking for authentic souvenir items, this is the go-to. It situated in Calle Crisologo. Choose among antiques, accessories, furniture, statues, figurines, and other wooden decors made out of narra and mahogany. You can also haggle here but not as much as you can in the public market, since this is more on being privately-owned.

• **Calle Plaridel**
You can find sought-after Vigan items here like abel products in form of bags, pouches, clothes, t-shirts, bed and table linens. Accessories like the usual key chains, wallets and coin purses are also available here. There are also burnays, basi wine, hand-rolled cigarettes, and Vigan special longganisa and sweets. Buying in bulk is advisable if you want to avail bigger discounts on items.

• **Pagburnayan and Camangaan**
If you are touring around Pagburnayan and Camangaan, you can already buy burnay jars, terra cotta, and abel products directly from them to be sure of their quality. Plus, you can have more choices of designs and can buy the products in relatively lower prices since they are the direct-sellers and the product-makers in general.

• **Zaguan Photo Studio**
If you feel like having a memorabilia picture taken, you can visit the Zaguan Photo Studio. Dress up with the period clothes and pose like Filipinos in the 16th century. Have your pictures taken, edited, and printed for a material finished that you can even pose on social networking sites. Smile for your best shot!

**CLIMATE**

As the Philippines has a tropical climate with the dry and wet season, the city of Vigan falls under dry season starting from the month of November until April of every year. The wet season takes place on the months of May to October. The average annual rainfall of the city s 190.683 mm and its highest recorded rainfall is 693.3 mm.

During warm season, the place's average temperature is 30.9 degree Celsius. The cold season can fall to 21.1 degree Celsius. For the whole year round, the average temperature in Vigan is 26 degree Celsius, colder than other provinces since its vicinity is surrounded by mountains and waters. About 7-10 typhoons visit Vigan every year and it usually falls during the wet season.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**

Your luxurious stay in the historic city of the North will not be complete without the relaxing comfort of an affordable yet fully equipped and good servicing accommodation. Take your pick among these recommended lodging:

• **El Juliana**: Located at the corner of Liberation Boulevard and Quirino Boulevard, this budget-friendly lodging will let you experience the old charm of the city. It spacious, fully air-conditioned rooms can make your stay soothing enough like home. Although a little far from the famous Calle Crisologo or the plaza, it's still a walking distance to the heritage site. You can also conduct meetings, celebrate parties or anniversaries, and have some family-exclusive gathering through booking its function room and own restaurant. You can also take a plunge in its swimming pool and have your car a free wash in their wide parking area.

  Contact: (077) 722-2994
  Address: Quirino Blvd. cor. Liberation Blvd.

• **Gordion Hotel**: Situated at the heart of the city, Gordion Hotel is a few meters away from attractions like Plaza
Salcedo and Cathedral of the Conversion of St. Paul. Staying in the hotel comes with a complimentary breakfast and wireless Internet access. There is also a conference center, a bar or lounge, and a rooftop terrace where you can enjoy the overlooking view of the city.

**Contact:** (077) 722-2526  
**Address:** V. Delos Reyes St., Vigan City

- **Hotel Salcedo De Vigan:** Long live yesterday's romance and lay down the beds of the rich in modern day comfort in Hotel Salcedo, located in V. Delos Reyes corner General Luna. Its high ceilings, huge windows, and palatial floors with Spanish design furnishings will make your stay all comfortable. Its rooms are fully air-conditioned equipped with flat screen television, WiFi access, telephone with NDD service, luggage rack, and even safety deposit box for your valuables. You can choose freely from different suites that will suit your taste and your budget.

  **Contact:** (077) 722-1200  
  **Address:** V. delos Reyes cor. Gen. Luna St., Vigan City

- **La Fernandina Hotel:** If you're not too cozy in choosing a place to stay, you can try booking a room in La Fernandina. It is best known as a tourist inn, located along Mabini Street. This small lodging house offers 11 air-conditioned rooms, recommended for small touring groups or companies who would want to book a private area where they can have their team building activities or trainings. Its conference hall can accommodate these events.

  **Contact:** (077) 722-2105 / 722-3203  
  **Address:** Mabini St., Vigan City

- **RF Aniceto Mansion:** Revisit the glorious past and feel like time traveling as you enter this cozy dwelling. It has been best reviewed for its good service, reliable staff, adequate breakfast, well-furnished, and excellent location as it is near Calle Crisologo.

  **Contact:** (077) 722-2383  
  **Address:** Crisologo St., Vigan City

- **Vigan Heritage Mansion:** Being the original abode of the late Ilocos Sur Governor Pedro Singson, the Vigan Heritage Mansion is probably one of the best places for local or foreign guests. Situated in Liberation Boulevard, the hotel offers modern comforts in an ancient abode. The 118-year old ancestral home has been restored and preserved to be enjoyed by travelers with its fully air-conditioned rooms that can accommodate up to 45 guests. It has an area that can also be converted into a conference hall perfect for company outings, seminars, trainings, or meetings. Its dining provides authentic Vigan cuisine served by their ever gracious staff. Room styles range from dormitory, family size, and standard which has twin rooms, deluxe single, and twin-sharing.

  **Contact:** (077) 722-6495  
  **Address:** Crisologo St. cor. Liberation Blvd., Vigan City

- **Vigan Plaza Hotel:** Its exterior is designed as a miniature of the whole city with Hispanic-Chinese architectural features. Entering the hotel, you will find an inner courtyard with a mystical fountain and modern amenities. The interior preserves the touch of Vigan's heritage ambience with its hardwood floors, wooden furniture, old photographs, lighting fixtures, and other decors. Its friendly and cheerful staff are always ready to assist you. They offer a number of choices for rooms and free breakfast for an overnight stay. Aside from this, you can enjoy having your meals at the hotel's restaurant, have your car safely parked in their two-level parking area, relax in their air-conditioned rooms, and surf the net through their free WiFi.

  **Contact:** (077) 632-0317  
  **Address:** Crisologo St., Vigan City

Choose the best place to rest the night away so you'll have more energy for another history trudging activity the next day.