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Your Guide to Travel Boracay Update **December 29, 2011**



ISLAND-BASED Freida Dario gives insider knowledge of an island she has fallen in love with and now calls home.

You are bound to hear Korean, Mandarin, and Russian when you visit Boracay, which incidentally has won acclaim as one of the best islands in the world. According to government tracking figures, 800,000 visitors flocked to Boracay in 2010, with foreign tourists accounting for 35% of that figure.

Koreans make up a huge chunk of the island's foreign visitors (35%), followed by the Taiwanese (22%) and the Chinese (16%). Although fewer, the Russians are highly sought after, known for being big spenders who fancy lobsters and expensive wine and champagne that make cash registers sing.

Driving the annual 15% growth for the past 10 years is tourists' curiosity for this tiny tropical island that has been reaping global media attention. Boracay ranks fourth in *Travel + Leisure's* Top 10 islands in its 2011 World Best Awards, while the popular travel website TripAdvisor ranks it as the second best beach in the world (from a list of 25). In Russia, an online survey shows that both the Philippines and Boracay are the top destinations among Russian travelers in 2010.

So busy is the island that its "low season" has a relative meaning- still crowded but not as jam packed as the high season, which begins this month, December. In the advent of mass tourism, Boracay now resembles an island with a gorgeous beach plus theme-park attractions. Ten years ago, the island offered only the usual water-based activities like snorkeling, diving, sailing, and island hopping. Now Boracay has a myriad of options like aqua walks on the sea floor, fishing, cliff diving, zip-lining, renting a private yacht or chartered helicopter, and riding a tornado jet boat, speedboats, ATVs, or segway. In addition to this there are countless resorts, restaurants, spas, bars, and retail stores.

For the uninitiated, the centerpiece of the island is its famous four-kilometer powdery white sand beach simply called "White Beach." The island's reference points are its boat stations numbered 1 (southeast), 2 (island's centre), and 3 (northwest). A new, popular reference point is D'Mall, which is a dining and shopping complex that lies near Station 2. The best map of the island is the well-illustrated Boracay Visitors Guide that contains plenty of useful information.

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Crowds mostly gather around D'Mall and at the centre of White Beach, so if you prefer privacy, walk along the beach toward either end of the island. The northwestern end by station 1 is considered the "elite side" as it hosts a string of high – end resorts, such as the multi-awarded Discovery Shores and an island pioneer, Friday's. The southeastern end by Station 3, in contrast, is home to more simple resorts and dive booking outlets.

Now that the island offers so many places activities, here we list some of the notables. Visit the award-winners: Discovery Shores, which ranks 8th in *Travel+ Leisure's* Top Resorts in Asia (its spa won the coveted Asia's Top Hotel Spa in the same survey); Shangri-la's Boracay Resort and Spa, which ranks 17th among the Top 20 Asian resort compiled by *Condé Nast Traveler*; Mandala Spa and Villas, which was named the Philippines' leading resort in the 2010 World Travel Awards; and Tirta Spa, which was among those shortlisted for "Spectacular Spas-Asia Pacific for 2009/2010" by the Asia Spa Institute in Singapore. The Tides Hotel tucked inside D'Mall gained a good review in 2009 from no less than the *New York Times* as "one of the 44 places to go"

Try out the island's other beaches. On the eastern side is Bulabog Beach where you'll find kite surfaces and a number of well-designed boutique resorts. On the western part of Bulabog are the beaches of Llig Lligan and Lapuz Lapuz; while on the eastern part are Tambisaan, Manoc Manoc, Cagban, and Calirojan beaches. Their precise locations can be found on the Boracay is famous for which you shouldn't miss. What used to be Hey Jude Bar is now Epic Resto & Bar operated by Erik Cua of Republiq and the newly opened Prive.

Epic's glamorous image draws the island's best looking party crowd. Other nightspots includes Bom Bom (reggae and acoustic), Juice Bar (flaming cocktails), Cocomangas (drink 15 shots of their concoction and you get a free T-shirt), the Pool Bar (nice chill out spot) of Tides Resort, and the Jungle Bar that opens only during full moon.