



My Daily Ride

The Jeepney

noun - jeep-ney - \ˈjēp-nē\

a Philippine jitney bus converted
from a jeep

jeep + jitney = jeepney

After three months of being in the Philippines, I have a well-established routine that francophones would describe as ‘métro-boulot-dodo’¹. However, my daily ride to work is not a subway but the Jeepney.

Jeepneys are probably the most popular and affordable modes of transportation in the Philippines. Jeepneys are to the Philippines what black cabs are to England. Displaying local and foreign influences, the Jeepney reflects the unique cultural identity of Filipinos.

History of the Jeepney

Jeepneys originated from jeeps that were primarily used during World War II by American soldiers. When American troops withdrew after the war, they left behind hundreds of military jeeps in the Philippines. As the war had ruined public transportation, Filipinos started stripping down jeeps to make space for more passengers. Apart from re-purposing the jeeps, Filipinos used them as canvas by decorating them with

¹ Literal translation: subway, work, sleep

“There is bit of Spanish, Mexican traits there; how they incorporate vivid colours, fiesta-like feelings. There is a little of the Americans because it evolved from the Jeep. There is a little Japan because of the Japanese engine. But it was built by Filipino hands.”

Ed Sarao, one of the first makers of Jeepneys

ornaments and bright colours reflecting the creativity and ingenuity of Filipinos. Today, Jeepneys are no longer made from military jeeps but produced by companies located in the Philippines.²

The King of the Road

I am a fan of Jeepneys. They are the most convenient system of transportation I have encountered. Unlike common public transportation, Jeepneys are privately owned. Usually, multiple Jeepneys follow the same route and compete for passengers on the way. It is estimated that there are about 50,000 Jeepneys registered to operate in Metro Manila³. Country-wide, the number of Jeepneys is over 203,000⁴. Their ubiquitousness on the roads mean your movements are never constrained by transportation schedules. If you need to go somewhere, just stand on the street and wait for a Jeepney to drive past. The driver will stop wherever you want along the route as soon as you utter the words ‘para po’. Jeepneys are also an inexpensive way to get around the city with fares as low as 7 pesos⁵ per person.

Jeepneys are not only a great mode of transportation but also serve as a form of mobile art. With their bright colours, punchy stickers and shiny accessories, Jeepneys are hard to miss when walking down the roads of Quezon City. The type of art they exhibit is wide ranging from religious imageries to cartoon characters. Some adorn images or words of personal significance to the Jeepney’s owner. Uniquely decorated, you will never see the same design on two Jeepneys. The Jeepney is a vibrant icon of the Filipinos’ creative excellence.



² <http://www.odditycentral.com/pics/jeepney-buses-art-on-wheels-in-the-philippines.html>

³ <http://www.alu.org.ph/139/TUCP-welcomes-e-jeepneys--monthly-salary-for-drivers>

⁴ <http://www.alu.org.ph/139/TUCP-welcomes-e-jeepneys--monthly-salary-for-drivers>

⁵ The minimum fare used to be 7.50 pesos but it was reduced to 7 pesos as of January 2016.

Downfalls of the Jeepney

Even though I particularly enjoy using Jeepneys, they face their fair share of criticisms in the Philippines. To start with, Jeepneys have been condemned for their contribution to fossil-fuel pollution and the increasing traffic volume in cities. This has led to high pressure to take them off the streets of Metro Manila⁶. To resolve part of the issue, Jeepneys' owners are now being encouraged to switch their engine from diesel to electric⁷. Though I have not had the opportunity to ride E-Jeepneys, short for electrical Jeepneys, they are already on the roads of Metro Manila.

The working conditions of Jeepney drivers also raise questions. For an arduous work day (12-14 hours), a Jeepney driver can expect to bring home around 400 pesos and 700 pesos on a good day⁸. Their salary on an average day can be not enough to cover the daily expenses of a family.



Jeepney drivers tend to drive fast and cut off other cars to get to hailing customers. Nevertheless, watching Jeepney's drivers weaving in and out of traffic can be entertaining in itself. Comfort wise, drivers usually wait for the Jeepney to be full before starting their route. Just when you think no more people can fit in the vehicle, one more passenger manages to squeeze in. Personal space can be close to inexistent and open windows for ventilation can feel insufficient when the Jeepney is overloaded with passengers and the weather is hot.

⁶ <http://www.odditycentral.com/pics/jeepney-buses-art-on-wheels-in-the-philippines.html>

⁷ <http://www.alu.org.ph/139/TUCP-welcomes-e-jeepneys--monthly-salary-for-drivers>

⁸ <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/01/31/drivers-decry-shrinking-income-demand-big-time-rollback-in-oil-prices/>

<https://blackhelios.wordpress.com/2012/06/05/a-confession-of-a-jeepney-driver/>

Tips on riding a Jeepney

Usually, a sign on the windshield tells you where the Jeepney is heading to. Make sure you travel with coins as drivers may not have enough change for big bills. You can pay for your fare by saying 'bayad po' and then give the money to the person next to you to pass it along to the driver. Jeepney courtesy dictates that you too should pass other passengers' money to the driver if needed. Saying 'para po', pulling the string located close to the ceiling or simply banging on the ceiling are all viable signals to tell the driver that this is your stop. The driver will usually pull over as soon as possible to let you get off the Jeepney. I like to add a 'thank you po' but this is neither common nor required when riding a Jeepney in the Philippines.

