

## Getting to Know the Igorots – Getting Around – The Jeepney

By: *Claus (Agpad) Nabert*

---



Something that is uniquely Philippines is the jeepney. They're like insects, you see them everywhere. When the Americans finally left after world war two there were hundreds of surplus jeeps available and the ever creative Filipinos acquired them, stripped them, rebuilt them and called them jeepneys. This vehicle emerged quickly as the most popular creative way to re-establish all kinds of things, like public transportation as well as shipping goods.

Today jeepneys come from two sources. There are a couple of manufacturers who do make jeepneys, David Motors Inc. in Quezon City, and the largest manufacturer of vintage style army jeepneys is MD Juan. While there are the odd lesser manufacturers too, by far the bulk of the makers are small private concerns. Frequently jeepneys are built from the ground up with used parts and engines. Sometimes when a privately owned workshop no longer has used parts they would purchase parts from the few formal manufacturers. Some of the workshops are one stop shops where you can design the jeepney from the ground up and eventually leave with a complete one that is even painted and decorated. Other shops specialize. Some will make the chassis and suspension and provide the engine. Then it goes to another shop that custom builds the body. From there you go to a shop that does all the painting and art work.



Jeepney "Factory"

Having a one stop shop is convenient in that you get a finished vehicle eventually with no additional fuss. On the other hand dealing with several shops as the vehicle comes together allows you to select the most creative people to build the vehicle exactly to your tastes and needs.



The jeepneys do everything. Their primary role is people transport. There are two benches, one on each side of the back. You climb into the back and just sit on a bench. Before the vehicle leaves the drivers tend to pack in as many additional people as they can and they will load the middle with cargo. If you ever wonder how a sardine feels squished into a small can, this is the most effective way to find out. More challenging is that if the trip is over the

unpaved mountain roads you become coated in dust and you are constantly thrown about. Worse, the padded seat is only lightly padded so before long it starts to feel like cement. But eventually you arrive.



Jeepney Stop

one and nothing to direct you there, you simply had to know and you had to know the last one was at four PM each day too.

As to how many people they can handle, if you want to sit comfortably the limit is about twenty or twenty two. However Filipinos are often short and very slim and they don't seem to mind being squeezed together. One time I watched passengers getting out of a jeepney hired to go on an outing. By the time everyone got out I counted forty three people. I couldn't believe it.



When the jeepneys are not transporting people they are transporting goods. Often around the harvest time some will remove the two benches and load the entire interior with things like cabbages or bags of rice etc. These are usually private contractors as opposed to people movers. Those who have a regular transit route have to drive that route all the time or lose their license whereas the private contractors who do not



have a route are able to transport anything they like whenever they like. Interestingly, both class of jeepneys make about the same money. Today more modern vehicles are being built but the jeepney seems to be a vehicle built to last forever especially in a country that has no snow and corrosive salt. But I suspect eventually the museum will be their end. In tests between an air conditioned modern bus and a typical jeepney they both consumed the same amount of fuel which makes the jeepney very environmentally unfriendly. But if they ever disappear I'll miss

them. As miserable as the ride always is, it's still a fascinating experience and part of the Philippines.