At the end of WWII when American troops were leaving the Philippines, they left behind hundreds of Jeeps.

With typical Filipino ingenuity the locals quickly modified them to carry more passengers, decorated them with flamboyant colors and ornaments, and used them as minibuses. Since then the jeepney has become the most popular public transport vehicle in the country.

Boarding the jeepney:
To get a jeepney to stop just hold your arm out when you see one approaching. Before boarding make sure you read the destination sign on the front windscreen. Jeepneys on the same street can go to many different destinations.

Most Filipinos leave signalling the driver until very late. Many don’t signal at all and expect the driver to know they want to board. Perhaps they think the drivers are also mind readers.

Choosing a Seat
Now you have signalled the jeepney and the driver has stopped, where will you sit?

I always prefer the seat next to the driver. By sitting there you have a more comfortable seat and a much better view.

However, another passenger may also want to sit in the front. In that case you are expected to move up close to the driver and share the seat, even if it is a single seat.

That usually puts you within striking distance of the gear lever – something the driver shoves around endlessly, usually into your leg.

If you have to sit in the back I suggest sitting on the left rather than the right. The reason is simple – when stopping, the driver seldom pulls all the way off the road. It’s the right hand wheels that go down into the pot-holes on the road shoulder – bouncy, bouncy.

Should you sit at the back or at the front? Getting to the front means crouching low and climbing over the other passengers’ luggage. This luggage could be bags of market produce, buckets of dead (and smelly) fish, or simply kids’ school bags.

On the other hand, sitting at the front can give you a slightly more comfortable ride.

Sitting at the back, however, puts you right at the end of the see-saw. The back of the jeepney is by far the bounciest place to sit.

Sitting at the back also puts you over the rear suspension which often is non-existent – no springs, no shock absorbers. You will then feel every rut and pot-hole on the road.

Paying the Fare
OK, now you’re on board it’s time to pay the fare. But you’re sitting down the back so how do you get the money up to the driver?

It’s easy – just hold the money out and call “Bayad” (this means PAY). A passenger near you will take your money and pass it to another passenger who in turn will pass it to another until the money finally reaches the driver.
The driver will be holding his right hand palm up and open, waiting for the money. It’s then you should call out your destination.

The driver will count the change and hand it back. Then the same hand-by-hand process will repeat itself until the change gets back to you. Easy!

**Getting the Jeepney to Stop**
You now see your destination coming up. How do you get the driver to stop?

There are several ways – you can rap your knuckles on the roof, tap a coin on one of the overhead metal hand rails, or simply shout “para.”

The word “para” comes from a Spanish word meaning STOP.

(I remember the word “para” as short for “parachute” – I want to bail out.)

**Jeepney Passenger Capacity**
Q. How many passengers can a jeepney hold?

A crowded Jeepney

A. Always one more!

That’s not much of an exaggeration. When the inside is full, other passengers will often stand on the rear steps and hold on for dear life.

Private Jeepneys go one better – the excess passengers, complete with baggage, pack themselves onto the roof!

**Jeepney Conductors**
Very few jeepneys have conductors. It’s not surprising – why pay someone for doing something you can easily do yourself?

In any case a conductor takes up a valuable seat that should be kept for paying passengers.

Sometimes the driver will have a family member act as conductor. In this case the family member is usually a wife or a child who will sit in the front beside the driver.

**The Drivers**
Jeepney drivers have a lot to occupy them...

* Watching for potential passengers (on both sides of the road)
* Tooting the horn to attract passengers
* Shouting his destination as he passes potential passengers
* Counting change for passengers
* Chatting on his cell phone
* And last of all... watching the other traffic

The worst jeepney drivers I have encountered are those in Ermita, Manila. These have absolutely no concern for passenger comfort or safety. It’s swerve left, swerve right, on the brake, off the brake, and when you get off you feel as if you’ve just been on a roller coaster.

And getting off is another art. You signal the driver to stop. He does... right in the middle of the road. You get off and find yourself isolated, with traffic hurtling past you on both sides. Now the trick is to get to the safety of the footpath without getting run over.
If you are in a hurry to get to your destination... don't be. The driver is concerned only with picking up more passengers, not getting anywhere on time.

Drivers will often stop at an intersection hoping that the people walking toward him will turn into passengers. I once got into a jeepney that was waiting outside the petrol station in Fields Avenue, Angeles.

After 10 minutes the jeepney still hadn't moved so I got out and walked. I arrived at the terminal well ahead of that jeepney.

**How to Stay Safe on a Jeepney**

Jeepney passengers are a common target for pickpockets, so guard your valuables carefully.

A common trick in Angeles is for a passenger sitting opposite you to drop some coins. He will then lean forward and put his hand on your knee for support while using his other hand to pick up the dropped coins from the floor.

While rummaging around he will shake your knee. This is to distract your attention from the bloke sitting next to you. This bloke will carefully take everything out of your trouser pocket or purse. Beware!
