In the Philippines, the construction of bridges occurred with the colonization of the islands by the Spaniards. Prior to their arrival, tribal communities lived beside bodies of water and travelled from one place to another via small boats. The Spaniards on the other hand in their desire to colonize and Christianize the natives established fixed communities under a system of governance and town planning known as Leyes de las Indias, or the Laws of the Indies. This dictated that communities should be permanent and safe, and accessible by land or sea to other towns. With the necessity of accessibility, especially by land, the need to establish road links and subsequently bridges became a priority of the Spanish Colonial authorities. The building of roads and bridges, Caminos y Puentes, in the country was initially conducted by the Spanish Friars assigned to a particular mission. These friars were neither trained engineers nor builders but with a basic understanding of Renaissance building techniques as well as most likely a pattern book brought in from Mexico or Europe, the construction of lasting bridges commenced. Though subsequently replaced by trained Engineers from Spain, the Inspección General de Obras Publicas or the General Board of Public Works was created by Royal Decree in 1866, the construction of these bridges, some still standing has proven that ancient building principles and techniques can never be replaced by modern technology. Though during the latter part of Spanish colonization, and with the arrival of the Americans in 1898, technology did come in with the construction of four significant bridges in the country.
On The Bridge of Spain, Manila, Philippine Islands.
The Puente de España, the precursor to the Jones Bridge was a bridge of major proportions to be built across the mighty Rio del Pasig. Erected in 1875 to replace the earlier Puente Grande, the Puente de España had six spans of masonry and two central arches of iron. Capable of accommodating pedestrian and vehicular traffic, at that time consisting of horse or carabao drawn carts and carriages as well as a modern trolley system, the tranvia, the Puente de España lasted until its subsequent replacement during the 1930’s with Juan Arellano’s Neo-Classical masterpiece, Jones Bridge.

Another significant structure erected across the Pasig was the precursor to the art deco Quezon Bridge in Quiapo. The Puente de Colgante was the second bridge to be opened to cross the river.
A beautiful piece of engineering in a time when Manila was vying for the title of **Paris of the Orient**, the Puente de Colgante was a suspension bridge. Erected in 1852 by Matia, Menchacatorre y Cia, a private company, the bridge, had the distinction of having probably two “firsts” in its reputation.

The first suspension bridge, not only the Philippines but in **South East Asia** as well, and, probably the first toll bridge of its kind in the Philippines, a precursor of the modern Sky Way, albeit for pedestrian use only.
The third to be built spanning the Pasig was the **Puente de Convalecencia** or better known as the Ayala Bridge, originally composed of two separate spans connected by the Isla de Convalecencia, which is home to Hospisio de San Jose, dropping point for abandoned babies, the bridge over this island was originally made of wooden arched trusses.

Completed in 1880, it suffered major structural damage and completely collapsed 10 years later. This was subsequently replaced with a simple metal saw trussed bridge in the last decade of the 19th century, though not significant for its design, its engineer nevertheless is important in the annals of Philippine history, for it was the only bridge that the famed **French Engineer by the name of Gustave Eiffel** built in the country. This bridge, famous for its engineer or otherwise, similarly didn’t last long and was subsequently replaced.
The fourth significant span to be erected in the islands is small in comparison to those that crossed the mighty rivers of our country. Covering only a small distance, roughly about 15 meters, the bridge over the Estero de Binondo in Manila is unique due to its ability to lift its platform from the ground to accommodate passing boats or cascos.
The Lift Bridge inaugurated in 1913 was the only one of its kind in the country. Spared from the destruction that befell most of colonial Manila during the Liberation, the Lift Bridge of Estero de Binondo was until recently the only link to both banks of the estero along Calle Dasmariñas until, its subsequent replacement by the most beautiful of all DPWH bridges, the standard concrete bridge.

During the American Commonwealth Period, a frenzy of bridge building was experienced
throughout the whole archipelago. Great engineers and builders as they were, the American Master proved that what could be linked by a bridge was indeed connected. Only immense distances hampered the erection of a bridge and it was only long after independence that a bridge would connect major island groups. Other bridges as well crossed the various spans that litter our country. With the arrival of the trains, railroad bridges became increasingly important. Though uniform in nature, these bridges especially those built along the northern and southern lines bear witness to the growth and prosperity of the communities that the railroads passed.

Though a majority of these bridges were destroyed during the Second World War, its eventual reconstruction heralded a new dawn to a war ravaged country. Today these rail bridges that connect Manila to the north and south are still standing, though the north line has been abandoned, the ghosts of its past still haunt the familiar landscape with its bridges standing isolated and unused. The south line on the other hand is very much in use and its bridges constantly being inspected and repaired for the safe journey of not only the locomotives that pass above her but the make shift trolleys that ply her rails.