

ILOCOS LAKBAYAN – 5 – FINAL

Next four photos are out-of-sync shots from my point-and-shoot digital and wide angle film cameras. Too bad I forgot to bring my card reader. I would have been able to copy the images from the others' cameras. Left set shows the spruced up Laoag church façade and the bell tower across the street. This bell tower has



been sinking. Decades ago, the entrance could be entered on horseback, according to my late grandma. But now one has to crawl. Good thing the settling rate is even, otherwise, we'd have a leaning tower of Laoag.



Above right shows the Laoag River, with its wide bank, and shallow water. I remember one summer in 1951 when the locals stopped me from wading in the swollen, rain driven waters, reaching both banks. The photo



was shot from the Gilbert Bridge spanning the river. It is now a 4 lane roadway. Years ago, it was a 2 lane bailey bridge not unlike the well known and picturesque Quirino Bridge in Ilocos Sur, shown on the left photo. See what a Marcos can do? We didn't care to see his other legacies, such as the International airport, or the developed areas near the mouth of the river with its sand dunes, called Bantay Bimmabay, as it looks like a reclining pig.

Sunday was check out day from Fort Ilocandia hotel. After an early mass at a nearby chapel, and breakfast, we piled in the two vehicles and headed south for Vigan. Our itinerary called for two stops: Currimaos and



Badoc. Sitio Remedios is a famous beach resort in Currimaos owned by a doctor. He reassembled old houses to rent out, in lieu of hotel rooms or cottages. Mercy actually first considered this place (its only 6 km south of Paoay) but it was fully booked, and it was expensive. We arrived mid morning and got turned off by the snooty reception of the guards who had their instructions of not just letting anybody come in and case the joint. Even if rightly so, there could have been more diplomatic ways. After a call from Mercy and Mon to the doctor, whom they knew indirectly, some of us walked into the area. It was indeed fabulous. See inset.

Further south was the old town of Badoc. This was a must-see site because of the Juan Luna Museum, and another old church. I had vivid memories of this town because this is where an old grand aunt lived, and years ago, as we entered the church, hundreds of bats came flying out from the belfry. That expression of

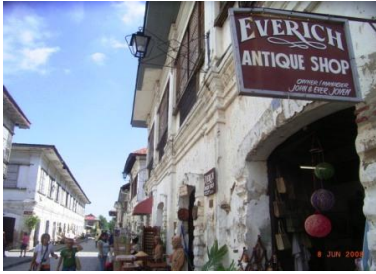


bats and belfrys always stuck to my mind. The church façade however, was now all whitewashed. But the bell tower and the walls were preserved in their original condition of old brick and stone with flying buttresses. But more significantly, soon after Lisa and I got married, we visited an old man in nearby Hacienda Luisita in Tanjay. He had immigrated there pre-war and was their chief mechanic. He was the only sibling of this grand aunt, known as "Maria i-badoc" which meant Maria of Badoc. There now is a growing Guerrero clan in Tanjay and they are my Ilocano connections.

The Luna Museum was terrific: great exhibits, well-maintained facilities. This bolstered the lore I read about the Lunas from Ambeth Ocampo's book. We generously gave to the donation box.



Vigan indeed is a city that had preserved its past. Whole sections went unscathed during the war, and furthermore, it seems that many of the rich people in the 19th century built their houses in the middle of the town, with its grid-like street pattern. So four huge houses occupy one whole city block. There are



block after block of these old, massive houses. Our hotel used to be one such large house. The shoppers area is Crisologo street, where antique shops beckon to the tourists from first floor storefronts of these old houses. Two blocks away was the Syquia Museum. President Elpidio Quirino had married into the Syquia clan, who in turn traced their forebears to a Chinese from the mainland named Sy Quia. There was a guide who gave us a comprehensive tour of the entire site; he was the last of four generations of caretakers.

We didn't have to travel far outside of Vigan to see other interesting sites. There was an excellent map I got from the hotel. In the next two days we visited the following:



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1. Another weaving shop, and this time, we saw actual hand looms in action. That's Lisa trying it out, coordinating the hand-foot action of throwing the spool of weft while maneuvering the foot pedals. This was familiar to me; years ago, under my grandma's house, there was such a contraption.
- 2 & 3. The Baluarte Zoo. Some say this is Chavit Singon's personal reparations for all the wrong-doings he did in the past: a free zoo to entertain all comers. The first picture shows camels and other hoofed animals. I was amazed at the miniature horses, weighing as little as 120 lbs. There were ostriches we could pet, and one of them snapped on my finger. But the caged "palm civet cat" is what caught our attention. That special coffee taken 4 days ago in the Soul restaurant may have come from beans that once passed through the digestive tract of one of this animal's cousins. As a matter of fact, the zoo cleaner was hosing down the cage of droppings, and Jess suggested we look for any beans.
4. The RG Pottery factory, founded in 1824. In the photo, the potter spins his wheel by foot, and forms the pot with his bare hands. I was surprised why it wasn't motorized. The large kiln was wood fired. All rejects are broken and sold by the truckload to Pangasinan fish pond owners for pond lining.

We also saw more sites and experienced other things such as: the Versoza Mansion that also doubled as a hotel, the Vigan church, various plazas, riding a calesa around town, shopping at the public market, fine dining at the outdoor Café Leona restaurant. Picture on right was our farewell cheers on our last night's dinner, compliments of Tony Estrera who had given the fine wine bottle to Jimmy precisely for such an occasion.



When we left for Manila the next day, we decided it would be a straight shot. No more sightseeing stopovers (except for food, gas, etc), despite tempting short side trips such as Tirad Pass or Manauag shrine. We got back to UP at dusk.

Danny Gil, 15 June 2008