

http://celdrantours.blogspot.com/2010_03_01_celdrantours_archive.html

SHORT NOTES FROM THE EDGE...

By: Carlos Celdran

March 18, 2010



B..B..BATANES

Earlier this year, I decided to slow down a bit on my tours. I have been touring folks around so much that I haven't found the time at all to travel and see the Philippines for myself. So when my friend Lia asked me if I wanted to check out [SEAIR](#) and fly to Batanes for a few days, (above). I answered with a short, "Hellz Yeah." I've never been to [northernmost part of The Philippines](#). I heard it was amazing and I had to see what all the fuss was about.

So here are some shots and notes from my two and a half day trip to the edge.



DAY ONE: DEPARTURE. Getting out of Manila Mode. Don't laugh at me. It's not easy to look good at 6:00am (above). Flights depart from the Manila Domestic airport (Yes, the vintage one). But don't knock it. They have a Cinnabon, magazines, and hotdogsilog along with massages available. It ain't Changi. But being Changi ain't the point here.



The SEAIR plane that took me to Basco, Batanes. The flight leaves daily at 8:30-ish in the morning and it costs around Php5000.00 ish pesos. If it's full, then there MIGHT be a second flight for the day. It's not as regular as their Manila - Caticlan flights but once again, that ain't the point here.



Coming in for a landing. In fairness, SEAIR's magazine is more than readable. I actually picked up a few travel ideas from it. The flight was quick. So was the magazine. Needless to say, I stole a copy to re-read in case I was bored. Note: Take advantage of the magazine stand at domestic airport if you are a distraction addict. Remember, there is NO wi-fi or 3G in MOST of Batanes. And that is a good thing. Without all the internet buzz, you actually get to know your brain all over again. And I'm glad that in the end, I actually like my brain.

Because three days dealing with a brain you don't like might be a problem.



The missus carrying her own luggage. Because that's the way we roll.



This is the Basco Airport (above) Fricking charming. I felt like I was landing at some ski lodge in Aspen. But since I've never been to Aspen, my closest peg would more like: "I felt like I was landing at the golf club of Camp John Hay in Baguio." Which is a pretty good peg for an airport if you really think about it. And don't take too much heed to the rumor that Batanes is inaccessible during rainy season. SEAIR will still fly there everyday if flight conditions allow. Some flights might be cancelled (due to bad weather) but there WILL be a flight at some point. Going to Batanes at around this time (SUMMER), weather is pretty stable. I wouldn't worry about getting stuck and missing work at all if you wanna do a two to three day trip to Batanes this time of year.



This is the runway of the airport (above). There were goats grazing on it. I swear to god, there were. I love that. It seems that Basco is a pretty sleepy town. Batanes is the northernmost, smallest province in the Philippines (219 square kilometers), 75% of the province are farmers, and the total population is a bit under 16,000 people. 16,000.00

people! There are more people inside Megamall at any given time than Batanes. And as I said, be prepared to get your brain in touch with the land and it's people. AGAIN. There is NO wi-fi in most places and even Smart Bro/Tattoo doesn't work too well outside of Basco town center. And in the outlying islands like Sabtang and Itbayat, forget it. There isn't even cellphone signal. And be reminded, this is a GOOD thing. If you are the kind of traveller who wants cable TV, convenience stores, and stuff, Forget it. Luzon is right next door. Kinda.



After a little bit of early morning drama, I finally checked into my hotel, [The Fundacion Pacita Abad](#). The only game in town, really. Take a look at their uber-cute Check in Office (above). Truth be told, there was a bit of a misunderstanding regarding transportation to our hotel accommodations, missing our city tour and stuff but in the end, I realized that it was just me expecting Batanes to act more like Manila. After a kick in the ass from my wife, I eventually snapped out of Manila mode. I was in the "now".

Batanes. Please take over my brain.



But first some gratuitous shots of the beautiful hotel Fundacion Pacita Abad. Seriously one of the most beautiful hotels in The Philippines. Check out the view from the path between the Fundacion Pacita Abad and my villa (above). There are no bad angles to Batanes. Furthermore, there are no bad angles to the FPA as well.



Gratuitous self Portrait (above). And believe it or not, it was only late in the game that I associated the artist Pacita Abad = Butch Abad = Liberal Party = Noynoy. Eeps. I'm in Noynoy-ville. I shoulda gotten clued in by the yellow baller bands on all the staff. Needless to say, to be courteous, I took off my green shirt and baller upon meeting Dina, his wife. No politicking here. No point. It's a yellow hotel. Hee hee.



Kinda. Our villa's walls were green. I wonder if they knew I was coming. Aw. Thanks guys.
By the way, Dina Abad is running for Congress up there. VOTE FOR DINA ABAD, OK?



Moving on. A better view of Fundacion Pacita Abad - without my ugly mug in the Gibo shirt blocking the view (above).



Our balcony overlooking the cliffs and the ocean. Seriously, this hotel is mad beautiful. It makes you wanna scream. It's like ugly was banned from the FPA.



The hotel lobby (above) and "Great Room". Everything here is dedicated to the amazing Filipino American painter Pacita Abad. Born in Batanes, Trained in Corcoran, Washington DC and the Art Students League in New York City, the FPA is a reflection of this woman's work, career, and capacity to connect cultures from the U.S. to the Philippines. Somehow, everything reminded me of my days in college at RISD. Even the lighting, the arrangement of furniture (of which they built mostly themselves in-house at FPA), screamed of U.S./Philippine art institution tastefulness. The place was so interesting that we ended up just taking a short trip into town to light candles at the [Santo Domingo de Basco Church](#) (YES. I know I'm a pseudo free-thinking self proclaimed agnostic, but some Catholic rituals I find to charming to give up), before heading back to stay in, drink wine, and read up about her life.

[Read about the life and career of Pacita Abad, which is both amazing and tragic. Click on the link here.\)](#)



The table in the FPA "Great Room" that would prove to be Tesa and my favorite spot throughout our stay. Right outside the window is a cliff dropping directly into a stormy sea.



The walkway to our villa.



Our candle-lit dinner. Nice. A totally Fil-American friendship type menu Pasta, Bagoong salad with ferns, Fried Chicken, Mushroom Soup. Dessert was Tiramisu if I remember correctly. Coffee was brewed.



The desk in my room overlooking the night sky. I would have sat down here and updated my blog and status, but fortunately, as i said twice before, wi-fi is very hard to come by in Batanes. I was asleep before ten.

And that is a very very good thing.

Tomorrow, Day two and a trip back in time.