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Room at the Top

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Chip Childers books into Fundacion Pacita, the late Ivatan artist Pacita Abad's former house, now turned into a hotel, and falls in love



LOCATION. Bravely straddling a ridge on the hills above Basco town in the windy barangay of Tukon, Fundacion Pacita Batanes Nature Lodge overlooks both the Pacific and South China Seas, and the 360 degree views from all areas of the property make Pacita seem like it was sponsored by a postcard company, with dormant volcano Mt. Iraya, Marlboro Country, the PAGASA Weather tower and other sites spread out right in front of you.

CHARACTER. If you are not an artist when you come to Fundacion Pacita, you will want to be one by the time you leave the hotel. Located on a former cow pasture owned by the Abad family, Fundacion was originally created as a home studio and casa de inspiración for the late artist Pacita Abad, whose tireless traveling around the globe never dampened her love for her native Batanes and its people. The serene setting and breathtaking views brought peace to the final two years of Pacita's life before she eventually succumbed to cancer. Fundacion Pacita was painstakingly refurbished by her brother, former Department of Education secretary Butch Abad, who continued on supporting Pacita's passions – celebrating her native Batanes, and encouraging local Ivatan artists to flourish. Proceeds from the lodge help to fund the Pacita Abad Center for the Arts, which educates young

artists from the province and supports heritage conservation projects in Batanes, such as the iconic stone vernacular houses. Finished in 2004, the compound has only this year opened as a lodge, and bookings are already in high demand. The stone architecture honors the local structures made out of stone, while the interior's African and European-inspired art installations show the influences of her travels.

ROOMS. If your hunch was, after pulling up to the stunning exterior that the rooms must be just as impeccably and charmingly decorated as what you just saw on your arrival, you would be correct. The rooms are a mix of modern and traditional comforts, the two setting the tone in decorating, with artistic detritus, books, shells and curios relaxing lighting and other painstakingly chosen objets d'art. Each room of this 10-room hotel, including the standalone cottages, has a private deck, and most rooms lead to a private garden and unique view of the scenery. Hot and cold water, mini-bar, queensize bed, private view decks and wi-fi access are standard. All rooms except the family loft have air-conditioning, although on most days, the wind blowing in from the ocean should be enough to cool you. A minimum of two days booking is required, pleading the case for making Fundacion the base for the duration of your stay in Batanes. Room rates are inclusive of set breakfast, round trip airport transfers, and a half day cultural heritage tour. Rooms begin at P4,500++ (about US \$100++) for the family loft, up to P7,900++ for the family terrace view. Away from the main building are several standalone cottages, for those wanting an additional notch of privacy.

FOOD. The order of the day is simplicity, quality and flexibility. Guests can indicate what they would like to eat during their stay, or trained chefs can surprise you with one of their few tasty

options. One uniquely Batanes option is the tatus, or coconut crab, which also tastes good with butter and lemon. Local veggies, fish and beef dominate menu choices, and can be cooked whichever way you want. The menu also includes the local flying fish and Ivatan adobo. Try the wild mabolo fruit if it's in season, just to have a taste of the exotic. Lunch and dinners are not included in the room rates, and run from P350-P900 per meal, depending on the fare.