

Islands less travelled

Text and photos by Armand Dominguez

IN the Northern most point of the Philippines lie the windswept islands of Batanes. Within these green patches of land are staggering seaside cliffs, gale force winds, white beached sand, and endless rolling hills.

Early this year,

my Dad and I visited Batanes. We stayed at the Fundacion Pacita, situated strategically on top of a seaside cliff. From the breakfast area overlooked the ocean and massive cliffs, while from the balcony of the room that my dad and I

stayed in, we had a clear view of Mt. Iraya.

The interiors of the Fundacion are decorated with the works of Pacita Abad, bearing witness to a time when it used to be Pacita Abad's studio. Today, it is a hotel, with Pacita

Abad's life written on the walls.

My dad and I stayed in Batanes for four days and four nights. Over those four days, our local tour guide, Roger, showed us some of the most awe-inspiring sites that we have seen in our lives.

The first place that Roger took us to was a Weather Station near the Fundacion, which he said was actually an observatory because it lacked a radar system. The observatory itself was at a high vantage point from which we could see almost the entire is-





A father and son go on a photo expedition to breathtaking Batanes, “The Islands less travelled”. The photo above shows Fundacion Pacita, a hotel on top of a sea-side cliff. See story on page 6.

land - the lush green hill sides with the occasional tree, Mt. Iraya, and several denizens on the island.

Near the observatory, was a small church used by the community that lived nearby. Inside it was quiet - not a sound but the click of the cameras and the sound of the footsteps of tourists who came to admire its stoic demeanor.

It wasn't long after the church that Roger took stopped the car for another site to behold. He took us to a small shrine of Mother Mary that was on one of the staggering cliffs of Batan. This cliff was different from the many others because it had stairs leading all the way to the bottom. From the pinnacle of the cliff you could watch the powerful waves crashing against the rocks again, and again, and again.

From the road, we saw a boat shelter at the base of the cliff. Roger said it was used as a safe point for boats that could not be hauled on shore during bad weather.

Next stop on our tour was the town Mahatao. When we arrived in the town, the students were all outside the school, playing, and we walked towards the town's church to the sound of children's laughter. The church was 300 years old and was made in the architecture typical of the Spanish colonial period.

Ivanna, the next town, had a church that was even older: The church in

a relatively uninhabited area of the island with very few people living nearby. We watched as the sun set on the lighthouse and lucky tourists like us, who were there to catch the sight.

On the second day of our trip Roger took us to a beach called Boulder Beach - a rather appropriate name as it was beach covered with massive rocks that gathered after eruptions from Mt. Iraiya.

For lunch Dad and I went to place called "Marlboro country". Marlboro country was a part of Batan that was mainly hills where cattle grazed. Lunch took place in a small hut atop one of the hills. After lunch, we walked down the lush green hills, to a point where we could no longer descend safely without climbing equipment. We stayed there for a good hour, looking at the clear blue sky, the azure waters, and the lone volcano looming before us.

Dad had something different planned for the third day of the trip to Batanes. Instead of touring around the island again, he decided that we would visit one of the other islands of Batanes called Sabtang. The island of Sabtang was full of a unique

traditional style of architecture. Roger explained that it was so that the homes could withstand the gale-forced winds that struck them almost every day.

While in Sabtang, Dad and I went around the entire island enjoying the scenery, whether it be architecture like the lighthouse, or natural landscapes such as the countless cliffs and a naturally forming stone arch on a beach.

On the last day of the trip we walked around the capital town of Basco, Batan. After wandering through town taking pictures, we went to the port of Basco and watched the glowing red sun set over a strange, rusted shipwreck off the port.

The trip to Batanes has changed me. Today I admire nature more; I admire how things are; I admire how sturdy well-made buildings are... I admire the world more today because of my trip to Batanes.

Armand has been living in Luzon, Philippines since 1995. He says that it was his father that taught him how to take good photos, and how to manipulate the light in pictures. Eventually, Armand would like to travel the world and explore it.

