

3rd Ambassador's/Consuls General Tour to the Philippines

By Judi Lebredo



Villa Escudero Labasin Waterfalls Lunch

The Philippines is an archipelago of more than 7,100 islands between the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea. Vietnam is to the east, Borneo is southwest and Taiwan is directly north. It is a mix of ancient cultures and advanced civilization. It contains some of the most diverse natural ecosystems ...soaring mountains, white sand beaches, tropical rainforests, underground rivers, limestone towers, volcanoes, uninhabited islands, protected reefs, cascading waterfalls as well as man-made rice terraces and coconut plantations.

In July 2007, I participated in the 3rd Ambassador's / Consuls General Tour to the Philippines. The trip was organized in part by The Philippine Embassies, Philippine Consulates General, Philippine Tourism Offices, and the Philippine Trade Offices in the United States and Canada.

The tour was developed for Filipinos and Filipino-Americans who have not returned to the country for a long period of time or per-

haps visiting for the very first time (as in the case of first-born generations). There were over 600 participants this year from the U.S. and Canada. My delegation was from the San Francisco jurisdiction; other jurisdictions included Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington D.C., to name a few. I had visited the Philippines only once before, over 30 years ago. This opportunity was a perfect re-introduction to the ancestral land of my family.

The Department of Tourism arranged the initial 3-4 day itinerary for the participants. Among the highlights of the Manila tour included a visit and luncheon at the Malacanang Palace and a meeting and photo session with Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. One of the full day tours included a trip to Villa Escudero. Villa Escudero is a scenic countryside colonial coconut plantation dating back to the 1800s. Lunch was served with the Labasin Waterfalls in the background and clear spring water running under the tables, making it a refreshing and soothing mid-day treat. Other day trips included tours of the Manila/Makati areas (Intramuros, Fort San-



Villa Escudero



Carabao



Philippines Jeepney



Hard Rock Cafe



Mall of Asia Globe

tiago, several museums). There was a wreath laying ceremony at the Rizal Monument, opportunities to visit Corregidor Island (known as "The Rock," it was the last Filipino-American bastion to fall to the Japanese); and a visit to the cool climate of Tagaytay, located 2500 feet above sea level and offering a panoramic view of the Taal Volcano.

Guest accommodations were at the Makati Shangri-La. Many of the meals served authentic Philippine dishes and were included as part of the tour package. The first night the ambassadors (as we were called) were treated to an exciting dinner and show, featuring Mindanao dancers and performers. In fact, there were several opportunities to view native and cultural performances during the trip. Police riding motorcycles escorted most of the bus tours (very helpful to navigate through Manila traffic) and knowledgeable guides were there to accompany us and assist the whole time.



Mall of Asia Ice Rink

In addition to the cultural program agenda, participants had opportunities to research and meet with various business entities in areas of investment, small business, franchises, real estate, and retirement. The tour was a great opportunity for business networking and making contacts with the motherland.

The tour could have ended in Manila, but most participants stayed and toured other regions of the country. Many found time to return to their respective hometowns and visit friends and family. It was common to add another week or two to the basic tour. Shopping was a priority for many, even if just to see the world's third largest mall, the Mall of Asia, or negotiate deals in the Green Hills district. The basic tour from SF cost around \$1,600 and the added-on options were limited only by your time and budget.

Even with its stunning natural scenery & attractions; it's the warm and engaging people of the Philippines that most visitors find unforgettable. From isolated hill tribes to the modern urban dwellers, Filipinos form a montage that reflects the islands rich and varied history. With all the wonder that is the Philippines, it is easy to understand why it is a must-see on any adventurer's list.



Welcome Dinner

Makati Manila



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Philippines: ■ By Judi Lebrede

In Past and Now

The country is marked by a true blend of cultures; truly in the Philippines, East meets West. The country reflects diverse indigenous people from its many islands, as well as influence from Asia (esp. Taiwan, China),

Spain, Latin America and the United States. The Filipino is basically of Malay, Austronesian or indigenous descent with a sprinkling of Chinese, American, Arab, or Spanish blood. The Spaniards introduced Christianity (the Roman Catholic faith) and succeeded in converting the overwhelming majority of Filipinos. At least 83% of the total population belongs to the Roman Catholic faith. In 2005, the Philippines had a population of over 85 million. The Philippines has Asia's largest Eurasian, Amerasian, and American population. Tribal communities can be found scattered across the archipelago. The Philippines

has more than 111 dialects spoken, owing to the subdivisions of these basic regional and cultural groups.

Modern Day Philippines:

The Philippines is a communication hub as evidenced by 12 English national newspapers, 7 national television stations, hundreds of cable TV stations, and 2,000 radio stations. Filipinos "text" average 3 billion messages each day. The Philippines is a newly industrialized country with an agricultural base, light industry, and service-sector economy. The Philippines is host to many of the business process outsourcing (BPO) industries in Asia. Numerous call centers and BPO firms have transferred to the Philippines, generating thousands of jobs, including positions with Fortune 500 companies.

The Philippines is currently the third-largest English speaking country in the world, 93% of the population speak English. **ATM**

Brief History and Background:

The Philippines has a diverse cultural history combining Asian, Spanish, and American influences. Prior to Spanish colonization in 1521, the Filipinos had a rich culture and were trading with the Chinese and the Japanese. In 1898, the Philippines became the first and only colony of the United States. Filipinos fought alongside Americans during World War II, particularly at the famous battle of Bataan and Corregidor. Then they waged a guerilla war against the Japanese from 1941 to 1945. The Philippines regained its independence in 1946.

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