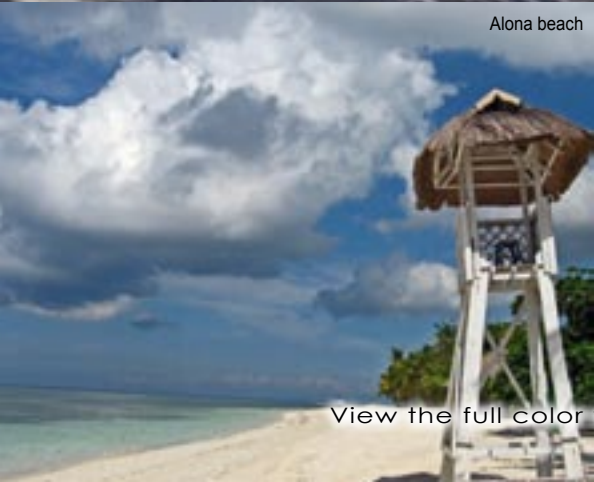




Alona beach



Alona beach



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Chocolate Hills

■ *By Judi Lebreo* **Bohol, Philippines**  
 – Treasure Island of Natural Wonders

**During a recent trip to the Philippines, I was able to visit the birthplace of my parents, an island called Bohol. As a first generation daughter of immigrants who met in California, I visited this island 30 years ago. Now that my parents have long passed, this trip was important as I wanted to explore the island that was connected to me through my ancestral roots.**

Back in the 1970s, I was immediately drawn to the quaintness, nature, and people (“Boholanos”) of this gem of an island. In July 2007 I found Bohol to be abundant in nature, rich in culture, and filled with pleasant discoveries. Although it has become a tourist destination because it has so much to offer, I found the island tranquil, yet captivating.

Bohol is the tenth largest island in the Philippines. It is one of the bigger islands in the Visayas, the group of islands in the center of the Philippines. Agriculture and tourism are the two main sources of income for Bohol. The island province is near Cebu in Central Philippines and is approximately one hour and fifty minutes from Manila.

Bohol is often referred to as the “Jewel of The Philippines.” Scenic Bohol draws from the many treasures spread throughout the 60-mile wide island: from the sparkling white beaches to the remarkable Chocolate Hills and centuries-old mission churches. Bohol’s beauty also lies in its unpolluted waters, which are rated among the best diving spots in the world and being host to some of the world’s rarest shells. Dolphin and whale watching is a popular activity during the right time of the year.

Bohol is the home of the tarsier, a tiny insect-eating monkey which size is smaller than a fist. Some scientists regard the protected species as the oldest mammal inhabiting the earth. Man-made mahogany forests and a national park are located in Bilar, while unspoiled jungles and forests are home to rare fauna and flora. Loboc River offers the opportunity to dine and enjoy the views of a nipa-lined emerald green river, which is part fresh water and part ocean/salt water. Mangrove forests, waterfalls, numerous caves, and coral reefs dot the island and provide more riches. Historical landmark churches dating to the 15th century are still being used for worship. The Chocolate Hills, all 1,000+ perfectly cone-shaped hills, are considered one of Philippines’ natural wonders and covers an area of about 18 square miles. They are called the “Chocolate Hills” because in the dry season the hilly grass turns brown.

People often go to Bohol for the resorts, relaxation, and the sandy white beaches. Once they arrive they see the natural beauty as well as the rare opportunity to catch glimpses of a simple life that for the most part, have not changed. It is a beautiful, peaceful, and enchanting tropical island with little development outside the capitol city, Tagbilaran. The island enjoys a relaxing slow pace, where life in the province goes on the same way as it always has. Along with its natural treasures, the vibrant people are another asset found within the island. Boholanos are famous for their



▲ Chocolate Hills



Loboc River Cruise ▲



Bilar Church

hospitality and warmth. It is remarkable to witness Bohulanos' simplicity, gaiety, and zest for life.

As with many places, Bohol is primed for changes. It has been grooming itself as a major ecotourism destination with several new resorts that are attracting snorkelers, divers, and nature lovers. While tourism will see a boost with the development of a new international airport on Panglao, I am hoping that Bohol will maintain the delicate balance between economic growth and ecological preservation. The aggressive campaign for tourism dollars should be managed well to protect the resources & its community for generations to come. The island is truly a showcase of history, culture, and nature.

This brief but meaningful journey to my ancestral land was insightful as well as inspiring. I was able to locate the gravesites of my maternal grandparents and see the hometown of my father for the first time. Seeing my family surname and middle name in a church, storefront, and cemetery brought both curiosity and delight. I imagined how it would have been to grow up in such beautiful surroundings yet felt gratitude for the circumstances that I have been given. My appreciation for their sacrifices grew as I toured their motherland, knowing it must have been very difficult to leave their families and the only home they had known. I am also grateful that I have "inherited" this island jewel as part of their legacy. I left Bohol still yearning for more, as this is the type of place you want to visit again. I look forward to returning someday ... as my list of "things to do and see in Bohol" is growing. **ATM**

▼Rice Field, Bohol

Bilar Mahogany Forest ▼



Judi's Mother - Bilar, Bohol



Shrine made by Judi's grandfather



Hotel Pool