

Cebu Travelogue

We recently came back from a 3 day trip to Cebu. There were a number of reasons. For one, we wanted to do our Christmas shopping at the bigger Cebu malls where the lobbies are cavernous and the garages have sensors on each parking slot that tell you where there is a vacant slot (green light) and there are signs telling how many vacancies are there per floor. No US version of this. See photos below.



Besides that, we always liked the short ferry ride on a WWII LCT, which means "Landing Craft Tank" so it makes me feel my SUV is a Sherman tank. The above left photo was taken from our ferry where the stair railing framed another ferry going the other way. And also, we wanted to try a highly reviewed Bed & Breakfast, instead of the same humdrum hotel fare.

We had some passengers with us. Lisa's niece and family came along for some Christmas shopping, too. They often take the bus to Cebu and stay with their kin. Another passenger was my cousin, Bino, a seasoned tour guide, and he offered his services for free. He said he'd bring us to the Lourdes of Cebu, the Sistine Chapel of Cebu, plus other interesting places.

This proved to be most intriguing. A direct drive would have taken us to Cebu by noon, but with all the meanderings, we got there late afternoon. First stop was the town of Boljoon, with an old church and bell tower, clearly marked as a Heritage site, so no incumbent priest or parish council can just tear up the place to do a pet project (unlike the Tanjay church).



Top left, the church as seen from the squat bell tower above. The Heritage sign on right does mention about the extensive archeological diggings as can be seen as light square patches on the left foreground photo. Inset identifies the 1692 priest.



The bells in the tower. But the base also served as a prison. Note the preserved etchings of a galleon by some poor prisoner who must have served his time in that era. Right photo shows the church's exquisitely painted ceiling, though it is relatively new, done in the 1920's and 30's, just like a host of other churches in Cebu and Bohol. Bino said two local artists stand out, Canuto Avila and Raymundo Francia. He had lots of lore about them. One of them could shift the paint brush to his toes and continue painting while laying on his back on the scaffolding. Imagine Michelangelo doing that in the Sistine Chapel?



The church had a simple structure, made more like a fortress to house the town's residents during pirate attacks so it had thick coral stone walls and massive wooden doors. Most coastlines have Moro watch-towers strung along vantage points for a continuous line-of-sight communication. Barely discernible in the above church photo are remains of a watch tower on top of the hill.

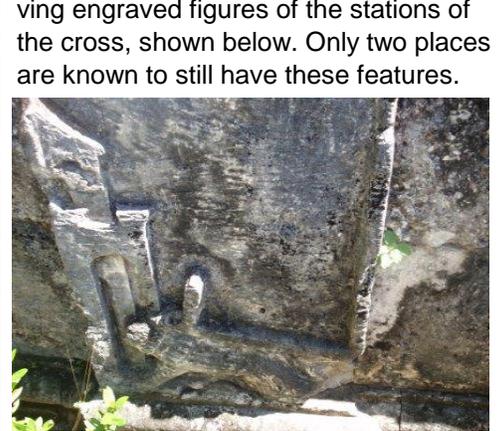
But modernity always creeps in. The sign in the photo on left proclaims the area as a Wi-Fi zone. There must be another tower somewhere from which hangs an antenna.



Next stop was Dalaguete church. It has the bell tower beside it. The church's ceiling was not as elaborately painted. See center photo. Note modern altar where priest faces the people. Right photo shows the side entrance and the flying buttress.



Above is stately church of Argao with tower, and cannons that I couldn't lift, and unique hedge wall which Bino points out as having engraved figures of the stations of the cross, shown below. Only two places are known to still have these features.



This is the Sistine Chapel of Cebu. The flat ceiling looks like bas-relief, but really is a mere painting. The arched ceiling is replete with hundreds of figures, scenes and symbols done with such elaborate detail that even the pleats of the clothing fold over so naturally. The area above the altar depicts Genesis. Top portion shows how God said "fiat lux - let there be light", and there was light. Second to the last portion shows man being created, and the last shows God resting. But something must have gotten wrong because towards the back of the church, where the figures are just as elaborate, the paintings stop, and the panels that would have made a complete scene (above) are left unfinished.



Next stop was at a weaver's shop, leftmost photo, showing the looms and spinning wheels. Bino says his foreign guests always get fascinated here. A supplier/buyer brings the raw materials and collects the product, mainly for export. We were lucky in that there were some leftover table runners which we could buy.

In contrast to the previous churches, the church in Simala, a few km inland from the town of Sibonga, is very new. The plaque on the crown structure says: "This Crown Structure is memorial to the victorious and powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mother thru the Penitential Rosary Walk in 1998, against the killer epidemic that struck the place, where several lives of poor children and infants had died. Built to honor Mary on the 8th year anniversary of the Monks arrival in Lindogon. Blessed on the 27th day of February, 2004". And indeed, the small original chapel already has been supplanted by a bigger one, and as shown



on the photo above, a newer addition is abuilding. As Bino says, this is the Lourdes of Cebu. Aside from alleged miraculous cures, I can certainly agree, especially in the commercial and carnival atmosphere outside the gated premises, and the hordes of people. There are racks of cabinets showing testimonials of miraculous cures, such as the third photo above showing discarded crutches and wheelchairs. But here, they are more systematic than Lourdes or Fatima. The winding road approaching the site is well maintained and concreted, and the coconut trees flanking the road are painted at their base with the Marian colors of light blue and white. And as the right photo shows, the candle racks have color-coded votive candles, available in clearly price-marked bins. Red if your petition is for love, yellow for health, etc (I may not be that accurate for the color coding). It was quite interesting in its originality, I must say.

But there was more interesting originality, at a funeral parlor near Carcar where most of all furnishings were modified caskets.



The waiting room furniture.

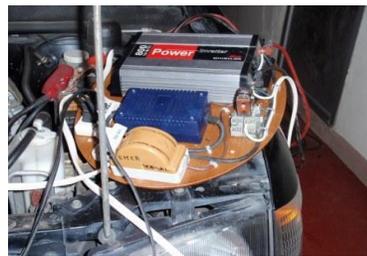
The overhead lighting.

Patio furniture.

Photo on right shows our nephew's back facing the wall mirror that is framed by sides of a casket. The patio furniture seems like an exception, but I wouldn't be surprised if the rims and leaf springs came from a hearse. But that's not all. A sign outside indicates that the owner also runs a sound and light studio for a wide variety of occasions - weddings, pageantries, political rallies, etc. Might be doing better than the monks at the church.

We passed by a few other places such as Carcar's oldest house, but I am running out of file space to show all. Suffice to say

that our Cebu trip was quite worth it. But I must confess of two other compelling reasons. I was in the market for a car battery for my emergency lighting contraption shown at right. My nephew had a source in Cebu with a deep discount. By the way, the DC inverter, charger, relays & knife switch that make up that contraption are mounted on a wooden toilet seat cover, but will stay in the garage. But the clincher was when an old buddy made good his promise to give me his extra air rifle, scope, silencer and all, if I came to Cebu. That's me testing it. Merry Christmas to all.



Danny Gil, 18 Dec 2009