

## TRAVELOGUE - TAKATUKA BEACH LODGE

From the sound of the place name "Takatuka Lodge & Diving Resort", one could imagine an oriental owner, not a Swiss-German who, not only owns (via his Filipino wife) the dominant resort in this mile stretch of a secluded pristine cove in Sipalay, Negros Occidental, but also is a compatriot to 4 other Swiss Nationals who own other resorts in the area.

My son-in-law Will, together with my daughter Babette and two children, are visiting from NJ/NY, and they found this place from the popular travel-guide book "Lonely Planet" and of course followed it up on the internet. Will is an avid traveler; in his younger years he went around the world as a "backpacker" - the term used for younger, more adventuresome, and certainly less affluent tourists. As they say that in the backpack of almost all budget travelers, you will find a copy of this book-guide.

Whereas most American tourists would expect to fly in, get bussed to, and step into the likes of a Westin Hotel, or Holiday Inn - as they would if they went to the classier Boracay resorts, or similar places in Cebu, Bohol, or Batangas, etc - they would have to pay pretty penny, perhaps up to \$250 a night on the high end. But who can beat the low end rate here at \$20 per night? We of course settled for the family suite (with air-con bedroom) for ourselves - Lisa, me, 2 "yayas" and the two kids - at a higher but very reasonable rate.

Not surprisingly, all the guests were European, mainly German. Some came with family; others were single men with their Filipina partners. The high seasons here starts in November, and is now just starting to enter the low season.

For starters, the term "Takatuka" is a word from some European fairy tale version of Alice in Wonderland. And

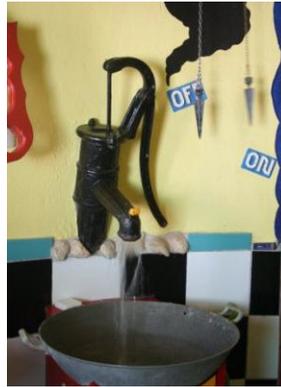


the owner seems to have adorned the place with fantasy. Our suite was named "El Castillo", and indeed, castle it was, with bamboo drawbridge at the foyer, domed circular bedroom with a mermaid figurine hanging from the ceiling



together with incongruous junk items such as a ship propeller, cow's harness, old paintbrushes, etc., all embedded into the walls. The bathroom had all sorts of accouterments cemented in the walls, such as cigarette lighters,

old CDrom players, goggles, etc. The toilet paper holder was an engine connecting-rod bolted to the floor. A horizontally fixed hatchet and handle was the towel rack.



The location and use of light switches and water faucets had to be explained to us, as they were bizarre, such as the bathroom lavatory made from a wok and whose old cast iron hand pump serving as a faucet had an old coccoo clock on the wall with "off" and "on" signs on pull handles for water control. The light switch was the horn button of an old Toyota steering wheel affixed to the wall. Indeed, this was fantasyland.

All in all, the accommodations were great, and more high tech than I've seen anywhere else. Motion sensors would light up the pathways at night. The fresh water showers were located all around the heavily shaded beach area among the easy chairs and hammocks, and they had a proper drainage to collecting tanks underneath. Their source was a deep well whose overhead water tank's overflow every morning indicated it was full.

What made me curious was the comment of one of the staffers that guests who smoked in the rooms would be cited because there were sensors. So when I was in the bath room, I checked if perhaps the goggles on the wall were hidden cameras.

The beach was great. Not with powdery white sand like Boracay, but close enough. Although the resort and its mile



stretch of beach is part of the mainland, it is more easily accessed by a 20 minute boat ride from Sipalay's beach front. See Google photo above.

There are dive areas further out at sea and around the cove (where I suppose the fine sand gives way to coral reefs), and just like the famous Apo Island, has all the facilities such as rental scuba gear, divemaster, etc. Babette lamented that she was out of practice from diving for so long that she would not take the chance of going diving, such as to the WWII warplane 35 meters in the deeper water off the cove, and of course, the fabulous coral reefs in the vicinity.

We had one dinner at the neighboring resort "Driftwood Village", also owned by a Swiss. The dining table was a slab of mahogany driftwood, suspended by nylon ropes. Must have weighed about half a ton.



So for the 2 days and 2 nights we were here, what did old fogies like Lisa and me do, as we don't dive, snorkel, or sunbathe? We swam a bit, ate a lot, and did a little bit of "apostolic" duty, pinch-hitting for the two house-help



whom we brought along to act as nannies for the 2 year and 10 month old grandkids, while the parents enjoyed themselves (while they could) devoid of the parenting duty.

And Lisa especially read a lot. There was a well stocked library in the resort, and even if half the books were in German, there were enough English novels that were interesting. As for me, there was the internet and laptop.

We walked to the closer end of the cove where there were caves in the sheer wall's overhang and I vowed to go



back with fins and snorkel, but later that afternoon I changed my mind as the tide was high the caves were underwater. Not for me. There are hiking trails and other interesting places to go to, but we didn't have the time. Some guests stay on here for a week or so.



Getting there and going back actually was half the fun. It was a 6-1/2 hour 230 km travel time from Tanjay via the southern route, along the coast, and included meandering to interesting places and a lunch stop at Bayawan City. As shown on the previous photo below, the view along the way sometimes gave way to something totally unexpected, such as the fishing village just past the town of Basay. The town faces the open sea which are great fishing grounds.



On the way back, we took the faster, shorter northern across-the-mountain route via Kabankalan and Mabinay. Fantastic views and scenic stops all along the way. See the map above. Sipalay is on the left center.

Interestingly, there is a much shorter route from Tanjay: the mountain route cutting across via Pamplona to Sta Catalina. But it is a horrible route, which I took with some friends in a four wheel drive the other year.

To my mind, Sipalay always has been synonymous with strife. During the Marcos years, especially after his sugar and coconut cartels deprived so much of the rightful share of the land-owner's wealth (and the much poorer sacadas, or field labor, as already exploited by the landowners), there was famine in the land, and unrest. This was a hot bed for the NPA, and justifiably so. Sipalay was then far and isolated. But not anymore. The roads are much better, and the economy certainly has taken a turn for the better.

Shall we go back again? Certainly. The owners have a petition for guests to sign that this pristine cove should never be allowed to have Karaoke bars, or jet-skis. They say they never would like this place to become another Boracay.

And for all those out there who intend to travel to the less touristy areas in the Philippines, do make this a stop. The internet brochure indicates it is only four hours by bus from Bacolod; about same from Dumaguete.

Danny Gil

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