

## ILOCOS LAKBAYAN - 1

The latest travel adventure of the “Lakbayans” was a 6 day trip to the Ilocos. Originally conceived over two years ago, the first plan called for a grand tour from Manila up to Aparri via the Cagayan valley, with a side trip to the rice terraces, then westward on the northern end of Luzon, and then back south wending its way on the Ilocos coast to Manila. There even was an ambitious plan to traverse the sea to Batanes. But it didn’t happen. There was instead a separate trip to Batanes March of 2007 that in itself was quite an adventure, as reported in much detail in the Upsca Newsletter Vol 16.

This trip was a scaled down version: a drive from Manila up to the farthest jump-off point point at Laoag where we stayed 3 nights, then 2 more nights in Vigan. From those two places, we made side trips radiating out to the interesting sites that took our fancy. We were in two vehicles: the van of Mercy which carried the Gils, Javellonas and Pasicolans, and the CRV of the Manlapaz’ shared with the Abads. Each vehicle had their drivers. Jimmy and Ting Ong originally were on the roster but they begged off as Jimmy needed a much needed rest from his hectic class schedule; besides they had been to Ilocos with family just two weeks before.

Although Mercy and Jimmy had flown in from their US trip a few days prior, Mercy had made all the arrangements for hotel accommodations and had prepared a list of interesting “must-see” places. Mimi had a full page clipping from a newspaper featuring the Ilocandia region; where to eat, etc.

We met Thursday at the UP Administration Bldg at 6:00 am. This was an opportunity for me to take photos of the Oblation. Looking now at the photo, perhaps I should have stepped back a few paces to the left, for a more revealing silhouette of the famous nude, if indeed it would have shown itself.



Anyway, right shot shows the Lakbayans. Not counting the two drivers loading baggage, and me the cameraman, that’s nine of us. Only Jimmy is caught full front view, but Jess’ and Romy’s profiles are quite clear. Good

thing they were dressed unlike the Oblation.



The North Expressway extending from EDSA to Dau, Pampanga, some 120 km plus, was an excellent ribbon of blacktop highway that allowed us to zip along at relatively high speed. Posted speed limit was 100 km/hr but we were hitting 110 plus, yet there still were other vehicles passing us. This toll road was



the first ever, built in the late 70’s I think, and the last time I passed through was in the late 90’s and it was horrible, with many stretches strewn with pot holes and heavy congestion on the two lane hardtop. In contrast, when it was still new, I remember zipping along in my uncle’s new car at 160 km/hr, or 100 mph, as he gave it the gas. We easily could have done it again but I wasn’t at the wheel. In comparison, the South Superhighway is in a worse condition, according to Jess and Jessie. For one, it carries much more traffic, and there is no more space for adding more lanes. The newest highway is one going to

Subic, but we weren’t going there. Bert Sandoval did email recently how impressive it was.



First stop was an excellent restaurant in Sison town right after the junction where one angles off to Baguio via Kennon road. The name of the joint was “Soul” and it was quite eclectic, with a variety of cuisine, catchy décor, and brewed coffee. It even had wifi for laptop users. And the prices were reasonable, except for the civet coffee where the grounds are taken from coffee beans that first went through the digestive tracts of a special civet animal. The rationale there is that the civet only eats the right coffee beans. So we get the best droppings. We had a filling lunch. Photo on left shows Jess & Jessie Javolona, Mimi & Mon Pasicolan, and Edna Manlapaz, the Pinoy style eaters. The others who took European style pasta were at the high tables.

This first day travel was the longest, since our destination was Laoag, some 480 km north, so we had figured 12 hours travel time with all the stops included. Our next stop was in Candon, Ilocos Sur. We parked at a crowded section of road beside Jolibee for a much needed pit stop. It so happened to be also at the plaza where the ancient church and bell tower - so typical of the Ilocandia churches - were located. But what struck me was the incongruity of what obviously was a facsimile Eiffel tower. See photo on right of the Candon church.



The free software GoogleEarth allows internet users to zoom in on any part of the earth and take a view anywhere from miles up, to a few hundred feet of the surface. However, not all areas on the earth are worth viewing; the oceans and other uninhabited places are shown in low resolution; just a general blur of the topographical outline is discernable. But for most urban areas, especially in the US, the surface scans are high resolution, so one can zoom down to say 300 feet and see clearly the roof of one’s house. In one internet exchange, Johnny Reyes claims that the view of his house in Belle Mead also showed him outside in his undershirt. But seriously, the software provides different switchable layers, such as roads, and most helpfully, blue point markers where anybody can post photographs of the particular area. Below is a photo of the Bangui windmills posted by some internet-savvy tourist.



This software feature proved to be most useful for us. With the laptop I brought, we managed to obviate more of the comedy of errors on the first night that had caused us time, gas and our patience.

To be continued.