

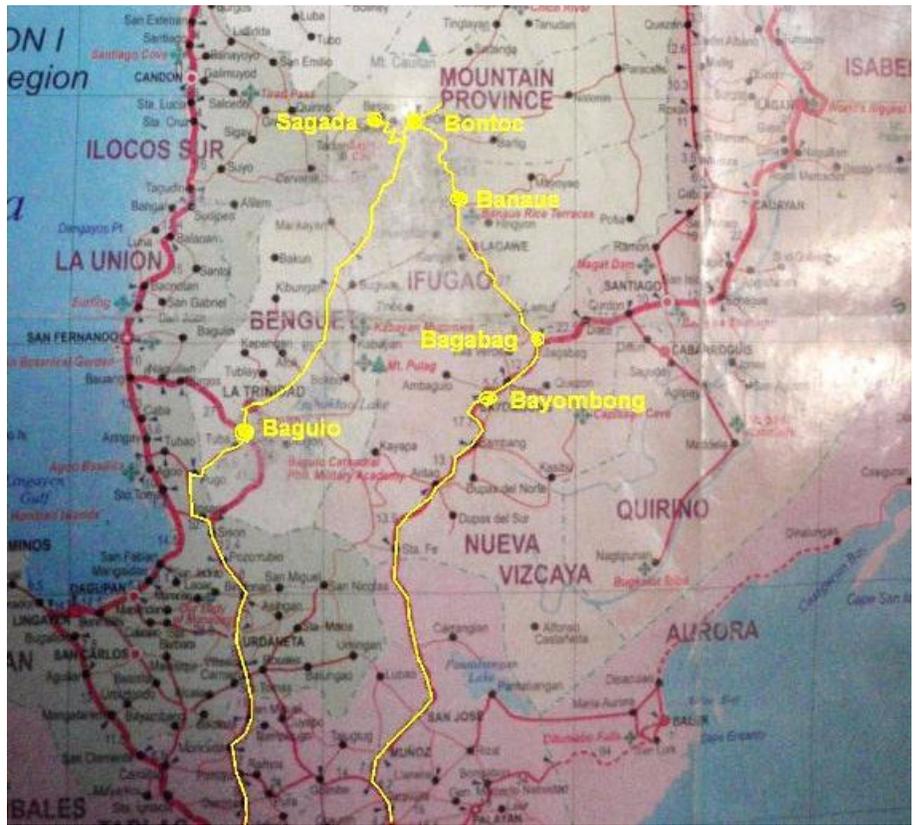
# SAGADA LAKBAYAN - 1

It all started mid year 2008, after the very exciting Ilocos Lakbayan, where 10 couples took a 5 day tour to Ilocandia. We vowed that Sagada would be the next destination - with it's fabulous rice terraces and breathtaking mountain views, not to mention the mummies, and caves and underground rivers. For those who may not recall, "Lakbayan" is a term we close UPSCA college friends use for the periodic trips we make to various places, here and abroad.

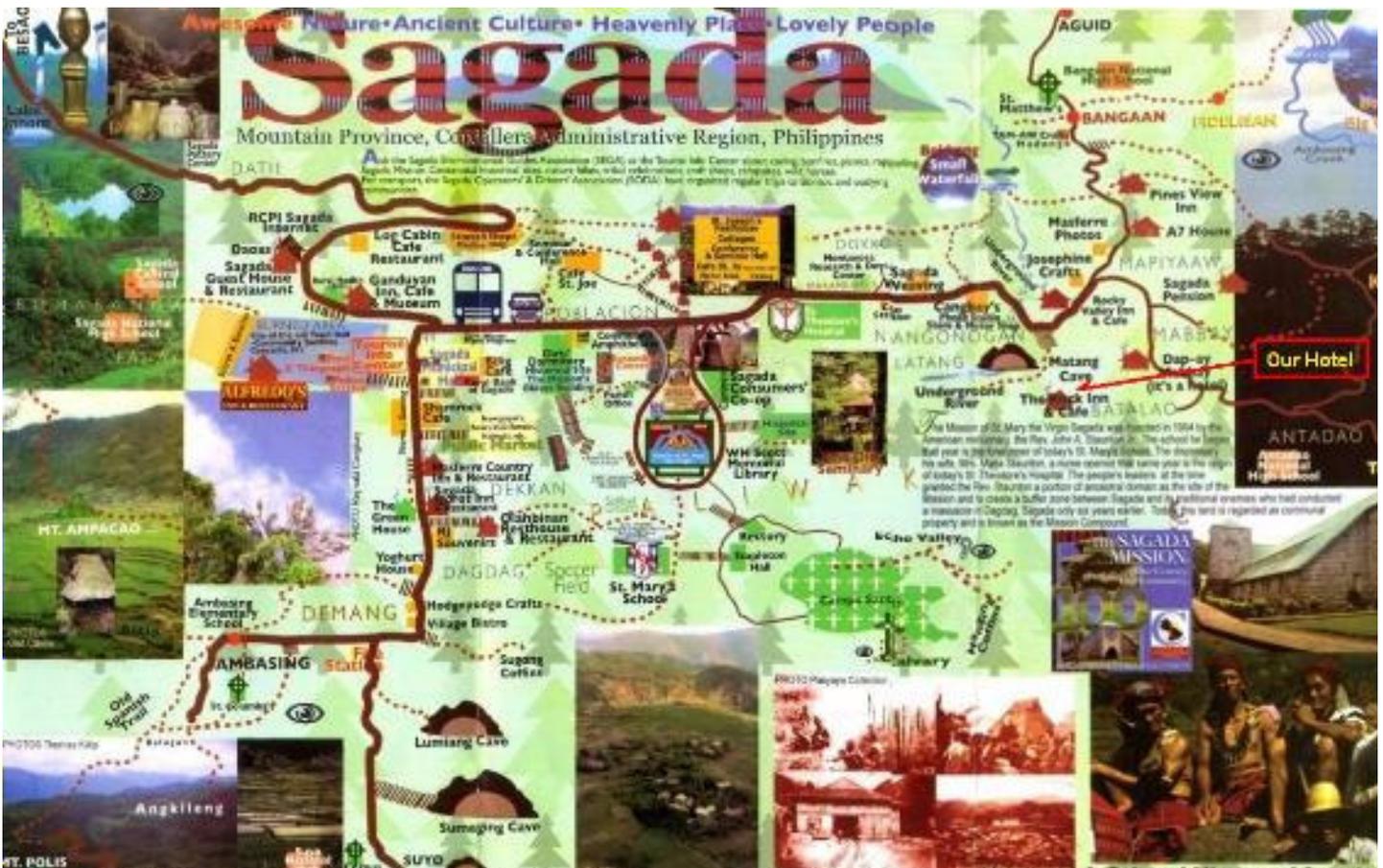
But 2009 came and went without the Sagada trip; it was unusually rainy, bad for the mountain drive.

In early 2010, a decision was made by the Gerry Gil Foundation's board members that it was high time to disband, as it was 15 years already since Gerry Gil's demise. What better time to do it on his birth month March by a big bash for all his old friends. Blanket invitations were made, which of course included all of the "Lakbay" friends. What better time to go on the Sagada Lakbayan right after the GGF bash. This dual event was a clincher for Bernie de Castro-Muller in Switzerland and Tony Estrera in Los Angeles: they said they'd fly in to join.

We ended up with ten people: the Abads, the Gils, the Pasicolans, the Manlapaz' and Bernie and Tony. Organizer Mercy hired a 15 seater van with 2 drivers for the 5 day trip, and reserved 4 nights at a local Sagada hotel. On



Monday March 21, we met at 4 a.m. at the UP Oblation and started off on the trek via the Cagayan Valley, shown as the right-side route in the above map. It was a harrowing 13.75 hour trip, but great and enjoyable. The van was a



tight fit with all the baggage piled in the last row of seats, with just enough space for me to sit in one corner with my laptop, and digital point & shoot camera handy at all times.

Fortunately, we had done all our homework. Between Mercy and Mon and the others, we had amassed a great amount of info on where to eat, where to take breaks, etc., and these kept coming in from text'd messages and phone calls. We turned down Pong Lustre's invitation to drop by for breakfast in his house in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, and instead went to a restaurant he suggested where there was all the native goodies such as tapsilog and logsilog (meaning tapa & itlog, and longanisa & itlog). It reminded me of another food acronym in the Visayas that sounded like shoot-to-kill but really meant sugba, tinola & kilawen (nothing but broiled and fresh fish). It took us some time to find the restaurant, and I voiced my complaints when we passed by a number of Jollibees and KFC's which became a standing joke about me stopping by at every Jollibee.



Photo above shows us at breakfast at the NE Restaurant.



Lunch in photo above was at the FGM Restaurant in Bayombong - "go around the plaza, look for the church, and it is in front" - such was the text'd instruction. And lo, it had a Wifi connection. This was the first of only 2 places where I could retrieve my emails in the next 5 days. And indeed, the church and bell tower was unique and we had some excellent photo ops

By this time, my laptop was already put to good use: logging all the expenses and travel/rest times into two spreadsheets. I became the treasurer to collect and disburse common funds. I also could download pictures from the camera into the laptop to show fullscreen to the others, and when the battery ran low, I had an inverter plugged into the van's cigarette lighter socket to charge the laptop via the 110 volt power supply. No wonder I gained another moniker: "oc-oc", meaning obsessive-compulsive.

At Bagabag, we took the turn-off northwestward (see map) to the mountainous road towards Banaue. It was slow and arduous driving, with the road zigzagging upwards through mountain passes with steep ravines overlooking rivers, and/or rice terraces. Many portions of the road were still undergoing repairs/upgrades.

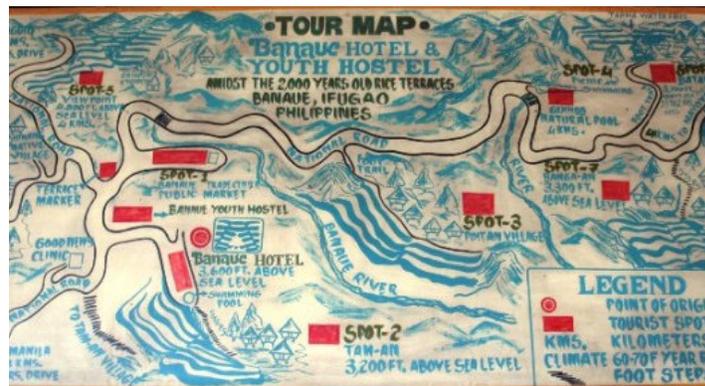
Here is where I realized the misconception about the famous rice terraces in Banaue.

Rice terraces are everywhere. Some are just grander.

It just is a matter of promotion. Obviously, the Banaue rice terraces were the most popular before. When we got to Banaue at 3 pm, it was time for coffee break at the famous, grand, but now jaded, 60 year old (maybe) Banaue Hotel.



Photo above shows how empty it was, save for a few elder foreigners at the other end. Below is a map of the area showing the hiking tracks and popular view points. The price list for hiring of tour guides was also fabulous.



I suppose if we had stayed in that hotel, and availed of all it's amenities, we would have witnessed the pageantry of native Igorot dancing and partaken of gustatory delights,



justifiably set to World Heritage standards as indicated by the plaque on above left photo. But we had to move on. The driver said it still was 3 more hours to Sagada and it was best to get there before nightfall. Instead of pretty maidens offering us welcoming garlands, all we saw was a old, lone Igorot woman walking on the rough road.

..... to be continued...

Danny Gil, 31 March 2010