

Travelogue - the Tanjay Circuit

Quite a number of friends have come to visit us over the past couple of years. Since the start of the year, no less than 13. Since most stay on an average of 2 days and 2 nights, there really is a limited opportunity to see most of the tourist trappings, which among others, would be Apo Island south of Dumaguete, with numerous jump-off points from various resorts, mainly foreign owned; Mabinay caves;



whale and dolphin watching at the Bais bay with side trips to the Sandbar and Mangrove forest; Twin lakes of Balinasayao with its ecological diversity; Lake Balanan with its well-developed amenities; highland town Valencia and nearby Forest Camp; and the hot and cold swimming holes (and three waterfalls) near Palimpinon's geothermal power station.

No wonder the present 5 daily flights to and from Manila are being upgraded to 7 flights. The photo on left shows the PAL plane and our latest set of guests Tony & Bernie Nievera, Tigi & Nora Barcelona and Max & Helen Joson deplaning a few days ago.

But not all the above-mentioned sites are still easily accessible. The Sendong storm last December caused a breakage of a natural dam somewhere in the towering Mt Talinis area, which resulted in a sudden and massive cascade of water down at least 3 rivers. One of them, the Banica River, scoured long sections of the newly concreted road to Palimpinon, and washed away two bridges. The Tanjay river rose, crested, and subsided in 4 hours and left the main national highway bridge's north approach washed away; it was impassable for 4 days. And to get to Forest camp, recently rehabilitated, though just 15 minutes away from Dumaguete, one has to ford a river bed as the bridge still is broken. Photo on right shows Nora and Helen at that bridge.



Then the Feb 6 earthquake centered in the Tayasan area, about 100 km north of Dumaguete rendered the north coastal route impassible, as roads buckled and bridges collapsed. A few days later, traffic could go via narrow detours and by fording the shallow portions of rivers where bridges had broken. Lisa's has many relatives in the area, and indeed, we had 2 sets of families as refugees for a few days after the quake. Facebook photo shows what happened. There were reports of sinkholes and other phenomena. This became one of my come-ons to photo-op



expert Tony: that perhaps we could go north to see the devastation. But with their 2 day schedule, there was no time. After all, they came here to relax at our place in Tanjay, see the town, see our farm a few kilometers west, and the beach house being eroded by the sea, etc. We just made the motions of going to the jump-off points, and showed photos of what they would have seen.

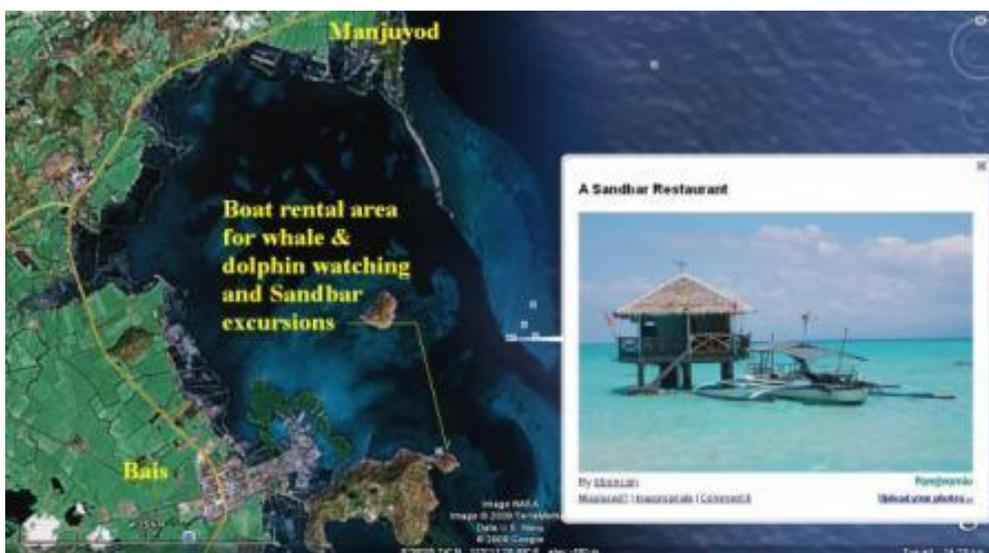
Their plane was 2 hours late, and so the breakfast at the Spanish restaurant along Dumaguete's famed Boulevard had to be scrubbed. We instead went straight to Pura Vida resort, about a half hour's drive south, for an early lunch, but first passing by the old Bacong church. Photo on right shows Tigi and Tony at the airport waiting for the porter to gather their baggage.



I didn't take many photos because I knew Tony would be snapping away with his 2 professional cameras with various lenses. Not surprisingly, he posted a number of excellent photos on the internet the next day. I had just upgraded my wifi to be a faster, and his iPad could handle all that uploading.

When finally we got together the group of six guests, plus their baggage, it was obvious that it would be an impossible fit for all in our van, even with the 4 bunk seats at the back. So we tried hiring a taxi, but couldn't quite communicate with the Korean owner of the 4 taxis at the airport garage, and ended up hiring a van, which was standing nearby, to bring just the baggage 30 km north to Tanjay. We got the name of the driver, the van's plate number, his cell, and his assurance that all the bags would get there, then gave specific instructions on where to find the house. We called our house help to watch for the van and to wait. In half an hour, we verified the baggage indeed was at home. Where else but in the provinces could something like this happen?

Pura Vida is one of the many sea-resorts dotting the coast near the famed Apo Island, world class marine sanctuary and scuba dive area frequented by foreigners. After an excellent lunch, we drove to Valencia, and got as near as 100 meters away from Forest Camp, but couldn't ford the river. Then we went to Dumaguete and had coffee in the Mall, before driving around to the City sights such as the Cathedral, the old Moro watch tower, and of course Silliman University. There's Tony shooting the Cathedral.



On left is a Google shot of the Bais Bay with inset of the Sandbar restaurant. We never got there, but just circumnavigated the island shown in the lower portion of the photo. This was part of our itinerary

the next day. On the island are a couple of piers used as jump-off points where "yachts" or outrigger bancas can be rented.

Photo on right shows the guests at one of these piers.



If we had had the time to spend a whole day, we probably would have seen the sight on above left photo: a pair of dolphins cavorting a few feet away from the boat. This was taken last year when our grandchildren visited. We had gone swimming at that area shown in the Google inset, a mile away from shore, yet at low tide, you stand on white sand.

Bais City is also known for its sugar central, where there once were grand estate houses when it still was managed by the Spanish elites of Tabacalera. Some of them still stand, such as “Casa Grande” and the bachelor’s quarters “Casa Soltera” But with the new owners, most of these have gone to pot.

The present mode of transport of the cane from the sugar fields to the sugar central is mainly by trucking, but there still are areas where narrow-gauge railways allow diesel locomotives to haul cane in the “bagonetas” or buggies.

And there is an old ancient steam locomotive on display. Photo on right is Tigi standing before it. Tony took a close look at the nameplate and said the locomotive was made in the USA.

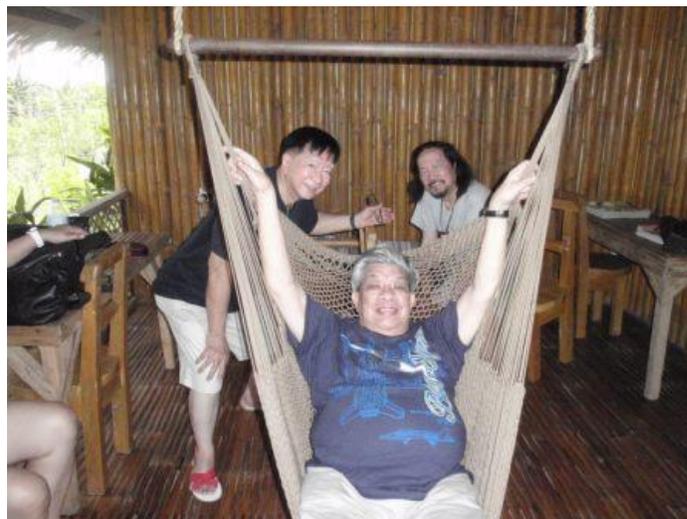


Tigi made the most of what was there. Our Tanjay house is on the main road, and among other commercial establishments, there is a barber shop That’s him being shaved.



After the Bais tour, we went to the farm, and had buko juice, budbud, and other delicacies. Photo on right shows the three guys relaxing at the farm house.

Unlike with earlier sets of guests where we have a sumptuous lunch and stay on the rest of the afternoon, we pushed on to our next destination: the beach house where we might take a dip since the tide was high that midmorning. But it turned out the sea was rough, so we proceeded to the next activity: lunch at a quaint restaurant a third up the way on the mountainous road to Lake Balinsasayao, about 14 km inland from the coastal road. We had planned to leave the girls there after lunch, then we guys go further on to the lake. The Google map below shows the overall view. The white stuff is not snow but cloud cover.



But an oversight on my part nixed the plan. I forgot to gas up, and didn’t have enough reserve for the extra drive to the lake and back. So we did the next best thing, as suggested by the restaurant owner, a friend of Lisa whom we had met in Dumaguete a week earlier at the snazzy hotel they owned. She had said we should relax and snooze after lunch in the easy chairs set up on the verandah specifically for that purpose, to the murmuring sounds of the river running way down in the canyon. We did just that.



After all, the restaurant, named “Azalea” is literally way in the boondocks, and when Lisa and I cased the joint last week over merienda, it seemed as if we had been the only guests that day.

Photo on left shows Helen, Lisa and Bernie placing their orders. I took the picture mainly to show Tony’s camera.

It was still bright when we drove back into Tanjay, and I decided to take the guests to a few more places. Earlier on the way to Bais, I had driven on the “bridge to nowhere”. It is a relatively new, modern steel bridge designed and donated by the German government to span the river at a lesser traversed road. Unfortunately, the government hasn’t yet fully

negotiated the appropriate right-of-way on one side of the bridge, so vehicles have to take a sharp turn on a narrow single lane dirt road to go to the concrete main road half a kilometer away. However, this bridge sure saved the day during the flood damage last December, when the main bridge was impassable.

The next place was “the pier to nowhere”. Actually, it is a fishing pier, and no large boats can ever dock there because even at high tide, the water depth is chest deep. At low tide, the shore line extends half a kilometer away. It is used among others as a basketball court, lover’s lane, meeting place for rallies, etc. That’s Tony and Tigi at the end of the pier.



But I think the highlight was earlier that morning when we went to the Tanjay church two blocks from the house. The patron saint of Tanjay is Señor Santiago.

So appropriate that Santiago “Tigi” Barcelona makes a visit. That’s Tigi & Tony beside the saint.



The church also has an iconic statue on the roof. It is that of a horse, shown on left photo, and it barely shows the saint riding on the horse.

Shown in foreground is Tigi, and I kidded him that he is not expected to climb to the roof to pose with the horse and the saint.

The next day, we convoyed to the Dumaguete pier for their fast ferry ride to Bohol.