

Mabua Days 2

Written by John Errol Loffler
Monday, 26 June 2017 19:43

The PNP (Philippines National Police) set up roadblocks today. How do I know? The banking up of vehicles either side of the roadblocks was pretty hilarious. I mean, you know how we have booze buses, and if you take a detour or stop down the street, they still get you? Well, the police are stopping vehicles coming to the road block and the start of the bank up is no more than 7 metres away. The cops take no notice of the avoidance and the mostly motorcyclists are happy to wait until the police call it a day!

Trucks, cars and mainly motorbikes dare not approach the roadblock because the penalty is vehicle forfeiture. Most vehicles are not registered or the drivers are not licensed. The other day, for instance, a concrete truck, driven by a 15-year old, wiped out a motorcycle, killing all three on the bike. (Lucky the motorcycle was carrying just 3. That's way below average!) The truck carried the same registration number as ALL the trucks in the fleet and of course, the driver, at 15, was unlicensed. Bad luck all round.

We have two motorcycles here at the hotel and I took the papers to the Motor Vehicle Registration offices. They were closed due to some festival of which I wasn't aware. In the locked front yard, there must have been 30 motorcycles and scooters. They were caught in the roadblocks and the drivers had to hand over their machines. I'm figuring this is a cheap way to buy a scooter. Offer the police 15,000php for a 65,000php scooter and ride off into the sunset. Well, the scooters and bikes will probably never be recovered because the owners cannot afford registration and/or licences!

However, I don't want to start on about transport here because that will take me into 10,000 words and up to the end of the season. Believe me, it's worth a read once I get it all down.

Martial Law has just been announced on Mindanao – that's where I am. Erk! I can't see it will affect me where I am. The city of Marawi is near Iligan and it's part of the autonomous Muslim area of Mindanao. It's only 404 kilometres away, so one hopes that anything going down there, stays there. There has been an evacuation of the area due to heavy gunfire and the military has been sent in. The autonomous area has a population of just over a 1 million. Marawi has a population of about 200,000, with 2 doctors and 1 nurse servicing the people. Poverty is rated at 72%.

More serious problems for me? The baker has gone to Leyte. Last week he was drunk. On both

Mabua Days 2

Written by John Errol Loffler
Monday, 26 June 2017 19:43

occasions, I was unable to get the bread he bakes. Bloody delicious. Three loaves set me back 100 php (\$2.50) and it makes great sandwiches and even better toast in the morning. I bet he's drunk in Leyte too!

How did I get here, you ask? Well, at the end of March I took a trip to Surigao to see a friend. I booked this place, it looked good and the price was right. I sat down with the owners, a Filipina woman who spent 27 years in Australia and is, in fact, an Australian citizen, and her husband, an Aussie, around 65 years old. I had only been there a few minutes and we were chatting. In passing, it was mentioned that they were heading back to Australia for three months and were looking for someone to manage the place in their absence. No hesitation: "I'll do it!"

The thing about my lifestyle, at the moment, is I can move anywhere at short notice. An internet connection, my laptop, and my worldly possessions in a suitcase. It seemed to be an adventure I could not resist. Experience running hotels/motels? Sure, I managed BP Norseman for a few months and the Rutherglen Motel for a couple of weeks. They were 50 rooms, two restaurants and thousands of litres of diesel a day at BP, and 15 rooms and wine tours at Rutherglen. Here there are 3 rooms.

Anyway, it's been fun. Met some really amazing people already. More stories to come from Mabua Beach.

Basol Island-Hop

I had some guests about a week ago, he was from the UK and she was from Dinagat Island, just off the coast of Surigao. I organised one of the fishing boats to take us to Basol Island, about a 30-minute trip. The weather was a little overcast but still hot. When we arrived at the island, it was deserted except for a friendly dog. I called her Robyn Crusoe, of course, teats hanging down low so there must have been pups not long ago, looked well fed and obviously very successful at using those sad eyes to get a decent feed from island hoppers. (pups not long ago...? So where did...ahhh...never mind!)

Mabua Days 2

Written by John Errol Loffler
Monday, 26 June 2017 19:43

There were only two beach cottages and before I had organised the trip, the rumour was that it costs 500php for a cottage. Did we pay the dog? Nope. The sound of a boat engine broke the peace of the island as it ran itself ashore and three guys landed on the beach.

At no stage did they talk to us, the foreigners, but through a seemingly complex system of meaningful looks, and bisayan language mutterings, it was clear that they were after the 500php. There was nothing to differentiate them from three local fishermen from the main island of Surigao, so to whom were we handing the money? On other islands I had visited there were uniformed caretakers collecting the cottage fees. We were in paradise mode so there was no argument from us and no confirmation barks from Crusoe, so they were given the cash!

The island itself had a beauty about it, but it was nowhere near a tropical paradise. For starters, the coral was non-existent. People coming from the mainland over the years may have been the cause, or it was a natural destruction. You were crunching old bits of coral under your feet as you walked along the shore. Sad. I had still brought my snorkel with me and you can't stay out of that warm sea water for long anyway.

One of my best investments I ever made was a pair of water shoes. I don't really know what you would call them, but the bottoms were stubby holders rubber and the upper part over your foot was a synthetic material of some sort. Not really diver's or proper snorkelling boots – I have a pair of those anyway. With pebble beaches and bits of coral, they were my walking and swimming footwear. Sadly, as I write they are on their last legs, or feet (pun intended) because cheap crap like that is not made to last. Ah well, another \$3 to replace them.

We spent most of the day on the island and Tim, who is a professional photographer, wandered off with his girlfriend to do some photo shoots. I had organised a couple of eskies with beer, soft drink and water in one, and the food in the other. When the eskies were opened, Crusoe showed a lot more interest in our visit. The begging eyes went into overdrive, so what choice did we have? Think about it. We might be the only island visitors before the weekend, for days. She wouldn't starve but she would be mighty hungry, might bite somebody, and most dogs here have rabies. There are two very large buildings in Surigao City next to the hospital called 'The Bite Center'. That's a fair clue.

Anyway, the day was really lovely, relaxing, and the water a lot calmer on the return boat ride. When you pass the more remote parts of the main island, you can see some grand structures being built on hillsides overlooking the Straits. Building in the Philippines has a lot more

Mabua Days 2

Written by John Errol Loffler
Monday, 26 June 2017 19:43

challenges than getting something done in OZ – believe me. Getting workers to front for the job is just one of them.

But who can blame them. Imagine waking up each day in your hut overlooking the pristine waters of Butuan Bay. You have a choice of going to work, no, find a job actually, or go for a swim and then back to sleep. What're ya gonna do?

{jcomments on}