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Philippines Trip

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Journals from Hong Kong Spring 2010

2010-03-14 Philippines Trip

We arrived the first day in Tagbilaran City, which is where the airport is on Bohol. This airport though is unlike any airport I've ever been to before, it has one landing strip and the pavement is rocky and the airport is one building with pretty much two rooms and that is all. Even the baggage claim is like maybe a 4 ft by 10ft circle. It was such a different experience, kind of felt like a 2nd world country. On the way to the place where we stayed we passed through the city, I couldn't tell you if there were any speed limits. They just honk and drive like 60mph on these tiny narrow little roads, and try to thread the needle trying get around these motorbikes with oncoming traffic. There were several times I thought we were going to hit an oncoming car/person on the side or the road.

But we finally got the Alona Beach on Panglao Island, which is where we stayed. Probably one of the most popular tourist areas on the island but it was really nice. Our place was a right on the beach and even though their resorts are a little different than our versions back home, how can you complain for \$8 USD per night. The first night the girls and I walked around the beach and checked out some places out. We ate at this one place, which was nice, and we were just ready to kick back and enjoy the upper 80 degree weather, it was perfect. Afterward we went to stand and got fresh mangos for dessert. You pick one out and then they cut it up for you and they were unbelievably delicious. I have never tasted such sweet fruit in my life! Probably why it became an ongoing event while I was there, I must have had mangos every single night for dessert, so good!

The first day there all of us decided we wanted to spend on the beach relaxing. My friend and I slept in and had a nice leisure morning laying out on the beach and getting massively sunburned. We also went shopping a bit and got some pretty sweet jewelry and sarongs. Our friends then met up with us later and we decided to all get massages on the beach! Best part was that they were a full hour long! Also, this was also the day I chased a cockroach out of our room, they have a lot of bugs and geckos running around everywhere in the Philippines. Wednesday was a very action packed and fun filled day!

We had scheduled a car to take us to Loboc, which is maybe an hour away on the main part of Bohol. We booked a lunch cruise on the Loboc River. This place was absolutely serene, the water is just this absolutely gorgeous shade of turquoise and there are trees surrounding the entire riverbank so it makes seem very jungley and secluded, so picturesque. The cruise was so much fun, the food was delicious. They had live music and they played a bunch of American music. On the way back up the river the boat pulls over at this stop where these native people are singing and dancing. So they dock up and everyone gets off the boat to go play these guitars and dance. I think though of all the things that I did on my trip this was definitely one of the highlights; it was just so much fun and maybe one of the prettiest places I have ever seen. After that we went to these things called the Chocolate Hills. Apparently they are supposed to be the

next wonder of the world though. Anyways, they are called this because during the summertime all the grass on these hills die and it turns them this shade of brown. There are over 1,000 of them in total so it looked like a ton of Hershey kisses off in the distance. However, when we were there it wasn't quite summer yet so they were still green colored but still really interesting to see.

Our final stop to visit the tarsiers. They are these tiny monkeys looking things with HUGE eyes. I guess they are actually one of the smallest, if not they smallest primate on earth, smaller than the size of your hand. Also they are endangered and the only place in the world they can only be found is in Bohol. That night was mellow. We had some Filipino food for dinner and it was awesome. In Hong Kong they don't use a lot of spices, everything is just boiled so it was nice to taste some spicy and flavorful food for a change.

Thursday was our big boating adventure!! We woke up at like 5 o'clock in the morning and headed down to the beach. We all boarded on these two little motor wooden boats and set out. The sun was just rising and it was absolutely gorgeous, rays of light were like streaming down from the clouds on the water. Absolutely beautiful. The first stop on the list was to go watch dolphins. There is place right off of another one of the islands where there are huge packs of dolphins that swim by everyday so we went and staked the boat right out in front of it. And what do you know 10 minutes later we see a group of maybe 4-6 swim by. It was really cool sight.

So then we turned the boat on and followed them and they lead us right into another huge group. As I'm trying to get my video working, one of the dolphins did a flip out of the water. There were still so many of them that it was incredible, unlike anything you'd be able to find back home, unless maybe you go to Sea World. Then we jetted out of there and headed to Balicasag Island for some snorkeling. It actually wasn't too far off the shore but they took us right where the sand level dropped so there were tons of fish. I've snorkeled before in the Caribbean but I think I would have to say that I enjoyed this even more. This fish were unbelievable shades of color: electric blue and rainbow, absolutely gorgeous. There was also a ton of pretty coral. Our guide had all of us dive down and touch a ton of things underwater (half of them I didn't even know what they were) but it was a blast. We must have spent an hour or 2 out there just swimming around looking at everything, it was amazing. And pretty much the only thing that I had been talking about wanting to do the entire trip so I am really glad that I got to do it.

After that we headed back in for lunch. This place was run by all locals and they had a selection of fish that they had caught that day right there for you to pick out. We decided to get blue marlin and they took it out of the bucket, put some seasoning on it and grilled it up right then and there for us. It was delicious! After that we headed back on the boat for our final destination, Virgin Island. Crystal blue water with a sandbar in the middle of the ocean, green island in the background with palm trees. I wish I could put into words how stunning it truly was. It was straight out of a postcard! We spent the rest of the afternoon there swimming around, taking pictures. I seriously did not want to ever leave. We walked on the sandbar all the

way to the beach and just soaked in the sun. On the way back, some lady was selling sea urchins so all of us decided to try them, fresh out of the ocean. Mixed with a little vinegar and they were actually pretty good, kind of tasted like crab. We then headed back our hotel, cleaned up and went out for a fun night of dancing on the beach!

Friday was the day we went to the Danao Adventure Park. The first thing that we went on was called the Suislide. Its pretty much like a zip line across the entire canyon and back. You lay on your stomach on a piece of cloth and then they buckle it in, give you a helmet and send you flying. An ongoing joke my friends and I have is that they always say BOMBS AWAY so we continue the trend back in Hong Kong. Once you get to the other side though you have to come back so it's like a 2 part thing. It was really cool; it literally felt like you were flying. And you look down and see nothing but trees and this pretty river running through, it was awesome but definitely needed to last longer. The next thing was the plunge, they were just setting it up for the day cause nobody had been on it yet so I was getting a little worried about that fact. We get up to the and look down and it's a straight drop off the side of a cliff over a canyon. My friend volunteered to go first and I was a little uneasy cause I wanted to make sure the equipment worked and everything but she was all for it. But finally it was my turn, they geared me up and I'm a nervous wreck. My heart is racing and all I'm thinking is get me down, get me down. So I sit on the ledge they lower it down so I'm sitting in just my harness with nothing underneath me, well besides the whole canyon. Bombs Away! I free fell 45 meters, in which I didn't even have time to scream cause I didn't even know what hit me. And then it swings out over the entire canyon for about 5 minutes, so I was able to finally take my hands off and enjoy. Probably the craziest thing I've done and I loved every minute of it. It was amazing!!

After that we went kayaking, we paddled upstream and downstream for a while and then ended at this one place for root climbing and rappelling. Root climbing is really awesome! You climb up the roots of a tree which are growing on the side of a cliff and you do it barefooted so you kind of feel like spider. And then once we got to the top we repelled back down it, I thoroughly enjoyed that part as well. Since we had been hanging out at Alona beach for all of previous nights we decided that it would be fun one night to take a tricycle bike into the city to get away from the tourists and go where locals go i.e. a discoteca! That was an absolute blast! Something that maybe I would have not normally done but it was well worth it. Then we left for the airport in the morning. I would have to say one of the best vacations I've ever been on, it was the perfect amount of relaxing and adventure, and I loved it. I will definitely be going back there again someday!

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