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DPWH ANNOUNCES PUBLIC BIDDING FOR BORACAY BRIDGE PROJECT



Facts

CONNECTING
PANAY ISLAND AND
BORACAY ISLAND

LENGTH
2.54 KM

ESTIMATED PROJECT COST
PhP5.48 BILLION

This is not a real or official representation of the proposed Boracay Bridge but is solely BSN's graphic rendition for visual purposes.

Artistic rendering by Alva Alvarez for Boracay Sun News (2019), edited by Charles Solano (2025)

BY FREIDA DARIO-SANTIAGO

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) made a public announcement last January 31, 2025, on their website, inviting local and international companies to submit their comparative proposals or bids for the highly controversial Boracay Bridge Project.

According to the invitation, the said comparative proposals are for “the

Comparative Bidding Process to finance, design, construct, operate and maintain an approximate 2.54-kilometer Boracay Bridge Project (BBP) connecting Boracay Island and the main island of Panay (Malay, Aklan) under a 30-year concession period from the start of operations.”

The Project is expected to:

- Open up a new all-weather access for vehicles and pedestrians, thereby, encouraging people to consider alternative accommodations and activity

centers on the mainland;

- Manage the environmental carrying capacity of Boracay Island; and
- Free up Boracay Island from overcrowding and overuse of existing facilities, which ultimately produce adverse environmental impact.

The comparative bidding for the project will be conducted in accordance with the procurement rules and procedures applicable for unsolicited proposals set out

in Republic Act No. 11966, “An Act Providing for the Public-Private Partnership Code of the Philippines (“PPP Code”), and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).”

For more information and to read the circular visit the DPWH website at www.dpwh.gov.ph/dpwh/announcements/36995.

Back story

In 2018, San Miguel Corporation (SMC)

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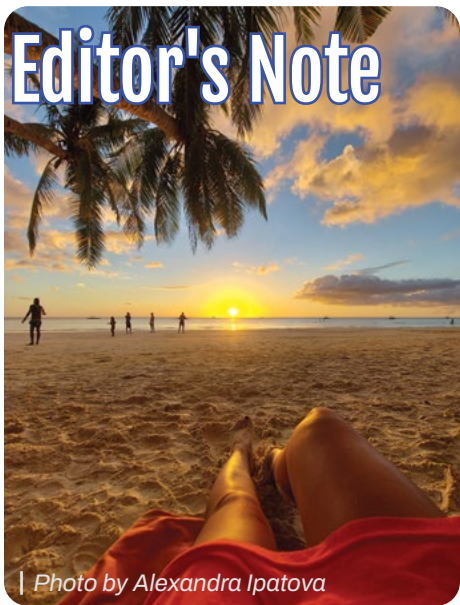
SPORTS
Boracay Sports Week

PERCY

“Best
seafood”
Esquire

Seaworthy Boracay, Station 1 Beachfront
in front of Willy's Rock





On everyone's lips ...

Like the metaphorical elephant in the room, all conversations in Boracay, no matter how they begin—be it about the weather, business, this or that person's lavish lifestyle posts or a new restaurant, the conversation will end up on the controversial debate on whether the proposed Boracay Bridge Project will be good or detrimental to the island.

My husband and I usually bite our tongues and try to stay mum or sit on the fence on the issue, but now that it seems like discussions are getting serious, we've been more vocal about where we stand, and you should too. Read the headline story which continues on page 3, so you can weigh the pros and cons and decide for yourself if you are in favor of the Boracay Bridge or not. Want your voice to be heard? Email us at fvds.boracaysunnews@gmail.com and we will publish some of your comments in the next edition of *Boracay Sun News*.

Celebrating Womanhood

This month, *Boracay Sun News* joins the global recognition of International Women's Day (March 8), with commemorations on the national level. In the Philippines, we celebrate National Women's Month on March 5.

Our special feature, "Women Empowered" (pages 14 to 16) is our way of spotlighting the community of highly accomplished women of Boracay who, in their own lives, professions and undertakings, have chosen to advocate for women's empowerment and gender equality.

The focus is on how women inspire other women to empower themselves by giving them tools and opportunities to improve their lives. By being living testaments of women who have overcome gender inequality and have taken on leadership roles, not only are they spreading awareness, but are beacons that inspire working women to excel and thrive.

We hope that this feature motivates women to break the glass ceiling and overcome the barriers that prevent them from advancing and reaching their full potential. We hope that other women realize that women's empowerment is not just a concept—it is real, as personified by the bold, brave and beautiful women who poured their hearts and souls into the interviews—**Sr. Elvie Oliamot, D.C., Normeth Parzhuber, Sarah Labrooy, Desiree Segovia and Karen Cabrera**.

We chose these lovely women because they are visionaries who push the envelope, and instead of seeing stumbling blocks along the way, these natural problem solvers welcome challenges and turn them into opportunities for women to thrive!

Thank you for sharing your truths, the challenges you face and what drives you

(and drives our men up the wall)! And of course, thanks to my collaborators as well, **Rica Velasco** and **Pauline Reitzer**, two exceptional women you don't want to cross! Haha!

You inspire not only hope but a sense of invincibility, because the truth is, we—both men and women—can achieve all that we set out to be, and find satisfaction and fulfillment when we give it our all and inspire change.

The Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country, and most of us were raised in a patriarchal society wherein the father was head of the family and the mother stayed home. Her job was to be a housewife, raise kids and feed the family. She was not expected to have a career, nor to have dreams or money of her own. In fact, she wasn't even expected to be smart, and surely, not smarter than the husband, who was the decision-maker, and therefore, the smartest and wisest in the household. Luckily, not all households are this way, but the majority are.

I grew up in a household of three daughters. Papa always had the last say. Mama was allowed a career, but only within the company, and Papa was her boss. So yes, we were not strangers to the concept of inequality, but we thought that was normal.

Boys always had the upper hand in the playground and in the classrooms, and for our parents, in the offices and boardrooms as well. So, how come we were not class presidents or varsity team captains despite having better grades and being faster, I often wondered.

As years rolled by and we had our careers, things started to change, and we felt seen in the workplace. We received promotions and became heads of departments and divisions. Today, Philippine society has tipped the scales towards a balance of powers between genders (men and women by birth). We've had two women presidents, former Pres. Corazon C. Aquino who was the first female president in Asia, and former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who was its second.

And let us not forget the late, former Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, who was named one of "The 100 Most Powerful Women in the World" in 1997 by *The Australian*. She was a Filipino scholar, academic, lawyer, judge, author, and

stateswoman who served in all three branches of the Philippine government: judicial, executive, and legislative.

Of the 23 Philippine senators, seven are women, and out of eight municipal

councilors of Malay,

two are women. Hopefully, this election year will produce an even stronger representation of women in public office, to give women a stronger voice and better chances in the fight for human rights equality, or the principle that all people are born free and equal, and have the same rights and dignity.

Achieving equal pay is another important goal for human rights and gender equality.

According to the United Nations (UN), across all regions, women are paid less than men, with the gender pay gap estimated at around 20 percent globally. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls continue to be held back owing to the persistence of historical and structural unequal power relations between

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women and men, poverty and inequalities and disadvantages in access to resources and opportunities that limit women's and girls' capabilities. Progress on narrowing that gap has been slow. While equal pay for men and women has been widely endorsed, applying it in practice has been difficult. (Source: UN.org)

Fun facts

Did you know that 50% of athletes in the Paris 2024 Olympics were women? The Paris 2024 Olympics made history by achieving full gender parity on the field of play for the first time.

The "woke" generation has come up with alternative spellings of "woman" (they think of everything, don't they?): "womyn," a feminist term for women, and "womxn," perceived as a more inclusive alternative. [The word "woke" is a slang term that originated in the United States. It can mean being aware of social justice issues or being obsessively politically correct and judgmental.]

When I think of the word WOMAN, what instantly come to mind are: Fortitude (strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or bear pain or adversity with courage); Strength; Resilience; Beauty and Badass!

I leave you with some of my favorite quotes on women. Wear these words like an armor, and always remember:

"Any time women come together with a collective intention, it's a powerful thing. Whether it's sitting down making a quilt, in a kitchen preparing a meal, in a club reading the same book, or around the table playing cards, or planning a birthday party, when women come together with a collective intention, magic happens." –Phylicia Rashad

"After all those years as a woman hearing 'not thin enough, not pretty enough, not smart

enough, not this enough, not that enough,' almost overnight I woke up one morning and thought, 'I'm enough.'" –Anna Quindlen

"She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness." (Proverbs 31:25-26, NLT)

To all you indefatigable and hard-working women out there, please, pat yourselves on the back and stop being your own slave driver/torturer. Learn to stop.

And lastly, to the wonderful women in my life, thank you for being a force and ally I can always rely on. To the girls and the next generation of women and future leaders of the world, you got this!

LIFE BEFORE WORK, women!

To all our visitors, **welcome to Boracay Island**, and **thank you** for choosing Boracay! Right on, and please, spread the word! 🌿

Vibe high, dive deep!

Peace and good vibes,

Editor-In-Chief

Email me at fvds@boracaysunnews@gmail.com.

For a daily dose of Boracay Sun News, visit any of our social media channels and be the first to know what's hot & happening in and around Boracay—the crown jewel of Philippine tourism!

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continued from front page

offered an unsolicited proposal to build a 1.2-kilometer bridge valued at PhP5.5 billion to connect the mainland of Malay, Aklan to Boracay Island. The Boracay Bridge would cross from Tabon in Caticlan to Manocmanoc in Boracay Island. SMC initially presented the complete proposal in January 2019 and received original proponent status.

On February 21, 2024, the DPWH announced that negotiations for the Boracay Bridge Project between the government and SMC's negotiating teams had commenced. The estimated cost was pegged at PhP6.497 billion, for the construction of the 2.54-kilometer limited-bridge access system with facility hubs connecting Boracay Island with Caticlan, Malay.

The bridge was pitched as a public-private partnership (PPP) between the DPWH and San Miguel Holdings Corporation, aimed at improving the transport of goods, facilitating waste disposal, and improving emergency response during typhoons and heavy rains.

With an estimated cost now at PhP5.48 billion, the project is proposed to be a two-way, two-lane bridge with provisions for a bike lane and sidewalk on each side.

In an article published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* last November 4, 2024, Malay Mayor Frolibar Bautista stressed the importance of public opinion, urging groups and individuals to weigh in on the project's impact.

"As long as the majority agrees and there's a win-win solution for those affected by the bridge, especially the pump boat operators, we need to move forward with caution," he said, noting the need for a comprehensive consultation with local stakeholders.

According to the same report, Aklan Gov. Florencio Miraflores opposed the project, arguing it could undermine businesses on the island and essential services reliant on tourism. Vice Gov. Reynaldo Quimpo said the provincial board was also drafting an official position paper opposing the project.

In an earlier statement, the Aklan provincial government had warned that Boracay's already delicate ecosystem might face further strain, adding to worries about potential job losses and revenue drops that could reach PhP361 million annually. (Source: *INQ.net*)

No proposal yet

The municipal council of Malay, in a resolution dated October 10, said it had not received any formal proposal or application from an investor for the construction of the Boracay bridge.

SB Malay assured the public that it would uphold transparency for all infrastructure and investment proposals for the bridge.

It promised the public that any infrastructure proposals would pass through stringent scrutiny and consultations.

Public opinion

Boracay Sun News (BSN) conducted an informal online community survey to gather the Boracay Island, Aklanon, and Malay municipality communities' thoughts and sentiments on the proposed BBP – a topic that has been fiercely debated for the past seven years, and published the results in the June 2024 issue (page 16-17).

The following is a compilation of the pros and cons based on the DPWH's project proposal and provisions found on their website (www.dpwh.gov.ph) and **BSN's** online survey.

Pros & Cons

Points raised in favor of the BBP: The bridge ...

- Will be a two-way, two-lane bridge with a bike lane and sidewalk on each side.
- Will connect Boracay Island with Caticlan, Malay.
- Is not intended to handle through traffic but will be used to move people, cargo, goods, waste, and supplies.

- Will provide access for utilities (power, telecommunication, water supply, and sewer utility lines).
- Will provide access for the transport of solid waste to help manage the environmental impact of Boracay.
- Will provide all-weather access to the island for people and vehicles, thereby encouraging people to consider alternative accommodations and activity centers on the mainland; alleviating overcrowding and overuse of resources on the island.
- Will provide all-weather access to the public and a safe evacuation route during times of calamities and medical emergencies.

Points raised in opposition to the BBP:

- Some boatmen and boat owners who operate ferry services between Caticlan and Boracay are concerned that the bridge will end their livelihood.
- Traffic problems due to accessibility of transportation in and out of the island.
- Easy access of contraband or other unwanted/illegal entities to the island.
- Lack of a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis.
- Lack of consultations with local stakeholders on potential environmental and social impacts.

The **BSN** survey which was conducted by Azenith Resurreccion on two platforms (SurveyMonkey and Facebook Polls), revealed the following results:

"The SurveyMonkey poll ran for two weeks with a total of 138 respondents comprised mostly of Boracay *Tumandok* or members of families of original residents. Surprisingly, we gathered equal votes for those 'in favor' and 'not in favor,' with a few undecided individuals.

Twenty out of 30 mainland Malay respondents were not in favor. Out of 101 Boracay respondents, 50 were in favor, 42 were not in favor and nine were 'not sure.'

Under the PROS, 26.81% favored the bridge, with the top reason being 'providing public transport access for supplies and utilities,' while 20.29% favored the benefit of 'providing all-weather access to the public and a safe evacuation route during times of calamities and for medical emergencies.'

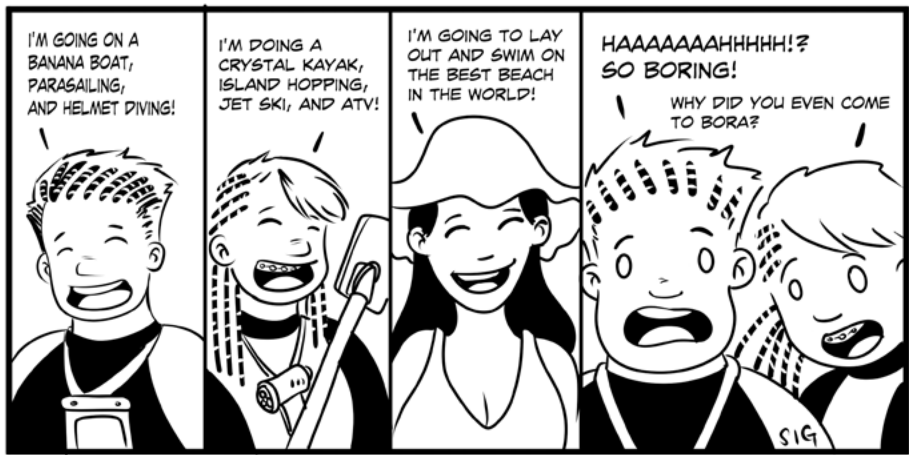
Under the CONS, 33.33% lamented the 'loss of jobs in the boat transportation sector,' 18.84% were concerned about the 'easy access of contraband or other unwanted or illegal entities to the island,' and 17.39% worried about 'traffic problems due to accessibility of transportation in and out of the island.'

The Facebook poll reached 3,500 accounts, with 56% that voted 'not in favor,' 40% that voted 'in favor' and 4% that were not sure.

Among the 40% of respondents who voted 'in favor,' the top reason was also to 'provide all-weather access to the public and safe evacuation.' Under the cons, 38% were concerned about the 'traffic problems that having the bridge would cause,' while 30% were concerned about the 'lack of comprehensive environmental impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis.'

Based on the results of this survey, the community was torn between the benefits and disadvantages of having a bridge to Boracay."

SUN TOONS Lightening up the day with a perky dose of humor



"Activity" by Sigmund Torre

Here are some notable comments from survey respondents:

"(The bridge will be helpful) in case of emergency, (since) our public hospital as we all know (has a) lack of facilities. It would be easier to transport patients especially senior citizens and persons with disabilities."

"All has worked without the bridge so far. The issues don't lie in not having a bridge, but rather not having more solid systems in place. It's not about the transportation but the actual system."

Social and environmental impact

"While the construction of the bridge from the mainland to Boracay Island could bring potential benefits, it is important to consider and mitigate the potential environmental and social impacts of the project through planning with foresight and consultation with all stakeholders. A comprehensive environmental impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis must be conducted before proceeding with the construction," said Ritchel Casidsid of the Aklan Trekkers, an Aklan mountaineering group that advocates environmental sustainability.

Not to be taken lightly is the plight of the motorboat operators and porters.

The Caticlan-Boracay Transport Multi-Purpose Cooperative (CBTMPC) is the sole organization that caters to motorboat transfers to and from the island with more than 4,000 members who are motorboat operators, boatmen, porters and industry workers.

According to CBTMPC vice chair Julieta Aron, they strongly oppose the bridge not only because of the jobs that will be affected but the environmental impact. A total of 350 motor banca and fast craft owners and operators, and 160 porters stand to lose their jobs if this project pushes through.

Mounting opposition

Last October 10, 2024, members of the CBTMPC held a motorcade that saw dozens of vehicles traveling from Barangay Caticlan to Barangay Poblacion to show their opposition to the bridge's construction.

According to *Rappler*, the CBTMPC has reached out to Aklan Vice Governor Reynaldo Quimpo, who, in a Facebook post, publicly expressed his opposition to the project, citing the lack of proper consultation with local stakeholders. He added that the project violates a provincial ordinance that enforces a "one entry/exit policy for the island to ensure the preservation and protection of the province's tourism assets."

In 2021, Godofredo Sadiasa, consultant for the CBTMPC said that CBTMPC members had to replace their wooden-hulled boats with fiber-reinforced plastic boats following the termination of their certificate of public convenience. "These boats aren't

just businesses. They are our way of life," he said in a local radio interview last November 2024.

Aside from the boatmen, 166 porters or baggage handlers servicing the jetty ports will likely lose their source of income from the project, according to the Vice Governor.

However, there are those who argue that the bridge will not eradicate the sea transport system from Caticlan to Boracay which will remain the primary means of tourist entry and departure, but will provide an alternative access.

Environmental impact

Beyond the economic hit, local leaders and boatmen were increasingly alarmed by the project's potential ecological footprint. Sadiasa said that the construction could damage Boracay's delicate coral reefs and the broader marine ecosystem which have been the foundation of the island's appeal and economy.

But the DPWH said the bridge "is not envisioned to cater vehicular through traffic, so as not to congest the island, but will be provided with loading/unloading areas on both ends to process the movement of commuters, solid waste, goods, and supplies." The project also aims to manage the environmental carrying capacity of Boracay Island. This will open up all-weather access for vehicles and pedestrians, "encouraging people to consider alternative accommodations and activity centers at the mainland."

The bridge is also envisioned to relieve Boracay "from pressures due to overcrowding and overuse of existing facilities, which ultimately produces adverse environmental impact."

In closing, we are sharing this comment coming from a concerned resident:

"MAKE SURE WE STAY AN ISLAND.

To add a bridge to Boracay ruins the fact we are an island. It will change our image and the experience for tourists of reaching the exotic destination by boat will forever change, not to mention also drastically affecting our underwater assets.

We should not consider the lack of suitable medical and trauma facilities, perennially poor port infrastructure and cargo management, and inefficient solid waste management as a reason to build a bridge. We only have one road, so we can't have more traffic. Instead, fix the problem areas and elevate the infrastructure to be at par with our Southeast Asian neighbors and truly world-class, deserving of the reputation as the country's number one tourist destination and one of the best islands in the world. Although the bridge may be beneficial for business and progress (especially for those involved in the project), we have to consider its environmental impact on the islands' sustainability for future generations.

Has there been a proper environmental impact study of the beaches and coral reefs of Boracay—the crown jewel of tourism, and of mainland Malay? We have not yet seen one."

For those who would like to view the full results of our survey, visit our website and download the June 2024 issue at www.boracaysunnews.com/newspaper.

Let your thoughts be heard! Email us at fvds.boracaysunnews@gmail.com and we will publish some of your comments in the next edition of **Boracay Sun News**.

Girl in the Middle

Rising above sexism in a male-dominated career

BY ABIGAIL LEI

Dorothy Violet Snell-Fuldheim started as a social activist and public speaker and became the first recognized woman broadcaster in 1929.

Dottie Frazier in 1940 was the first lady scuba diving instructor, dive shop owner and operator, hard hat diver and even produced wetsuits and dry suits.

Italian composer and singer Maddalena Casulana was the first female musician to publish and print her works in 1568.

With Nellie Bly as her pen name, Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman broke barriers in journalism by writing about her investigations and strong opinions on social issues.

These are just some of the ladies who broke the glass ceiling when females were regarded as the lesser, weaker sex, often being dismissed as better off in the kitchen or staying home.

Today, we are more fortunate because courageous women in the past stood their ground and fought for the rights and privileges we enjoy today.

But let's address the elephant in the room. Women still suffer and become victims in workplaces and communities that we thought were already safe. I know, because I have been there, and a lot of us remain stuck in pools of misogynists and sexists.

Did you know that only about eight percent of company leaders are women? Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg recently called for "more masculine energy" in companies.

How do we survive such undesirable environments?

Identify the problem.

Some can be blatant but most are subtle and sly in their remarks that the untrained or naïve woman will miss the attack. For example, a co-worker may congratulate you for the promotion saying, "Those twins really work for you," implying that your success was because of your chest size and not your qualifications. On the other hand, another colleague may seem genuinely happy and celebrate with you, saying, "You deserve this, having the complete package: beauty, brains and body." See what was done there? Most sexists get away with it by throwing in a compliment to mask the insult.

Choose how to respond.

Cliché as it may be, this rings true: What happens to us is out of our control, but how we deal with it or react to it is the power we hold.

It is easy to get upset or hurt when we get diminished or undervalued because of our gender. We may give a knee-jerk response and likewise verbally attack with a joke, sarcasm or even get physical when we can't control our emotions. But when we do, we allow them to further attack us or prove that as ladies we are not meant for pressure-driven environments. They may even make a move to get us out of our position and worse, out of the company.

Before anything else, remember that what they do to us is a reflection of their character, and how we respond is a reflection of our grace. Should things get out of hand, choose

to utilize the proper channels like human resources. Learn if there are policies in place that will ensure your safety in the workplace.

“What they do to us is a reflection of their character, and how we respond is a reflection of our grace.”

Assert your rights.

Knowing your rights is the first step, but asserting them may seem daunting. Women often feel unsafe to simply report incidences, all the more to respond with a clever comeback or to dismiss it by laughing or changing the subject.

In the Philippines, we now have the Safe Spaces Act or Republic Act 11313, which protects all of us, regardless of age or gender against uncalled-for discriminatory or sexually motivated behavior or actions, in public, private and online spaces.

This is a huge win since it does not only penalize offenders but also maximizes the effort for prevention of such untoward incidences, giving the local government units, schools and employers the responsibility to implement the act, raise awareness about it and provide a safe place for everyone. Also, these institutions can be held liable should they fail to comply.

Check your community or workplace if such measures are being taken, and call for action should there be a need.

Create your own safe space.

If people can't provide it for you, create your own safe space. Place limits and boundaries. Remember, jokes or banter may seem harmless, but the wrong people may start to feel comfortable simply because you allow it and see no wrong, or they might feel they are getting away with it if the intention or motive is indeed there.

You have the power to stop things from getting out of hand.

Most importantly, ladies and gentlemen, if you see any injustice, harassment, discrimination or any offense being done to someone, step up and protect your mates especially when they do not recognize it themselves. Let's teach each other to better equip and protect ourselves, too.

We are, after all, each other's keepers. 🌿



Dottie Frazier, the first lady scuba diving instructor



INDULGE

Boracay Beach Truck: A Global Culinary Adventure in Every Bowl



Conveniently located at the entrance of D'Mall from the main road, Boracay Beach Truck stands out with its vibrant red food truck, immediately catching the attention of international visitors.

The food truck offers a refreshing twist on quick, flavorful meals with two signature concepts: **Island Bowls** and **Sunrise Milk Tea**—perfect for those on the go or looking for a quick, satisfying bite.

Step upstairs to the air-conditioned second floor for a more relaxed dining experience, where you can still enjoy the same bold flavors and global variety. Whether you're craving Indonesian, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, or Vietnamese, Boracay Beach Truck has something to satisfy every palate.

Must-Try Rice Bowls Include:

- Indonesian:** Mei Goreng (PhP320), Chicken Satay with Nasi Goreng Fried Rice (PhP360)
- Filipino:** Arrozcaldo (Starts at PhP120), Tofu Sisig (PhP250), Chicken Adobo (PhP320)
- Korean:** Kimchi Fried Rice (PhP280), Beef Bulgogi (PhP350)
- Vietnamese:** Beef Pho (PhP360)
- Chinese:** Stir-Fried Beef in Oyster Sauce (PhP380)
- Asian Fusion Specials:** Fried Ebi Tempura (PhP390), Chicken Katsu (PhP390) with free iced tea



Must-Try Sunrise Milk Tea Include:

In addition to its diverse selection of savory dishes, Boracay Beach Truck also offers a refreshing lineup of drinks through its **Sunrise Milk Tea** concept. Indulge in classic favorites like **Matcha Milk Tea**, **Taro Milk Tea**, or the crowd-pleaser, **Brown Sugar Boba Black Tea with Cream Cheese**, with prices starting at just PhP110. These drinks are the perfect way to cool down and complement your meal.



Boracay Beach Truck brings a taste of the world to the island, offering a diverse menu at prices that hit the sweet spot for every budget. Whether you're looking for a quick meal or a full-on culinary adventure, the price is just right without compromising on flavor or quality. Enjoy your meal in their air-conditioned upstairs dining area or grab a bite to go—either way, it's a must-visit for food lovers in Boracay. And with their signature red food truck, you simply can't miss it!

Follow them on Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok: @boracaybeachtruck
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NEWS

Study Cites Significant Role of Women in Boracay's Tourism Industry

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE

A study entitled “Gendering the Informal Tourism Sector toward Inclusive and Sustainable Growth: The Case Study of Boracay Island,” examines the challenges and opportunities for women and highlights the importance of women in the robust tourism industry of the resort island of Boracay, especially those coming from the informal sector.

Conducted in December 2023 by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), the study which was posted on their website reveals the intricacies of this sector, the challenges faced by women, and the impact of local and national policies on their participation and empowerment.

The study was authored by Jean Clarisse T. Carlos (Philippine APEC Study Center Network project development officer), Marie Jel D. Bautista (former assistant professor at Central Luzon State University), Dr. Andrew L. Tan (Asian Institute of Management), and Eylla Laire M. Gutierrez (Center for Tourism Research Manager).

According to the International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, the informal sector refers to a wide range of activities, that exist outside the formal economy. It includes various types of work and businesses that operate independently and are often characterized by low wages, limited job security, and lack of legal protection.

The focus included the roles women play in sub-sectors like beach mat vending, hair braiding, excursions, food and beverages, and souvenirs.

“We found that while informal workers are organized in associations, there are challenges related to seasonality and competition with formal establishments,” the research indicated.

The study underscored the challenges faced by these workers: fierce competition, seasonality of demand, restrictive government-designated locations, and at times, harassment and prejudice at work.

The study indicated that women in Boracay's informal sector are often drawn to activities that promise flexibility, low entry barriers, and the ability to work within their communities. They are the hair braiders, souvenir sellers with trinkets that hold memories, the street vendors whose culinary feats sustain the *paluto* restaurants, the entrepreneurs who orchestrate excursions, and the masseuses who offer moments of relaxation and beauty.

However, the income they earn, despite being significant contributors to the island's tourist appeal, often fails to meet their personal and familial needs. Many express a desire to enter the formal economy to secure social benefits and a stable income.

The study urges empowering women through targeted training, financial literacy programs, guest management, marketing, and product innovation. It calls for gender sensitivity workshops and training for tourism stakeholders to address deep-rooted social norms that contribute to issues like sexual harassment in the community.

The local government's initiatives include “no accreditation, no operation”

policies that mandate registration for service providers. As a result, 23 organizations, comprising 14 associations and nine cooperatives, represent informal workers, offering benefits like financial aid and eligibility for health checkups and training.

However, some emerging workers like beach mat vendors who sprung up following the implementation of the 25+5 meter easement rule by the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (BIATF), remain unregulated and unregistered, hinting at a need for broader and more inclusive policies.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the contributions made by these informal workers. Karen Joy Sargado of the Department of Tourism (DOT) Western Visayas emphasized during the webinar the DOT's initiatives to support informal workers. “Despite regulations often favoring the formal sector, the DOT recognizes the crucial role played by informal tourism workers,” Sargado said.

“This recognition is evident in initiatives providing technical assistance, livelihood programs and support for small businesses within this sector.”

The study notes that women workers prefer the informal sector due to the flexibility and direct income it provides, which is often higher than in formal roles. However, the seasonal nature of tourism leads to income instability, and a lack of social security and health benefits creates vulnerability. Many women have no intention of transitioning to the formal sector, valuing the autonomy their current

roles provide.

The local government unit of Malay and the DOT have been cited to be actively involved in managing the informal tourism sector.

However, the researchers noted the challenges at hand, such as the emergence of new unregulated informal workers.

“The study underscores the importance of better data collection on these workers to formulate effective policies,” they said. 🌴



Hair braider in Puka Beach
(TikTok: @kister.morata)

NEWS

Malay IP's Cite Need for More Social Programs for their Survival

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE



Cristiany Coching with her mother Gamay and Rowena Tamboon with Sr. Inah, DC

Members of the Indigenous People's (IPs) in Malay, Aklan also known as Ati, have called on both the provincial government of Aklan and the local government of Malay to provide them with more social and environmental programs necessary for the survival of their tribe.

The needs of Malay IPs were gathered and formed part of the newly enacted Provincial Indigenous People's Development Plan, a first in the province. Enacted in 2024 it is expected to be updated in 2028.

The National Commission of Indigenous People (NCIP)-Western Visayas helps in the crafting of the development plan together with the IPs in several municipalities in the province including Malay, Aklan.

Engr. Roger Esto, the head of the Provincial Planning and Development Office (PPDO) who led the crafting of the development plan said the desire of the province to come up with such a book triggered the harassment suffered by the IPs

in Boracay last year.

In the said plan, the IPs in Malay including Boracay, called on the government to address their concerns on the issues of environment, social services, health, education, economics and disaster management.

The development plan indicates that there are 1,012 registered IPs in the entire town of Malay, including Boracay.

For the environment, the IPs cited soil erosion incidents in some parts of Malay, Aklan. They also expressed the need for more trees as part of their development needs.

For social services, they lament the lack of government social services for them especially on financial assistance. They also reported an increasing number of motorcycle drivers among their ranks.

Several Atis use motorcycles for their livelihood as *habal-habal* drivers. However, they need to spend more to acquire a driver's license given that the Land Transportation Office is in Kalibo.

Malay Ordinance No. 27 which is now being implemented, only allows one representative of the family to become a *habal-habal* driver. This means that in a large household of 10 family members, only one of them could make a living as a *habal-habal* driver.

For health, they reported problems with diarrhea, lack of knowledge on hygiene and sanitation, prevalence of early marriage, drunkenness among minors, and lack of toilets in their households.

In the field of education, the IPs underscored their limited income that hinders them from sending their children to school and for the lack of school supplies.

The IPs also voiced out lack of economic opportunities and cited trainings on disaster management.

Esto said the PPDO through the Aklan provincial government will look for possible ways to solve these concerns.

In a related report, Dr. Karl Lachica, chief

of the Ciriaco S. Tirol Hospital in Boracay told the **Boracay Sun News (BSN)** that they have employed two Atis who are now working as nursing aides.

Rowena Tamboon and Cristiany Coching both graduated from a midwifery course and applied for work at the hospital.

“They were selected from the community and underwent necessary training to help our hospital staff in our daily operations,” said Lachica.

They were presented to Aklan Governor Jose Enrique Miraflores after they completed their training in December 2024.

They were featured in the May 2024 edition of **BSN** upon their graduation.

Rowena Tamboon and Cristiany Coching are certified with Health Care Services NC II. National Certification Level II (NC II) is one of the levels of certification offered by TESDA. They graduated on February 23, 2024, from St. Anthony College in Roxas City.

TOURISM NEWS

DOT EYES MORE TOURISTS FROM INDIA



JOHOR BAHRU, MALAYSIA – In her address during the 12th ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers Meeting last January 20, 2025, Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco underscored the promising growth and future potential of tourism relations between the Philippines and India.

According to Secretary Frasco, in 2024, the Philippines welcomed nearly 80,000 Indian visitors, marking an over 12% growth compared to the previous year.

“While this number is smaller relative to our ASEAN neighbors, it represents significant growth. We see tremendous potential in India’s outbound tourism market, and we are committed to making the Philippines a top destination for Indian tourists,” Secretary Frasco noted.

Secretary Frasco likewise elaborated on the diverse experiences the Philippines offers which cater to Indian travelers’ unique preferences: “The Philippines offers a diverse array of experiences that cater to the unique preferences of Indian travelers. From our world-class and award-winning beaches, our top dive sites, and rich cultural offerings to our renowned wedding destinations, as well as our MICE venues that can very well cater to the Indian market. The Philippine experience is one that harmoniously blends natural beauty with cultural richness, providing Indian tourists with a perfect mix of relaxation, adventure, and discovery.”

She emphasized the vast potential for further expansion, highlighting the Philippine government’s proactive approach to visa liberalization by air and sea, exemplified by the successful launch of the Cruise Visa Waiver Program and active participation in joint working group meetings and business-to-business interactions with Indian counterparts.

“We have already initially instituted the introduction of electronic visas for Indian nationals by the Department of Foreign Affairs. This digital initiative streamlines visa processes, and we look to make the efficiency of the operations of the e-Visa system even better under our President’s instructions,” said Secretary Frasco.

“As we strengthen these connections, we are also excited about the possibility of direct flights linking the Philippines and India, a critical development that will open up new pathways for tourism, trade, and cultural exchange. We are hopeful that Air India will soon connect Indian cities directly to destinations in the Philippines that include Manila, Boracay, Clark, and Cebu,” added Secretary Frasco referencing the efforts of the DOT’s Routes Development Team.

Meanwhile, Secretary Frasco also noted that sustainable tourism remains a cornerstone of the partnership between the Philippines and India, reflecting both nations’ shared respect for cultural heritage and natural environments. The recent 75th-anniversary celebration of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and India highlighted the strength of this relationship and the vibrant opportunities for future tourism cooperation.

Secretary Frasco pointed to the successful participation of the Philippines in events like the Outbound Travel Market (OTM) 2024 in India as a testament to the country’s commitment to engaging with the Indian tourism sector.

“Together with the ASEAN-India partnership at the forefront, we can continue to unlock new opportunities for sustainable tourism growth, economic development, and cultural exchange,” she concluded, expressing optimism for a prosperous future for both nations.

Strengthened tourism ties with India

In a bilateral meeting with Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat of India’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism held on the sidelines of the ASEAN Tourism Forum meetings, Sec. Frasco reiterated the Philippines’ readiness to sign an implementation program to execute the Memorandum of Cooperation on Tourism that was signed between India and the Philippines in 2019.

The specifics of the implementation program would cover critical areas such as the expansion of air connectivity not just to Manila but also directly to destinations that include Cebu, Clark, and other gateways. The exchange of travel professionals, as well as the engagement of joint marketing promotions will result in a mutual increase in tourism flows, among other things.

“Your Excellency, we are very hopeful that through our meeting today, through the forthcoming implementation program and the work that both our teams will do, we can increase from the 79,000 Indians that arrived in the Philippines last year to allow the Philippines to have a share of the over five million that arrived to the ASEAN in 2024,” enthused Frasco.

To this, Minister Shekhawat replied, “India and the Philippines both share a long, long, long heritage and a relationship between both the countries, not only on the basis of the business and other things but also cultural ties that are also there between both the countries.”

“I would like to thank you for the initiatives which have been taken up by the Philippine side for creating more tourism potential between both the countries. I’m sure that the efforts of the Philippines side and India in tourism, both of the offices are going to put in. The number of tourist inflow to both the countries are going to increase, and certainly, the share of the total number of tourists, Indian tourists visiting ASEAN countries, the Philippines deserves much, much more,” Minister Shekhwat concluded. 🌴

(Source: Department of Tourism)

TOURISM NEWS

PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND FORGE NEW 5-YEAR TOURISM COOPERATION DEAL

The Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) aims to strengthen its bilateral relations with Thailand by signing the “Implementation Program of the Agreement on Cooperation on Tourism” last January 19, 2025.

Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco and Thailand Minister of Tourism and Sports Sorawong Thienthong officially inked the agreement at the DoubleTree Hotel in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. This initiative follows the longstanding partnership established by the original Agreement on Cooperation on Tourism, signed on March 24, 1993, in Manila.

“For the Philippines, this collaboration provides an exciting opportunity to tap into Thailand’s remarkable success in attracting visitors, particularly in areas such as cultural tourism and medical tourism. We can benefit from Thailand’s robust arrival numbers, its internationally recognized cultural heritage, and world-class medical services, which will undoubtedly enhance our own tourism offerings,” said Secretary Frasco.

“In return, Thailand stands to gain from the Philippine expertise in hospitality, where we have earned a reputation for excellence. Additionally, the Philippines is a premier destination for dive tourism—home to some of the world’s most biodiverse marine ecosystems—and for English language tourism, where our world-class language schools attract students from all over the globe,” she added.

Minister Thienthong expressed his enthusiasm, saying, “Thank you for this MOU signing, for exchanging our knowledge and technology and we are looking forward to working with the Philippines.”

The program, set to run from 2025 to 2030, aims to enhance bilateral tourism cooperation, promoting mutual growth and development within the tourism sectors of both nations.

Key areas of focus include Tourism Cooperation, the Exchange of Best Practices, Human Resource Development, and Joint Tourism Promotions and Marketing.

To ensure successful implementation, a Joint Working Group (JWG) will be established to oversee coordination and monitor the activities and deliverables of the program.

“The signing of the Implementation Program of the Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism between our two nations underscores our deep cultural, economic and historical connections. As we position ourselves as “two countries, one destination” we recognize the incredible potential of combining our strengths to offer travelers a truly unforgettable experience,” enthused Secretary Frasco. 🌴



DOT Sec. Christina Frasco and Thailand Minister of Tourism and Sports Sorawong Thienthong at the ASEAN Tourism Forum, Malaysia.

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Top Island Takeaways

From souvenirs to food, shop local and take a piece of Boracay home with you

BY RICA VELASCO

Meet the Experts



Paula Mae Sullano
Front office and reservations
associate of Ambassador in
Paradise Resort

8 months in this job
6 years in the hospitality
industry



Mikee Gonzales
Front office and reservations
manager of Diniview Villa Resort

9 months in this job
15 years in the hospitality
industry



Lhodie Caldeo
Operations manager of Hue
Hotels and Resorts

3 years and 4 months in this job
18 years in the hospitality
industry

One of the most popular and fun activities in Boracay is buying *pasalubongs* (gifts from one's travels), souvenirs and island mementos. This tradition allows visitors to take a piece of the island home, whether it's for friends and family or a personal keepsake.

To help you navigate the most authentic and distinctive options, we consulted the island's hospitality experts. With their insights into locally made products and signature island treasures, here are some of their top choices for the perfect mementos that support local businesses and preserve the spirit of Boracay.

Top Souvenir Takeaways



Artwork at Happy Planet, D'Mall

Paula:
One of my top recommendations for souvenirs is the locally produced native handbags and wallets crafted by local artisans. Made from rattan, these bags often feature vibrant colors and shell accents, available in styles ranging from beach totes to chic

crossbody bags. You can find them at markets like D'Mall or D'Talipapa.

Additionally, anklets and necklaces made from shells are popular among younger tourists. Priced between Php100 to 200, these accessories add a fun touch to tropical outfits and are frequently sold along the beachfront.

Lastly, I recommend the paintings and artwork available in local markets. These colorful canvases, capturing the island's stunning sunsets and vibrant marine life make for beautiful displays at home.

Mikee:
My top souvenir takeaway items would be the paintings (shirts, canvas, bags, etc.) at Happy Planet. It brings me back to the

Old Boracay, where the happiest memories could be captured on canvas or T-shirts.

I remember ordering 12 painted T-shirts in a day that depicted the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen.

Another favorite of mine is Crystal Shack, a shop filled with crystals, stones, accessories, sarongs and silver crafts. They provide advice on healing through crystals and offer guidance on birthstones.



Hand-painted T-shirt at Happy Planet, D'Mall

Lhodie:
If you're looking for souvenirs, my top recommendation is Tropical Nomad. It's a collaboration store that sells items from local artists and brands. They feature handmade earrings called Amayze, which make perfect gifts from the island. They also have handmade accessories which I love from Sama-Sama Philippines.

For men, I recommend Destileria Barako for their Ube Cream Liqueur, which is exclusive to Malay. Additionally, there's Localidad in Station X, which showcases handmade goods from local artisans, including woven items made by indigenous people, as well as customized products like bags and wallets.

Top Food Takeaways

Paula:
When it comes to food takeaways, you can't leave the island without trying *barquillos*, crispy rolled wafer treats that are beloved by both locals and tourists. Made from a delicate blend of flour, sugar, and butter, these crunchy delights are perfect

with coffee or as a sweet snack on the go.

Another popular choice among Korean and Chinese guests is banana chips and dried mangoes, available at local markets and street vendors. The dried mangoes are incredibly sweet and flavorful, while the banana chips are crunchy, often lightly salted or seasoned with coconut. If you're looking for something unique, Ambassador

in Paradise offers delightful treats like *bandi* made from sugar syrup blended with nuts, along with coconut balls, *butong-butong*, and *bukayo*, all crafted from fresh coconuts.

Mikee:
My top food takeaway item would be the Cinnamon Aman from Lemoni Café. They have a complete list of freshly baked breads and pastries every day. Also, the banana chips from Budget Mart are the best I've tasted. And don't forget Bread and Butter for *pasalubong*. They have the best *barquillos*, *piaya*, *biscocho* and toasted *mamon*.



Locally made sweets at Ambassador in Paradise

the chori burger. It's best when consumed immediately. I once sent it to a friend in Manila, and it arrived in good condition. Biscocho from Bread and Butter is another excellent option. They offer boxes filled with different types of bread and biscocho. For cakes, Quency's is popular for birthdays, and their *ensaymada* is also a personal favorite.

Lhodie:
For food, I highly recommend the Calamansi Muffins from Real Coffee. If you don't buy one, it's as if you didn't really visit Boracay! Another must-try is

Top 'Grammable Takeaway Photos



Diniwid Beach

would be at Yapak Beach. It's where I spend most of my time during my days off, and the turquoise waters and powdery white sand are simply picturesque. It takes me back to when the island was still uncrowded. Next, I recommend Mt. Luho for its 360-degree view of the whole island. Of course, Diniwid Beach is also a must-visit for its chill atmosphere and beautiful sunsets.

Lhodie:
Willy's Rock is a must-visit, especially from the second floor of the Sunny Side Café in Station 1 which offers a fantastic view of the beach. Don't miss the sunset at White Beach and the sunrise at Tambisaan Beach. To find the best spot in Tambisaan, walk to the right from the port until you reach a small resort—it's an excellent spot for sunrise views. There's also a rock formation at the end of Angol Beach that's perfect for photo opportunities, along with the chapel in Fairways and Bluewater.

We hope these tips were useful to you as you explore the best of Boracay's offerings. Whether you're picking out a unique souvenir, indulging in a local delicacy or capturing the beauty of the island, we trust you'll find something special that resonates with your experience here. 🌴

Mikee:
My top 'grammable takeaway photo spot



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Welcome to the AI Era that Makes Trip Planning Easier

BY PAULINE REITZER

Virtual Travel Assistants: Your 24/7 Travel Companions

AI-powered virtual assistants and chatbots have become invaluable tools for travelers seeking advice and assistance during their trips. These tools can provide real-time information, answer questions and even help resolve issues like flight delays or lost luggage.

AI-powered virtual assistants such as Google Assistant and Siri, have become indispensable companions for travelers. These intelligent assistants can provide a wealth of information and assistance, from suggesting nearby attractions to booking accommodations. Simply ask your virtual assistant a question and it will use its vast database to provide relevant answers and recommendations.

KAYAK's AI-driven virtual assistant, KAYAK Trips, is designed to help travelers manage their plans from start to finish. The assistant can track flights, suggest alternative routes in case of delays and provide updates on gate changes or cancellations. It can also recommend restaurants, attractions and activities based on the user's location and

interests. By integrating with other services like Uber and Lyft, KAYAK Trips can even assist with transportation needs.

AI-Enhanced Safety and Health Monitoring

In recent years, safety and health have become top priorities for travelers. AI tools now play a crucial role in monitoring travel risks and providing real-time updates to make informed decisions about trips.

Sitata is an AI-powered platform that provides real-time travel safety information. It monitors global news, health advisories and security alerts to keep travelers informed about potential risks at their destination. The AI behind Sitata analyzes this data and sends alerts if there are any concerns such as disease outbreaks, natural disasters or political unrest. This proactive approach allows travelers to make informed decisions and take necessary precautions before and during their trip.

Sherpa is another AI-driven tool that helps travelers navigate the complex world of travel restrictions and visa requirements. The platform provides up-to-date information

on entry requirements, quarantine protocols and vaccination mandates for various countries. By inputting their travel details, users can receive personalized advice on what they need to do to comply with local regulations, reducing the risk of facing unexpected issues at the border.

Making your holidays easier on a daily basis

AI has also made a significant impact on travel photography. AI-powered camera apps and editing software can automatically enhance your photos, adjusting factors like exposure, contrast and color balance. Additionally, some apps can even identify specific scenes and landmarks, suggesting appropriate filters and editing techniques. By leveraging AI, you can capture stunning photos that capture the essence of your travels so you can share your travel with everyone in an even better way!

Splitwise is another useful app while traveling with friends. This app helps users in splitting costs, not only between friends or co-travelers but when what's due isn't a 50/50 split. The app has options such as splitting a total by percentages or shares. Plus, you can connect your third-party



payment app, such as PayPal or Venmo to make the payment.

As AI technology continues to evolve, we can expect even more innovative solutions that will further enhance the travel experience, making it easier for everyone to explore the world with confidence and ease. Whether you're a seasoned traveler or someone planning your first adventure, AI tools offer valuable support at every stage of your journey, ensuring that your trip is as enjoyable and hassle-free as possible.

AI tools have significantly transformed the way we plan and experience travel. As AI technology continues to evolve, we can expect even more innovative solutions that will further enhance the travel experience, making it easier for everyone to explore the world with confidence and ease. 🌿

BREAKING NEWS

AKLAN GOV URGED PBBM TO INTERVENE IN THE BORACAY BRIDGE PROJECT

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE



KALIBO, Aklan – Aklan Governor Jose Enrique Miraflores said he personally asked President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. to intervene and stop the implementation of the proposed Boracay Bridge Project. This was according to Gov. Miraflores in a chance interview with the *Boracay Sun News* on February 17, 2025.

Miraflores said met with the President in Iloilo City on February 13, 2025, at the quarterly meeting of the Regional Development Council (RDC) where Miraflores sits as a member representing the Aklan province.

The RDC discusses the government's programs and projects related to the Western Visayas, comprised of the provinces of Aklan, Iloilo, Antique, Capiz and Guimaras.

On February 3, 2025, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Central Office in Manila announced the Swiss challenge process for the P5.48 billion unsolicited proposal of conglomerate San Miguel Corp. (SMC) to build a bridge linking Boracay to the Panay mainland in Malay, Aklan.

The announcement was made after the DPWH published a notice on January 31 on their official website calling for a proposal under a "comparative bidding process" for a project to finance, design, construct, operate and maintain a 2.54-kilometer Boracay bridge infrastructure under a 30-year concession.

"What worries us is that SMC has recently issued a Swiss challenge asking for other possible bidders in the project. This, despite that SMC has not yet initiated any dialogue with the community. We all know that there were many oppositions on the said bridge," Miraflores added.

Arnulfo Magcope, chairman of the Provincial Agriculture and Fisheries Council (PAFC-Aklan) told the *BSN* that they had filed a resolution opposing the construction of the said bridge. 🌿

NEWS

DENR Distances from Enforcing Environmental Laws in Boracay

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Western Visayas is now distancing themselves from enforcing environmental laws in this resort island.

In a press conference at the DENR-WV Regional Office in Iloilo City on December 16, 2024, Raoul Lorilla, OIC-regional executive director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Region 6, responsible for overseeing the management of resources in the region and for promoting sustainable practices, said that all the decisions to be made now on Boracay is in the hands of the Boracay-Caticlan Sustainable Development Council (BCSDC).

The DENR had taken over the management of Boracay Island when then-President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the six-month closure of the resort island in April 2018. Since then, the DENR led the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force

(BIATF) which aimed to rehabilitate the environment of the island.

The BIATF was officially deactivated upon the expiration of the executive order signed by Duterte on June 20, 2022. The responsibility of managing the environment of Boracay was turned over to the care of the local government unit (LGU) of Malay.

But while it is now in the care of the LGU-Malay, the DENR still has a final say on the regulation of environment-related laws in Boracay.

As this developed, the business community composed of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry-Boracay and the Boracay Foundation Incorporated voiced out their concerns over balancing the environment and business of this resort island.

The BCSDC, chaired by the Aklan provincial government was formed to include members of the Aklan

provincial government, the Malay-LGU, the Philippine Coast Guard, the DENR and the Department of Tourism, among others. The BCSDC was organized in order ensure the environmental sustainability of Boracay as a premier tourism destination.

"Right now, we leave the management of Boracay's environment to the BCSDC in coordination with the DENR Central Office headed by our Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga," said Lorilla, during the press conference in Iloilo.

Lorilla served as former Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer (PENRO) in the province of Aklan. 🌿

The Philippines Embarks on a New Era in Wellness Tourism



Mandala Spa & Resort Villas Boracay's award-winning Hilot Trilogy

The Philippines is making its mark on the global wellness stage as the government unveils an ambitious campaign to position the country as a leading destination for wellness tourism. This initiative gains momentum from the Global Wellness Institute's (GWI) recently revealed report at the 18th Global Wellness Summit (GWS) in the UK, highlighting the global wellness economy's impressive growth. In 2023, the global wellness economy reached a record high of \$6.3 trillion, with projections to nearly \$6.8 trillion in 2024 and a staggering \$9 trillion by 2028.

GWI forecasts an annual growth rate of 7.3% for the wellness economy from 2023 to 2028, far outpacing the global GDP growth rate of 4.8%. Wellness tourism is among the top growth leaders, projected to expand by 10.2% annually, alongside segments such as wellness real estate (15.8%) and mental wellness (12.2%). By 2028, five wellness sectors, including wellness tourism, are expected to surpass \$1 trillion in market size. GWI estimates the current value of the wellness tourism sector at \$830 billion, with projections to reach \$1.4 trillion by 2027, making it one of the most dynamic sectors of the wellness economy.

A Strategic Location for Wellness Travelers
As global travelers increasingly prioritize health,

wellbeing, and meaningful experiences, the Philippines offers a unique blend of traditional healing practices and holistic wellness. With lush tropical landscapes, pristine beaches, and a deep-rooted culture of nurturing care, the country provides the perfect setting for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual rejuvenation.

Renowned for its Filipino Hilot, a traditional massage incorporating local herbs and rituals, the Philippines also boasts a wide array of wellness experiences, from nourishing farm-to-table cuisine and spiritual journeys to advanced diagnostic testing, medical detox programs and longevity retreats. This unique combination, paired with the warmth of Filipino hospitality, makes the Philippines globally competitive in wellness tourism.

WeTAP's Vision for Wellness Tourism
The Wellness Tourism Association of the Philippines (WeTAP) is at the forefront of this transformation, aiming to establish the Philippines as a premier international wellness destination. WeTAP envisions wellness tourism as a driving force for nation-building, generating significant tourism revenue, and creating dignified, gender-equal job opportunities. By 2028, the association hopes to see the Philippines recognized globally for its world-class wellness offerings, skilled professionals, and unique Filipino wellness experiences.

The Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) recognizes WeTAP as the official voice of the wellness tourism industry in the country and has joined forces with the association to bring this transformative vision to life. Together, they are leading the development of world-class wellness retreats, eco-luxury spa resorts, and integrative medical programs that proudly showcase the Filipino Brand of Wellness - a distinctive fusion of traditional healing practices, heartfelt hospitality, and evidence-based holistic care.

Industry Leaders Speak
"WeTAP represents a new chapter in the Philippines' tourism sector. Our country has all the ingredients to become a global leader in wellness tourism - from our natural beauty and traditional healing practices to our

world-class hospitality. We believe WeTAP will play a crucial role in bringing this vision to life, helping the Philippines not only recover but thrive in the post- pandemic world," said Catherine Brillantes-Turvill, president of WeTAP and founder of Nurture Wellness Village, Tagaytay.

"We are grateful to the Department of Tourism for recognizing wellness tourism as a cornerstone of the Philippine tourism industry. We are committed to promoting evidence-based holistic healing, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility. By showcasing the Filipino Brand of Wellness, we aim to attract travelers seeking meaningful and transformative holidays. Wellness tourism has the power to enrich lives, foster environmental stewardship, and support local communities," said Jennifer Sanvictores, marketing & public relations head of WeTAP and global head of sales, marketing and communications for The Farm at San Benito, Batangas.

As the world seeks destinations that nurture the mind, body and spirit, the Philippines is poised to become Asia's premier wellness hub. Through this bold initiative, the country sees an immense opportunity to boost its economy, champion regenerative travel, and redefine itself as a sanctuary for evidence-based holistic healing.

Join Us in Elevating Philippine Wellness Tourism
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HEALTH & WELLNESS

Media Use Guidelines for Families

BY KATE NG-LARRAURI, M.D.

Dr. Kate Ng-Larrauri is a Boracay-based pediatrician, a specially trained medical doctor who works with babies, infants, adolescents and young adults.

As a first-time mother, parenthood has been an unexpected journey for me so far, with new challenges to navigate at every turn, which some may find ironic since I am a pediatrician. I felt like I was thrown inside a bull ring to participate in a *corrida de toros* with no exit points. It's true what they say, a "pedia mom" does reach a point where no amount of years in medical practice (15 years in my case) prepares you for motherhood, and you would lose that sense of objectivity. True enough, as a mother of a soon-to-be

one-year-old, I can say that I haven't really been "by the book" as I am still learning how to navigate through this new chapter, through both lenses. When asked about my opinion regarding screen time, I do have reservations, but at the same time, it is about finding a balance. Screen time refers to the amount of time spent using devices with screens, such as smartphones, tablets, computers and televisions which all can affect how children feel, learn, think and behave. It's important to be mindful of screen time, as excessive use

can lead to various health issues, including eye strain, poor posture and disrupted sleep patterns. Developmentally speaking, the crucial period in one's life is the first year wherein there is accelerated growth, and that includes all domains such as the physical, emotional, social, cognitive and language. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends minimizing or eliminating media exposure, other than video chatting, for children under the age of 18 months. For older preschool-age children, media limits are very appropriate.

There are risks and benefits that come with media use. The key is to develop habits that help your family strike a healthy balance. You can decide what media use is best for your family. Remember, all children and teens need adequate sleep (8–12 hours, depending on age), physical activity (1 hour), and time away from media. Below is a table representing media use guidelines for families, as lifted from the AAP.

Media Use Guidelines for Families

Age	Description	Media Use Guidelines
Younger than 2 years old	Children younger than 2 learn and grow when they explore the physical world around them. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers and other children and adults. However, children 18-24 months of age can learn from high-quality educational media, if their parents play or view with them and reteach the lessons.	Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk and teach (e.g., video chatting with family along with parents). For children 18-24 months, if you want to introduce digital media: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Choose high-quality programming.Use media together with your child.Avoid solo media use.
2 to 5 years old	At 2 years of age, many children can understand and learn words from live video chatting. Young children can listen to or join a conversation with their parents. Children 3-5 years of age have more mature minds, so a well-designed educational program such as <i>Sesame Street</i> (in moderation) can help children learn social, language and reading skills.	Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day. Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds. Choose media that is interactive, nonviolent, educational and pro-social. Co-view or co-play with your children.
5 years and older	Today's grade schoolers and teens are growing up immersed in digital media. They may even have their own mobile device and other devices to access digital media.	Make sure media use is not displacing other important activities such as sleep, family time and exercise. Check your children's media use for their health and safety.
Tweens and teens	Tweens and teens are more likely to have some independence in what they choose and watch, and they may be consuming media without parental oversight.	Parents should engage tweens and teens in conversations about their media use, digital citizenship, what they've seen or read, who they are communicating with, and what they have learned from their media use.

Have a strategy for managing electronic media to maximize its benefits and minimize its risks. There is so much more to learn when it comes to the ever-changing times, so stay tuned for more tips on setting media use boundaries for your family, on our next issue!

DC Fitness & Gym Boracay

BY SEEMA MANOHAR



Healthy living is a big part of our island culture in Boracay. There is no shortage of fitness options on the island from outdoor sports such as beach Frisbee, volleyball, tennis, soccer, golf and dragon boat, to indoor sports such as basketball, badminton, table tennis, pickleball and boxing, to name a few, and the enduring favorite of many: the gym! Gyms on the island are available in various capacities and locations and the newest gym on the island is DC Fitness & Gym, an impressive space that seamlessly merges the benefits and technology of a modern gym with personalized, friendly and professional customer service. Conveniently located across the street from Astoria Hotel, Station 1, DC Fitness and Gym is a multi-floor gym with secure entry through access cards. The gym has a range of the latest high-grade equipment that includes regular and curved treadmills, super-squat machines, cable machines including dual cable cross machines, a rowing machine, hip thrusts and leg press



machines and a wide range of free weights. Mats, exercise balls, bands and boxing equipment are also available, as well as Zumba and yoga classes. A body scan machine is offered for free to all gym guests. A personal favorite is the sauna, which is also available to all guests (included in the membership and guest passes). Staff instruct guests on how to self-regulate the temperature in the sauna for an individualized experience and after 15 minutes of use, the sauna is disinfected and prepared for the next session. Personal trainers, both female and male, are available and provide a free, one-time coach assessment and the number of sessions and rates are determined based on a personalized plan to best suit the individual needs of clients. Some of the services available through a personal trainer include weight loss plans, body conditioning, strength training, and martial arts such as Muay Thai. Registration and gym membership is electronically monitored. Members enjoy



exclusive unlimited gym use and resident membership rates are offered in three-six- and 12-month packages. Non-resident passes are available for daily and monthly users. The facility is air-conditioned, supported by a backup generator and offers CCTV security. Lockers are available per visit as are showers, Wi-Fi and beverages. Staff offer a personalized service, welcoming guests by name and fostering a sense of community, promoting a judgment-free zone making it a safe, clean, friendly place to get your daily gym grind and meet those 2025 fitness goals! 🌱 Location: Main Road, Station 1 (across Astoria Boracay) Members access: 6 a.m. to midnight Non-members access: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. DC Fitness Gym Boracay @dcfitness.boracay

BORACAY GYM DIRECTORY

FIT Boracay

The Tides Hotel Boracay, D'Mall
(+63 917) 542 8306
/tidesboracay/
@tidesboracay

OMG Fitness Boracay

Ocean Club Beach Resort, Station 3
(+63 917) 138 8025
/ohmymusclegym
@omgfitness_boracay

Kingfisher Gym

Kingfisher Farm, Station 3
Kingfisher Gym Boracay

Alpha Fitness

Patio Pacific, Station 1
/patiopacificboracay
@patiopacificboracay

Iron Throne Fitness Gym

Bulabog Beach
Iron Throne Fitness Gym

Health Club at Shangri-La Boracay

Shangri-La Hotel & Resort, Yapak
(+63 36) 288 4988
/ShangriLaBoracay/
@shangrilaboracay

ENVIRONMENT

Malumpati Animal Farm in Antique Launched

BY AMANDA VIRREY

As a company that proactively supports the environment and the community of Boracay, Ambassador in Paradise Boracay launches the Malumpati Animal Farm, an organic and free-range farm in Pandan, Antique.



“The purpose of our farm in Pandan is to provide a spacious and lush environment for ducks, chickens, wild pigs and goats to dwell in, as well as to allow them to live longer beyond the usual butchering age,” shares Ambassador’s former General Manager Ryan Alba.

Last December, they moved 17 ducks out of the livestock farm and into a double-tiered bamboo house within the half-hectare farm. A couple of weeks later, the chickens followed suit, as well as the wild pigs a few meters away.

Each group of livestock has its own fenced housing amid a wider perimeter fence, allowing the locally hired caretakers to

monitor and secure each head. Soon, goats will be grazing the verdant terrain.

The feeds of these livestock are 100% natural and organic. The chickens feed on corn and coconut meat, while the ducks and pigs feed on *upo* (bottle gourd), *gabi* leaves, eggplants, *kangkong* (water spinach), *alugbati* (vine spinach), cabbage, local fruits and other vegetables that are packed with high nutrition, thus ensuring their health and strength without the need for artificial and industrially manufactured growth enhancers.

Their vision of a longer lifespan for their livestock promises to impact the island community and its neighbors, providing holistic care for the animals.

At least at the Malumpati Animal Farm, pigs live for six months to 10 years, ducks from seven weeks to six years, chickens from six weeks to seven years, and goats can live as long as 12 years instead of 12 weeks.

Further fulfilling their sustainability efforts, Ambassador ensures a constant supply of natural feeds through agricultural lands in Santa Fe, Romblon, Libacao, Aklan and Yapak, Boracay.

The farms in Romblon and Libacao serve as Ambassador’s connections with those communities, providing them with livelihood opportunities, likewise supplying the ingredients for the resort’s restaurant and providing a marketplace for their staff’s consumption at a low price.

On the other hand, their farm in Yapak, which is nestled within the upcoming Ambassador in Paradise Garden Hotel, is rendered a vegetable garden where guests can experience a farm-to-table experience, harvesting crops, eating freshly cooked vegetarian dishes, and purchasing their harvests. Guests can also experience the *kawa*

bath dip and purchase bottled condiments made by the garden-hotel’s indigenous Ati employees.

Adding to this are their specialized tours to local landmarks like the Malumpati Spring Resort and the Motag Living Museum in Malay, as well as tie-ups with fish ports and fishermen all over Panay Island, supplying them with fresh fish and seafood for their “Fresh Catch-to-Table offerings.

Ultimately, while Malumpati Animal Farm is the Ambassador’s source for organic and free-range produce, it is but one project out of a bigger vision which is to be a sustainable source of livelihood that empowers local communities and supports natural resources, skipping multiple middle-resellers for better prices and the freshest supplies, highlighting each locale’s rich and unique traditions, and providing an enriching and memorable experience for tourists.

To know more about the Malumpati Animal Farm’s other sustainability efforts, contact Ambassador in Paradise. 🌿

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Ducks are released into a fenced house



Wild pigs eating green leaves in the barn



A chicken feeds on a coconut husk



Chicken bamboo house



An abundance of coconuts offered to Malumpati Animal Farm visitors



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NEWS

DOT Secretary Calls for Meeting with Malay LGU to Discuss Tourism Fees

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE



Photo courtesy of Philippine Star /Edd Gumban

member of the board of directors of the Boracay Foundation Incorporated (BFI) said that she authored the increase of both terminal and environmental fees now being charged in Boracay.

“The environmental fee was introduced as an ordinance in 2005. They were only charging PhP50, in 2009 it was amended and increased to PhP75 per tourist. In 2020, after the Boracay closure, we increased the environmental fee to PhP150 for locals and PhP300 for foreign tourists,” she told the *ANC News Channel*.

“After 2020, we realized that the local government has no access to the environmental funds. So, we decided to increase it. It has been already past 11 years (from the 2009 increase) and the hauling cost was increasing and we had no money to pay for the hauling,” she added.

The hauling cost refers to the garbage being collected in Boracay and transferred to the mainland.

By law, the Malay local government cannot appropriate the collected amount for environmental fees to other line items not related to the protection and sustainability of the environment including the marine ecosystem.

The terminal fee on the other hand (PhP150) is only charged when the Caticlan Port is being used as a gateway.

During the *Habagat* season, boat operation is transferred to the Tabon Port and the LGU does not charge terminal fees to tourists.

Frasco said that among her thrusts include the luring of a hundred cruise calls to visit the country until 2027, some 20 of them are expected to visit Boracay.

She also said that because Chinese tourists failed to visit the Philippines last year due to political issues raised in the West Philippines Sea, she is seeking to increase the arrival of Indian tourists to the Philippines in the country this year.

“Out of six million Indian tourists in 2024, only around 78,995 of them come to the Philippines. We just need to place the needed infrastructures for more Indian tourists to visit our country,” she added.

In April 2024, Indian Ambassador Dr. Sadre Alam told the *Boracay Sun News* at the Belmont Hotel that he saw Boracay as a potential place to go to for Indian tourists.

Aside from promoting Boracay to Indian tourists, Frasco also said that Boracay will serve as a venue host for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Tourism Forum (ATF), an annual gathering of Southeast Asian tourism ministers.

It was gathered that Boracay and Manila will be the venue for this year, while Cebu will play host early next year.

Malay Mayor Frolibar Bautista earlier told this writer that it could not be avoided that some tourist services in Boracay may be expensive as this resort island was recently named “Asia’s Leading Luxury Island Destination” at the World Travel Awards 2024.

It was gathered that among those excessive fees were corporate events, entertainment and wedding permits. The fees for such events are based on the scale of the event being requested. 🌴

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Frasco announced that she is planning to meet with local government officials to discuss some allegedly exorbitant tourism fees that are being charged in Boracay.

This was after a journalist asked her a question at the “Kapihan sa Manila Prince Hotel,” television show last January 22, 2025. The DOT Secretary served as the special guest on the show where she spoke of the plans and programs of the DOT for 2025.

During the forum, Frasco was asked by a journalist about the reported concern of several stakeholders that the DOT was lacking in its thrust to promote Boracay as a premier tourism destination because the tourism secretary is from Cebu.

The journalist also mentioned the low occupancy in hotels and restaurants.

The DOT Secretary said that her department was not remiss in the promotion of Boracay. Instead, it had received reports that some tourists are turned off with the high fees being charged by several tourism services in Boracay. She did not specify which local government services were said to be excessive.

She said she met with the Philippine Hotel Owners Association, the membership of which includes Boracay hotel owners as well as the Tourism Congress Union of the Philippines.

“Both organizations are unanimous in their reports to us that the challenges they are facing in Boracay emanate from the excessive fees that are being implemented as far as tourist activities are concerned. These are not impositions of the DOT, rather these are LGU impositions.

As a result of these concerns brought to us, I have already engaged with Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Juanito Victor Remulla to request the mounting of a dialogue among the DOT, the governor of the province of Aklan, as well as the mayor of Malay in Boracay precisely to address these ordinances that has been instituted as a result of the LGU authority, not as a result of the DOT. To my mind, having been as a mayor of myself I respect the autonomy of the LGU, at the same time we need to consider the tourism experience,” she added.

Before the question and answer segment, Frasco had been explaining to the national media how her department has been proactive in promoting the different tourism destinations in the country in the past two years and six months.

Nenette Graf, former Sangguniang Bayan (SB) Member and currently a

NEWS

MAYOR BAUTISTA CALLS FOR CRACKDOWN AGAINST UNREGISTERED WORKERS

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE



Photo by Freida Dario Santiago

Malay Mayor Frolibar Bautista has called on various government agencies to be vigilant against unregistered tourism workers in Boracay Island.

During a weekly flag-raising ceremony last January, Bautista addressed local government officials and national government organizations alerting them on the entry of illegal workers to Boracay Island. Among those who attended the flag-raising ceremony were personnel from the Philippine Coast Guard, the Malay Tourism Office, the Maritime Police, and the jetty port security.

“In my sortie around Boracay, I discovered two personnel working as agents of sea sports services who did not have their identification cards. Why were they able to enter Boracay? I am worried about this incident. I am calling the concerned government agencies to investigate why there are people working in Boracay with no government-issued identification cards,” he added.

Those found working illegally without proper IDs are asked to leave the island for

security reasons.

For over a decade, the Aklan provincial government has implemented a “one entry, one exit” policy. A government ID is required for workers, residents and tourists coming to and from Boracay. This is aimed at preventing undocumented individuals from entering the island.

In 2018, the Malay local government made the process of entering Boracay more stringent after it introduced a barangay ID policy for all residents in barangays Manocmanoc, Balabag and Yapak. The residents would have to present their barangay IDs when passing through the Caticlan or Cagban jetty ports.

In August 2024, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported the deaths of three individuals and seven others who went missing after riding on a fishing boat from Boracay to Semirara, Antique. The victims were killed in a collision between two fishing boats brought about by strong waves.

Based on the PCG investigation, the victims bypassed the “one entry, one exit” policy as they docked directly on a beach in Boracay. 🌴





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National Women’s Month has its roots in the recognition of International Women’s Day (IWD) on March 8, a historical event stemming from the organizing efforts of women in the early 20th Century.

In the Philippines, National Women’s Month (NWM) is celebrated on March 5. It has become a platform to spotlight women’s accomplishments and address ongoing and emerging issues related to women’s empowerment* and gender equality. The focus is on how women inspire other women, and how their success and leadership roles allow them to be a light, a beacon and an inspiration to working women in male-dominated professions.

According to the Philippine Commission on Women, the recurring theme for NWM from 2023 through 2028 is “WE for gender equality and inclusive society.” “WE” represents “Women and Everyone,” highlighting the collective responsibility for gender equality, not solely resting on women but involving

SPECIAL FEATURE

National Women’s Month

WOMEN EMPOWERED

BY FREIDA DARIO-SANTIAGO

everyone. “WE” also symbolizes “Women’s Empowerment,” a goal achievable when various entities, ranging from agencies and institutions to private partners and duty-bearers at national and local levels, ensure women equal rights and opportunities. The active participation of women in seizing these opportunities is also essential. Through the collaborative efforts of women and everyone, achieving gender equality becomes a tangible possibility.

Introduced in 2023, the theme is a renewal of the commitment and call to action advocated for in the 2016-2022 theme, “WE Make CHANGE Work for Women.” The earlier theme stressed

the importance of compassionate and harmonized networks towards gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The 2023 Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) which evaluates gender equality and progress, reflects the achievements in closing gender gaps in the country. According to the report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Philippines maintains its status as the leading Asian country in narrowing the gender gap. The country has attained 79.1% gender parity, securing the 16th position out of 146 countries globally—a rise of three places from its previous ranking, holding the second spot among its neighboring

countries in East Asia and the Pacific region.

*Women’s empowerment is the process of giving women the tools and opportunities to make decisions about their lives and influence social change. It involves helping women to become aware of gender inequality and to speak out against it.

WOMEN ADVOCATING WOMEN

We asked three inspiring Boracay women to share with us some of the challenges women face today, and their insights on overcoming these, taking on leadership roles, and the importance of supporting fellow women (and how to rule the world with woman power {wink wink}).

We hope that this feature motivates women to break the glass ceiling and overcome the barriers that prevent them from advancing and reaching their full potential. We hope that other women realize that women’s empowerment is not just a concept—it is real, as personified by these bold, brave and beautiful women of Boracay Island.

Sister Elvira “Elvie” Oliamot, D.C | Interviewed by Freida Dario-Santiago

I am Sr. Elvira M. Oliamot, a Daughter of Charity for 37 years. It is my second time being assigned here, the first time was from April 17, 2012 to May 14, 2015, as the education coordinator and treasurer. The first time was in June 2019 to the present. I was appointed as the Sister Servant of the community of Sisters. We are only three Sisters serving the Holy Rosary Parish Ati Mission: Boracay Ati Tribal Organization.

The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (DC) first came to Boracay on April 29, 2000, at the request of then-Bishop Gabriel V. Reyes in response to the Kalibo Diocesan Synod of 1997 for the welfare of the Indigenous People, the Ati of Boracay. Its main mission was to assist and accompany the Ati of Boracay.

At present, we are preparing for the celebration of 25 years of presence with the Ati this coming April 2025. That’s 25 years of journeying with them in a grace-filled encounter with our Lord through the Ati. A testimony of God’s faithfulness and love, and a manifestation of His endless generosity and presence to those who are being displaced by society.

I, together with the other DC assigned here, are God’s instruments of His presence and love. We believe that it is not us who are teaching them how to live their lives, but we are also learning WITH them, so that together, we will discover how to live life that is rooted in their identity and culture as Indigenous People and at the same time, as a person with rights and dignity equal to those of others.

Our way of journeying with them varies as time goes by. Programs have evolved from addressing the issue of malnutrition, illiteracy, discrimination, lack of livelihood opportunities, landlessness and housing, namely:

1. Education

There is already a nursery and kindergarten school inside the village exclusive only for the Ati children and scholarships for college students in partnership with our DC Schools in Roxas, Iloilo, and Cebu, Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Assisi Development Foundation Inc.

2. Health

To continue to improve their hygiene and wellbeing. Just last year, with the help of KALAHI-CIDDS-PAMANA and LGU of Malay and Brgy. Manocmanoc, a Health Center was launched within the ancestral land of the Ati named “Sapiw Durugukan.” It is open to all residents of the barangay to promote easy access and quality health care among all. The community is blessed to have a graduate of BS in Midwifery who will be a great help to the center.

3. Livelihood

We know that we will not be staying with them for good, and so it is our main goal to help them stand on their own, as individuals and as a community, thus sustainable livelihood is one of our main focus.

Through the years, many skills training seminars and workshops have been given to the Ati in collaboration with private individuals and groups, the government and NGOs. Most of these flourished and are now sustaining the community such as a community store and souvenir shops, vegetable gardens, a dragon fruit farm, a bakery, a peace pond, and the newly-built Sapiw Pahuwayan or the Ati Lodge.

4. Advocacy for Justice and Peace

After experiencing the death of an Ati youth leader, this advocacy was intensified to stand for human rights, justice



Sr. Elvie Oliamot joins the Boracay Ati at the Ati-atihan beach parade (Photo by Sr. Inah Ellana, D.C.)



“We envision a just, equal and empowered Ati of Boracay who can stand on their own with dignity and pride as the first settlers of the island and as human beings with rights and dignity equal to those of others.”

and peace, and to protect their rights to their ancestral lands. Unfortunately, their fight for their ancestral land is still ongoing.

For us, DC, it is also one of our advocacies, that is why, we stand at the forefront with them especially now in their #LabanNaMayDangal. Their fight is also the fight of the whole DC not only in our province, but of the whole Company. According to our founder, St. Vincent de Paul, “There is no charity without justice.” Thus, as long as they are not yet reaping their justice, we will stand and fight with them.

5. Cultural & Spiritual

We always make it a point to uphold and respect their unique traditions and cultures. We share our faith and practices with them and they also teach us and generously share their rich traditions and precious lives with us. We envision a just, equal and empowered Ati of Boracay who can stand on their own with dignity and pride as the first settlers of the island and as human beings with rights and dignity equal to those of others.

Women’s empowerment and gender equality

In most of the tribes here in the Philippines, their leaders are usually men, and their structure is more patriarchal. But in the past 20 years, the Ati Boracay has been led by a woman Tribal Chieftain, together with her are seven other

women who comprise the Project Management Team, or the coordinators of each program.

They became empowered as they were tested like gold by the many abuses and injustices they experienced. They are the ones managing their community and accompanying their tribe. We are just companions in their journey who offer guidance, but the leadership is all theirs. Through the Council of Elders, men’s and women’s voices are equally heard as well as the youth who are the future of their tribe. We continue to impart to them that they have equal dignity and rights, and that respect for their uniqueness is essential in their lives.

Women as leaders

Without being biased, we have discovered some qualities of having women as leaders. They are more risk-takers and are open to leaving their comfort zones, especially during injustices and abuses. The Ati Women Leaders could speak more simply and courageously from their heart especially if it is for the good of the community. They could communicate well and calmly. They are more sensitive to their instinct and are open to changes and flexible enough to divert things and decisions when needed. They are compassionate yet firm when things are being shaken. Above all, their nurturance as a mother goes beyond their family, as they could care for the whole community as just one family.

On the other hand, they also experience some abuses in terms of gender and sexuality, and so, we also intensified our advocacy for anti-violence against women and children, including protecting the rights of men. It is quite challenging because, as a tribe, they also have their own beliefs. We continue to educate them and make them aware of the realities of life outside of the village and their rights. We also initiated some awareness campaigns among the men in society, both fathers and youths, with the help of Men Opposed to Violence Against Women Everywhere (MOVE) Aklan.

At the end of the day, we continually advocate for gender equality, human rights, justice and peace.

On a personal note, a good leader is a good listener and a follower. Most of all, humble. Humble not only in sharing herself and her gifts but humble enough to embrace her vulnerabilities before others. A good leader empowers and inspires others to develop their abilities and goodness. Above all, a good leader has the heart for the Almighty who is the Giver of all; for herself because you cannot give what you do not have; and for the poor who are her sisters and brothers despite race, color, and gender.

With these, a community will surely flourish and be united without anyone being left behind, all are together in achieving one goal.

Message to women

For all the women out there, let us continue to empower one another and inspire hope in others. Let us continue on this path of gender equality and women empowerment. Let us together face the challenges of other women among indigenous tribes and in other parts of the world where women are still deprived of many things with kindness, respect, and humane love so that no one will be left behind. May this patriarchal world be balanced by the strength and love of women.

May we look to God the Father, the Creator of all, who built the “Mother Church” as His spouse in bringing here on Earth His Kingdom where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28).

Normeth Preglo Parzhuber | *Interviewed by Rica Velasco*

Boracay resident since November 1989.

Achievements and recognitions

Founder and director: Philippine Mermaid Swimming Academy (2012), International Mermaid Swimming Instructors Association (2014)
Managing director: Hangin Kite Center & Resort (2000)
Co-founder/property investment specialist: Searena Realty (2022)
General sales manager: Ion Philippines (2006)
Distributor operator: Duotone Kiteboarding Philippines (2001)

I've never received many awards besides being a valedictorian, MVP in sports, and Girl Scout of the Year. Honestly, being complimented daily for being fit for my age is more than enough for me!

Creating the International Mermaid Swimming Association is my proudest achievement—not in terms of financial gain, but in the recognitions I've received from various international TV channels, magazines and media outlets as the creator of the very first official mermaid school. I felt like an instant celebrity, with years of nonstop interviews. Mermaids from all over the globe travel to train with me so they can open their own academies.

Additionally, I launched an event called the Merlympics in 2015, which has been held twice in Germany, once in the UK, and twice in Switzerland. This year, we will host it in Würzburg, Germany. It fills me with pride to see that mermaiding has evolved from a lifestyle into a profession.

Tell us how your businesses are instrumental in providing equal opportunities for women and improving their lives.

My mother once said, "Do the things you love, and the money will follow." That's exactly what I believe in. All my businesses and organizations focus on bringing joy to both myself and my clients.

From scuba diving and mermaiding to kiteboarding and organizing events, I'm passionate about it all. I train many students, guiding them from novice to expert, helping them become independent and turn their hobbies into professions.

What are your thoughts on women's empowerment and gender equality?

Women's empowerment and gender equality are like the ultimate team-up for a brighter future. When we empower



“Behind every successful man stands a strong woman, but behind every successful woman is an exhausted man!”

women, we're giving them the superpowers to make choices for their lives. Gender equality means everyone gets a fair shot at opportunities and resources.

Think of it this way: when we embrace these ideas, we unlock better economic growth, healthier communities, and more vibrant lives. It's like adding a splash of color to a black-and-white world! Achieving gender equality and empowering women isn't just smart—it's a recipe for a fantastic future for all of us!

Do you have any advocacies for women and the community?

We started Project MOM (Mermaid on a Mission)

collaborating with Boracay Foundation and some marine biologists to restore and clean our reefs through coral planting which sadly has been stopped since the pandemic and we are still waiting for our local government to give us the go signal to resume the project.

We also travel from island to island, teaching fishermen proper first-aid techniques and emphasizing the importance of our coral habitats, including sharks, turtles and other marine life. Additionally, we launched Project Smile, as Mother Theresa said, "World peace starts with a smile." Together with my sister, the Tooth Fairy, Dr. Vivid Preglo, and local and international dentists, we provide dental clinics in remote areas and islands and distribute free dental kits.

What would you say are the most vital qualities of a good leader?

Vision: A strong leader has a clear vision and can articulate it to inspire others. They see the bigger picture and can set goals that align with that vision.

Trustworthiness and honesty are crucial too. The ability to adjust to changing circumstances and challenges is vital. Leaders must remain flexible and open to new ideas, approaches and solutions.

A good leader inspires and motivates others to reach their full potential. They recognize achievements and encourage growth and development.

Women as leaders

Women leaders can sometimes encounter relationship challenges, as some men may feel their masculinity is threatened. We should acknowledge that while we may take the lead in certain areas, we wouldn't be able to do so without our partner's support. Behind every successful man stands a strong woman, but behind every successful woman is an exhausted man!

Message to women

Swallow your pride and ego. Always strive to stay positive and forgive as much as you can. Don't hold on to grudges; you'll sleep better at night. Believe in yourself, keep leading, and pursue what makes you happy—don't wait, because tomorrow might be too late!

Sarah Labrooy | *Interviewed by Rica Velasco*

Philippine resident since 1997, Boracay resident since 1999.

Achievements and recognitions

Owner and partner at Lemoni Cafe (since September 2005) and DiniBeach Bar & Restaurant (since December 2019).

Tell us how your businesses are instrumental in providing equal opportunities for women and improving their lives.

We care about the environment and have always emphasized sustainability to our team and it's beautiful to see them take this to heart. We believe in our staff and always promote from within. We treat our staff as a team of professionals and value their input. It's about respect.

What are your thoughts on women's empowerment and gender equality?

The fight is not over, and we all have a role to play. Something very simple we can all do is for women to support women. Don't look at each other as competition, let's all look at each other as allies.

Do you have any advocacies for women and the community?

I have two advocacies for all women that I feel so strongly about, and I tell these to our female staff all the time.

1. Always work and make your own money, for yourself and your children.
No matter what your status in life is, this is so important as we cannot truly depend on anyone in this life except ourselves.
2. Breastfeed!

When I see women throwing their money down the drain on formula it just breaks my heart. Not to mention of course it is not nearly as nutritious for babies. I wish hospitals and the government did a better job of encouraging this.

What would you say are the most vital qualities of a good leader?

The ability to listen, truly listen to other people and put yourself through empathy in their place. It's also very important to not take things personally, to stay above the fray. If people believe you are a fair person that sees every side then they will look at you as a leader.



Women as leaders

The women in this country are the best of the best. Everything would collapse without them. Our restaurants are very female-oriented. If you are a man in our companies and can't take direction from a woman you are in the wrong place. Women, let's face it, are the hardest workers and know what real loyalty is. Perhaps this is due to our nurturing and giving nature. If you need a job done, ask a woman!

I have been in hospitality my whole life. The minute I started with a part-time job in high school I knew it was for me. Moving to the Philippines and being able to be a partner in two businesses that I adore with an incredible business partner is the dream of my life. What I love about hospitality here is the people.

Filipinos are just naturally the most hospitable people in the world. They have an inborn empathy and kindness to their fellow human beings; this makes them a natural fit for hospitality. I have hired many people over the years with zero experience and trained them to be wonderful

service professionals due to their ability and desire to learn. Training people from scratch is something I truly take great pride in. I care so deeply for our teams, especially the women I have worked with for so many years. We like to think of ourselves as one big family. One team, One Dream!

The greatest challenge of being a woman in the hospitality industry

I have never felt at a disadvantage of being a female when it comes to our staff. Having said that, I am disrespected and made to feel small by male customers (mostly foreign) on an almost daily basis. Sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously.

Message to women

Believe in yourself. You can accomplish anything you put your mind and heart to, but you must truly believe it before anyone else will. Be kind to yourself, with the way you speak to and about yourself. If you work hard in whatever industry you are in and go above and beyond on a regular basis, you will stand out. Try to work with strong women that you admire. Older women, mentor younger women. Moms, do your daughters the biggest favor and put them on birth control (am I allowed to say that?).

I love the women of this country. Truly. I think about 95% of my female friends are Filipinas. When I think about my female friends it's years of support, laughter, good times and deep acceptance of each other. We are having fun growing old together and look forward to so many more years of this. Every woman should enjoy female friendships, and as you get older, you appreciate your female friends more and more. 🌿

“Every woman should enjoy female friendships, and as you get older, you appreciate your female friends more and more.”



SPORTS

Karen Cabrera: A Trailblazer in Philippine Ultimate Frisbee

BY PAULINE REITZER

beginnings in 2002 with four teams to a world-class event featuring over 20 teams from countries like Australia, Portugal and Japan.

Her leadership extends nationally as well. Karen served as vice president of the Philippine Flying Disc Association (PFDA) in 2014 and became its president from 2018 to 2024. Under her leadership, the sport flourished, fostering inclusivity and opportunities for athletes across the country.

“Ultimate is empowering,” Karen says. “You’re respected for who you are, not your gender.” She passionately advocates for girls to join the sport, highlighting its inclusivity, confidence-building, and the chance to shine equally alongside men.

Karen dreams of a future where more girls embrace Ultimate not just for fun or fitness but as a platform for growth. “It’s a way to dream big,” she adds. “With hard work, amazing things can happen.”

With Karen’s help, the Boracay Open and Philippine Ultimate continue to inspire players from all walks of life to push boundaries and celebrate the spirit of the game. 🌴



Karen Cabrera is a name synonymous with Philippine Ultimate Frisbee. A proud Boracay local since 2004, she has dedicated two decades to the sport and the growing community it fosters. Karen’s journey began learning to throw from Niña Bustamante alongside other local friends. Soon after, she joined the legendary Boracay Dragons, cementing her place in Ultimate history.

Karen’s influence goes beyond playing. In 2010, she and her team took over organizing the Boracay Open, one of the most anticipated Ultimate tournaments in Asia. “It made sense for a local to manage logistics,” Karen shares. Since then, the Boracay Open has grown from its humble

CHIT CHAT

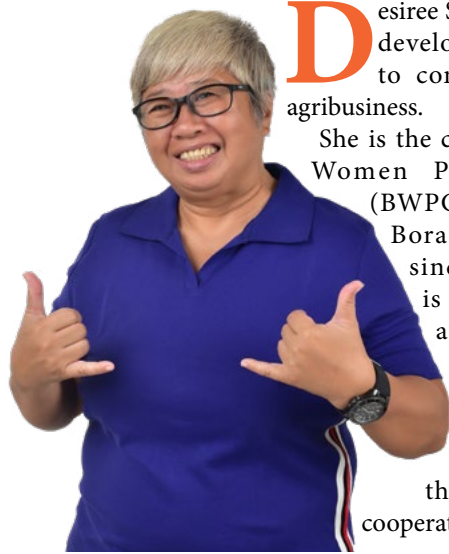
BSN chit chats with some of the community’s pillars and the folks you all want to get to know a little better.

Ma. Ninfa Desiree Segovia

BY PAULINE REITZER

Editor’s Note:

While we support and highlight many advocacies and initiatives, we would like to clarify that any interviews or content we produce are not affiliated with, and do not promote any political parties, political representatives, or political organizations. Boracay Sun News’ intent is to remain neutral.



Desiree Segovia is a passionate social development worker dedicated to community organizing and agribusiness.

She is the chairperson of the Boracay Women Producers Cooperative (BWPC), also known as Pinay Boracay. A Boracay resident since November 2012, she is a recipient of numerous awards and recognitions for her philanthropic work, particularly in her selfless dedication towards empowering women through various agricultural cooperatives and entrepreneurship.

Personal recognitions:

- 2024: DA Region 6 Winner, Search for Outstanding Rural Women
- 2021: Unsung Women Hero Soroptimist International, Inc.
- 2020: Your Hospitality Community Hero, My Ranggo Magazine

BWPC awards:

- 2019: Coast Guard Auxiliary District Western Visayas (CGADWV), BEST
- 2019: One of the Best Women’s Group, Province of Aklan
- 2018, 2022, 2023: DTI, One Town One Product (OTOP) Awardee (Gumamela Products & Wearables Beach Wears)
- 2023: Top 5 Social Enterprise Sinag Awards by BPI Foundation and Bayan Academy
- 2024: DTI, Top 3 Best Product for Flower & Fruit Candies
- 2024: DTI, Best Shared Service Facility (Wearables in Western Visayas)

Why did you pursue a career or business venture in this field?

I am passionate about transformations for the betterment of a community especially families. It is something we can be proud of. I started in 2003 when I ventured into agribusiness of malunggay

(moringa), calamansi and corn for feeds. The business required a lot of negotiations with communities of farmers all over the country.

What major challenges have you encountered so far?

The major challenge is pursuing

goals with greater independence and control since I only have limited resources and funding.

When you decided to live on Boracay, what did you love most about the island and lifestyle?

I moved to Boracay in 2013. The beach was calling and there were opportunities for transformation in the community. As a social worker, the culture of the community is a challenge for transformation. Beyond the beautiful beach, Boracay is a community of loving and compassionate people. And it’s a very good model for sustainability, social justice and significance in the country and the world.

Why did you choose to pursue a career or business in Boracay?

The business industry is full of potential for the community and for personal or professional growth as well as an unlimited potential in possible income.

What are your greatest achievements so far?

My greatest achievement is helping the local women get organized for their economic growth, social justice and welfare.

What keeps you preoccupied, aside from work?

Traveling with my growing family for memorable moments and memories.

What most people don’t know about you?

That I serve the people without being paid.

As a business person, what is the most bankable feature the island has to offer?

Its laidback lifestyle due to its beaches, the agritourism opportunities and its good-natured women farmers.

How should businesses contribute to the sustainability of Boracay’s environment and tourism industry?

The business community should take the lead in having an eco-living lifestyle and take the extra effort to educate the community in environmental

sustainability.

What is your message to the Boracay Island community, its leaders and the youth?

We can do this together. Let’s work together for a more beautiful and better Boracay.

What is your goal for your business this year? Where do you see yourself and your business five years from now?

There will be so much struggle due to the economic inflation. However, with proper management and reasonable sacrifices to sustain life (and still be happy in life), I see myself playing an important role in helping people in a more serious level. 🌴

What is the Boracay Women Producers Cooperative?

The Boracay Women Producers Cooperative (BWPC), known as Pinay Boracay, is a great example of entrepreneurship fueled by community.

Pinay Boracay began as a vision to showcase Boracay beyond its reputation as a tourist destination, instead highlighting its potential for agriculture and food production. Desiree recognized the opportunities for transformation and chose to focus on empowering local women. Today, the cooperative has its own “Heritage Hub,” a 300-squaremeter lot where members process their products, farm organic vegetables, and grow tropical flowers.

Through intensive training, the women of BWPC have developed skills in enterprise management and sustainable farming practices. Their products align with the vision of an Eco-Agri-Tourism Farm Village, emphasizing low-carbon, zero-waste and organic methods. For instance, BWPC’s product lines are crafted from locally sourced raw materials, ensuring that each item reflects their commitment to non-chemical farming and environmental responsibility.

BWPC’s impact extends beyond agriculture. Their advocacies include “Organic Boracay” for promoting safe, organic food; “Botanicals Boracay” for encouraging the use of natural herbs for health; and “Beautify Boracay” for environmental beautification using tropical flowers and sustainable landscaping practices.

Pinay Boracay offers a variety of eco-friendly, culture-based, health-promoting products. These include herbal oils, anti-dengue body oil, native mango snack bites, blue ternate flower, calamansi and gumamela candies, breadfruit chips, sunblock lotion, soap and hard shampoo, perfumes, essential oils, herbal teas, and Sarasarang Banana Native Coffee with coconut sugar. Their product lines showcase the best of Boracay’s natural resources.

In addition to its agricultural and social endeavors, BWPC also advocates for women’s welfare and wellbeing through its BAYeNIHAN initiative, which focuses on ending violence against women and girls and fostering support systems for empowerment.

Looking forward, BWPC remains focused on overcoming challenges like economic inflation while striving to sustain its impact on the local community. With a dream of building a better Boracay, Desiree’s leadership and the cooperative’s efforts exemplify how business, sustainability and social justice can work hand in hand.

Pinay Boracay’s products can be found in the following shops: Localidad, Hue Hotel, GMarket in Ambulong, Savoy Hotel, Boracay Newcoast, VHub along Station 3 beachfront, Cagban Jetty Port and Henann Hotels & Resorts.

You can support Pinay Boracay by donating to their BAYeNIHAN initiative, purchasing their products, availing of their cultural land tour services, or enjoying their slow food culture dishes. For more information, visit their website at www.pinayboracay.com. 🌴

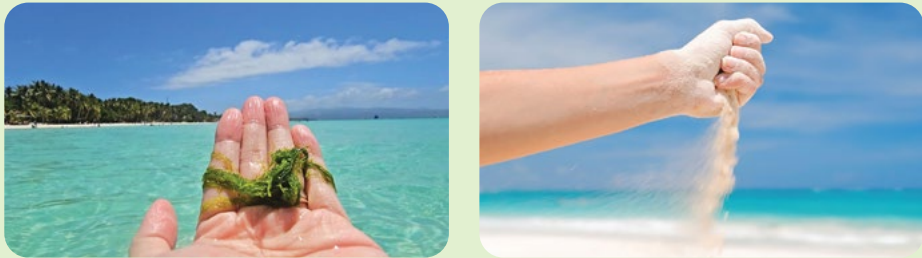
ENVIRONMENT

Algae 101

We debunk the myth behind Boracay's fine white sand and the alleged role that green algae play

TEXT & PHOTOS BY FREIDA DARIO-SANTIAGO

Boracay's uniquely pristine white sand is often attributed to the green algae that are prolific during the summer season. It is believed that the green algae or seaweed (locally called *lumot*) bakes under the tropical sun and the dried remains that crumble into the sand give it its illustrious and distinctive white sand.



MYTH: This fibrous green algae turns into Boracay's famed white sand.
MALING PANINIWALA: Ang lumot ay nagiging puting buhangin ng Boracay.

This is a myth.
Truth be told, it is easy to see why this has been a long-held belief by local island folk (and worthy of respect). Part of the reason people think that these fibrous green algae turn into sand is simply because when they dry up on the beach, ultra-fine sand tends to cling to it and as it decomposes, it seems as though it becomes sand. In fact, it just disintegrates and mixes into the *actual sand*.
Sand is comprised of minerals. Algae on the other hand (which are plantlike living things called protists), do not turn into mineral substances. When they dry up and get pulverized, it does not turn into white sand. Rather, they turn into soil sediments, mixing with the existing mineral compounds in the sand, only adding to the sand minerals' cushy or pillow-like characteristic.
Therefore, what gives Boracay Island its unique talcum powder fine sand? The answer is the abundance of Halimeda spp. and the Parrotfish that grind it into sand.
Boracay Island's sand grains are made up of coral sand. This coral sand consists mainly of calcium carbonate, the mineral that makes the skeletons and shells of corals, clams, and other marine organisms. These are formed when **Parrotfish** feed on corals. The reef fish bite and scrape algae off of rocks and dead corals with their parrot-like beaks, grind up the inedible calcium-carbonate reef material (made mostly of coral skeletons) in their guts and then excrete it as sand (as much as 450 kilograms per year). It is the abundant presence of **Halimeda spp.**, hardened or calcified coralline algae (or algae that live inside the corals' tissues, not to be mistaken with the lumot along the island's shores) in Boracay that creates the fine white sand mixture that is unique to Boracay Island, and crucial to the island's coral reefs.



A patch of Halimeda spp. in a coral reef; Steer clear of catching or eating parrotfish (locally called loro or mol-mol) are the ultimate sand makers, thanks to their teeth that allow them to pulverize coral into the ultra-fine Boracay sand.
(Photo courtesy of fishmasters.com)

Should we be worried about the prolific green algal bloom that is a seasonal natural occurrence at summertime?
As of this writing, the algae along the shorelines of Boracay Island's beaches, particularly along the world-famous four-kilometer White Beach, are in full bloom. According to Boracay-based marine biologist and dive master Haron Deo Vargas, it is harmless and very safe to swim with. In fact, it is nature's way of balancing the ecosystem.
This phenomenon has been observed for decades by locals who point out that back in the 80s since hardly anyone walked on the beach, the untouched algae looked like a light green carpet.
Due to the calm warm waters and intense light, these green algae consume excess nutrients from the water resulting in their bloom during the hot summer months, even serving as a shelter for some juvenile fishes. For Boracay locals, the recurrent green algae along the shore is simply an indication that the summer season has arrived.
However, Vargas, a former marine biologist of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Community Environment and Natural Resources office Boracay who specializes in coastal and marine resources management also tells us: "The algal bloom—although harmless in and of itself—is also an indication of much organic nutrient deposits on our beaches. As such, it is vital that action is taken to make sure that our pristine beaches remain safe for swimming for tourists and the local community—such as regular water quality monitoring around Boracay Island and making sure that all commercial and residential establishments are complying with environmental laws."
So far, its breadth is not yet alarming, but local scientists are taking notice, and are hoping that the local and national government will remain steadfast in its commitment to protecting Boracay Island's environment.
Compared to the years prior to the island closure when the algal bloom was considered alarming, today it is still within "normal" parameters. But how long this will last without regular testing and environment policing is the big question.
Learned something new? Share these fun facts with your friends and family, because the more we know about our environment, the better we can understand how to live in harmony with nature and preserve God's greatest gifts to humanity.

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ISLAND GUIDE

A Backpacker's Guide to Hostels in Boracay

BY PAULINE REITZER

Boracay has long been a favorite destination for travelers. Backpackers especially appreciate its laid-back atmosphere and affordable accommodation options. If you're looking to explore this tropical paradise on a budget, staying in one of Boracay's hostels is an excellent choice.



Happiness Hostel Boracay

Located in Bulabog, Happiness Hostel offers a peaceful yet social experience. Just a short walk from Bulabog Beach, famous for kiteboarding and watersports, this hostel is perfect for adventure seekers and water sports enthusiasts.

Highlights:

- Location: A five-minute walk from Bulabog Beach and a 10-minute stroll to White Beach.
- Social atmosphere: The hostel has a community vibe with its coffee shop, skateboard bowl, swimming pool, delicious Middle-Eastern restaurant (with vegetarian options), wellness area with yoga, massages and ice bath, cozy common area, game area with darts and billiard, and regular daily and evening activities for guests. It's easy to meet new friends and share experiences.
- Amenities: Free Wi-Fi, air-conditioned rooms, dorms and private rooms, generator and access to lockers for added security, and a wellness center and tattoo shop.
- Nearby attractions: Kiteboarding and windsurfing in Bulabog Beach and D'Mall for shopping and dining.

If you enjoy tranquility with easy access to activities, Happiness Hostel is a perfect fit.



Chillax Boracay

As the name suggests, Chillax Boracay offers a laid-back, relaxed environment that invites you to take things slow and enjoy the island life. Nestled in Diniwid, Chillax gives you a break from the busier areas of the island.

Highlights:

- Location: Near Diniwid Beach but away from the hustle, providing a quiet atmosphere.
- Unique vibe: A mix of rustic island charm and modern conveniences with container accommodations in the middle of a jungle setting. The outdoor lounge area is a perfect spot to unwind with fellow travelers.
- Amenities: Clean, well-ventilated dorm rooms with private lockers, a shared kitchen available for guests, a swimming pool, a generator, and fast Wi-Fi.
- Nearby attractions: A short walk to Diniwid Beach, local eateries and the nightlife along White Beach, Station 1.

Chillax Boracay is for those who want to enjoy Boracay's famous beaches without being constantly surrounded by crowds. It's a more serene spot but still close to everything the island has to offer.



Chill Out Boracay

If you're in the mood to take it easy and enjoy a casual atmosphere, Chill Out Boracay offers just that. It's a great choice for budget travelers who want a simple, clean and welcoming place to stay.

Highlights:

- Location: Bulabog, which is the quieter part of Boracay's center, and walking distance from White Beach.
- Social hub: The common areas here are designed to foster interaction. You can chill in the garden, exchange stories, or participate in some organized hostel activities. The restaurant offers international and Filipino cuisines with vegetarian options.
- Amenities: Offers both private and dormitory-style rooms with air-conditioning. There's also a small café that serves affordable meals and local favorites.
- Nearby attractions: White Beach is only a few minutes' walk away, as well as D'Mall where you can shop and dine. Bulabog Beach is also conveniently close by for kiteboarding and water sports enthusiasts.

Chill Out Boracay is perfect for budget-conscious travelers looking for a social environment where you can easily meet new people and make friends while staying in the heart of Boracay.



Frenz Resort & Hostel Boracay

Frenz is one of the most iconic and well-known hostels on the island. Established over 20 years ago, it has a strong reputation among backpackers for its great value, lively atmosphere and central location.

Highlights:

- Location: Right at the center of White Beach between Station 1 & 2, perfect for those interested in the buzzing nightlife.
- Lively atmosphere: Frenz is famous for its social environment. The hostel regularly hosts live music nights, beach parties and even offers pasta parties on certain days.
- Amenities: Offers a range of accommodations from dorms to private rooms, all equipped with air-conditioning. The hostel also has a swimming pool, restaurant, billiards table and a beautiful garden.
- Nearby attractions: White Beach is a two-minute walk away and you'll have easy access to bars, restaurants, and shops.

If you're looking for a place that offers a blend of fun, relaxation and an opportunity to make new friends from all over the world, Frenz is the place to be.

Choosing the Right Hostel for Your Boracay Adventure

Each of these hostels offers something unique for travelers, whether you're looking for a quiet escape or a lively social scene. Here's a quick comparison to help you decide:

- Happiness Hostel: Perfect for those who love watersports and want a peaceful setting and beautiful architecture near Bulabog Beach.
- Chillax Boracay: Best for travelers looking for a quiet, inexpensive and laid-back spot near Diniwid.
- Chill Out Boracay: Great for budget-conscious travelers wanting to stay close to the

action in Station 2.

- Frenz Resort & Hostel: Ideal for those looking to meet fellow travelers and dive into Boracay's nightlife scene.

No matter which hostel you choose, you're sure to experience the best of Boracay's charm, whether through its beaches, nightlife, or friendly backpacker community. Enjoy your stay! 🌴



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INDULGE FOOD TRIPPING ON A BUDGET

BY JAZ MARA

Eating out and enjoying good food isn't always synonymous to spending a lot. In fact, a good feast within the budget makes it even more satisfying! Here's a list of establishments on the island that offer affordable dishes that both solo travelers and big groups can enjoy.



CHICHAS AND PICA

A charming spot with a menu of dishes all priced below PhP300, Chichas and Pica should definitely be part of any budget-friendly, must-visit restaurants list. They offer all-day breakfast meals, quick dishes and favorite snacks with a selection of warm and cold beverages like specialty coffee. With an ideal location at the beachfront of Station 1, the dining experience always involves enjoying the sea breeze and amazing view of the famous Willy's Rock. They have rice meals and wraps for solo travelers, while groups can mix and match dishes from their menu such as Nachos (PhP260), Flavored Chicken Wings (PhP275) and Spam Carbonara (PhP290) for a feast that is less than PhP1,000.



KOLAI MANGYAN

Right beside Chichas and Pica is a native looking restaurant that offers tasty and well-loved Filipino dishes at very affordable prices. Kolai Mangyan has combo and sharing meals, perfect for solo travelers and big groups. They offer dishes such as *Sinigang* (a sour broth with meaty cuts of pork and vegetables), *Kare Kare* (stew with thick, savory peanut sauce, meat and vegetables) and *Lechon Kawali*, a popular Filipino dish made with well-seasoned pork belly fried into golden perfection making its skin super crunchy and its meat tender and moist. Here, diners can enjoy a festive table of dishes that is easy on the wallet. A suggested complete and well-balanced feast for sharing is: Lechon Kawali (PhP400), *Bulasing* (PhP150), *Pakbet* (PhP300), cups of rice (PhP50/each) and Leche Flan (PhP50) for dessert. All that within a P1,000 budget.



Branches:
Manoc Manoc: Tindahan it Boracay on Tuluhan Road
Bulabog: Road 1A
Website: jtsmanukangrille.com
FB: JT's Manukan Grille Boracay
Phone: 0968 6001961



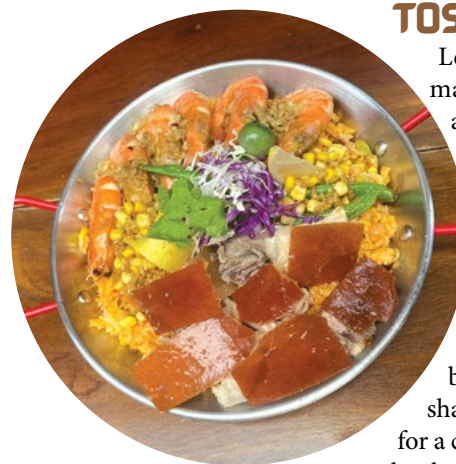
DONENOO

Samgyupsal on a budget? Absolutely possible! Donenoo, a local-favorite Korean restaurant offers ala carte samgyupsal for only PhP380. This includes 150g of thinly sliced, high-quality meat and unlimited servings of side dishes and rice. It doesn't require a minimum number of persons unlike the usual unlimited samgyupsal packages, which makes it perfect for solo travelers or groups that may want to try other Korean dishes. They also offer different types of *gimbap* (PhP150) which is served with unlimited side dishes. Their Korean stews such as *Kimchijjigae* are also worth trying and are less than PhP500.



BUN BUN BORACAY

Tasting a variety of dishes served in small plates is what makes Chinese dim sum amazing! There's always that softness or crispiness from a bun or a dim sum wrapper then a juicy and flavorful bite from the meat and of course, an extra umami from the dipping sauce. These bites are always so comforting and satisfying! Bun Bun is spoiling Boracay foodies by offering a variety that are all below PhP200. The menu also includes affordable noodles and skewers that can be paired with the dim sum dishes. Chinese cravings satisfied without breaking the budget.



TOSTACHON

Lechon is a special Filipino dish prepared by marinating a whole pig with condiments, herbs and spices then roasting it over an open fire for hours giving it a crispy skin and flavorful meat. This dish brings excitement and smiles since it is usually served during special occasions. Luckily, lechon is available daily at Tostachon. They offer different lechon sets and dishes for solo and group diners. Their Surf and Turf plate offers a mixed serving of lechon and buttered shrimps (PhP499), which is good for sharing. It can be paired with chop suey (PhP220) for a complete feast that is very affordable. Tostachon is also known for their *tostadas* (PhP150), deep-fried tortilla chips topped with either lechon or chicken bits. A perfect budget snack while enjoying the island.



ESKINITA

It's always interesting to try familiar dishes but prepared and served with a twist, just like the Crispy Palabok from Eskinita. This dish uses deep-fried vermicelli noodles instead of the usually boiled ones. The noodles are smothered with a delicious shrimp gravy sauce topped with minced pork, smoked fish and a boiled egg. It is good for 2-3 persons and is only PhP370. That's a steal! Their grilled dishes are served with homemade barbecue sauce made with Tanduay, a famous local rum that surely adds a unique flavor. For local desserts, the Banana *Langka Turon* ala Mode (PhP170) is a top choice. It is banana and sweetened jackfruit wrapped in spring roll wrapper, fried and served with ice cream and muscovado. Serving sizes include solo rice meals and dishes for sharing. As the name suggests, Eskinita is located in a small alley close to Bulabog Beach.



CATHY'S BISTRO

Offering a chill dining experience, Cathy's Bistro along Bulabog Beach is worth a visit. This restaurant offers various dishes from different well-liked cuisines. Asian rice bowls, European plates, salads, sandwiches, pizzas and pasta, they've got you covered. Must-try dishes are Chicken Teriyaki (PhP350) served with rice and salad, and the Puttanesca (PhP320), which is made with al dente Italian noodles topped with a sauce made with anchovies, olives, bell peppers, capers and tomatoes. This place can be a one-stop shop for groups with varying food preferences or solo travelers who prefer more options to their meals. 🌿

7,641: PHILIPPINE TRAVEL INSIDER

More to love about the Philippine islands

Editor’s Note:

This new section is our way of practicing inclusivity and endeavors to introduce our readers to other Philippine destinations worth a visit. Our hope is to connect the 7,641 islands by creating travel corridors (and connecting flights and routes) from Boracay Island and back to our shores! #stringingthegems

DISCOVER MORE OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS WHEN YOU VISIT BORACAY

BY GENE LOVES ACOSTA



If the past few years have taught us anything, it’s to enjoy the thrill of discovery and make the most of every chance to explore. Travel has shifted from being a luxury to a way of connecting with people, cultures or ourselves. And Boracay, the crown jewel of Philippine beaches, isn’t just a place to relax or have fun anymore. It has also become a springboard to exploring some of the country’s most breathtaking spots.

With the Department of Tourism’s message, “Love the Philippines,” there’s never been a better time to explore and appreciate what this beautiful country has to offer. Every destination has something special waiting for you, from lively cities to peaceful islands. Here’s a guide to the amazing places you can fly to from the Catician Airport.

Manila
Airlines: Cebu Pacific, Philippine Airlines, AirAsia
Frequency: Multiple daily flights
Duration: Typically around 50 minutes to 1 hour
Estimated fares: Starting at PhP1,600
What to do: Manila is a bustling hub of history and culture.

Walk the cobblestone streets of Intramuros, shop ‘till you drop at sprawling malls and savor different cuisines, from street food favorites to Michelin-starred dining. The city is alive 24/7, with vibrant nightlife spots, museums and cultural events.

Cebu City
Airlines: Cebu Pacific, Philippine Airlines
Frequency: Averaging six flights daily
Duration: Approximately 1 hour
Estimated fares: Starting at PhP1,500
What to do: Cebu, the “Queen City of the South” is a mix of history, culture and beach life.

Visit the iconic Magellan’s Cross, explore the breathtaking Kawasan Falls and feast on Cebu lechon (arguably the best in the country).

Cebu is also a gateway to other destinations. Take a ferry to Bohol (2 hours) for the Chocolate Hills and tarsiers, Dumaguete (4 hours) for Apo Island’s diving spots, or Siquijor (3 hours) for waterfalls and beaches.

Prefer flying? Cebu connects you to Siargao, Davao, and even international destinations like Hong Kong, Tokyo and more.

Angeles City (Clark)
Airlines: Philippine Airlines, AirAsia, Cebu Pacific
Frequency: Two to five times a week, depending on the airline and season
Duration: Approximately 1 hour and 5 minutes

Estimated fares: Starting at PhP2,000
What to do: Angeles City is where history meets adventure.
Explore Clark Freeport Zone’s theme parks, visit heritage sites like Museo ning Angeles and indulge in local Kapampangan dishes. For thrill-seekers, Mount Pinatubo offers a rewarding trek with surreal crater views.

Davao
Airline: Cebu Pacific
Frequency: Two to three direct flights per week, varying by season
Duration: Approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes

Estimated fares: Starting at PhP1,800
What to do: Davao is the perfect blend of urban energy and natural wonders. Visit the Philippine Eagle Center, stroll at Eden Nature Park and enjoy a foodie adventure at Roxas Night Market. If you’re feeling a little adventurous, it’s also the best place to try the king of fruits, durian.

El Nido
Airline: AirSWIFT
Frequency: Averaging 11 times per week
Duration: Approximately 1 hour and 5 minutes
Estimated fares: Starting at PhP4,800
What to do: El Nido is a dream destination with towering limestone cliffs, turquoise waters and hidden lagoons.

Go island-hopping to explore Big Lagoon, Secret Beach, and more. It’s a paradise for snorkeling, diving or just lounging by the shore with a fresh coconut in hand.

**Flight frequencies and estimated fares are subject to change depending on the season, airline schedules and booking time. For the most accurate and up-to-date information, it’s best to check directly with the airline’s official website or trusted travel booking platforms.*

NEWS

Boracay Stakeholders Unite to Promote Boracay as a Premier Hub for MICE

BY JUN N. AGUIRRE



Photo courtesy of BMA

Scores of stakeholders have formed an alliance to promote Boracay as a premier hub for MICE. Formed in 2021, the Boracay MICE Alliance (BMA) is a group of private-sector tourism stakeholders in Boracay, whose goal is to make Boracay a top destination for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE).

The said alliance is composed of personalities involved in hotels, restaurants, tour operators and other related services, and is represented by Cleofe Abiso of Megaworld Hotels and Resorts (chairman), Maia Ivy Israel of Belmont Hotel Boracay (president), Claribel Casimero of B & C Island Leisure Tours (vice president), and Jimmy Maming from the academe (auditor).

The Board of Directors include Atty. Jobert Peñaflorida (iFiesta), Russel Cruz (Boracay Water Sports Association), Serafin Javelona (Southwest Tours), and Virgilio Sacdalan.

According to Nico Ivan Velasquez, BMA’s group public relations manager, the recent launching of BMA’s travel deals aimed at luring tourists to Boracay proved successful.

Dubbed “The Great Boracay Getaway,” the campaign offers travel bundles, perks and experiences from from around 30 top-tier properties and services, from hotels, food and dining outlets, wellness providers, and other merchants in Boracay. The initiative invites local and international tourists to explore Boracay and gives them more reasons to return.

Velasquez told *Boracay Sun News*, “The BMA was formed to make this resort island the venue of conferences, exhibits and meetings,” adding that they also organized a series of activities with the end goal of boosting Boracay’s tourism industry. One such activity was the successful High-5 Clean-up, Networking and Business Exchange in Manila.

The combined BMA capabilities include 14,730 rooms across 430 hotels and resorts accredited by the Department of Tourism (DOT), three convention centers and meetings and event spaces for a total of 4,500 participants. Velasquez said, more hotels are expected to come online in the future.

The other participating properties are Almon Ink Tattoo Studio, Altabriza Resort Boracay, Alta Vista, Aria Cucina Italiana, Azalea Hotels, B and C, Belmont Hotel Boracay, Boracay Adventures, Boracay Amor Apartments, Boracay Beach Truck, Boracay Grace, Boracay Haven Resort, Boracay Haven Suites, Cafe del Sol, Crimson Boracay, Grand Blue, Hama Japanese Cuisine, Mega Paraw, My Boracay Guide, New Lounge, Ondus, Purple Diaries, Savoy Hotel Boracay, Shore Time Condotel, Shore Time Hotel, and Viaje.

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SPORTS

BORACAY'S EPIC SPORTS WEEK: KITEBOARDING THRILLS AND FRISBEE FUN

BY PAULINE REITZER



PKA Tour Season 10 along Bulabog Beach, Boracay Island (Photo by Alexandru Baranescu)

Get ready for an action-packed week on Boracay Island! From March 14 to 16, 2024, this tropical paradise will host not one, but two epic international sports events: the Philippine Kiteboarding Tour's 10th Season Finale and the Boracay Open Ultimate Frisbee Tournament. Whether you're into high-flying stunts or fast-paced team action, Boracay's got something special in store for you.

Philippine Kiteboarding Tour Season 10 Finale

Calling all the kiteboarding fans! The longest-running kiteboarding tournament in Asia is back, and it's celebrating its 10th anniversary. Organized by the Philippine Kiteboarding Association (PKA), this finale will bring together over 80 riders from the Philippines and beyond, including legends like Thailand's Narapichit "Yo" Pudla and Singapore's Max Maeder.

With Bulabog Beach's clear waters as the stage, expect jaw-dropping competitions in three thrilling categories:

- Hangtime Showdown: See riders defy gravity and stay airborne for as long as they can. It's an impressive event every time.
- Freestyle Extravaganza: Daring tricks, spins and flips—this event is all about creativity and flair.
- Racing for All: Classic twin-tip boards or cutting-edge foil boards, there's something for everyone. Watch racers navigate the water with great speed and precision.

This year's event is especially exciting as kite foiling just made its Olympic debut in Paris in 2024. With an eye on the LA 2028 Olympics, the PKA hopes to inspire a new generation of Filipino athletes to take on the world stage.

Boracay Open Ultimate Frisbee Tournament

For frisbee enthusiasts, the Boracay Open is the


ultimate beach tournament with a perfect balance of highly competitive action and a great party. Part of the Asian Beach Ultimate Tournament series, this annual event has been drawing teams from all over the world since 2003. Over 40 squads will compete in three pools—Power, Recreational, and Chill—making it a perfect mix of serious gameplay and relaxed fun.

Matches run all day, but the fun doesn't stop when the sun goes down. Evenings are all about social events, beach parties and a chance to soak up Boracay's famous nightlife. It's an experience like no other, where sportsmanship meets island vibes.

More Than Just Sports

These events aren't just about the action, they're about showcasing Boracay's stunning beauty and vibrant culture. They're also a boost for local tourism and a reminder of the island's commitment to sustainability and environmental conservation.

Whether you're into kiteboarding's high-flying excitement or the fast-paced energy of ultimate frisbee, Boracay is the place to be this March. Mark your calendars, follow #PKATourSeason10 and @BoracayOpen for updates, and get ready for an unforgettable week of sports, fun, and island magic! Don't miss it out! 🌴



ISLAND EYE

This month's snapshots of sightings that deserve to be acknowledged or called out for action

BY FREIDA DARIO-SANTIAGO

THUMBS UP

ZUMBA FOR FREE at Shoppes at Station B

One-stop shop, at the Shoppes at Station B Mall along the Main Road close to Fairways and Bluewater, you can shop, get a salon treatment or some pampering, have a snack, do some grocery shopping and the day by joining a Zumba class! Zumba is a cardio-dance fitness program that combines Latin and world rhythms with choreographed steps. It's designed to be fun and effective, and can help you burn calories, tone muscles, and improve your cardiovascular health. Get fit for free every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5 p.m. in the Mall Atrium of The Shoppes Mall. 🌴



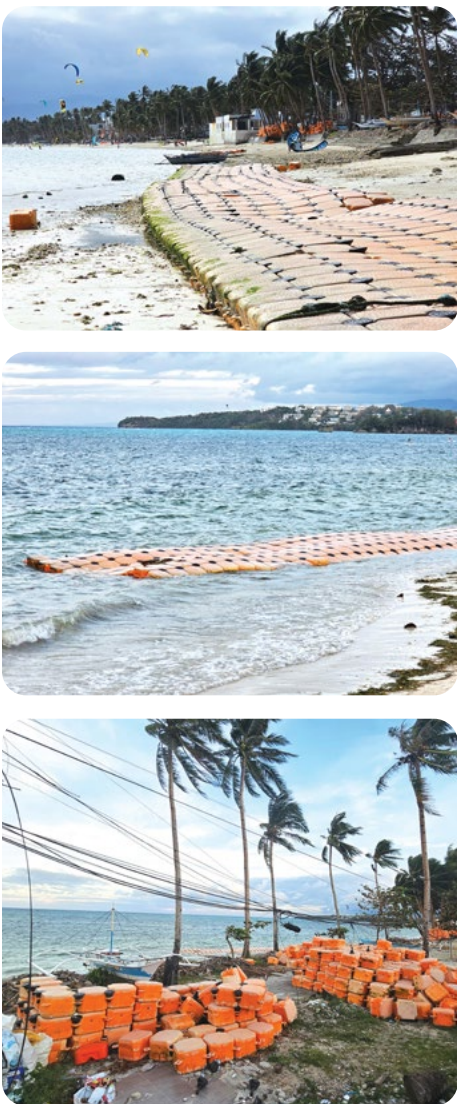
HEADS UP

POWER OUT AT CATICLAN JETTY PORT

We came across a post on a public Boracay page on Facebook with 39K members. The January 28 post was from a "concerned resident" with data on Boracay tourism arrivals and how much was allegedly collected in terminal and environmental fees. What struck us was a comment from a resident regarding the unscheduled power interruption a few nights before, affecting the entire island of Boracay and parts of Malay town in the mainland, including the Caticlan jetty port. He said that there was no electricity at the jetty port. Upon seeing this, **Boracay Sun News** reached out to Jetty Port Administrator Esel Flores for a comment. According to Flores, the Caticlan jetty port's generator indeed broke down. Installed back in 2014, it could no longer keep up with the power requirements of the Caticlan jetty port which has since undergone expansion, and that they are planning to purchase a bigger one this year. We asked why they haven't upgraded it yet, especially since the terminal fee is precisely for the maintenance of the jetty port, to which he replied that as port administrator, he was not privy to the funds collected by the provincial treasurer's office. However, he assured us that he had already made the request. 🌴



Abandoned Pontoon along Bulabog Beach



Boracay prides itself as Philippine tourism's crown glory. Multi-awarded and considered one of top island destinations in the world, Boracay was recently named "Asia's Leading Luxury Destination" at the World Travel Awards 2024. However, one need not look too far to see very disturbing signs of neglect. These photos were taken last month along the shore of Bulabog Beach—hailed as the Number one Kiteboarding Beach in Asia, during high tide and low tide. Left to rot underwater and dismantled blocks dumped by the roadside, the images speak louder than words. 🌴

Photos by Freida Dario-Santiago

It takes a village!

Send us your snapshots via Facebook Messenger @boracaysunnews or email to fvd.s.boracaysunnews@gmail.com and include the date and short description.

SPORTS

PICKLEBALL FOR BEGINNERS

What you need to know and why it's so much fun (and so addictive)

BY AZENITH RESURRECCION



A game of pickleball excites fitness fanatics, adrenalin junkies and even not-so-athletic residents and tourists in Boracay.

Masey Pickle Ball Boracay opened two courts on the second floor of City Mall Boracay last October and welcomed players into this fast-paced racket or paddle sport.

What is pickleball?

Two players (singles) or four players (doubles) use a smooth-faced paddle to hit a perforated, hollow plastic ball over a 34-inch-high (0.86 meter) net until one side is unable to return the ball or commits a rule of infraction. It is played indoors or outdoors.

An old friend and high school classmate based in Singapore recently visited the island with her family. They stayed for a week and asked me if there was a pickleball court on the island. She and her husband played regularly back home and they just wanted to sweat out.

I took them to the courts and introduced them to some friendly locals having their matches. I ended up playing with them and I instantly learned the basics and felt really good after a few serves and winning a few matches. I instantly realized how fun it was and promised to play regularly.

While I consider myself a bit of an adrenalin junkie as I am into water sports, dragon boat racing, ultimate disc, and obstacle course racing and running (to name a few), I have always ditched my friends who have been constantly inviting me to play badminton and beach tennis due to my busy schedule.

Having finally tried pickleball, I discovered that it is one of the easiest racket sports to learn. No wonder so many are hooked! I asked a few regular players about pickleball, how they got hooked, and why it's so much fun and addictive.

Chique Llige (60), a hotelier, and Normeth Parzhuber (53), an entrepreneur and an avid kiteboarder who recently won a bronze medal in women's double in the intermediate level at the Dinagyang Pickleball Cup in Iloilo City, both swear that this sport is for everyone.

Who introduced pickleball to you and how did you get hooked on it?

Chiqui: My kids. I was introduced to the sport while visiting them in the US. I

got hooked on it when Masey at City Mall opened two courts.

Normeth: I introduce myself to pickleball (laughs)! I've played various racket sports, including lawn tennis, badminton and squash. When I first heard about pickleball, I immediately checked it out on YouTube. Initially, I didn't like the way they played—it looked like playing table tennis with a big net. I also thought it was just for older people who could no longer play tennis. However, once I started playing, my perspective changed 360 degrees. It's an incredibly fast-paced sport that requires you to be quick and alert at all times!

What do you like about this game/sport compared to other paddle sports?

Normeth: Accessibility. It's easy to learn, making it accessible to players of all ages and skill levels. The simple rules allow newcomers to quickly join in and enjoy the game, unlike tennis which takes years to be good at.

Chiqui: Pickleball is a social sport that fosters a sense of community and friendship. A pickleball court is smaller than a tennis court, I find it easier on my knees.

How long have you been playing and how often do you play?

Normeth: Been playing since November last year. I play almost every day when we are preparing for a tournament.

Chiqui: I've been playing twice a week in the past five months, alternating with badminton.

What would you advise those who want to try it? Any tips?

Normeth: To play pickleball effectively, it's best to learn from a qualified coach. This ensures you develop proper techniques and avoid getting used to incorrect grips, serving methods, and ball-hitting techniques.

Chiqui: Playing pickleball encourages social engagement since players often join teams, fostering friendship and friendly competition. What I love about it most is that it's pure fun. So, my advice is to just have fun!"

Can you say you are addicted to playing pickleball? What do you think are the benefits you get from playing regularly?

Normeth: I am absolutely addicted to pickleball! I hear the sound of the ball in my head all the time! In fact, the pickleball court has become my bar, my dance club—my nightlife has completely changed.

Chiqui: It gives us movement beneficial to health. Physically, the sport provides benefits like improved hand-eye coordination, strength and agility. Playing releases endorphins to boost mood and it's another healthy way to deal with stress.

Normeth added: I've also shifted away from alcohol and now drink a lot more water and take supplements to stay fit and boost my endurance. I wake up without hangovers, feeling stronger and healthier. Now I only "DINK and DRIVE" (keystrokes in pickleball). They say people who play racket sport stay young and live longer, and that it helps prevent Alzheimer's or dementia and I want to be that person!

Indeed, this sport has made these ladies focus more on health and wellness. Listening to them has convinced me to give myself time to play more. It is a low-impact sport that has many health benefits, including improved cardiovascular health, mental alertness and social connections. The best part is the stress relief, the release of more endorphins and being with like-minded people who aim to do better health-wise and be better.

To play, reach out to Masey Pickleball Boracay players at City Mall, or just walk in anytime from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Ask about coaching schedules. 🌴



Normeth Parzhuber with other players at the recent Dinagyang Pickleball Cup in Iloilo where she takes home the bronze medal (Photos by Simon Peter Perez Jandinero)




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PEOPLE OF BORACAY

Dynamic Duos of Boracay (Part 2)

Louisse Carreon & Dominic Napat

BY RICA VELASCO



Photo by Kate Tagua and Janna Lejano

Occupations:

Dom: Certified nutritionist and athletic coach (precision nutrition), certified free diver and scuba diver, co-founder of No Space 4 Waste Boracay, underwater photographer
Louisse: Published author under Summit Media, content editor, photographer, social media consultant

Status: Engaged and partners in life

How long have you been friends/a couple?
Officially together since March 29, 2021, and engaged since October 13, 2024.

When and how did you meet?

We were officially introduced to each other in Boracay De Paris in March 2021. Unofficially, our story started in Exit Bar the month before.

Did Boracay Island have anything to do with your meeting/your story?

Yes, aside from meeting in Boracay, we came here and fell in love with the island on our own. And as we were getting to know the island community, we found each other.

How has living in Boracay deepened your bond with one another?

As individuals, we found ourselves starting over in Boracay. In doing so, we found each other at a time in our lives when we were reconnecting with nature and our deeper selves. Together, we were able to face the challenges of living on an island after hustling in the city for years. We've lived together in Boracay for the past three years. Here, we found peace and solace. This is our home.

As a duo, how have you strengthened your involvement and connection with the island community?

As a duo, we do our part in helping support local businesses by offering our skills as photographers and loyal patrons. We contribute to the local community market in Canvas Inn and are hosts at Trivia Night in By Da Way Bar & Restaurant and we join and organize ocean cleanups through Freedive Boracay and DiveGurus Boracay.

Did you instantly hit it off? Was it love at first sight?

As friends, yes. We found out that we had the same interests. We both love to travel and immerse ourselves in different cultures. We love to eat good food and try new things. We share the same beliefs and

values. We like the idea of being 100% whole before entering a relationship. Perhaps our past experiences shaped us into who we are. And when we found each other, it felt like the right time. So, naturally, that friendship quickly turned into something more. Of course, unplanned events helped.

It's just funny how the universe kept finding ways for us to spend time together. Our mutual friends got quarantined, and there was no one else to hang out with but each other. And then, it was our turn to get quarantined. We stayed in one room for 20 days. It strengthened our bond for sure.

What traits do you value most about each other?

Louisse: He is goofy, smart, and knows martial arts. 100% book boyfriend material.

Dom: She's hilarious and has an open mind and open heart.

When did you know that he or she is "your person" and that it was for keeps?

Louisse: It's not just one thing, so I don't know the exact "when." But I do know that it's mostly the little things. How he takes care of me, plans the future with me, and makes me feel loved, valued, and adored every day. You know how they say the "honeymoon phase" lasts only a couple of months? We're more than three years in and I still feel as giddy as the day I realized I liked him. He made me believe that there's no such thing as the "honeymoon phase." It's the kind of love I only read (and write) about in books. And I'm truly thankful that I get to experience it now and forever.

Dom: Louisse made me believe that I am capable of being in a serious romantic relationship again. Before we met, I was single for a few years after a bad breakup. I told myself I would not date anyone unless I met someone that would make me want to change. Here I am with the love of my life that brings out the best in me. Even before we quarantined together, I knew that I was going to change my relationship status with

Louisse. We just melded naturally together.

What is the secret to your relationship or the glue that keeps you together?

Louisse: Honesty, communication, and consideration. I feel very comfortable telling him anything and everything. I never feel judged. I feel confident to talk things out to better understand each other. We respect each other and consider each other's feelings and wellbeing.

Dom: Honesty. I never hide anything from her and most of all, I don't feel like I need to transform myself to earn her love.

Is there a formula or special ingredients for a good relationship?

We try to do 1:1:1. One date a week, one weekend staycation a month, and one trip a year.

But as we're both very busy, we try to go on a date at least once a month, and we try to do something special with each other, free from distractions. We try to be in the moment with each other.

Your advice on a happy relationship and keeping the flame & fun alive?

We're not perfect. We don't believe a relationship is 50/50 or that we make each other whole. We are both whole individuals who decided to be together and put effort into the relationship because we love each other. Some days require more effort than others, but we always try to remember that we're a team. Each relationship is unique. Sometimes, you just have to find what works for you. One thing is for sure, though. Honesty and communication are key.

Stay tuned for more dynamic duos in upcoming editions!





TAGAY

Our way of saying “Cheers,” Tagay salutes the island’s unsung heroes and achievements.

BY FREIDA DARIO-SANTIAGO

Ambassador in Paradise Donates Wheelchairs at the Ports

September 25, 2024, marked a significant day for the Boracay community as locally produced heavy-duty wheelchairs made from high-grade stainless steel and local bamboo finish were distributed to the ports of Boracay: Cagban, Tambisaan, Caticlan Jetty, and Tabon. This initiative was spearheaded by the Ambassador in Paradise Resort, reflecting their commitment to accessibility and community support.

“A special thanks goes out to Carlo Maceda for his generous donation of one unit, which will undoubtedly make a difference in the lives of many. Additionally, heartfelt gratitude is extended to all the port administrators for their warm welcome and cooperation in receiving these wheelchairs,” Ryan Alba, Ambassador’s former general manager told the *Boracay Sun News*.

We also learned that the wheelchairs were created by the resort’s Transfers team, in collaboration with the Bamboo and Native Crafts Napaan.



Shop Fresh at the Baraklan Store in Hagdan

Another Ambassador initiative is a *baraklan* (Aklanon for store) in Sitio Hagdan, barangay Yapak. Not your ordinary store, they sell freshly harvested rice directly from rice farmers in Antique, freshly caught fish from the ports of Iloilo, and vegetables from local farmers in Antique—all while supporting the Ati women of Boracay, who proudly run the store.

Location: Hagdan
Open daily from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.



Epic Boracay Receives TripAdvisor’s Travelers’ Choice Award

Every year, TripAdvisor awards the top traveler favorites, from destinations, hotels, restaurants, and things to do around the world, based on reviews and ratings collected over 12 months. The Travelers’ Choice Awards 2024 named **EPIC Boracay** as among the “Best of the Best” winners, decided by real travelers from all over, sharing real opinions and stories.

The awards are essentially a celebration of real traveler experiences, that were nothing short of excellent!



Mandala Spa & Resort Villas and MASBOI Receive ASEAN Tourism Awards



Mandala Spa & Resort Villas’ director of operations Elke de Sullan Ginggaray (leftmost) accepts the ASEAN Spa Services Award along with other winners in the spa category, as presented by DOT Sec. Frasco (center) joined by department undersecretaries Maria Bueno, Myra Valderrosa-Abubakar and Verna Buencuseco.

category, Philippine initiatives stood out for their dedication to sustainable livelihoods and cultural preservation. The Malay Sailing Boat Owners’ (MASBOI) Cooperative in Aklan and Suyac Island Mangrove Eco-Park in Negros Occidental in Region VI, showcased their commitment to sustainable tourism.

The ASEAN Tourism Standards Awards serve as a vital platform for recognizing exceptional tourism enterprises and encouraging the adoption of best practices across member states. By adhering to ASEAN’s rigorous criteria for sustainability, cultural preservation, and service excellence, the awards foster collaboration and unity in advancing the region’s tourism industry.

The Philippines shone brightly at the ASEAN Tourism Standards Awards held in Johor Bahru last January 21, 2025. This prestigious event recognized outstanding contributions from ASEAN member states to sustainable, inclusive, and quality tourism development.

Several Philippine tourism enterprises were honored for their adherence to ASEAN standards in excellence, cultural preservation, and sustainability. Joining the awardees at the event, Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco celebrated their remarkable achievements, underscoring the Philippines’ commitment to world-class tourism.

The ASEAN Spa Services Award celebrates professional spa service providers that integrate well-being with cultural traditions. Among the recipients were **Mandala Spa and Resort Villas, Boracay**, Apricus Therapeutic Clinic, Chi, The Spa at Shangri-La Mactan, Cebu, The Spa at The Manor and North Haven Spa in Baguio City.

In the ASEAN Community-Based Tourism Award category, Philippine initiatives stood out for their dedication to sustainable livelihoods and cultural preservation. The Malay Sailing Boat Owners’ (MASBOI) Cooperative in Aklan and Suyac Island Mangrove Eco-Park in Negros Occidental in Region VI, showcased their commitment to sustainable tourism.

PCCI-Boracay Announces Newly Elected Board of Directors

Congratulations to the newly elected Board of Directors (BoD) and officers!

Announced on the PCCI-Boracay General Membership group page on Facebook, outgoing president Michael Sweeney said: “I would like to thank all our members for the support, and your efforts over the last several years. I hope we have represented the business community dutifully, professionally and altruistically; and have been able to push for modest changes and improvements for Boracay Island and business.

I would like to especially thank President Djila Winebrenner, Vice President Mark Santiago and past President Wesley van der Voort for amazing efforts during both my two years as president, and over the last 5 years that we have collectively led this organization.

As we move forward, we have some excellent new members on our BoD, including Stefan Becker of SRB Cargo, Nowie Potenciano of Sunnyside Cafe Group, Ryan Alba, and Art Boncato of Megaworld.

In response, incoming president Djila Winebrenner said: “As your new President, I am honored to serve this dynamic business community and to continue the mission of PCCI-Boracay—to be the voice of business and a driving force for positive change on our island.

Boracay’s success depends on collaboration, fair competition, and sustainable growth. As an advocate for free enterprise, job creation, and transparency, our Chamber is committed to ensuring that policies benefit businesses, residents, and visitors alike.

Our networking events, training workshops, and advocacy programs are here to support you. By working together, we can build a stronger, more sustainable Boracay and ensure that our island thrives for generations to come.”



Philippine Chamber of Commerce & Industry
BORACAY

ANNOUNCEMENT

Congratulations to the Elected Officers of the
Philippine Chamber of Commerce & Industry – Boracay
for the year 2025

President – **Djila Winebrenner**
Vice President / Corporate Secretary – **Mark Santiago**
Past President/Director – **Michael Sweeney**
Past President/Director – **Wesley van der Voort**
Director / Treasurer – **Stefan Becker**
Director – **Nowie Potenciano**
Director – **Ryan Alba**
Director – **Art Boncato**

100% Local Protein at The Sunny Side Café Group



Percy’s Arroz de Mariscos and Singapore Style Black Pepper Crab

Mango Mama and Ube Mama, with Berry Mama in Baguio City.

Nowie Potenciano, co-founder and co-owner of The Sunny Side Café Group of restaurants, together with his wife Odette, announced last December 15, 2024, that they finally achieved their goal of using 100% local protein across all their restaurants, namely The Sunny Side Café, Percy Seafood and Spicebird. They also own the popular Mama dessert collection: Coco Mama,

According to Nowie, most restaurant owners know the unfortunate reality that sometimes it’s easier and even more cost-effective to just use imported protein. “But after Percy, in which we decided to use purely local seafood in order to help local fishermen recover from the pandemic, we felt it more imperative to do the same in our other restaurants.”

He adds, “Moving to entirely locally sourced protein wasn’t as simple as one would think. For one, we had to find reliable suppliers that would provide the same level of quality our guests expect so that you wouldn’t miss your usual Angus Beef, for example. We also had to do a lot of R&D, like developing this *tanigue* that we smoke in-house and use for our popular röstis and Eggs Benedicts at The Sunny Side Café. This deliciously replaces all the smoked salmon that used to be flown in from thousands of miles away.

We’ve been working on this project for quite some time and we’re proud to finally make it happen. We hope to see you all again at The Sunny Side Cafe, SpiceBird and Percy, and taste how good 100% local protein can be.”

BORACAY COMPASS

Insider tips from the locals

BY SEEMA MANOHAR

Editor's Note:

When traveling, the most honest and reliable recommendations come from the locals. Each time a family member or friend, or friend of a friend, or cousin of the *Tita* of a friend's neighbor is planning a trip to Boracay, the first persons they ask are us. And so we welcome our visitors with recommendations from local friends. Enjoy!

“I think food, culture, people and landscape are all absolutely inseparable.”
– Anthony Bourdain



CARLO & AMY RAVELO

Boracay residents since 2022, living their best island lives on sabbatical with their two children.

Why Boracay

An easy answer for this outgoing couple was, “The beach of course!” They like that Boracay, despite being a small island, offers something for everyone and is an ideal place for families and raising young children. The couple feels, “Though we are far from home, we’ve found community and interesting hobbies that keep us here,” and remain especially drawn to the slow-paced island lifestyle.



Bulabog Beach
(Photo by Gene Loves Acosta)

Must See

Bulabog Beach during the kiteboarding season (November to April) is a must-visit. The breezy days, the large, colorful kites gliding in the sky and around the bay, the kiteboarders practicing their tricks on the water, the local community gathering for coffee or the island children playing on the boardwalk all make for a very charming, local Boracay scene.

Must Try or Taste

This foodie couple has a wide and interesting range of recommendations. Some of their favorites are the Tuna Tartare at **True Home Hotel & Bistro**; the lasagna and pizza at **Giuseppe Boracay** is a Ravelo family favorite; the shaved ice-desserts at **Ice Flakes** are perfect for those hot, summer Boracay days; **Levantin Boracay** is a neighborhood favorite for food and drinks; and for a special occasion or for sunset drinks with



True Home Bistro

stunning views, **Sirena Restaurant & Clifftop Bar** at the Shangri-La Boracay is a top pick for Carlo and Amy.

Advice

The couple recommends taking the Hop On Hop Off bus (fondly referred to as the “HoHo” by islanders) for a comfortable, air-conditioned ride. The bus runs frequently, offers an online trackable schedule, and has several convenient drop-off locations. Taking the bus helps avoid road congestion and promotes ride-sharing and the bus pass offers convenient cashless transactions.

Environmental Reminders

Carlo and Amy encourage everyone to enjoy the beautiful beaches of Boracay but to kindly keep the sand, shells and corals where you see them on the beach and not be tempted to take them with you. 🌴



ANDRE & CARMILLE GARCIA

Both entrepreneurs and restaurateurs, this lovely couple have been living in Boracay since 2014 with their two young children.

Why Boracay

The urge to leave and raise children away from the city is what motivated Andre and Carmille to seek an island lifestyle. Carmille was pregnant with their first child and the couple shared, “When the opportunity to move to Boracay came, we grabbed it right away and never looked back!”

Must See

“The sunsets!” Boracay sunsets never get old and for the couple, “The sunsets are our absolute favorite! Even from afar, the colors in the sky are always a sight to see.” They also like to snorkel near Station 3 and in the Amihan season (November to April), they enjoy watching the kiteboarders in Bulabog Beach.

Must Try or Taste

The couple has a lot of favorites and recommends these restaurants for serving up great food all the time, every time. They include the island relic, **Dos Mestizos Restaurant** for quintessential Spanish food, **Thai Basil Restaurant** located in D’Mall for consistently good home-style Thai comfort food, **Nagisa Restaurant**, a landmark in Angol Beach for Japanese food and slow-living views and **Island Chicken Inasal** for its unbeatable flavors with two locations (D’Mall and One Central).



Dos Mestizos' famous paella



Island Chicken Inasal



Thai Basil



Thai Basil's Tom Yum Goong

Advice

Andre and Carmille enthusiastically urge, “Take long walks around the island and explore beyond White Beach.” They caution tourists not to underestimate the water because while the waters may seem calm, some sudden dips and undercurrents can catch a good swimmer off-guard. There are color-coded flags along the beach and the lifeguard stations explain the flags and safety measures, so please swim safely.

Environmental Reminders

Always:

- Keep the beach clean so everyone can enjoy its beauty.
- Keep personal trash to a minimum and dispose of trash properly. 🌴



Weekend Buffet

From mouthwatering global favorites to authentic Asian dishes, indulge in our buffet that offers something delightful for every palate.

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B6 Discovery Boracay
B6 Percy Seafood
B7 Canyon Hotels & Resorts
C3 Budget Mart
C5 Aria Cucina Italiana
C5 Aria Gelato
C5 Back Beach Burgers
C5 Cafe del Sol
C5 D'Mall
C5 Epic Boracay
C5 Hama Japanese
C5 Hobbit Tavern
C5, C6 Island Chicken Inasal
C5 Jammers Beach Shack
C5, D3 JT's Manukan Grille
C5 Kelana
C5 Lemoni Cafe
C5 Pick A Pearl Boracay
C5, C6 Coco Mama
C5 Mango Mama
C6, D4 The Sunny Side Cafe
D3 Villa Caemilla
D3 Bistro Des Amis
D3 Mandala Spa and Resort Villas
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Sibuyan Sea

Tambisaan Jetty Port
Crocodile Island

Tabon Jetty Port
The Road to Kalibo

Caticlan Jetty Port



Discover Villa Caemilla Beach Boutique Hotel, an exquisite destination nestled along the beautiful Boracay Island beachfront. Unparalleled boutique service, artisanal cocktails, and luxurious yet affordable experiences await.



Visit Villa Caemilla Restaurant, open daily from 6 am to 12 midnight, and delight in a tantalizing menu of international cuisine. Indulge in a variety of savory options including fresh salads, sandwiches, steaks, pasta, and seafood. Our restaurant is the perfect setting for families and friends to enjoy shared meals. Make sure to join us for our daily happy hour from 4 pm to 6 pm!

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