

“THE SUN SHONE BRIGHTLY AS IT BROUGHT LIGHT TO THE WORLD. IT WAS LIKE SAYING, “HAPPY BIRTHDAY IZAH!” GOD MADE THE DAY PERFECT FOR SNORKELING, SWIMMING AND HIKING.”

# ESCAPE TO PARADISE CALLED CORON

STORY BY IZAH MORALES

Timon and Pumba weren't joking when they sang, "Hakuna Matata: It means no worries for the rest of your days!" In the northern island of Palawan, this worry-free philosophy lives.

For four days, I had a stress-free and adventure-filled life as I explored Busuanga Island and Coron Island, two of the Calamianes group of islands. Thanks to impulsiveness in booking airfare tickets. A roundtrip ticket of P1,137.00 made my dream a reality.

### Summer in November

The adventure began when we sailed through the big and fuzzy waves towards Malcapuya Island. It was already past 1:00pm but we still proceeded with our journey even if it was high tide.

The cool breeze brought about by the Northeast monsoon, or Amihan Season, added a tremble and made my bones chill. But I still had a smile on my face then I looked at my parents who were already worried. Papa even quipped, "Ano ba itong mga trip mo, anak, parang Survivor?"

I knew he was just afraid of the waters because we were the only boat sailing and the deep blue sea surrounds us.

After two hours of a seemingly battle of the waves, our boatman, Mang Nestor, safely docked the boat at the shore. The worried looks from my parents' faces faded as soon as they saw the pristine blue waters kissing the long stretch of powdery white sand of Malcapuya. It was a picture perfect scene.

The azure waters invited me to take a dip. If there's a piece of heaven on Earth, then it would be on a serene island like Malcapuya.

After getting sun-kissed, I stood up to wash away the salt that my body has absorbed. My throat also felt dry and I was thirsty. A good thing, then, that our boatman mentioned the caretaker of the island sells fresh buko juice.

For P20, my thirst was quenched. It was a relaxing feeling to drink the juice by the sea with few people around, unlike on party island, Boracay. We almost had the whole island to ourselves.



As much as we wanted to stay longer, we couldn't since the sun was already bidding goodbye. Time was ticking fast. We returned to Coron Town and recharged for the next day.

### Birthday Hurrah

The sun shone brightly as it brought light to the world. It was like saying, "Happy Birthday Izah!" God made the day perfect for snorkeling, swimming and hiking. Our island-hopping escape began with Siete Pecados.

Siete Pecados is home to rich and colorful marine life. It was fun swimming along with the school of fish and capturing nature's beauty with an underwater camera.

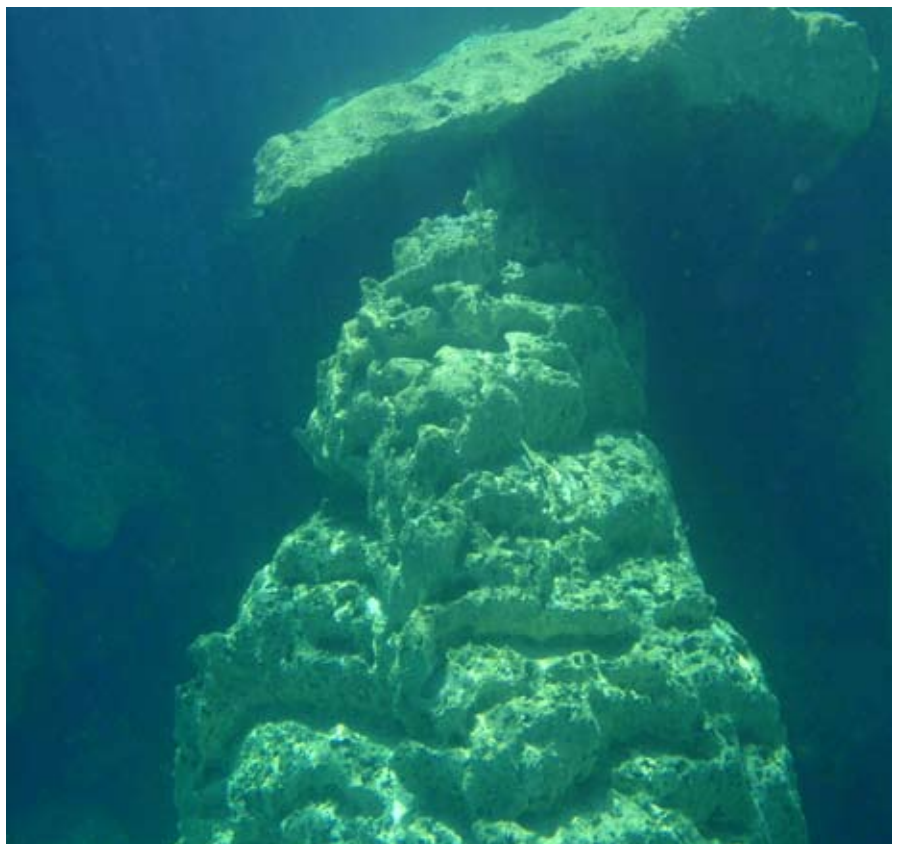
I saw a blue fish, whose specie I'm not aware of. Our boatman, Kuya Eli, related that long time ago, cyanide fishing destroyed the corals in Siete Pecados. But when the local government took action and made the area protected, the marine life returned and became abundant once again.

### The cleanest lake in the Philippines

After thirty minutes, we sailed to the famous landmark of Coron: Kayangan Lake. It is the most photographed part of Coron. You haven't been to Coron if you don't have a photo of the Kayangan.

Hiking 100 steps up and 100 steps down was challenging to my parents. But the picturesque scenery was worth the effort. The view from the top was breathtaking, both figuratively and literally.

When we reached the swimming area



surrounded by bamboo planks, I wanted to jump right to the crystal clear water but our boatman pointed at the make-shift stairs: Safety first.

My feet felt the cold water and gave me a chill up my spine. Nonetheless, I submerged my whole body and felt refreshed. I put my goggles on and saw the school of fish living in the lake. They converged in one area and formed like a flower.

Kayangan Lake, known as the cleanest

lake in the Philippines, is a mixture of 30% salt and 70% fresh water. Hence, the water's fine for swimming. My eyes weren't irritated at all compared to swimming in the sea.

We could spend all day in Kayangan Lake but we were following an itinerary to cover the Coron Island loop. We bade Kayangan goodbye and off we went to the next destination.

Back at the boat, we were surprised to see crabs, grilled squid and tuna, and bananas prepared for us. We filled our

hungry bellies with the mouthwatering treat in preparation for the next leg of our journey.

### Meeting the French at Barracuda

After resting for a while, our boat stopped in front of huge rocks with a makeshift wooden staircase sandwiched in between. Unlike the Kayangan Lake, there were only 37 steps before reaching the platform to the Barracuda Lake.

Barracuda Lake is haven of the barracudas, which could be seen when one dives deep into the blue-green brackish waters. Divers visit the place too because of the thermocline, a transition layer where the temperature changes. But since we're not divers we just enjoyed swimming.

A French couple arrived and sat on the side. I smiled and greeted them. They smiled back. The woman praised the Philippines. She said, "Beautiful country!" and her companion added, "And good people!"

It was heartwarming to hear such compliment from foreigners. How I wish

every Filipino could enjoy the wonders that the Philippines has.

### Twin Lagoons

From Barracuda Lake, off we went to the Twin Lagoons, which are divided by a huge wall of limestone karst. The only way to get to the other side is either to swim through the hole or climb the rocks.

Armed with a life vest, I chose to swim through the hole since there's still a breathing space. Our other companions chose to ride a raft (balsa in Filipino). So as not to hurt their heads, they had to lie on their stomachs instead of their backs.

At the other side, there was a small native nipa hut. The boatman said that one of the Tagbanuas live there. The Tagbanuas are the indigenous people of Coron Island.

### Back to the beach

Banol Beach was once an ignored island according to our boatman but the small stretch of white sand gave an intimate appeal, especially for couples. The place is perfect for

when you want to reflect on life.

After taking tons of photographs, we took another dip into the sea as our boatmen led us to the Skeleton Wreck. Coron is also a popular dive site for wrecks.

The Skeleton Wreck is the shallowest shipwreck site in Coron, which can be seen from the surface of the water even without diving. It has a maximum depth of 22 meters.

The hop ended at the Survivor-like set, CYC Island or Coron Youth Club Island, where we watched the sunset.

Nothing compares the experience of communing with nature where you find joy, peace, and love in harmony. **ZA**

#### Travel Notes:

- Boat Rental to Coron Island Loop- Php 1,500
- Boat Rental to Malcapuya Island- Php 3,500
- Each island has an entrance fee except for CYC Island. If you're booked on a tour, your tour operator will take care of the fees.



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