

A Voyage to Philippines

In November 2010 I spent a fortnight (6th – 20th) on the Philippines and I am still absorbing that experience. The flight was rather long – 22 hours altogether. The flight from Praha to Incheon (Soul) took 10 hours, then I was waiting for 7 hours in the airport hall, and the flight from Incheon to CEBU International Airport took about 4 hours¹.

On the way to Incheon, there were some young Czech people sitting next to me who traveled to New Zealand (for hiking). They helped me with some technical problems, i.e. how to connect the earphones, or how to tear off food packages. Before the flight I had to inject a dose of *heparin* into my thigh to prevent blood coagulation².

At the CEBU airport my friend and her cousin were waiting for me. It was about midnight. As we left the airport hall, it was like entering a sauna with an ingredient of city smog. Two dogs were sleeping nearby lying flat on a little lawn. We took a cab to a flat in centre of Cebu city where my friend's cousin was staying. Her house was situated inside a yard, which was watched by a guard. We spent the rest of the night there. In the morning we had breakfast and took a taxi to a bus terminal, where we got on a microbus. Our ride from Cebu city to Daanbantayan (a town in the north of the island) took about 3 hours. Almost constantly the driver was blowing the horn to prevent collisions with playing children, dogs, hens, cows or other vehicles – pedal-cabs, motor cabs (tripedes), jeepneys and others, which lined the road. It sounded as a kind of “dialog” with the surroundings. There was a teacher sitting next to me who told me a lot interesting information about the country.

On the road, most striking were school girls in colored school uniforms walking along the street. Boys were quite inconspicuous among them, dressed in black trousers and white shirts. They were walking to their homes during the dinner break. As I was said later on, the uniforms are daily washed in hand and ironed – the washing machines are not used there³.

I stayed at *Skyp's Hotel*, situated on the seaside. It was a two-store concrete building. The hotel was built by American *Skyp Ellsworth* whose wife was Filipino. He died 2 years ago and the hotel is now run by his family. I met there some interesting people from various countries – USA, France, Switzerland and Germany. On the ground floor of the hotel, there was a dining room (or hall) and a piazza, and there was a small garden with deck-chairs, which was protected by a low wall with an iron gate against the tide. There were a few steps below the gate leading to the beach.

It was low season and sometimes I was the only guest in the hotel. I spent time bathing in the sea, sunbathing and reading books from their library. I read through two of them: one was about American history, the other about the latest history of Afghanistan. One could observe remote islands and large ships on the horizon, and there were trawlers sailing around. If the tide was low, the sea retreated far from the shore and people were searching for crabs hidden in the sand. Once I saw a crab hide into the sand before my eyes.

¹ Both flights with Korean Airlines

² The same must have been done before return).

³ It is probably due to low water pressure in the public pipe-line.

The conditions for swimming were not optimum – the water was extremely salty (due to evaporation) and the salt penetrated into one's mouth. It was necessary to wait for the high tide as the sea was very shallow. In the evening the water was as hot as coffee. My friend Estrella had some duties at school and she sent her boy-cousin Joselito to keep me company. He is a mechanic and he used the time by servicing the hotel's ventilators. We understood each other quite well though his Philippine English. Two days before my departure I got an earache and I had to see a doctor in Daanbantayan. They prescribed some antibiotics for me and I had to take them during the return and for several days afterwards.

My friend lives at Tapilon, which is a village at the north end of CEBU. I visited her place twice. I got acquainted with Estrella's family and we undertook a voyage to Malopasqua⁴ – an island half an hour away from there by a motorboat (a trawler). Malopasqua is a beach resort which is visited by rich foreigners. The main island's attraction is diving to old wrecks. On the beach there we could also watch the traditional way of building wooden boats without any sketches.

Another day I visited *Bateria High School* where Estrella teaches. All the teachers were women. I introduced myself to them⁵ and I took the opportunity to speak briefly to the students of three classes; I tried to say something about Czech Republic and about Europe. The students acclaimed me in chorus. They knew the word "Prague" (probably having been instructed) and of European countries they only knew Spain. When I addressed some of them, they were rather perplexed. Then I attended a lesson of English in another class, taught by an experienced teacher.

There were about 50 students in the classroom of age about 16, about 2/3 were girls. There were no desks in the room; students were sitting on special chairs with circular rests with a small tablet attached. Mistress started the lesson with writing the words "Creator" and "to create" on the blackboard. She adopted the principle of teleology:

"What is the purpose of the Sun?" "To give us energy; to create organic substances in plants"

"What is the purpose of the stars?" "To show fishermen the direction"

"What is the purpose of the Moon?" "To shine for people in the night"

"Can a man make an animal?" "No, he cannot. Only Creator can do that."

Students answered in chorus or individually; alternatively mistress said incomplete sentences and students supplied the missing words in chorus. Students read also sentences from their copybooks, which sounded like excerpts from Bible, and mistress explained the meaning of them. The instruction suggested the Holy Mass a little. Students didn't work with textbooks.

The subject matter contained elements of grammar, chemistry, botany, ethics and psychology. Mistress emphasized the role of mother for a child, her self-sacrifice (without mentioning the role of father). Students had to give examples from their lives... She said that a typical Filipino is happy in his heart and has a smile on his face. Children also recited the words of the song "*Twinkle, twinkle, little star...*" and mistress commented their meaning, especially stressing the word "*diamond*"⁶.

⁴ In Spanish Malo Pasqua means "unhappy Christmas"

⁵ Being a former teacher

⁶ *Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky...*

The students were absolutely attentive; they swallowed every word of the teacher's. I asked the teacher after the lesson whether she based her explanations on her own views or deductions. She told me that the matter is given by the curriculum (or the textbook). I asked my friend whether they recognize the Darwin theory of evolution – she said yes, they recognize it.

The colloquial language on CEBU is Visayan (Cebuian). The official languages of Philippines are Filipino and English. Filipino is spoken in Manila and surroundings and students learn it at school.

On Sunday I attended the catholic Holy Mass in Daanbantayan spoken in Visayan language. The church was built of grey stone with a low roof without gallery. There were benches also in the garden around. Apparently the church was built in the time of Spanish rule. The service was quite impressive, with touching choir and organ music. The priest preached with powerful voice; as my friend told me, it was about obedience before God.

My airplane was leaving Cebu at 0.50 on Saturday⁷ and I had to leave the hotel at 9 a.m. on Friday. It was the same as during the arrival – we took a microbus, took a few hours of rest at Estrella's cousin in Cebu. In the evening we undertook a short excursion in the streets of the town. There was a park near there and some people were jogging along the sidewalks⁸. There was some smog in the air; the traffic was still high in the main streets. We saw a marketplace which was full of small stalls. I bought a few wooden armlets for memory. There was just a blackout, but the stallkeeper had a torch. She was very nice.

Finally – we had to take a cab to the airport. The driver had to weave his way through the traffic. There was little place at the airport for saying goodbye to Estrella and her cousin; I left them and passed through the check point. I had to take off my shoes before the x-ray inspection and take metal things off my luggage. The Korean airline officers indicated and seized my small “arm” – a pocket knife.

Sloup, Thursday, January 20, 2011

⁷ 50minutes after midnight

⁸ It was the only place in the town where I saw sidewalks

Pictures from Cebu



Na rybářském člunu (Z výletu na ostrov Malopasqua)
On the trawler (voyage to Malopasqua island)



Stavba člunů na ostrově Malopasqua

Building boats on Malopasqua



Návštěva na Bateria High School : beseda s členkou učitelského sboru
Visit at Bateria High School: chat with a staff member



Uvítání na Bateria High School: Ochutnávání domácích specialit
Welcoming at school: Tasting local specialties



V zahradní besídce, Tampilan, Daanbantayan
In an alcove; Dublin family



Ulice v obci Tampilan, ostrov Cebu
A street in Tampilan, Daanbantayan



Děti nesou z kopců dřevo na topení
Carrying firewood from the hills



Koupání v ústí řeky, v pozadí pobřežní mangrové porosty. Tapilon
Bathing in the river mouth; a mangrove swamp in the background



Porost na ostrově Cebu, Tapilon
The Cebuan vegetation



Rodina na motocyklu. Tapilon
A family on the motorbike



Tradiční domky v obci Tapilon, Cebu (na stěně volební plakát)
Traditional huts in Tapilon; a voting poster



Háj kokosových palm s kozou / *Coconut palms, a goat*



Domek v obci Tapon, banánovník
A cottage in Tapon



Rybářské čluny na pobřeží, v pozadí ostrov
Trawlers on the coast



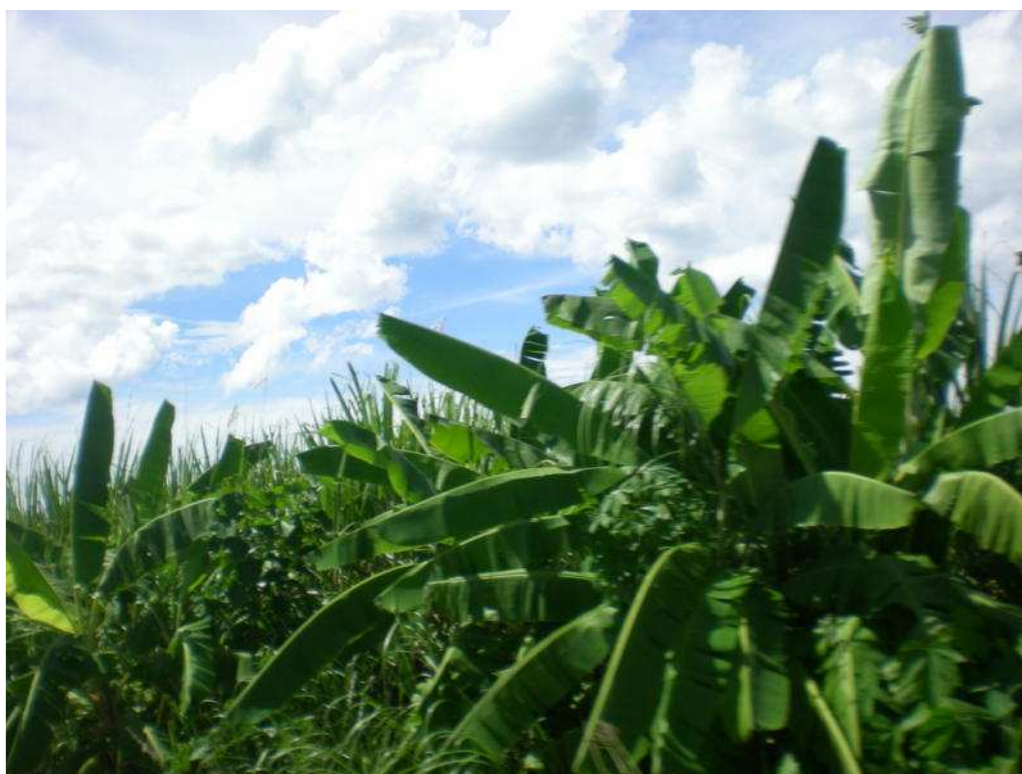
Přístaviště
Landing place (wharf)



Přívěsný vozík (sajda) motocyklu
The sidecar of a motor-cab (tricycle)



Pole cukrové třtiny
A sugar cane field



Banánovníky
Banana plants



Na verandě „Skip´s Hotel“
At Skip´s Hotel, Daanbantayan

Snímky z listopadu a prosince 2010
Pictures taken in November and December 2010, by: Estrella Dublin