

# Angono: WHERE ART HAPPENS

By Celia Nachura / Photos by Elise Corpuz

Unbeknownst to many, an unassuming town in Rizal's broad landscape is hailed as the "Art Capital of the Philippines".

## AN ART ESCAPE

The Nemiranda Arthouse is a great first stop once you step foot in Angono. One can have breakfast or a morning snack at the Atelier Museum Café before you admire the works of the celebrated Nemesio Miranda, best known as Nemiranda. The Angono native is a renowned visual artist, excelling in a variety of mediums and lauded as the "Father of Imaginative Figurism". If you're lucky, you might encounter him sipping coffee in the area and indulge in a bit of conversation with the master painter.

Budding photographers will love the whimsical aura of the museum. Nemiranda's early sketches are displayed by the front, mostly of notable Filipino figures such as Jose Rizal, Apolinario Mabini and Gomburza. Art installations spill from every corner, from carvings on the walls to masks hanging from the ceilings; it is apparent this contemporary artist is not limited to paint and canvas.

Nemiranda's works are certainly varied, but he also displays a strong affinity towards women, nature and distinct Filipino culture. In the Arthouse, characters plucked from Filipino folklore come to life as sculptures; keep an eye out for the Mermaid of Angono arched gracefully at the entrance of the main gallery.

Stretching 1,000 square meters, the Nemiranda Arthouse will impress many by showing just how prolific the contemporary is. Overflowing with artistic treasures and designed to inspire and delight, this is a must-see not just for artists but for every tourist passing by Angono.

## LUNCH OUT, ART IN

Even Angono's restaurants boast character and artistic prowess. For a good lunch while remaining immersed in local art and culture, stop by the Balaw Balaw Specialty Restaurant. It is a convenient stop after the Nemiranda Arthouse because of its location just several meters away. Like many of the town's popular destinations, Balaw Balaw was opened by an Angono artist, the late Pedrigo N. Vocalan and his wife Luzvimin L. Vocalan.

Those who are unaware of its deep roots in art will likely overlook Angono as just another bustling provincial town. Home to many respected artists and to a string of galleries that make it a worthy detour in any road trip, this small municipality is quietly concealing a vibrant artists' community.



From the exterior to the interiors, this house-cum-restaurant is a treat to explore for enthusiasts of art. Influenced heavily by local practices, Balaw Balaw's strength lies in its undeniably Filipino flavor—in architecture, art and cuisine. Visitors can order authentic Pinoy food, and explore the rest of the area while waiting.

Angono is the site of the famous Gigantes Festival, so many of the town's artists are learned in the craft of designing masks. The town's tradition of mask making is particularly prominent in the restaurant, with a huge array of masks displayed throughout the space. Balaw Balaw has hosted numerous diners, from ordinary tourists to famous personalities like the host of Travel Channel's Bizarre Foods, Andrew Zimmern.

Further inside, there is a two-floor gallery exhibiting the works of Pedrigo and other selected artists. It is apparent from the paintings how much nature has helped shaped the artists of Angono. Forests and fishes are common subjects, possibly a nod to the lakeshore community and the nearby mountains. One wall also showcases Pedrigo's talent in human figures, with frame after frame of meticulously drawn nude sketches.



## ALL IN THE FAMILY

One gifted child is enough for most parents. Master painter Jose "Pitok" Blanco and wife Loreto Blanco have seven. Some sort of "art gene" must be embedded in their shared DNA. They have roots in fishing as evidenced by their family logo (an upside down fish), but all found their niche in the world of art. Guided by their late father, Glen, Noel, Michael, Joy, John, Gay, and Peter Paul seemed to be destined to a career in painting from the beginning.

The Blanco Family Museum is one of the most famous stops in Angono, and the gallery tracks the fascinating development of the children. On the walls are works of each Blanco, from their earliest scribbles to more mature large-scale projects.

Among all the talent in the family, certainly the most impressive are Jose's works that take up a whole other section of the museum. The master of folk realism was taught by National Artist and fellow Angono native Carlo "Botong" Francisco and has elevated his skill to make his mentor proud. Catch a glimpse of his Filipino "Last Supper" painting and one of the Angono Fisherman's Festival—a massive undertaking that took him about two years to complete.

The Blancos are certainly devoted to their craft; even matriarch Loreta, who picked up a paintbrush well in her thirties, was able to hone her skills as a painter. Now, all seven children dedicate most of their time to painting, with all except Joy settling in their hometown of Angono to use the ancestral home as their main studio.

## AND THEN THERE ARE MORE...

It would take more than a day to explore the entirety of Angono's art community. Make sure to allot time for National Artist Botong Francisco's Angono home, part of which has been converted into a museum for the public. Outside, the Doña Aurora Street is lined with walls of concrete murals by local painters inspired by Botong's mural-style. For a more ancient take on art, head to the Angono Petroglyphs, the oldest known work of art in the country discovered by none other than Botong Francisco. The crude drawings of humans and animals date back to 3000 BC.

## HOW TO GET THERE:

Take the Angono-bound jeepneys or shuttles at the EDSA Central Terminal or Cubao. Get off at the Angono marketplace and simply take a tricycle to your destination.



# MAKING *waves*

Word broke of this idyllic surfing town when it became the setting for Hollywood blockbuster *Apocalypse Now* but looking at Baler, an apocalypse is the furthest thing from the mind.

It's more like paradise.

Text by Cella Nachura

Photos by Jerico Montemayor for Photozuela

Make-up by Rhina Montemayor

Models: Lorraine Lapus and Aisa Locsin for Stoked Inc.

Clothes and surfboards by Rip Curl; Shades by Oakley



**T**o no one is this town more like a paradise than to surfers. Even just driving down the back road of Sabang beach, one can recognize the surf culture that's clearly present. From surfboards perched side by side to the athletic physiques of locals in the area to glimpses of the beach with waves too large not to ride—all of it speaks of a sport that transcends play: it's a way of life.





**This page:**

On Aisa: Ripcurl Sunset shirt; Oakley Holbrook Clear

On Lorraine: Ripcurl Sunwalk Tee, Ripcurl Mini short vintage; Oakley Jupiter Squared Matte Clear

**Opposite page:**

On Aisa: Ripcurl Lovebirds tee, Ripcurl Amazonia surf shorts; Oakley Frogskins Blacklight Orange Pink

On Lorraine: Ripcurl Faux Real Tee; Oakley Frogskins Blacklight Yellow Blue

From an outsider's perspective, surfing seems to be so integrated in Baler's culture that it is difficult to imagine a time when it wasn't there. Charles "Mac" Ritual of the Aurora Tourism Office says even before Hollywood catapulted the town into the spotlight, foreign surfers had already discovered the potential of Baler as a prime surfing spot. Kuya Mac, a second generation local surfer himself, remembers the time when Baler's surfers had to share a limited number of boards.

Nowadays, Baler is making waves not just in the ocean but in the tourism industry. There is no shortage of surfboards in Baler anymore—and there is a healthy influx of visitors. Although the swell from September to March is best, the promise of a good surf all year round means there are always hopefuls in the area watching out for opportunities to get in the water.







The variety of surfing spots in Baler is one of the reasons visitors find themselves going back. This is a destination that caters to all preferences; here, there are beach breaks, reef breaks and even river mouth breaks.

Beginners need not fear getting in the action, even with more experienced surfers in the area. This is an inviting destination for newbies, and Sabang's beach break provides the ideal conditions for learning. The waves are friendly, the instructors helpful and the sandy bottom means wiping out will not result in anything worse than a bit of a bruised ego. As *Kuya Mac* puts it, "[Baler is] for everyone from beginners to hardcore."

Perhaps beginners' fears stem from the common (mis)conception of the ocean as a force to reckon with, a place where the strongest of men meets his match. It may be true. But surfers learn to ride that power instead of fight it, and in places like Baler, they learn to love it.

**HOW TO GET THERE:**

The Genesis Bus Terminal at the corner of EDSA and New York streets in Cubao offers trips to Baler at 12:30AM and 1:30AM daily. Take the Joybus, the Genesis Bus Lines' executive coach and enjoy the six-hour ride in stop-free comfort. At the Baler Central Terminal, hop on a tricycle and direct the driver to the resort.



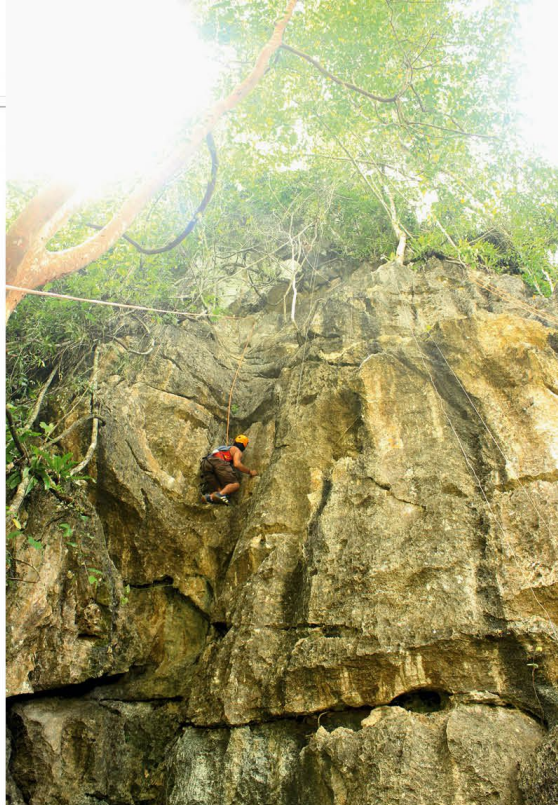
On Lorraine: Ripcurl Heart short sleeve rashguard,  
Ripcurl Hyper Real Tri  
On Aisa: Ripcurl Girls long sleeve rashguard



## LESSONS FROM *Puerto Princesa*

By Celia Nachura / Photos by Paelo Pedrajas

There is a lot that goes into building a sustainable paradise like Puerto Princesa.



**P**rotect. Rehabilitate. Plan. Puerto Princesa's main development thrust has been whittled down to these three basic concepts—protect what is there, rehabilitate what has been destroyed, and plan for the intelligent utilization of the city's resources.

Looking at the idyllic landscape of Puerto Princesa, one can only conclude that they've been nothing but successful.

Most notably, Puerto Princesa soared to new heights when the city's Underground River was named one of the new 7 Wonders of Nature. The winding turquoise river certainly deserves to be placed among the planet's most beautiful sites, but the real reward that was reaped from the title was the massive influx of tourists.

In a short span of time, Puerto Princesa jumped from being a quiet fishing village to a premier tourist destination. While the revenue from the flock of travelers is beneficial to the city, it can sometimes seem in conflict to their mission to preserve and protect the environment. Puerto Princesa Tourism Head Rebecca Labit describes the predicament as "a very beautiful problem."

"The Puerto Princesa Underground River receives tourists that often exceed its carrying capacity. However, we have agreed to never compromise the eco-system and the biodiversity of the park just to accommodate everyone," Labit explains.

Securing a permit to the river tour is a little trickier now that Puerto Princesa welcomes more than a thousand tourists daily—quite a number above the park's carrying

capacity of 700 to 1000. Visitors should allow a little flexibility in their schedules when in Puerto Princesa, especially during peak seasons, as their preferred time slots may not be available when they get there.

While groups in vacation are most eager to catch a glimpse of the world-renowned Underground River, there are other activities in Puerto Princesa that just might capture one's fancy.

Nearby dive sites such as the White Beach and Red Cliff offer a rich underwater world that's as stunning as any other site in Palawan. Dolphin watching at the bay is a fun activity that's managed by local fishermen in the area. The Iwahig Firefly Watching is also worth checking out, having been awarded the prestigious Gold Award by the Pacific Asia Tourism Association.

As evidenced by tourist traffic, the strength of Puerto Princesa's tourism campaign is really in their natural attractions. And while ecological interests may occasionally clash with urban development, Labit is convinced the city can remain unwavering in their principles.

"We still stick to the three guiding principles we have adopted ever since. Until now, we've remain committed against mining, we don't have logging, we are still the cleanest and greenest city, and we are the only city that is carbon neutral," Labit pointed out.

Labit credits Mayor Edward S. Hagedorn for spearheading the city's environmental advocacies. Hailed as a visionary, it was the mayor who initiated Puerto Princesa's e-cruise from the first sanitary landfill in the country to the Trikebayan or e-tricycle.

Indeed, Puerto Princesa has stood out as a model city for eco-tourism so far—but it doesn't stop there. The city government seeks a holistic development for Puerto Princesa, working hard to help enhance the lives of local folk just as it has sought to nurture the environment.

This city has undeniably thrived with recent developments in the tourism industry. More importantly, community-based sustainable tourism projects ensure the local population's continuous participation. Training programs are being set in place, capacity building activities for all kinds of livelihood opportunities from tour guides to drivers.

All of these are only the beginning. The biggest challenge for Puerto Princesa now is longevity. The key, according to Labit, is institutionalizing the programs so they could

be guarded from political intrigue and affiliations.

Still, there are only positive things on the horizon for Puerto Princesa. Blessed with an abundance of beautiful natural resources, definite goals and a hard-working workforce, it's hard not to bet this city will continue being an inspiring success story in the future.

### HOW TO GET THERE:

From Manila, there are daily flights to Puerto Princesa via Air Philippines, Cebu Pacific, Philippine Airlines and Zest Airways. You can also board the Superferry or Negros Navigation for the 18 to 22 hour trip to the city.

