



IT TAKES *LB*
A
VILLAGE

AT BAHAY KALIPAY, PEOPLE COME TO MEDITATE, TO HEAL INTUITIVELY, TO TRANSFORM, SELF-AWAKEN, SURRENDER TOWARDS AUTHENTIC AND MEANINGFUL EXISTENCE, AND SAVE THE PLANET THROUGH GOOD VIBES. NINA UNLAY JOINS THE COMMUNITY FOR A WEEK TO SEE IF IT'S POSSIBLE TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE WITH COCONUTS.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LYKA GONZALEZ



MY MORNING COCONUT WAS A LITTLE BROWNER THAN I LIKED, AN OPINION I ONLY COULD HAVE FORMULATED AFTER DAYS OF **MANY, MANY OTHER COCONUTS.**

In some parts, they call the coconut the Tree of Life. Nutritionists stand by them as a superfood, and if you take residence in a tropical country then the odds are that you are on their side. In any place that advocates sustainable living, a medium-sized coconut is invaluable; the meat and juice provide almost all the daily nutrients needed for the average human being. An article in the Ceylon Medical Journal argues that the type of fatty acids found in coconut meat are directly converted into fuel for the body, which means if you live on an island with an abundance of coconuts, you don't need anything else to live.

It was the week of Inner Dance Energy School (IDES) at Bahay Kalipay, a healing house and retreat center by its own definition, where a group of people from all over the globe had gathered. In the following days, the routine was set: there were lectures, healing sessions, dialogues—and there were always coconuts. After each session, there was a chance to share, and the experience would sometimes move people to wail, to laugh, or to cry. At times, they happened all at once.

But that morning was a Wednesday, and Wednesdays were designated Non-Doing Day. Non-doing included not speaking, and so the open dining area was filled with ten to twenty people scraping the insides of their coconuts in near silence, communicating through facial expressions and elaborate hand gestures in place of words. Occasionally, someone would rub their belly and smile. It was almost comical: watching these people, barely more than strangers, transmitting meaning like in a game of charades.

Looking back down at my own brownish coconut, I wondered how long we would live like this.

SOME PLACES COME WITH EXPECTATIONS, and this one had it down on paper: “We are a self-regulating and self-governing community. These intentions give us direction on how we intentionally manifest our highest potential, to help ensure that we all enjoy our stay at Bahay Kalipay and allow our shared visions and purposes to flow into form.”

It wasn't the warmest welcome, but Bahay Kalipay wasn't your typical hotel. The rest of our welcome package contained values that disguised regulations—words like mindfulness and empathy. “Have you watched the movie *Divergent*?” was photographer Lyka's first question. “It reminds me of the Amnity class.”

The comparison to a movie about a dystopian world wasn't very comforting. But there was an otherworldly quality about Bahay Kalipay, and you could feel it in the air from the first visit, like its very texture was made of something special.

Nestled in a quiet road lined by trees quite a way from the city center, first impressions of the place were simple; the atmosphere likened to that of a low-maintenance spa. The wooden cottages are quaint with hints of vibrancy: a mural on the bedroom wall, colorful glass for tiles, a deep blue meditation maze with chimes that catch in the wind. The majority of our orientation was spent on a rundown of practices: some as mild as washing your own dishes and going









barefoot in common areas, others a little more difficult. The food is an entirely different conversation; Bahay Kalipay is still, at its heart, a raw-food detox center. After all, healing intuitively still involves what we take in. Some guests come and choose the coconut diet, while others opt to treat themselves to food from the outside once in a while. One of the more difficult rules, at least for this hungry meat-eating writer, is not being allowed to bring in cooked food, since the smell might distract the other guests.

Bahay Kalipay is not a hotel, and I have difficulty saying convincingly that it is a place for everyone. It is a shared home. And like all homes, a visit comes hand-in-hand with the trust that you have every intention to take care of it. Coming into this establishment was more than just a transaction; it was a promise.

PI VILLARAZA LIVED ON COCONUTS FOR THREE YEARS. He founded Bahay Kalipay without a home in the typical sense—Pi understood the idea of place in a way that others found difficult. Even before the years he spent on his coconut diet, he walked away from his life in Manila and never stopped.

Literally.

“When I walked away, I thought I was going to walk away for three hours... and then I wasn’t going home. Why did I keep going farther? It felt good. I knew I didn’t want to go back. I just kept walking and it became the easiest thing to become the poorest person I know. The energy woke up inside me, and I became a healer.”

But Pi isn’t just interested in healing people; he’s more interested in healing systems. Pi is also the founder of Maia Earth Village in Puerto Princesa, which is part the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). Students from the Inner Dance Energy School sometimes extend their time in Maia, where they are welcome to stay for as long as they need a place to heal or to work. GEN has been around for two decades, and it’s an organization with

a goal: a sustainable future, a sustainable life even, from the ground up.

Maia is a big place meant to take up small space; a model for township conscious of its footprint, and a home for people who want to continue to live like that. The ones who stay reside in mudhouses, eat food grown from the land, and manage on solar power. There are approximately 10,000 ecovillages worldwide listed under GEN.

But ecovillages are more than just structures; they’re communities, fundamentally built with a conscious effort towards sustainable design that bleeds as deeply as creating atypical systems of learning (like the IDES). Part of GEN’s mandate is to connect people—recreate the network between policy-makers, academics, people who are capable of creating change—and the ecovillage is an essential part of the setting. “Last year, we gathered almost 100 people all around the world. We had people from the military, Gawad Kalinga, Department of Education, [some of the] top doctors. All the chakra systems were represented. Imagine TED Talks meets Boom Dialogue meets Burning Man and inner dance, all together in one room. We had these really respected people who would normally wear ties dropping down to dance, gathering to look at the biggest crisis, the biggest problem. Climate change, the big oil crisis, energy sources depletion. Those are the problems. Should we meet at a five-star hotel? Why are we doing this and what is the point? You need a special set of conditions to be able to hold that. We’ve been offering Maia as that as a place as such meetings should be held, because you are there and you feel the world in its truth differently.”

Pi would be the first to say that Bahay Kalipay and Maia Earth Village are two very different things: one is a healing house, the other a community. But the line is blurred in other ways, in their intimate relationship with people and

place: the way they explore how your environment plays a near-invisible, significant part in your life.

SOMETIMES, RYAN WANTED TO GO HOME.

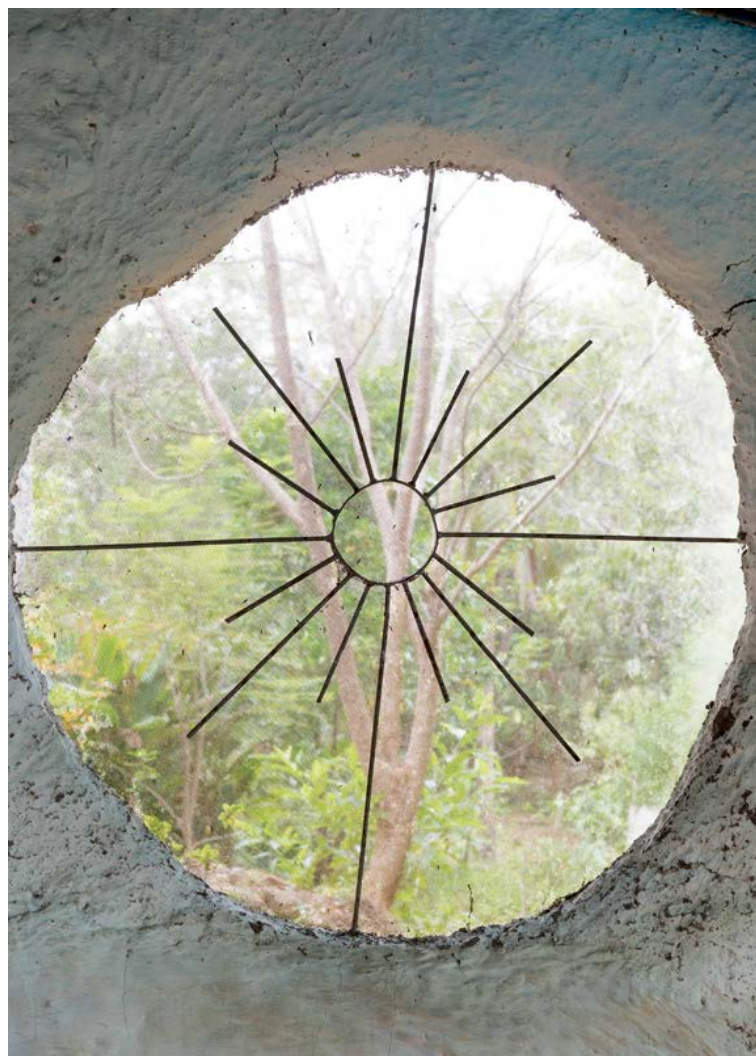
In one of the grimmer, less visited nooks and crannies of Bahay Kalipay, he had found a cottage he could smoke in, away from the other guests, and it was ideal for conversations over cigarettes and coconuts. He had been here for nearly a month, facilitating inner dance sessions and daily ashtanga classes in the mornings.

Ryan was a seeker. He didn’t need to be in Puerto Princesa to be looking for connection—he sought it in life every day, over a meal, in a healing session, within a yosi break. “I don’t mind being the yoga teacher that smokes,” he shrugs. “Sometimes people think that connection has to happen a certain way. I’ve had some of the most interesting connections with people over a smoke. It doesn’t matter: connection is connection.”

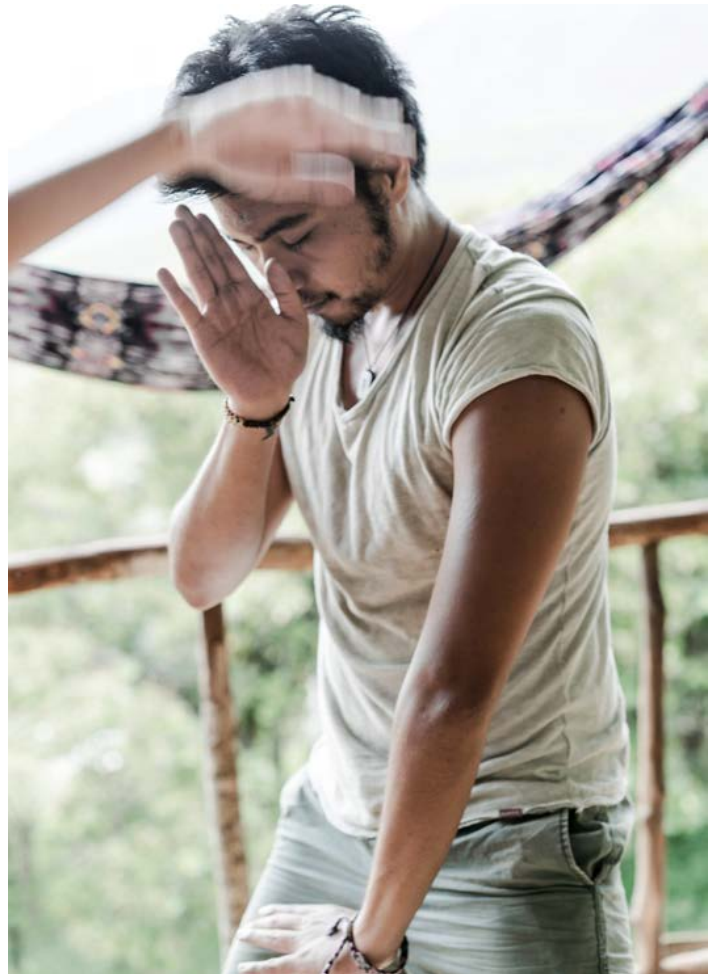
He was in Bahay Kalipay not to connect, but to untether. “There are a lot of experiences that lead me to the process; a whole lot of them were a bi-product of an avoided depression that seeped into the core of my being that unknowingly influenced my choices and behavior,” he says. Ryan is also a man of many words, the reason I usually find myself cocking my head to the side, trying to understand, before he reels into the punchline: “I was in love.”

It made sense. Ryan had a kind of lust for the world that had me tilting my head at him more than once, trying to understand what he was trying to say while asking my own questions. To which, he would usually respond, “Yes, exactly!” without offering further explanation. But it was indicative of the nature of this community—words never fit exactly right.

PALAWAN HAS MANY NAMES: The Last Frontier, Best Island, Land of Safe Harbor.











This Page: Pi Villaraza once chanced upon an article about Manila being the most crowded city in the world. His journey led him to Palawan, the Philippines' least populated province.



In this community, the word being passed around is: “sacred.”

Since 2015, Puerto Princesa has been the least populated city in the Philippines according to land area. The province of Palawan is the largest in the Philippines, and the island itself is the country’s fifth-largest.

At the same time, Puerto Princesa is one of the top cities when it comes to tourism. For the past few years, the rise of incoming foreign tourists has been steadily increasing. And the class here is representative of that fact: Out of the 25 students of the IDES, only a

handful consist of locals. Of the incoming foreigners, a number of them have heard of Bahay Kalipay from friends in Bali.

“Palawan is where my journey led me,” Pi, who never attributes these details to happenstance, says. “It’s ranked as one of the top islands in the world; but should it become another Bali? Another Boracay? Or should it contribute? Should it keep developing because of commerce? It makes sense where [the city] is the least populated, the wealth is there... meaning we need sacred spaces where people find their true selves.”

Once upon a time, the land that Bahay

Kalipay sits on was nothing more than a garbage dump, a repository area for a businessman fixing up old refrigerators (there’s a metaphor in here somewhere about a place that now stores its own idea of nourishment). “But it was beautiful,” Pi says. And he knew about sacred places—the money that initially funded Bahay Kalipay came from an article he was writing, for a publication, about sacred places.

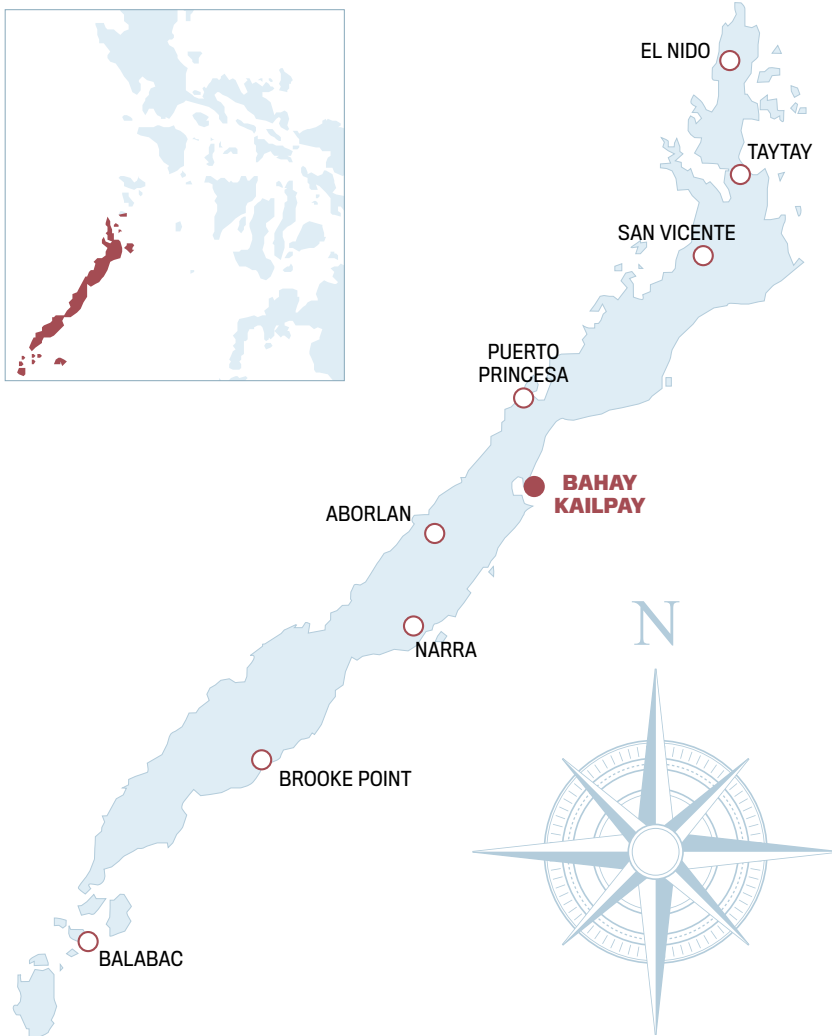
“For me, a sacred [place] means a place where transformation is happening. You’re changing your behavior; you’re changing your mind. You’re changing the way you’re experiencing the world. Getting by a whole day on just coconuts seems like such a big deal. But here—because of the mindset—you’re not anxious. That’s an experience that then shifts your perception, and then shifts your behavior. You’re not the same person anymore because you’ve shifted the whole loop.”

It was hard to think that I wasn’t anxious—after all, I didn’t last even 48 hours without heading out for a cup of coffee. By the second day, Lyka and I left for the city center and my stomach found a way to some sizzling bulalo along with the much needed caffeine. Once caffeinated, the question became clearer: what were we doing in Bahay Kalipay?

We weren’t unfamiliar with the world of healing—we were two seasoned yogis, acquainted with the likes of meditation and Reiki. We considered ourselves friends with this world. But getting by on the minimal, even in terms of diet, was tough. After a trip around the outside world, and with some meat in me, we headed back to Bahay Kalipay with this question still ringing in my head.

But I could see the changes in the people around me; if I didn’t, they would tell me. In sharing circles, both men and women would cry, and thank the rest of us for being here.

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WHAT IS IDES?

IDES IS A BIG CONCEPT ON THIS RELATIVELY SMALL PAGE.
IF YOU'RE GENUINELY CURIOUS, COME TO ENERGY SCHOOL.
HERE'S OUR ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE IT IN 300 WORDS OR SO:

"Inner dance is the biggest party and the deepest meditation. We're learning to listen to music, at the same time learning to listen to your person, at the same time learning to listen to the earth," says Pi Villaraza, the founder of the IDES. The Inner Dance Energy School (IDES) has been around since 2013, as an experiential system of learning. The IDES is held monthly at Bahay Kalipay, usually during the first week of the month. While there are pillars to the structure, the content is largely based on context; the module adapts to its environment and culture. Pi has also attested that different cultures respond differently to the innerdance experience proper.

While no Energy School has exactly the same content, there is always heavy discussion on theory, related sciences and studies, and the reactions to the innerdance sessions held daily. These can occur either one-on-one or in a group session, and it begins with the receiver of the healing laying down in a position that can be likened to yoga's savasana or corpse pose. From here, the facilitators begin to play a series of music, and create sensory elements in the receiver's surrounding environment, that transition between meditative and powerful—exploring the body's autonomic nervous system and the relationship between the parasympathetic and sympathetic responses in the attempt to explore spatial intelligence and human consciousness. The experience can be so intense that it moves some people to wail, to cry, or to laugh hysterically. Inner dance is a retreat into the mind and owns a philosophy that if you can change your mind, you can also change your body.

There is much, much more to be said about inner dance, and you can start reading at innerdanceprocess.org or bahaykalipay.com.

