

FREE ISSUE
AT THE NINYO AQUINO
INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
04

turista

Your gateway to Philippine Adventures

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A ROADMAP
TO THE METRO'S
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THE COUNTRY'S
CULTURAL & DINING
HAVENS

MOUNT PINATUBO

A NATIONAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL WONDER



TRAVEL

notes from

PINATUBO

TAKING A TRIP TO AN EXTRAORDINARY GEOLOGICAL SITE, CHRISTIAN REGIS SHARES SOME JOTTINGS FROM HIS TRAVEL JOURNAL ABOUT A PLACE FILLED WITH HISTORY AND WONDER.



Traveling to Mount Pinatubo is like going back in time. As a mountaineer and *turista*, I always saw it as a place definitely worth visiting. It is a geologic and national wonder that overcame a violent and dark past.

June 18, 1995

Mount Pinatubo is a dormant volcano in the Zambales Mountain Range. Once a 1,745-meter tall heavily forested mountain, its climactic eruption on June 15, 1991 turned out to be the second largest volcanic eruption of the 20th century.

The eruption obliterated the summit and ejected billions of tons of volcanic material.

Pyroclastic flow covered the whole mountain and ash clouds went 34 kilometers up in the stratosphere, enveloping Central Luzon and Metro Manila in total darkness. On the same day, typhoon "Diding" struck Central Luzon. With torrential rain and gusting winds, the typhoon stirred up ash clouds and showered ash all over Luzon and even reaching parts of Southeast Asia. Most of the death and destruction were caused by the typhoon. Roofs collapsed under the weight of the ash and boiling mudflow swiftly carved surrounding rivers and low-lying inhabited areas.

Eighteen years since then, Mount Pinatubo is now ironically a famous tourist destination.

Offroad Adventure

Contact the P.D.C. Spa Town Office before leaving Manila for Mount Pinatubo. If it's open, book a trip and ask for a 4x4 vehicle and a driver. Special permits are given to those who want to trek, run, or bring their own bikes or vehicles.

PHOTOS: CHRISTIAN REGIS



The gateway to Mount Pinatubo is Capas, Tarlac. For commuters, catch a bus in Manila that heads to Mabalacat or farther north. Meet your designated driver at Mabalacat or at the P.D.C. Spa Town Office at Capas earlier than 9:00 a.m.

The easiest way up Mount Pinatubo would take an hour and a half of off-road driving and a 20-minute trek to the magnificent Pinatubo Lake. If you're the adventurous type, you can take the harder route that would take an hour of off-road driving and a strenuous three-hour trek up its winding river. Either way, a guide will accompany you all the way from Capas to the lake, and back. P1,500 per person will cover all the basic expenses of the trip.

The first part of the trip is a 10-kilometer drive through Crow Valley—a huge lahar field left over by volcanic mudflows during the eruption. Before 1991, Crow Valley was the US Air Force's training grounds for bombing and strafing runs. The Philippine Air Force now uses it. The Air Force, as well as bad weather,

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determine the availability of Mount Pinatubo to tourists.

It is an action-packed drive: 40-kilometer per hour speeds, going up and down 30-degree inclines, splashing through the wide, shallow O'Donnell River that wind across the valley, and viewing the majestic walls and distant mountains.

If you're taking the easier route, the jeep then enters the “Skyway”—an unpaved road that goes from the foot of the volcano up to the Crater Lake. You will pass by astonishing ash valleys, walls, and streams.

The jeep then stops at the hiking trail that goes up to the Crater Lake. The trail is a river valley, shaded by the tall-forested mountains,

and the ground is littered with vegetation and rocks with sizes ranging from basketballs to Volkswagens. It can be a mildly strenuous trek but it will pay off once you get up the hill.

Pinatubo Lake

The lake was formed when billions of tons of volcanic material from within the volcano where ejected during the eruption and the cavity left inside collapsed, forming a crater. Rainwater then began filling it up. Highly acidic at first, but the water has neutralized after 18 years of rain and volcanic inactivity.

From the concrete viewing deck, stairs will lead you down to the freshwater lake. The shore is rocky and loose. Swimming and boating are allowed on the lake.

We saw orange-colored rocks on the other side of the lake, and out of curiosity, three of us swam a hundred meters to get there. The water is clearer and colder in the middle and the bottom was nowhere in sight. I found out



Breathtaking view of the "Skyway" amidst the surrounding mountains



Remnants of destruction: a stream of sulfur with volcanic rocks



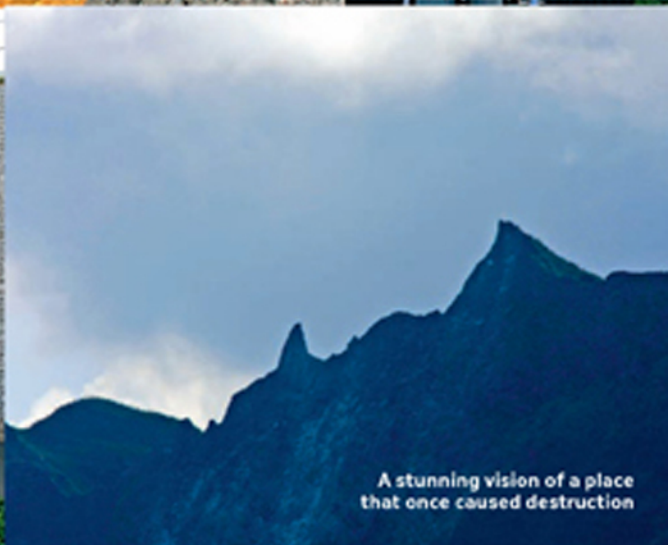
The American monument to the "Battling Bastards of Bataan"



Local Aetas greet you in their homeland



A tribute to national history



A stunning vision of a place that once caused destruction

that it was estimated at 600 meters deep—twice the height of the Empire State Building. We reached the orange walls and found loose, sharp rocks coupled with the intoxicating smell of sulfur.

Going back up to the viewing area is probably the most strenuous part of the trip. However, the trek back on the trail is quite easy, a mere 10 minutes. Back in the Crow Valley, the 3:00 p.m. sun would have changed the color of the ash and surrounding mountains from bright white to a warm orange. Once you're back in the office, you can get a spa treatment, complete with body massage and volcanic mud baths. You can also take a shower in the homes of the locals for P20.

The Capas National Shrine

A place you shouldn't miss when in the area is the Capas National Shrine. With its 70-meter black obelisk, it is impossible for travelers not to see it or be drawn by its mysterious yet enlightening appeal.

Camp O' Donnell was a military training camp. But in April 1942, during the invasion

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of the Philippines by the Japanese Imperial Forces, it was transformed into a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp after the Fall of Bataan and the surrender of 80,000 Filipino and American troops. After the "Death March", in which 21,000 died, the surviving 54,000 troops were imprisoned at the POW camp. The prisoners struggled to survive against malnutrition, sickness, and abuse. Thirty thousand prisoners died in Camp O'Donnell.

Capas National Shrine is a memorial to the Filipino and American troops who died and

survived at Camp O' Donnell. The shrine features mini-forests, a large esplanade, a small museum, and even the last known surviving "hellish" boxcar that was used to transport the prisoners. The Memorial Plaza is the most important part of the shrine. Three black marble walls surround the obelisk, engraved with images, poetry, statistics, and the names of Filipinos known to have died there.

The shrine is an eye-opener to our dark history, which we have forgotten to remember. It was awkward to smile for the cameras, knowing how much misery had filled that place. With the thousands of names engraved in the black marble, I searched for my family name. And there it was, three soldiers bearing my mother's maiden name. I am hoping that I was related to them because it would be a great honor to have had great grandfathers who participated in the greatest war in history.

We left for home exhausted and touched from our trip to the past. We went up Mount Pinatubo and visited Capas National Shrine—an adventure with Mother Nature, a place of enlightenment as well as a tribute to our history.

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