

SOJOURN TO THE CITY OF GENTLE PEOPLE

Whether you prefer a city or a country tour, Negros Oriental definitely has a lot of things to offer its visitors. From its historical schools and churches as well as its amazing waterfalls and lakes, a trip to this province will surely delight any traveler.

Text and Photos by **Astra C. Alegre**



When one hears the name of the southern province Negros Oriental, chances are one would immediately think of its capital city, Dumaguete, where the iconic Silliman University can be found. A 'must see' for first time visitors, Silliman, built by the Americans in 1901, is the first university outside Manila and the first Protestant school in the Philippines.

The first thing that strikes you and one that leaves a lasting impression are the century-old acacia trees that dot the expansive campus, which has been declared a bird sanctuary. Silliman also has a modern and fully equipped marine laboratory with a large collection of bone skeletons from marine mammals, whales and dolphins.

The impressive 7 kilometer Manjuyod Sand Bar located in Bals City

Enjoy the scenic view at the serene Lake Balinsasayao. (below) A huge boat is one of the many interesting artifacts inside Silliman University's Museum



Another must see tourist attraction: Apo Island

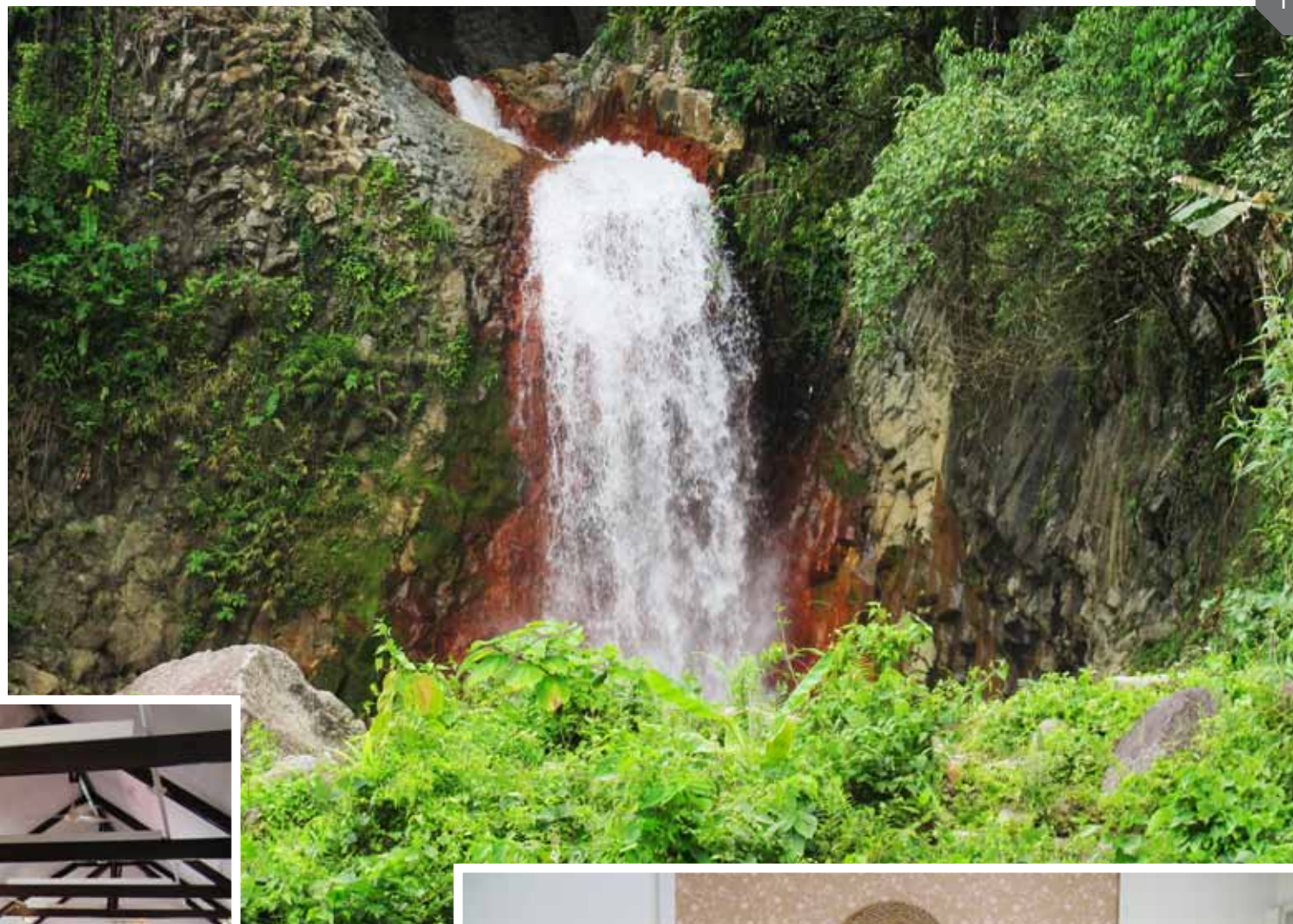
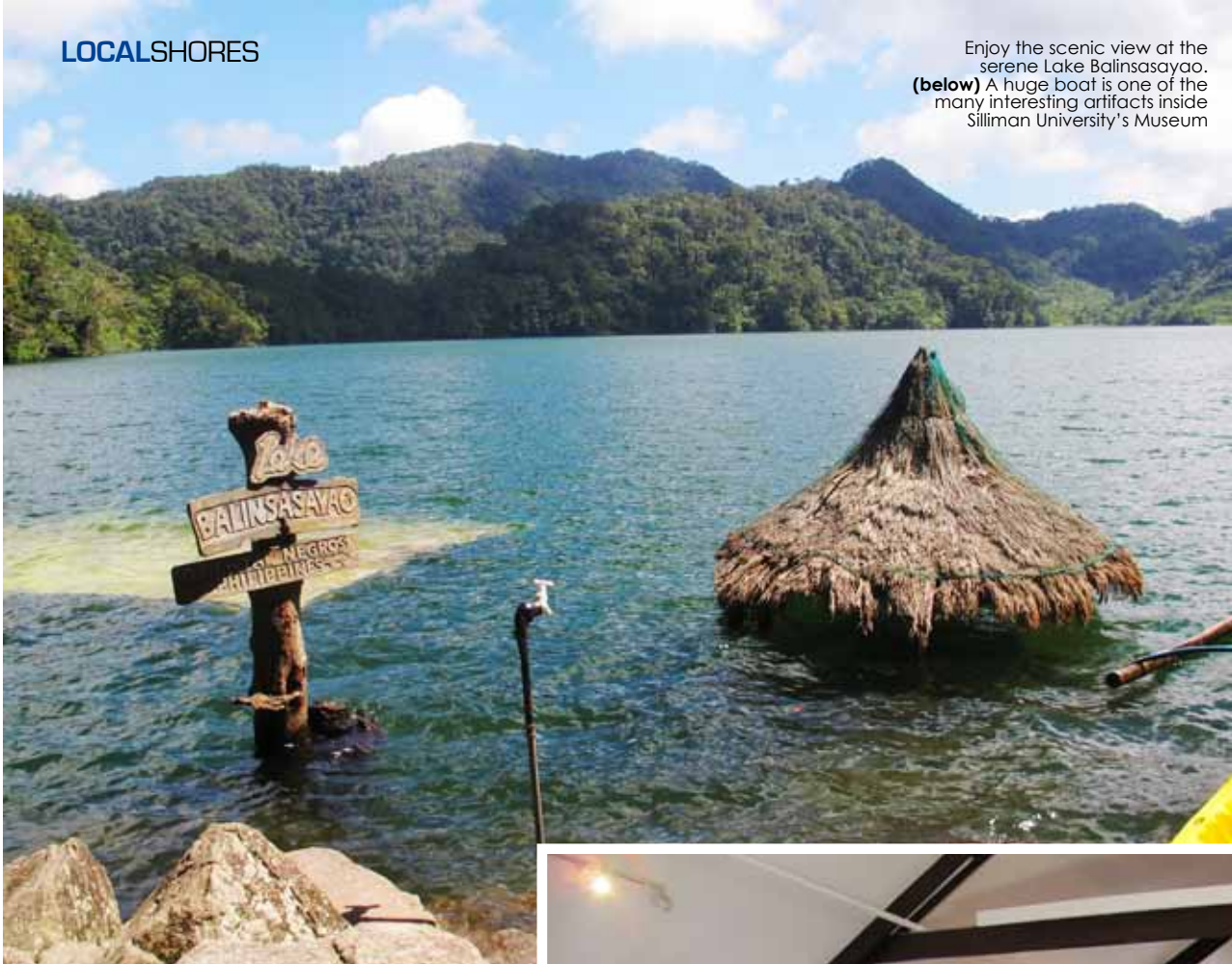
Approximately 30 kilometers south of Negros Oriental is Apo Island. The volcanic islet is located in the municipality of Dauin. To get to the island, you will need to take a 30 minute boat ride from the village of Malapatay, Zamboanguita.

What to do once you get there? A lot. Relax at the island's white pebble beaches. Take photos of the various rock formations surrounding the place. Tourists can also enjoy snorkeling, trekking, or even swimming with the sea turtles. Apo Island is also famous as a diving place and is said to be among the top diving spots in the world.

The other main attraction of the island is its marine sanctuary where you can find corals, clownfish, clams and many other water animals. Back in the 1980s, Dr. Angel Alcalá from Silliman University was able to convince the local fishermen about the importance of creating a sanctuary. The marine sanctuary in Apo Island has inspired the creating of other marine sanctuaries all over the Philippines. The sanctuary has also gained attention worldwide.

There are resorts in the island where guests can stay a night or two if they wish to explore the place at a more leisurely pace.

(top to bottom) One of Negros Oriental's unique attractions, the Pulang Bato Waterfalls; Get a good night rest as you lay down at one of Sta Monica Beach Club's comfortable beds; Buy some fresh squid from the market for your lunch or dinner



Also impressive are the old buildings on campus that have survived, representing American colonial architecture. The Luce Auditorium is patterned after the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila. Its library has an extensive Filipiniana section. The Silliman Hall "houses an ethno-anthro museum with archaeological artifacts dating as far back as 2000 years."

The university's oldest building faces the boulevard, which was named after national hero, Jose Rizal, who made a stopover here after his exile in Dapitan. Today, the boulevard serves as a public park where people stroll along its tree-lined promenade to take in the breeze from the bay and enjoy their 'tempura,' the popular local street food, much like the more common fish balls sold by itinerant vendors from rolling carts.

We checked in at the Sta. Monica Beach Club, just 20 minutes from the airport. It is now managed by the same owners as the luxury resort, Amorita in Panglao Island in Bohol. Our room, which was painted white, immediately gave us a sense of peace and tranquility. Resort manager, Cita Alcantara, welcomed us warmly, as we enjoyed our welcome drink, a refreshing glass of cold lemongrass tea. You can hear the crash of the waves, so conducive to restful sleep, Alcantara said. The resort has 21 rooms—18 deluxe with loft plus a family house with three bedrooms.

At the time of our visit, they were hosting their first wedding event, a Filipino bride and her foreigner husband, which we saw

by the pool bar later that night while we enjoyed our dinner prepared by Chef Syl Malenab who made a delicious meal out of the fresh shrimps and crabs, which we bought at the public market earlier.

It was a full day of sightseeing for us. Yes, there's more to see in this 'City of Gentle People' as it is called, than just the university. We visited the historic Cathedral Bell Tower, which dates back to the early 1800s. At that time, it was used to warn the natives of marauding pirates. Today, the imposing stone structure stands as an important architectural landmark in the city.

A modern landmark in its own right is the Sans Rival Café, famous for its silvanas and of course, sans rival. We got to try two kinds of silvanas—the original butter, and chocolate, which we had for dessert after a filling lunch of oriental-style fish fillet, potato salad, pork with sauce, and lechon wrap.

We got to see a bit of the countryside on our way to Red River Valley in the town of Valencia. There, we saw the Pulang Bato Waterfalls, so called, not because the water is red but perhaps because of the reflection of the red rocks on the cascading water that pours into a swimming hole. We saw several kids bathing in the natural pool.

Not far from the waterfalls is the Red Rock Hot Spring. This time, there were no bathers in sight. Back at the Sta. Monica Beach Club, we took a relaxing shower with complimentary lemongrass liquid soap and conditioning shampoo. A perfect way to end a tiring day. And then, to bed.

We started early the following day. We left the hotel at 7 a.m. and headed towards Bais, which is well-known as a jump off point for dolphin and whale watching tours on Tanon Strait. We lingered at the Manjuyod white sand bar, "a seven kilometer stretch

of premium white sand" that emerges only during low tide. We saw baby crabs and starfish in the shallow water. We lost all sense of time.

There are wooden cottages built on stilts that appear to float on the water during high tide, which can be rented. At the cottage, we enjoyed our packed lunch of chicken *adobo*, veggies, rice, watermelon, mangoes, and bottled water.

The other major attractions we

visited that day were the Twin Lakes of Balinsasayao and Lake Danao. The freshwater lakes are located 1000 feet above sea level and are separated by a narrow mountain ridge. You take a 30-minute ride going in and a short four minute walk to view Balinsasayao Lake. It's great for fishing, swimming, boating, and kayaking. Or you can simply do nothing. Breathe. Take in all the fresh air that your lungs can hold, and let it sweep away all the cobwebs in your head. Walk away refreshed.

Back at the Sta. Monica Beach Club, a fresh plate of cookies was waiting for us in our room. We had dinner *al fresco* by the sea. We had tomato and cheddar soup, kani salad, *sinaglaw* (pork *sinugba* and tuna *kinilaw*), *crispy pata*, sizzling *bulalo* with creamy sauce, and chocolate cake. It does not get any better than this. ☑