

SUNDAY

May 2012

# INQUIRER MAGAZINE

THE  
UNLIKELY  
MAMA SAN

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BEST  
RESORT  
FOOD

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UNFIT  
TO BE A  
MOTHER?

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10 TIPS  
FOR SAFE  
ONLINE  
SHOPPING

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18  
WAYS  
TO A  
GREEN  
HOME



*Mommy Dearest*  
THE OF BEING  
GENELYN MAGSAYSAY



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### The Incredible Burden of Being Genelyn

By Fe B. Zamora

Sometime starlet Genelyn Magsaysay was only 17 when she became a mistress to Sen. Ramon Revilla, Sr. She would go on to bear him nine children, three of whom, the police say, might be involved in the brutal slaying of their sibling, Ramgen Revilla. He is in a good place now, she says of her eldest son in this exclusive interview, but she apparently isn't. While earnestly seeking justice for Ramgen, this single mother says she must also defend her other children from naysayers who, it seems, cannot have enough of their made-for-movies family chronicles

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Cover photo by Alanah Torralba  
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## Meeting the Filipinos in Andorra

There are more tourists than residents in this tiny principality between France and Spain, and more Filipinos than you'd expect in its shops, hotels, restaurants and churches

BY MABEL GUIA ACOSTA  
PHOTOS BY CARMENCITA FERRERIA



REGULAR reunions: Filipinos converge at Placa del Poble (above); Andorra landscape (top)

ANDORRA sounds like a mythical country in one of those Disney princess movies, but this small autonomous principality wedged in the Pyrenees between France and Spain is real and home to some 800 Filipinos who comprise one percent of its population.

Not surprisingly, a familiar landmark stands at the capital's Parc Central: a bronze bust of Dr. Jose Rizal that commemorates our national hero's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Philippine Honorary Consul General to Andorra Hans Peter Holbach had commissioned Andorran sculptor Angel Calvante to do the 50 x 30 x 216 centimeters bust that he later donated to the city.

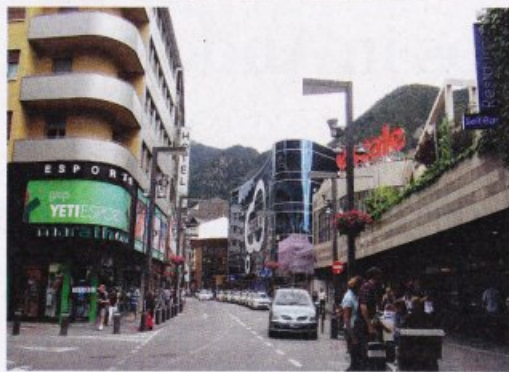
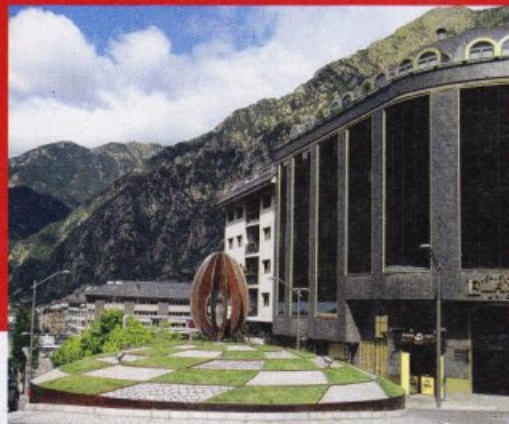
The recognition given to Rizal also reflects Andorra's acknowledgment of the contributions of Filipinos to this tiny principality. The first Filipino settlers here came in 1978 and were mostly domestic helpers, as there was a law limiting foreign workers to domestic employment. In the mid-90's, a new law was passed opening blue-collar jobs to migrants and foreign workers.

Aida Pera, who has been living and working in Andorra for 25 years, recalls how Filipinos have graduated from domestic work to become sales clerks, chambermaids, janitors, cooks and waiters. "Ngayon konti na lang kaming mga DH at yaya (Us nannies and domestics are now a minority)," she says.

The openness and vaunted hospitality of our fellow nationals greeted us when we recently visited this Pyrenean nation after we decided to extend our stay in Europe. Mo-



Among OFWs, the main attraction is the availability of jobs and the friendliness of the locals. Filipinos are apparently held in high esteem here.



rocco was also considered but a recent bombing made us change our plans. Instead, my Rome-based friend Carmen Ferreria and I took a flight from Ciampino, Italy and landed in Barcelona's El Prat airport. From there, we waited for the coach that leaves every two hours for the four-hour trip to Andorra.

I later learned that if you're coming from France, there are buses and coaches from downtown Toulouse and the Toulouse-Bagnac airport that leave twice daily and arrive in Andorra two and a half hours later.

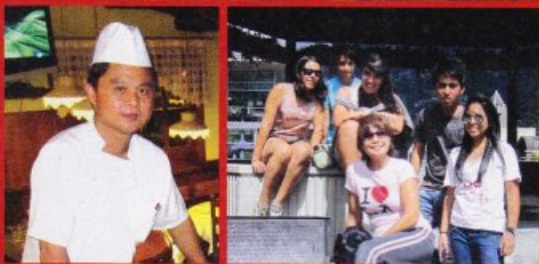
The more moneyed can travel in style via helicopter and be in Andorra in 35 minutes.

This small mountain state is home to almost 80,000 people, a third of whom are Andorrans while the rest are either Spanish,

availability of jobs and the friendliness of the locals. Says Pera: "*Maayos ang trabaho dito* (The working conditions are good). They prefer Filipinos because we're more hard-working than other foreign workers." The OFWs are willing to work beyond regular hours if a job needs to be done, she adds, unlike other workers who adhere strictly to their per hour contract.

Andorrans value loyalty and are wont to treat domestics like family, says Pera, adding that she has been working for one family since she came here. The young girl she used to care for now has a daughter of her own.

Pera is a member of Filand—The Filipino Community of Andorra—a non-profit association founded to preserve, share, celebrate



SCENES from a second home: (Clockwise from left) Andorra roundabout; Filand members; Aida Pera; Kathleen Marie and friends; Ernie Naval, and High Street

French or Portuguese. Its independence dates from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century where, online sources say, Charlemagne is said to have granted the Andorrans self-government for their help in defeating the Moors

"There are actually more tourists here than residents," reveals Honorable Josep Vila Circuns, Minister of Commons. There are after all ski runs, mountain hikes, hot springs, opulent hotels, duty-free shopping and lots of public art in this peaceful suburb-like country.

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and promote the diversity of Filipino heritage and culture through arts and cuisine in Andorra. Filipinos are apparently held in high esteem here. "The Filipinos can be counted on to join and support cultural events and festivities. Even in calamities, Filipinos always lend a hand," says Minister Vila Circuns.

The solidarity among Filipinos is also a plus, says Filand President Bong Canlas. "We help and support each other. When newcomers arrive and are jobless, we all help out and recommend them to our employers," he adds in Filipino.

Indeed, the news of us—fellow nationals or *kababayans*—visiting Andorra spread like wildfire and resulted in us being greeted warmly everywhere we went. Ernie Naval, who works as a cook at *Dos Casadores*, offered the services of his daughter Kathleen Marie and her friends to act as our tour guide. He also arranged for us to meet his sister-in-law, Aida Pera, who briefed us on the OFW situation in Andorra.

Ernie's wife, Elsie, had come to work in Andorra in 1988 and he followed in 1992. Both of them work in the same restaurant/bar, a cooking stint markedly different from his previous job as phone operator in Saudi Arabia.

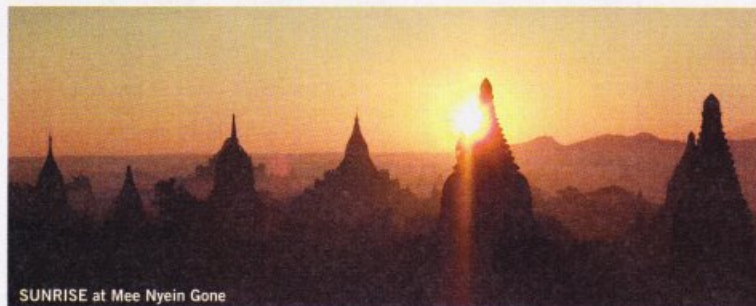
The restaurant where the couple works is one of five owned by local businessman Nicolas Cruz and his partners. All five establishments have Filipinos staffing the kitchen and waiting tables.

Another early migrant to Andorra is Lino who started working in Barcelona in 1979.

From there, he would shuttle to Andorra to work as a cook in an *osteria*.

Continued on page 30





SUNRISE at Mee Nyein Gone

## Behold, Burma

From page 14

There are three seated Buddhas up front, but Ye's obvious favorite was the huge reclining Buddha in the back. I wondered aloud why the images were in such tight enclosures. The explanation was that the pagoda was a memorial to an imprisoned monarch. But I would see later that huge Buddhas in small spaces were sort of the norm.

Near sundown, we had to decide where we wanted to watch the vaunted Bagan sunset from. Most visitors pick Shwesandaw Paya but Ye said there would be a lot of people there. He opted for the less crowded Lawka-Ou-Shaung (12<sup>th</sup> century), where we found no more than 20 tourists and local guides already waiting.

When the sun, with a gradual muting of its blinding light, signified that it was about to begin its descent, a slight chill and a hush fell on the small crowd. From our perch on the temple's third-level terrace, we beheld a spectacular sight—hundreds of pagodas as far as the eye could see, in red bricks made to look even redder by the fading sun. Among these stood some of the most splendid structures of worship I had ever seen, their domes softly shining like tempered gold.

A great distance from where we sat, three hot air balloons glided across the plain.

No one dared break the exquisite silence on the terrace. I glimpsed more temples below, in the opposite direction, and next to me, faces gleamed as though in front of a fireplace, each one in a half-smile, exuding goodwill. Raja turned to me and said, "Thank you." My cup ran over.

## Sunrise theater

Next morning before dawn, we took a short walk from our hotel, the Bagan Thande, to Mee Nyein Gone (12<sup>th</sup> century), a wise choice for a sunrise "theater." Ye said everyone would again be in Shwesandaw. It was very dark in this little-known, therefore almost deserted, temple and the steps leading to the second-level terrace seemed to have been made for toddlers. But there were a few other tourists already positioned among the *stupas*, and we had missed the first sliver of light. Already we could make out silhouettes of pagodas below.

If sunset was a prize, sunrise was a bonus. One by one, or in tiny groups, the pagodas presented themselves to the daylight, as though emerging from the ground, roused from sleep. I

seriously thought I might be dreaming.

I decided at that point that I had seen everything I had come for. But more was coming.

At the Alo Taw Pyi (11<sup>th</sup> century) temple we joined devotees in a traditional festival and offering to the monks. Although we looked markedly different from the colourfully outfitted locals on account of our attire, we were soon feeling comfortable enough to join them in a scramble for lucky coins tossed by some officials from a tower. In an open reception hall, the faithful paid their respects to a "healing monk."

Next we went to the market, which I had earlier seen on YouTube. I bought a beggar-monk puppet and a tarnished wooden Buddha head.

Shwezigon Paya (11<sup>th</sup> century), to our delight, was like a smaller-scale Shwedagon. Htilominlo (13<sup>th</sup> century) stirred up my most dreamy sighs but it was Gubyaukgyi (12<sup>th</sup> century), with its richly tinted murals that pre-date the Sistine chapel by at least three centuries, that made me very proud, indeed, to be Asian.

Ye had pointed out Ananda Paya (12<sup>th</sup> c) to us on Day 1. At last we stepped inside its courtyard that was studded with souvenir stands but was still remarkably quiet. Perfectly proportioned, Ananda is the largest and best-preserved in Bagan, most dramatic showcase of the national enthusiasm for religious monuments. Also, at last, we set foot on Shwesandaw (11<sup>th</sup> century), which we had viewed twice from afar. We understood why Ye hadn't taken us there for sunset or sunrise: The steps were narrow and steep. But the vast terrace could accommodate about a hundred people at a time without looking crowded. We were there at high noon, however, and it was delightfully deserted.

At the end of our visit, we had barely scratched the surface of this blessed plain.

Bagan, to be cliché-ish about it, is more than a destination; it could be the end of a search for many pilgrims. In 1996, a government campaign for tourists, "Visit Myanmar Year" was dampened by Aung San Suu Kyi's impassioned plea to "visit us later." Burma (before the recent elections that saw Aung San's landslide win) is the longest-running military dictatorship, but the obstinate traveller is bound to ignore the political basis of such a supplication, of course.

The good news is that even the pro-democracy leaders who have consistently bucked the military government's tourism efforts, seem to have softened their stance and are now agreeable to throwing the country's doors wide open to the world. ☉

## Andorra...

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He would enter Andorra in the morning, and exit it in the afternoon to evade the law that limited foreign workers to domestic work. His working papers were also being processed still. But sheer determination, guts and perseverance saw him through and by 1988, his permanent residency came through. Lino, the proud father of two daughters, both professionals and now married, is one of the earliest naturalized Andorran among the Filipinos living here.

Aside from the capacity for hard work and the desire to send enough money to families back home, Filipinos in Andorra are also bound by faith. This Catholic principality has many cathedrals and churches that fill up with Filipinos on Sundays.

In Placa del Poble, it would be very difficult to miss a *kababayan* strolling around. The friendly smile or the knowing nod are enough to indicate that they acknowledge your presence, unlike in other countries where Filipinos sometimes avoid each other for one reason or another.

The resilience and adaptability of Filipino are also in full view here, as they overcome the language barrier and withstand Andorra's hot summers and long winters.

They may not yet be among the working elite here, but Filipinos in this small principality wear Pinoy pride on their sleeve: in the shops, restaurants, hotels and gardens that Filipinos lovingly tend. In distant Andorra, we felt that we've never left home. ☉

## Paradise...

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Little by little the Rodriguezes developed the place so that people wanting a beach weekend could come. The resort is now managed by Julian Rodriguez III, eldest of eight children of Dr. Julian (Chiching) P. Rodriguez Jr. and his Spanish-born wife Purita (now a full-fledged Davaoëña), who have been married for 55 years. The place must have served as the young couple's paradise getaway back then.

Well-traveled and educated abroad, the elder Rodriguez, an educator, has experienced what the world had to offer to culture- and pleasure-seeking travelers. The family's island property, transformed as a resort, is now open for people to enjoy and confirm the DOT's claim that really, "It's more fun in the Philippines." ☉

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