



Setting off in a trowl



# a day in the life of SUGAR BEACH

MAIDA C PINEDA FINDS LIFE IS SWEET IN THIS UNSPOILT RESORT  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT A WOODWARD

Looking out to the Sulu Sea, waves gently crash like a sweet lullaby. The glimmering sun makes the water shimmer. The sea is empty save for one or two small fishing boats.

It was a German couple Jogi, owner of Sulu Sunset Resort, and Jen Peters, author of various “Lonely Planet” guides to the Philippines and the *Philippines Travel Guide*, who gave Langub in Sipalay the name Sugar Beach. And while the powdery sand may not be as white as refined sugar, life is still sweet. A handful of mom and pop businesses have sprung up here to cater for a small number of visitors, so those

who discover Sugar Beach can enjoy an intimate, private experience.

There are no vendors except, fittingly, a lone ice-cream man with his freezer. The beach boasts crystal clear waters. A 10-year-old girl named Kai-kai plays with schools of fish at play. She speaks Ilonggo and laughs with visitors. In the evenings, Sugar Beach’s blessed western orientation makes the golden hour seem to last forever, enabling you to walk from one end of the beach to the other, until the sun disappears straight into the water. As the sky puts on this spectacle, the fishermen carry out their tasks, pulling their nets with osohos and tamban fish. They smile at tourists and engage in warm conversations.



Main picture: smiling faces on the beach while (bottom left) the fishing goes on. Right: an enchanting island paradise. Middle right: checking the catch in the trowl; and you won't miss this pathway to the beach! Bottom right: Takatuka's intriguing bathroom



Best of all, this beach strip paradise is only three hours from Bacolod by car, passing through sugar cane fields, zigzagging roads and a refreshing ocean view drive.

While there may be a handful of foreigners who now call Sugar Beach home, the locals of Langub still outnumber tourists and it is their lifestyle that prevails. Young girls play on a swing or run along the beach during sunset, while the fishermen go about their business. Throughout the day, you will also see “trowls” going back and forth along the beach – v-shaped bamboo contraptions with a net in the water. Attached at the end is a small black pail. One local woman explained that her net sifts the water and she uses the basin to check for fish fry; tiny *bangus* (milkfish), fingerlings to be exact. Once

caught, the fish are kept in the black pail. She earns PHP15 (USD0.34) for every 100 fry. On a good day she can collect 1,000 fish fry. Men, women and children collect fish fry, it is very much a part of daily life on Langub beach.

Visitors can arrive on this island via an outrigger boat and step directly into Takatuka Lodge and Dive Resort, entering a colorful dreamland from the pages of a storybook. The name comes from the 1940s adventure stories of Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren, and refers to a magical country in the South Seas. Beach chairs are bright green, red, blue and yellow, while coconut halves painted like M&Ms dot the plants and sand. There are totem poles and teepees. The room's shower is disguised as a shovel and wheelbarrow; there's a rainbow-colored wind vane; and you quickly learn to press a plastic Daffy Duck to get service at reception.

If you think this is stimulus overload, guest cottages with names like El Castillo, continue the assault on the senses. If you've ever found yourself wondering where all those defunct pagers, old blenders, and CD players go when they die, you'll find the answer here. Takatuka is a heaven for old appliances and



**“Young girls run about the beach and fishermen go about their business.”**

gadgets. A CD player has been transformed into a water fountain, if you press an Indian statue it turns on the table lamp, and honking on an old steering wheel switches the room lights on. The bathroom light switches are old fashioned voltage regulators, and it takes several minutes to work out the faucet before realizing that pulling a lever dangling from a Fiat hub cab releases the water. Shower time is entertaining with items cemented on to the bathroom wall and little coins shining like stars on the ceiling. There’s no need for a storybook here to put you to sleep, right above your bed are mermaids, boats and dangling fish, prompting some wild Technicolor dreams.

Those behind this colorful assault on the senses and the installation art are brothers Karl and Marc Kalitta and their wives, Cathy and Evarose. Diving initially brought these German and Swiss nationals to the Philippines 11 years ago, but serendipity – and falling in love – brought younger brother Marc back to Sipalay very quickly. Five years ago, Marc convinced his brother to join him and



Soak up the sun and relax... and there's not much competition for your beach chair



open Takatuka. There is no doubt that the two European carpenters have put in long hours to creatively execute their wild ideas. Each of the rooms – Bamboo, Nipa, Negrito Hut, Rainbow Cottage and El Castillo – have a unique concept.

While the boys have been busy building, their wives whip up culinary creations: Swiss specialties, German frankfurters and schnitzels, Korean rice, Mongolian kebabs and Filipino favorites. Just like this resort, the food is never bland.

Primarily catering to European tourists, Sugar Beach's busy season coincides with the northern hemisphere's winter months, so is busiest from October to April. There are only six beach resorts and almost all are mom and pop businesses. You barely need to stir yourself to enjoy the good life. Lounge in your chosen beach chair. At lunchtime enjoy delicious food and ice-cold beer. Soak up the sun, then swim in the waters of the Sulu Sea, while leaving your things on a chair without worrying about them being lost or stolen. With only a handful

**“At noon, the resort staff plunge into the water in shirts and shorts to cool down.”**

of tourists, you don't even have to worry about someone coveting your favorite spot. While there may be only a few seashells to collect, the island has soft sand ideal for swimming with no rocks, pebbles or coral to hurt your feet. “Parang isang malaking swimming pool”, explained a local (it's like a gigantic swimming pool). The resort staff also live a sweet life, and at noon plunge straight into the water in shirts and shorts to cool down.

Yet what if the sweet life of reading and soaking up the sun becomes too monotonous?

Well then it's time for a sea change, and a 30-minute boat ride to Punta Ballo. This fine white sandy beach is more than a kilometer long. Its shallow, sandy coral-lined bottom stretches for 100 meters, making it ideal for snorkelling. German, Swiss, Belgian and Filipino resorts abound in this area. Arthur Müller, a Swiss diver and owner of Artistic Diving, explains that he gave up his three-year stint in Boracay to open the first dive shop on the island. There are 43 dive sites here, and as one of the pioneers Müller has the unique privilege of



The sun sets over the Sulu sea and the day's play (right) comes to an end.  
Bottom: Entrance to Takatuka



## HOW TO GET THERE: From Bacolod

Cebu Pacific flies four times daily from Manila to Bacolod, and Cebu to Bacolod. Take a Ceres Bus Liner - non-air con service starts at 2.30am, then every 45 minutes until 8pm and travel time is five hours. Ceres Bus Liner air con service starts at 8am, last trip at 4pm. Travel time is about four hours.



naming them. He animatedly recounts the stories behind the names. One example is Ketchup Drop, named after his dive buddy, Heinz, with whom he discovered that particular spot. There are also wreck dives and he can spend hours engaging guests in stories while their feet dangle in his cool bar pool overlooking the ocean.

Life is sweet in Sugar Beach and small pleasures are magnified. As the sun sets, take a stroll along the shore of the Sulu and the water dropping off your feet will feel like syrup. ■

## WHERE TO STAY: Takatuka Lodge

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