



Palawan – the farthest, the nearest

## Description

It's all thanks to facebook. Actually it's all thanks to the internet. I told you this internet thing will catch.

We have this facebook group of families from all over the world, traveling all over the world and gracefully sharing information with each other. We had the opportunity to connect through this team a couple of worried parents of a sick girl who caught some serious virus in Vietnam with an Israeli pediatrician who works in Hanoi, receive a lot of information about the countries we've been at and will be at hopefully, share information from our side and generally enrich our whole trip informatively, mentally and emotionally.

As the time to fly to the Philippines approached and we started taking our plans to the ground and looking for accommodations we discovered to our horror that we are talking about quite high costs. Much more expensive than those we got used to so far in the six months we spent traveling (this week! This week we are already six months of traveling). Not only that it's much more expensive but the internet has a lot less options to offer and the places to stay look much more basic with their amenities. A bit panicked we posted a question to the traveling families group. Within minutes information started flowing in our direction in the group or by private messages. One of those came from a nice German lady who mentioned by the way a name of website with lists of accommodation options, something like Airbnb. We logged in to this site. We didn't know it before. And we came across a place in the island of Palawan where we planned to arrive after our stay in Luzon (the island where Manila is located). While browsing through the photos of the place we noticed to our astonishment the flag of Israel over the entry gate to the place's front yard, and right next to it scribed in big letters – the word SHALOM (peace or hello in Hebrew).

Quick messages exchange with the charming lady who owns the place brought up that it was a special project of a group of true Israel lovers, religious Christians from the Philippines. Apparently there are quite few of them in the Philippines. We decided to take the place for a week.

Palawan is a remote island, the farthest in the Philippines and we are on its northern tip. Officially we are in El Nido zone, a pretty touristic town, but as a matter of fact we are located right on the beach, a one hour tricycle ride (some kind of a three wheeled motorcycles) on a rough road turning into a dusty dirt road turning into the spot where the tricycle drops us off and we cross the river over a seemingly (and feelingly) unstable bamboo bridge turning into narrow sand alleys between huts and bamboo fences where we walk hesitantly.

And then ahead of us revealed the beach of the bay and then one more step and we enter through a gate with two flags of Israel above it, no less. From the inner gate there is a drawing of a Menorah and the text "Shalom". Unbelievable.



The gate to The Refuge Place where we stayed in El Nido

The house is very basic. It has toilet, one of them even with a flusher! Two showers, no hot water, one of them even have a good stream, most of the time. There's a fridge, two bedrooms and a kitchenette where I can finally cook food that is not junk. The accessibility here to groceries is limited, getting into the market requires a magical ride to El Nido, almost an hour distance by tricycle or local bus that leaves once a day at 6am and returns, well, at some time during the day.

So now I have some words to say to my beloved readers. You might imagine how many times I have heard during the last six months the words "I want it too" / "I envy you" / "I wish I would be in your place". So sure, we all want to be on a gorgeous beach with this beautiful sunset that looks great in facebook even with a lousy camera and a photographer that matches the level of the camera which is an integral part of a three years old Samsung Galaxy that discharges its battery once a day without warning.

So now I want you to know that all this beauty comes with few challenges. Some examples? No?? I'll give them to you anyway.

Cold showers, bucket showers, showers with a stream that is so weak that you can hardly call it a

stream. Anything but hot showers. The last hot shower we had was in Bangkok and it too wasn't the best I had, mind you. A toilet with a flusher that works. Sounds basic. Isn't it? Well, it's not. But cold showers and toilet with no flusher are the obvious. Let's talk about a constantly wet floor in the toilet. Can you imagine how I miss clean toilet that I can sit on with my feet remaining dry, god damn it.

Forget it. Let's talk about cockroaches. Huge. With no fear of humans. Wake up at night and go to the toilet? Are you nuts? It's too dangerous. If I have no choice I wake The One up and he escorts me and also kills whatever creature has to be killed. And then evacuates the corpses. Because you know what happens to corpses of cockroaches that were executed at night and then left on the floor..? Imagine ants. Lots of ants. Fire ants. Mind you! It hurts!

Sand on the floor. Ridiculously thin mattresses. I who slept on a 30 centimeters thick Hollandia mattress! Sand in bed. Should I continue? Because there's more. But you know, I would have done it over and over again and again. We're having so much fun.

I just wanted to say bitches that when you are quick to respond with "I want it too", take a moment to think if you're tough enough for all this fun.

But the real story of the Philippines so far is undoubtedly the people. Wow. Hospitality and cuteness of levels we have never met before. The Filipino joke of themselves that they are just like the fruits here "small and sweet." It's actually so. We've been interacting with the people here more than anywhere we have been to during the last six months of our journey.

It started with the amazing hosting we got on our first week in the Philippines in Tagaytay. Just imagine, people who met us only one day before spend an entire morning of their private time in order to help us look for a guesthouse. They take us from one place to another, haggle with the owners, take care of us. They invite us to their home. They introduce us with their friends. Can you imagine?

And then Tec, the sweet lady whom we rent the house from here in Palawan, announces that when we get to Manila before the flight from Luzon to Palawan there's a lady who wishes to host us in her home. We were embarrassed. What do you mean "wishes to host us in her home"? You have to admit that it doesn't happen to you every day. We reached an amazing house of amazing people that hosted us so nice, including meals, pool, a shofar for different arrangements we had in the city and a ride to the airport the next day. Can you imagine?

And then I published the previous post in the blog and I received responses from many amazing people who live in Manila inviting us to come as their guest in case we even return to the city. Because it seems that hospitality and kindness are common virtues here in the Philippines and everything is thanks to this internet you were so skeptical about and I always told you it will catch!



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Fish dry up in the sun in Bucana

And then back here, we came for a week to stay in a beach house. We extended in two more days because we don't really feel like moving from here. We're treated here with kids gloves. If we go to El Nido for island hopping they accompany us and make sure we are fine. They are not exactly rich people and that's an understatement. They live in a fishing village an hour away from El Nido by bus ride that goes there once a day at 6am. Big fuss. If we want to travel to some beach they organize the transportation and then join us. It feels that we're in good hands and we're being taken care of and it's pleasant.

And then by pure chance, two days ago we were waiting on the shore by a nice beach house with a nice porch for the boat to take us island hopping. Suddenly pops out of the house a nice person with his morning coffee in hand, recognizes that we speak Hebrew, starts talking to us enthusiastically and even starts singing some songs in Hebrew. No more than five minutes later and we are already facebook friends and no more than two additional minutes pass when he invites us to his other beach house round across the mountain. So that's where we stay on Friday after we've already extended our stay here in two more days, because how could you say No to Anton. Stay tuned, the heart-warming encounters with our Filipino brothers never stop surprising.

### **El Nido**

*El Nido is a town in the northern tip of **Palawan**, Philippines and without doubt the crown jewel of this island (which is considered to be one of the most beautiful islands in the Philippines and maybe in the whole world). The town lies beneath huge karst cliffs that create altogether a remarkable picturesque landscape. The town draw many tourists, mostly local, and the most popular activity is island hopping – a cruise with the local ships between the dozens of islands and lagoons in the area with swimming stops, snorkeling, kayaking and lunch included. We took tour A out of 3 tours offered for a price of 27\$ per person. Island hopping trip is takes a full day and is a must for anyone getting in El Nido. It gives a short glance to part of the amazing beaches and turquoise water of the Philippines.*

*It has to be considered that every tourist in El Nido is required to pay environmental fee, some kind of a local tourists tax, of 5\$ per person and it is valid for 10 days.*

*Another activity we've done in **Bucana** village is a cruise by the mangroves up the river into the island on a – a local bamboo raft. We hired it for 17\$ for all of us.*

*We reached Palawan with Cebu Pacific Airlines flight from Manila to Puerto Princesa, the capital of Palawan. From there we took a 6 hours minibus to El Nido for 10\$ per person.*



The beach of Bucana village, 50 minutes from El Nido town



A tour on the river by the mangrove



Cashewnuts. Locally grown in Palawan.



The view from 7 commandos beach

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