



A HAPPY OCCASION: The Dinagyang Festival, happening Jan. 18 to 27, began in 1968 as a joyful reception of the *Santo Niño* (Holy Child) replica given to the Parish of San Jose City. Dinagyang comes from the Hiligaynon word *dagyang*, which means "to be merry and very happy". Photo by Emmanuel Lerona

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE: DINAGYANG FUN IN ILOILO

Even just a short visit to Iloilo can be memorable.
Reports by **VALERIE CAULIN**

Before the festival begins, start your Ilonggo experience by visiting two of the main churches within the city:

Jaro Cathedral, where the great hero Graciano Lopez Jaena was baptized, and the "feminist" Gothic **Saint Anne Parish** in Molo. Jaro's belfry and the spires of Molo Church dominate the city's skyline.

Houses of the sugarcane barons of the old days still stand today, drawing both curiosity and amazement from passersby. Some of these old houses are now used as commercial establishments, others as schools. The grandest of them all, the beaux-arts **Nelly Garden** built in 1928, is now used as a wedding venue and is open for exclusive tours. (Call +6333 320 3075 or email nelly.garden@yahoo.com)

TEE TIME

Santa Barbara Golf Course, 15 minutes from the city, is the oldest golf course in the country. Scottish engineers in charge of building Panay Island's railroad system built this course in 1907. Take a walk around

its lagoon or enjoy the view of this 18-hole golf course at the balcony of its clubhouse, before stopping in at the mini-museum.

The newly renovated pre-war buildings along **Calle Real** (JM Basa and Iznart Streets) with their magnificent Art Deco architecture add snapshot appeal to the city's nightlife.

WHERE TO DANCE, PARTY, AND DINE IN ILOILO

Benigno Aquino Avenue in Mandurriao is Iloilo's newest entertainment strip. There's also **Smallville** for dining with live bands. **Paseo de Arcangels** (behind Philippine Airlines' office) is another party destination popular with reggae music lovers.

Restaurants serving local dishes and international cuisine, café, a cake shop, and a wine bar are all housed at **Plazuela**, a family-friendly complex. Haute cuisine and international menus can be had along **The Avenue** inside Smallville.



Did You Know?

Iloilo's economic boom during the second half of the 1800s led to it being declared the "Queen City (Queen City) of the South" by Spain's Queen Regent Maria Cristina. The city's prosperity afforded its residents luxurious lifestyle.



20TH CENTURY MALLING: Hoskyn's, which is still open with their fixed-priced goods, is regarded as the Philippines' first department store.



Photo by Emmanuel Leron



ILOILO'S MANY FACES:
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
(LEFT) A colorful Dinagyang
street parade scene; Nelly
Garden, built in 1928, is
now a popular venue for
weddings and group tours;
Sisig Lobster at Cilantro's;
San Joaquin Church's
intricate sculpture in relief
depicting the victory of the
Spanish against Moorish
leaders in the Battle of
Tetuan. Photos by Ray
Caurin.

Craving for good ol' Ilonggo food? Try *batchoy* at any branch of **Ted's and Deco's**. *Pata* (cow's leg braised in tamarind-based broth) is another Ilonggo dish. Savor this sticky sour dish (Php55 per serving) at **Ped Bacs Kusina**, an institution when it comes to Ilonggo dining (www.facebook.com/pedbacskusina).

Cilantro's Vietnamese dishes (www.facebook.com/CilantroIloilo) are more budget-friendly at Php90 per 100 grams, plus cooking fees. They serve the only *sisig* lobster in the city. Cool off with a tall glass of Vietnamese iced coffee, *Ca Phe Sua Da*.

PAMPERING

Indulge in a rejuvenating massage at **Skinetics Wellness Center** (www.skinetics.com.ph), nominated as "Medi-Spa of the Year" at the 8th AsiaSpa Awards held last November 15, 2012. *Lutay*, a traditional Ilonggo massage, makes use of virgin coconut oil and

heated leaves of *buyo* or Piper betel (Php700). The traditional **Dagdagay Foot Massage** (Php300) will ease your tired soles.

GETTING OUT OF TOWN

Want to venture outside the city borders? Then visit the neighboring Guimaras—an island famous for its impossibly sweet mangoes.

Just 15 minutes off the southwestern coast of Panay, Guimaras Island, with its tranquil white-sand beaches, is a big shift from the frenzy party mode left in the city. Explore the town of Buenavista at the other side of the island and stay at **El Retiro Beach Park** (www.elretirobeachpark.com).

Then explore the **Santo Tomas de Villanueva Church** in the town of Miag-ao, one of the four Philippine baroque churches inscribed to the UNESCO World Heritage list. In San Joaquin, the province's southernmost town, the **San Joaquin Church** boasts a peculiar façade. It celebrates the triumph of the Spanish armies against the Moors during the 1860 Battle of Tetuan. The main chapel of its *campo santo* (cemetery) is a notable site for those keen on arts and architecture. ■



PAL flies between Manila and Iloilo five times daily. PALakbayan tour packages are available. For more information, call PAL reservations office at (+632) 855 8888 or visit www.philippineairlines.com.