



RHYTHM OF THE STREETS: Lively drumbeats and dances—and lots of smiles—greet visitors attending the yearly Ati-Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan. Often referred to as the “Queen of Philippine Festivals,” the festival earned at least Php3 million in the 2012 festivities. Photos by Ree Dexter E. Ingersoll

FESTIVE KALIBO

The capital town of Aklan is slow-paced and ordinary, typical of rural life. But during the Ati-Atihan Festival, it jolts to life with celebration. Reports by **VALERIE CAULIN**

Pounding drums, bodies painted black, colorful and elaborate costumes—they all paint dramatic, visual stimulation. Kalibo’s Ati-Atihan is held every January, and is one of the Philippines’ most recognizable festivals.

Kalibo comes from the Akeanon “*sangka libo*,” which means a thousand. It traditionally represents the number of natives who converted to Christianity when the Spanish friars adapted the festival to honor the *Santo Niño* (Holy Child), and set it to the third Sunday of January.

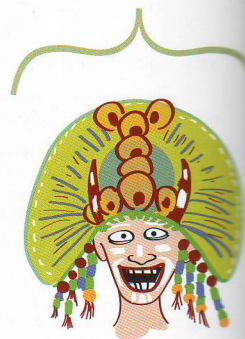
But the festival’s origin dates much earlier than that. In the 13th century, Malay *datus* (tribal chieftains) and their people first performed the *Ati-Atihan* when they settled in the island and made it their new home away from Borneo. Celebrating with a ritual dance, the newcomers covered their skin with soot to mimic the dark skin of the native Atis. In fact,

Ati-Atihan means “to be like an Ati.”

This year, the Ati-Atihan will be celebrated on January 13–20, 2013. Bare-faces are not allowed, so don’t be surprised if a total stranger puts black paint on your face. Just laugh and join in. Let loose and dance! Unlike other festivals where onlookers are mere spectators, Kalibo’s Ati-Atihan is unique because everyone is encouraged to participate.

BAKHAWAN ECO-PARK

Covering a total of 200 hectares of *bakhaw* (mangroves), what started as an environmental cause way back in the 1990s is now a major attraction in Kalibo. Offering shelter to more than 37 species of birds, the eco-park offers cool breeze and different shades of green. Observe community life with children harvesting mud crabs, mollusks, and other shellfish. A new addition is the *tamilok* (shipworm)



KALIBO LINGO

The language spoken in Kalibo and the rest of Aklan is called *Akeanon*.



SEVEN-BASIN FALLS: Located about 30 kilometers from Kalibo, Jawili Falls enchants with seven waterfalls and crystal-clear pools.

Beyond Kalibo

In Brgy. Afga in **Tangalan** (a 30-minute drive northeast of Kalibo), you'll find four hectares of **Wave-Rock Formation**, which used to be a quarry site for coral stones. Come during low tide to enjoy the best views.

In **Jawili Beach**, a few meters away is a stretch of white-sand beach, with a few newly developed bungalows for day trips.

The **Jawili Falls** (entrance fee of Php5) are an impressive seven cascades. Cottages are available for Php150.

The province of **Antique**, an hour out of Kalibo, boasts 7 kilometers of white-sand beach, rich marine life, and a thriving fishing community. Visit **Golden Beach and Phaidon Beach Resort** (www.island-dreams.com).

challenge (Php200), a type of shellfish that tastes like oyster.

TIGAYON HILLS AND CAVES

Climb 46 steps uphill alongside centuries-old trees and enjoy a good vantage point of Kalibo River. Sixteen-century Chinese ceramics were excavated in this area, which are now on display at the *Museo It Akean* (Aklan Museum). Sit down and enjoy mountain breeze and see the occasional *lawin* (serpent eagle) soars across. ■

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ONE WITH NATURE: Bakhawan Edo-Park, a community-based eco-tourism project in Kalibo, has an 800-meter trail that cuts through a mangrove forest.



PAL flies between Manila and Kalibo five times weekly (and daily for flights operated and codeshared with AirPhil Express). PALakbayan tour packages are available. For more information, call PAL reservations office at (+632) 855-8888 or visit www.philippineairlines.com.