



mabuhay

AUGUST 2018

TAKE A DEEP DIVE IN CAMIGUIN

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Fast times, slow
living in Bangkok's
Ari neighborhood

Young makers in
Singapore bring art
out of the galleries

Seal meat and
bannock are on the
menu in Toronto



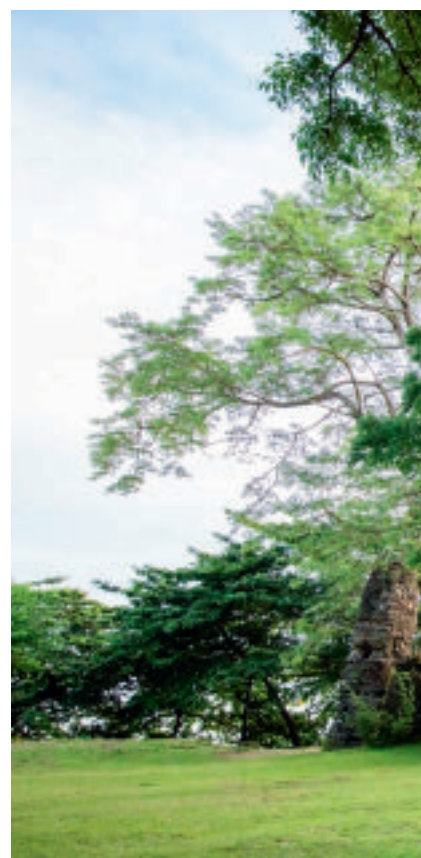
GOING GLOBAL

Camiguin

WITH GWYNNE GALLARDO

After a seven-year stint in Dubai, Gwynne Gallardo now enjoys the quiet life in her hometown of Camiguin, the "Island Born of Fire" where she helps run her family's two beach resorts. Here, she takes time off to plan a weekend of exploring hidden waterfalls, heritage sites and the artisanal food scene

As told to **Dana Ter**
Photography **Harvey Tapan**





My family likes to tell me that I'm a real daughter of Camiguin. My mom had wanted to give birth to me in a hospital four hours away in Cagayan de Oro, but after two weeks of waiting, she got bored and went back to the island – and that's when I entered the world. I'm the only one among my sisters who was born on the island, and I even have a birthmark in the shape of Camiguin.

Around the time I was born, my family opened Caves Dive Resort, which I help run today, along with our family's other beachside hotel, Medano Island Resort. In this role, I meet people from all cultures. It's fascinating to see Camiguin through the eyes of travelers and hear how they have enjoyed their stays here.

I had a carefree childhood surrounded by waterfalls, hot springs and mountains. My siblings and I climbed bitaog trees, collected hermit crabs and jumped off 15-foot cliffs into the ocean. We would go home with scraped knees, worn-down *tsinelas* (flip-flops) and sunburned skin. My parents encouraged us to try new things. I believe that fueled my wanderlust.

In high school, my mom sent me to Cagayan de Oro where I stayed with a family who treated me as their own daughter. From the age of 12, I was managing my own schedule and budget. I later took up business management at Ateneo de Manila University, which gave me the skills to go into the corporate world. At Sony Philippines, I oversaw the





setting up of stores in cities outside Manila. A few months later, I was offered a role in Sony Middle East and Africa and I lived in Dubai. The culturally diverse region intrigued me.

During my seven-and-a-half-year stint there, I met Filipino engineers, ship captains, flight attendants, nurses and teachers. These encounters showed me how Filipinos are willing to sacrifice and be apart from their families and how resilient we can be in the face of adversity. One thing was clear, though. Everybody always comes back home. I did in 2017.

When I was growing up here, everybody knew everybody. But the Camiguin I came home to felt different. Big concrete buildings had replaced many of the old heritage houses that I used to walk by as a kid. It took me a while to realize the benefits of urban development – we have more dining options now, from seaside cafés to rooftop bars, which also create more jobs for locals. I had to reacquaint myself with daily island life and the people, but slowly, as each day passed, the faces





became familiar again and I realized I never left.

SATURDAY

5.30AM

I start my weekend super early by catching a 10-minute boat ride in Barangay Yumbing to ❶ **White Island**. This famous sandbar changes shape depending on the current and tide. The light is amazing as the sun rises and I take photos of Camiguin waking up with mist clinging to the peaks of Mount Mambajao, Mount Timpoong, Mount Hibok-Hibok and Mount Vulcan. After a quick swim, I snack on sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves and freshly caught sea urchin as I chat with local fishermen.

8.30AM

Camiguin has always had an exciting food scene and one of the newer cafés on the island is ❷ **Hayahay Cafe**, opened last year by a younger generation of Camiguinons. I order a smoothie bowl and a cup of French press coffee.

9.30AM

Freshened up and fueled for the day, I head to ❸ **Katibawasan Falls** and dive into the ice-cold water. Vendors at the gate sell *kiping* – crispy cassava chips with sweet coconut syrup – which I wash down with homemade *tuba*, or coconut wine. Sitting on the big boulders by the natural pool, I let the thunderous sound of the water dropping more than a hundred feet engulf me.

11AM

I drive to the east side of Camiguin, where the newly paved roads bring me up a hill with spectacular views of Camiguin's coastline. Mantigue Island, with its lush canopy of trees, sits across the water from here. I drive past Taguines Lagoon, where I often go zip-lining, and the Katunggan Mangrove Park before stopping at the ❹ **Giant Clam Sanctuary** at Kibila White Beach. The sanctuary is run by a local cooperative, Cantaan Centennial Multi-Purpose Cooperative, that trains children as young as 10 years old to be guides. It is impressive to hear the children pronounce the scientific



CITY GUIDE Saturday

White Island
Mambajao

Hayahay Cafe
Camiguin
Circumferential Rd,
Mambajao
[fb.com/hayahaycafesacamiguin](https://www.facebook.com/hayahaycafesacamiguin)

Katibawasan Falls
Mambajao

Giant Clams Sanctuary
Kibila White Beach,
Cantaan, Guinsiliban

Farmhouse Pizzeria
National Hwy, Tupsan,
Mambajao
[farmhousepizzeria.business.site](https://www.facebook.com/farmhousepizzeria.business.site)

Mantigue Island
Mahinog

Gasa and Vjandep Bakeshop
Cor Jose Rizal
and Plaridel Sts,
Mambajao
[vjandep.com](https://www.facebook.com/vjandep.com)

Paradiso Hillside Resort & Restaurant
Agoho, Mambajao
[hillside.agoho.ph](https://www.facebook.com/hillside.agoho.ph)

Nypa Style Resort Camiguin
Bug-ong, Mambajao
[fb.com/nypastyleresort](https://www.facebook.com/nypastyleresort)



CITY GUIDE Sunday

**The Beehive
Driftwood Cafe**
Zone 1, Catibac,
Cataraman
[beehivedriftwoodcafe.
weebly.com](http://beehivedriftwoodcafe.weebly.com)

Santo Niño Cold Spring
Cataraman

Tangub Hot Spring
Mambajao

**Casa Grande &
Orange Pie**
Burgos St, Mambajao

Caves Dive Resort
Agoho, Mambajao
[cavesdiveresort
camiguin.com](http://cavesdiveresort.camiguin.com)

Timbel Falls
Mt Hibok-Hibok

Peninsular Kape Art
Yumbing, Mambajao
[fb.com/
peninsularkapeart](https://fb.com/peninsularkapeart)

Infinity Bar
Medano Island Resort,
Pearl Rd, Mambajao
[medanoisland
resortcamiguin.com](http://medanoislandresortcamiguin.com)

Balai sa Baibai
Agoho, Mambajao
balaisabaibai.com



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7



READY, SET, DIVE

Camiguin's underwater world is just as magnificent as its mountains and waterfalls, and many resorts, including Caves Dive Resort, offer scuba diving lessons. Sign up for a class and check out one of these scenic dive spots

Old Volcano

This dive spot has a steep drop and derives its name from being at the base of an extinct volcano. Over time, the hardened lava turned into a reef and became populated by small fish, oysters, eels and giant clams.

Black Forest

Located at White Island, this is a stunning, if eerie, coral garden filled with black coral. Vibrantly colored schools of parrotfish, scorpionfish, butterflyfish and many other species make their home here. A rare whale shark was even spotted visiting once.

Sunken Cemetery

In 1871, a volcano erupted and a part of Camiguin Island, including a cemetery, sank into the Bohol Sea. Today, a giant cross marks the sunken cemetery where healthy reef has taken over the headstones. It is also home to turtles, eels and stingrays.





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names of clams and share the history and science behind the efforts to revive and protect Camiguin's clam population.

1PM

I tuck into a towering cheeseburger and sip on refreshing lemongrass tea at **5 Farmhouse Pizzeria** which was opened in January by a couple from Hawaii. I enjoy my meal under the shade of their nipa hut while watching ducks swim in the pond. The tasty salads here are made with fresh greens harvested from their own garden.

2PM

I catch a short boat ride to **Mantigue Island**, which has a protected marine sanctuary, where I take a stroll and pass by a fishing village to buy white shells for soup later in the day. A shop run by the local government offers snorkels and stand-up paddleboards for rent. Snorkeling, even in water as shallow as two meters, is a treat to the senses with lots of colorful, healthy coral and fish almost two feet long.

4.30PM

It's back to Mambajao for an afternoon snack at **6 Gasa**, next to **Vjandep Bakehouse**. Gasa sells freshly baked pastel, which is a Spanish term for cakes, although in Camiguin, it means buns with sweet fillings. There are so many flavors to choose from, but I stick to my childhood favorite, the *yema* (condensed milk, egg yolk, sugar and vanilla) filling. These packaged snacks are good pasalubong (souvenirs) too.

5.30PM

7 Paradiso Hillside, the first Italian restaurant on our island, opened in the early '90s. In 2008, the Italian owners, Annie and Kalen Tranchese, moved the restaurant to its current location in the hills where they still serve the same fresh handmade fettuccine, margherita pizza and tiramisu that I love. Over a glass of red wine, I watch the sunset paint White Island an orange hue.

7.30PM

8 Nypa Style Resort Camiguin's Italian restaurant is the most atmospheric place

for after-dinner drinks. The resort is in the middle of a mahogany forest in Mambajao and the restaurant has an amazing selection of Italian wines. Red wine is the perfect drink to wind down the day.

SUNDAY

8AM

Opened in 2016 by a Belgian transplant, **9 10 The Beehive and Island of Honey** makes fragrant coffee sweetened with honey produced from the café's own hives. I take a seat on a recycled driftwood chair on the sand and order

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We climbed bitaog trees, collected hermit crabs and jumped off 15-foot cliffs into the ocean. We would go home with scraped knees, worn-down tsinelas and sunburned skin

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honeyed coffee, a healthy veggie burger and a Belgian waffle. I can't resist a scoop of delicious, homemade dragon fruit ice cream, so I get that too.

9AM

On the drive to **Santo Niño Cold Spring**, a different set of peaks greets me. Mount Tres Marias, made up of three similarly sized mounds, looks like three sisters gossiping in the morning light. At the cold spring, there used to be a slide that delivered adventurous swimmers to the deep side of the pool, but now I make do by jumping from the edge into the ice-cold water. If you want a challenge, look for the mouth of the spring as it feeds fresh water to the massive pool. The water is so clear and filled with tiny fish, but don't worry – they don't pay



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We have more dining options now, from seaside cafés to rooftop bars, which also create more jobs for locals
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heed to swimmers. A fish spa was recently set up there and I treat my travel-weary feet to a fish pedicure. When I get hungry, I order a tender and perfectly seasoned chicken adobo from one of the many vendors. It goes great with boiled bananas and beer as cold and refreshing as the spring.

10AM

It's time to warm up at **Tangub Hot Spring**, which is right on the beach facing the Bohol Sea. The water temperature changes based on the tide as the volcanic spring mixes with the seawater. I sit on the beach and let the water envelop me in its warm embrace.

11AM

Our capital town, Mambajao, used to be filled with prewar houses – squarish buildings made of wooden planks and displaying hand-carved designs – that were passed down from one generation to the next. Our family bought one of these houses, **Casa Grande**, in the late '90s and my siblings and I used to play in the hills nearby and eat fresh fruit – bananas, mangoes, papayas – from our fruit farm. When I drive by now, it saddens me to see that many of the old houses have been torn down to make way for new buildings. If only the worn-out hardwood floors and solid trunk pillars of these old houses could talk. My hope is that more people will realize the importance of heritage preservation and that these silent sentinels will still be standing decades from now. On the ground floor of Casa Grande is **Orange**



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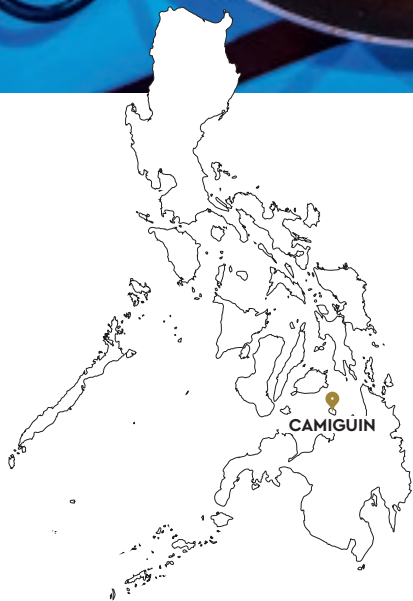


Sweet celebration

Come October, Camiguin's sweet lanzones are in season and the annual Lanzones Festival, which runs from October 23 to 29 this year, celebrates the fruit's harvest with marching bands, dancing and elaborate floats. This is also the time to snack on the fruit, but be careful not to bite into the bitter seeds.



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CAMIGUIN

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swingaround.
philippineairlines.com

Pie, a casual Chinese restaurant where I get some *sotanghon guisado* (sautéed glass noodles) to go.

12.30PM

Lunch is at **📍 Caves Dive Resort** – this place holds a lot of memories for me. My six siblings and I picked up swimming here, and this is also where I got my PADI Open Water Diver certification. For lunch, I order from the menu and tuck into three of my favorite local dishes: *kinilaw*, our local version of ceviche; *surol*, free-range native chicken cooked in coconut milk and herbs; and *pejay* salad made with blanched local ferns. If I'm really hungry, I'll order the *dinuguan* (savory meat stew), which is made from my yaya's recipe, and a white shell soup. After that, I hang out with my dogs and walk them by the beach.

2PM

A short drive up Mount Hibok-Hibok and a walk along a short trail brings me to one of Camiguin's hidden treasures, **Timbel Falls**. The falls may not have the height of Katibawasan Falls but it more than makes up for it with the wildflowers spread



around the area. It's one of the few places in Camiguin where I can see *waling-waling* (orchids) – it feels like my own secret garden.

4PM

Hungry after the trek, I make my way to **📍 Peninsular Kape Art**, a Spanish restaurant where the croquetas are always piping hot and the sangria is refreshing. Opened by a Spanish transplant, Laura Salazar, in 2016, this restaurant's seafood paella brings me back to my travels in Spain. They also sell souvenirs and I peruse woven purses and earrings and necklaces made from seashells collected from Camiguin's shores.

5.30PM

My Sunday nights are low-key and usually spent sipping my favorite cocktail, Sex on the Roof – peach schnapps, vodka, orange juice and a cherry – at **Infinity Bar**. It's a rooftop bar with a view of Mount Hibok-Hibok, which looms majestic in the moonlight. I order sizzling gambas and *sisig* (crispy pork jowl, ear and liver) for bar chow.

8PM

I head next door to **Balai sa Baibai**, a gorgeously landscaped resort that also has a bar by the beach and a small dipping pool. With a glass of gin and tonic in my hand, I let the moon and stars gently illuminate the view. The calm waters lap on the rocky cliffs and I hear its song to me. It gives me joy to explore my island, even after so many years. For this island girl, each day in Camiguin feels like a homecoming.