

Castillejos... A Haven to Retire, A Home to Reside

Looking for an exquisite place where you can live harmoniously through the rest of your life? A haven where you can revisit history and commune with the marvels of nature? A sanctuary where you can get away the commotion of the urban life? A home where you can retire and enjoy the bliss of life with your loved ones?

You are surely looking for one of the sprawling towns dotting the mystic province of Zambales. This town that would appease your craving is none other than the Town of Castillejos. Castillejos is endowed with the gifts of nature and carved by an impressive history. A town which stands tall among others for its abounding natural treasures, rich cultural heritage, jovial festivities and zestful events, reminiscent historical landmarks and amazing tourist destinations.

Castillejos takes pride for being the home of one of the most admired men in history – the late Pres. Ramon F. Magsaysay. President Magsaysay is the seventh president of the country who spent his childhood days in this placid town. He was engraved in the heart of every Filipino as the “Man of the Masses” because of his noble leadership, exceptional humility and fervent passion for public service.

Castillejos likewise bears the moniker “Camote Producing Capital of Zambales.” Camote or sweet potato is the one-town-one-product for its ubiquitous abundance in the town.

Trailing back the history, the settlement we now know as Castillejos was founded sometime in the middle of the 18th century. According to Agustin Dela Cavada in his *Historias Filipinas*, the creation of Castillejos took place in 1743. Uguic was probably the first name of this town, but in the course of time, Uguic was written as Uguit. Thus, the town was known as

Pueblo de Uguit until January 23, 1863. It was believed that the present name of the town was given as a tribute to a soldier named Marquez de Castillejos.

One of the most noteworthy tourist destinations in our town where memories come alive is the Magsaysay Ancestral House located at Brgy. San Jose. The taciturn two-storey structure became witness to the early childhood years of Pres. Magsaysay. Now, the ancestral house which is considered as one of the significant historical treasures of the country, serves as a living beholder of the town's unremitting development. The structure houses Magsaysay's personal belongings, his furniture, medallions, books, his 1954 Cadillac Limousine and a Willy's Jeep. Visiting the venerable house is a magnificent voyage into the times of yore. Reconnoitering the resplendent structure gives not only a feeling of nostalgia but also a sense of pride to everyone. For it doesn't only account the history of the president but also takes part in giving honor to the Filipino nation that has afforded such a noble citizen and hero worthy of everyone's esteem and admiration.

Castillejos offers not only a revisit to history but also a communion with the wonders of nature as the town nurtures ecological tourist spots like the Looc Lake in Brgy. Looc. This 1.13 square km. national lagoon is now being transmogrified into a majestic lake resort. According to Castillejos Planning Office, it has contrived a master plan for the Looc Lake Development Project. The plan comprises facilities like kayaks and aqua cycles for water sports enthusiasts, facilities for family-oriented enjoyment activities such as fishing and picnics and facilities such as floating grill cum bar and restaurant. Walkways and trails for bikers, horse riders and trekkers will be constructed in the midst of luxuriant agoho pine forest. All these facilities will be established to be a magnet for the venturesome guests and tourists.

The town is also the dwelling of the Green Garden Vegetable Farm in Brgy. Balaybay which has become well known as the source of high-value vegetables that find their way to supermarkets in the Subic Freeport and in Metro Manila. The vegetable farm uses sets of modern farming equipment and machine while the methods of planting are usually based on the techniques adapted from Taiwan and were combined with the traditional way of farming here in Philippines. The garden is a paramount journey's end to those who love eating and growing vegetables and to those who desire to learn various farming techniques.

If you love rendering altruistic works and charitable endeavors, the Aeta Children's Home at Brgy. Balaybay is the right place to pick. This serves as the dwelling place of indigent Aeta children who are being provided with care, shelter and a serene environment. The home leads these kids towards an integral formation of their personality and character, development of their potentials, and a positive reintegration in their family and in the society. Talking, playing and dealing with the Aeta children will surely give you an incomparable feeling of fulfillment.

Other places that you can traverse around in our rapturous town include the Pottot River at Brgy. Nagbayan where you can bring your family and friends for a whole-day picnic. Be mesmerized while swimming in the crystal cerulean water of the river with your loved ones in delight. You can also chill out in our Little Boracay at Brgy. Nagbunga where you can be welcomed by the gentle breeze and warm placid waters of the river. The fascinating and quiet river park boasts of lush array of coconut, mango and pine trees. Truly, a best place for family conversations, games and other fun activities.

If you wish of having a pool party, Castillejos has the finest resorts to offer. The Country Cottage Resort in Brgy. Balaybay, the Cris Aura Swimming Pool in Brgy. Magsaysay and the St.

Nichols Resort in Brgy. Del Pilar are just some that you could choose from. These resorts are nestled in a nice pleasant rural setting amongst flourishing trees and gardens.

If you are fond of mountain trekking, our town has the best place to suggest. The Balaybay Mountain is the apposite destination. Just bring your colleagues with your bag full of foods and you can freely clamber the precipitous yet safe mountain of the village, locally considered as Little Baguio of Castillejos. From the summit, you can pleasingly behold the splendor of our entire town.

Castillejos doesn't only proffer breathtaking places to enjoy but also effervescent and vibrant festivities and celebrations to behold.

A pity to miss is the Semana Santa festivity during the holy week where penitents would indulge in self-flagellation to repent for their sins. With covered faces, their heads are crowned with thorns, while the sound of bamboo slivers whipping their unclothed backs which provide the rhythm and the beat for the ritual. Other lent activities observed in our town are fasting and abstinence, the traditional passion plays or cenakulo, panata, via crucis, visita iglesia, live kubol contest and the pabasa in almost all barangays. To make the celebration piously meaningful and truly memorable, a station of the cross is also being held and this will be culminated by a grand procession of almost thirty to forty saints, dubbed as the longest procession in the province every holy week.

Our 14-barangay town is also the home of the exuberant Camote Festival, a flamboyant festivity of thanksgiving for the bountiful harvest of camote in our town. You can truly be delighted as the two-day celebration features street-dancing competitions, camote product trade fairs and other fun games in the town plaza. This is being held every third week of April which is

geared towards improving the economic condition of the community, making it stable and conducive to the best interest of the citizenry.

Being the home of one of the greatest presidents the country has ever had, Castillejos also bestows appropriate commemoration of the president's greatness through the Ramon Magsaysay Day celebration every August 31 in line with his birth anniversary. The celebration is being spearheaded in coordination with the National Historical Institute which is being attended by Zambaleños from the other 13 towns of the province.

Castillejos also takes pride of celebrating the longest Christmas season in the province starting from December 1 to January 6 dubbed as Castillejos Paskuhang Bayan. A multitude of fun activities are being conducted that draw a lot of both foreign and local tourists annually. This includes global reunions, Christmas dance and song competitions, cultural presentations, traditional *simbang gabi* and the establishment of Christmas booths around the town. The Christmas adornments in every barangay let everybody feel the genuine spirit of Christmas, not to mention the gift-giving activities and the caroling of the kids.

Welcoming the New Year with a rapturous blast of fine-looking firework displays has been the tradition of Castilleneans. Everybody is given the extraordinary chance to witness the creative pyrotechnic displays in the sky after attending the Mega Noche mass at the church.

Giving *pasalubong* back home has been part of the tradition of every Filipino. In Castillejos, you will experience the best delicacies of our town like the Castillejos *longaniza* from Tiya Teresa's, a local variation of sausage available in the town's market. The *tudok-tudoks* (sweet rice fritters) and the *suman sa ibos* are the consummate matches for the *longaniza* and Zambales mangoes. And of course, our one-town-one-product, the camote. Camote is being processed into feeds, flour, starch, and pectin for local and export markets. The flour is further

processed into fermented products such as, soy sauce and ethyl alcohol. The local folks also used sweet potato as raw material in the production of camote polvoron, camote pie, camote ice cream, camote wine, camote tart, camote fries and camote candies.

Aside from the astounding tourist spots, historical landmarks, vibrant festivities and delectable delicacies, our town also takes pride its incomparable and unequal treasures – the Castilleneans, its people. Our exceptional character stands out and this we truly proud of. The townsfolk are naturally disciplined. Our self-discipline is the mother virtue which leads to our being peace-loving, environment-friendly, God-fearing, open-hearted and socially responsible citizens. These values contribute a lot to the relentless pacing of our town towards progress and development. For these, we are admired by many, because these traits are the foundation of our culture, tradition, history and treasures as a united town.

Yes, Castillejos is not an impeccable town but we never stop in treading our path towards the realization of our vision. We strongly envision being a center of excellence and progress in the province of Zambales, providing sound investment opportunities, agro-industrial advancement and tourism, under a responsive leadership and empowered constituency upholding the spirit of unity towards achieving a globally competitive economy and sustainable development.

This vision is now gradually realized with the incessant support of the constituents to our local government. We always infuse in the chambers of our hearts the spirit of bayanihan or volunteerism for we believe that our vision will only be realized through volunteerism until such time that we achieve our victory. Victory which defines sustainable progress and development of our town as our local leaders persist to lead us actively in pursuing development initiatives, efficient delivery of basic services and equal opportunity for everyone through mobilization of

enlightened citizenry, adopting appropriate technology and providing a healthy environment for investors to ensure vigorous economy and a peaceful and harmonious community.

And from all of these, dear foreign retirees, we could undoubtedly assure you that your choice to retire in our town will never be a mistake. Castillejos has touched by civilization and continues to embrace development but despite of this, it has maintained its rustic beauty and natural ambiance. Our remarkable history, spectacular tourist destinations, vibrant festivities, rich traditions and worth-emulating values say it all!

Indeed, Castillejos is an exquisite place where you can live harmoniously through the rest of your life. A haven where you can revisit history and commune with the marvels of nature. A sanctuary where you can get away the commotion of the urban life. A home where you can retire and enjoy the bliss of life with your loved ones.

Retire here in our town for there is no place like Castillejos!