



DECEMBER DAY TRIP

Following on from September's wonderful trip to the Coconut Palace, the Senate and Manila Bay Hotel, Gabriella and Helen once again organized a fabulous day of activities for the ladies of BWA.

The trip commenced with a visit to some local parol sellers in San Fernando, Pampanga. Parols are traditional Filipino Christmas light decorations variously made from paper and shell. The craftsmanship was exquisite: seems like a shame to only use them a few months a year!

Next stop in the tour were two parish churches in Bacolor, Pampanga. First was the San Guillermo Parish Church. Four years after the 1991 eruption of Mt Pinatubo in 1995 more lahar flowed from Pinatubo and covered the church in 60 feet of lahar (a lethal mix of volcanic ash and mud). Thanks to the efforts of volunteers and the local parishioners, the church still operates today, with the second floor windows now serving as the entrance.

Just a few minutes away we came to the second parish church, the sacred shrine of Cabetican Our Lady of Lourdes with

"healing powers" for the ill. Renowned as a place for miracles and curing the ill, the original shrine has been rebuilt many times over. The new shrine is undergoing renovations for Christmas. On our way out, Helen asked about a gigantic concrete structure just near the shrines entrance. We were told it was the former church, due to be remediated. A few intrepid ladies went down some stairs to explore - and what a sight! The original images of the saints still lined the walls and the grotto at the altar shone blue.

Finally the ladies were ready for a bite to eat and made the 45 minute drive to Subic. Formally the US Navy Seals home in the Philippines, Subic is a free port and offers rainforest walks, Tarsier sightings, the chance to swim with dolphins and more.

Helen and Gabriella had kindly booked us a table at Vasco's for a delicious lunch of fish and chips for some, pies for others whilst overlooking the bay.

A wonderful experience and another opportunity to see more of the Philippines' rich culture and history.

