



Pila Day Trip, Laguna

During pre-Hispanic times, the southern shoreline of Laguna Bay where Pila is located, was a cultural and trade center demonstrated by archeological finds such as glass beads, gold jewellery and clay and porcelain pottery. Upon the Spanish colonizers' arrival, the more intrepid of them took rafts and sailed down the tributaries of the Pasig River and landed and stayed in the Pila area where the Catholic influence is prevalent. Pila, also because of its location, is renowned for its fish farming industry and as a cultural National Historic Landmark. So on Thursday, 31st July a mixed group of BWA members and non-members set out in the squally Manila weather to brave a trip to this area about two hours away. Luckily, as we drove south the weather improved and the sun started to peep out.

We took a little detour to avoid sitting in traffic and saw the devastation caused by Glenda as we passed through the rainforest areas of UP Los Banos and IRRI. Mature trees that had been ripped off with their roots showing and electric lines like spaghetti were strewn everywhere. As we went through the Pila Archway we started looking for Cora Relova's rest house – Cora was going to be our host and guide in Pila - called "Campo" a beautiful resort which used to be a recreational center for the Philippine military before WWII. Cora has a border of frangipani trees fronting her rest house but all the leaves and flowers had been blown down. She was waiting for us at the steps of her house when we arrived and offered us refreshing buko juice with coconut meat. After freshening up we were whisked away to a very rural setting to meet the barangay capitan and his councilors who gave us a talk about the Laguna de Bay fish farm industry comprised

of pens and cages - both very profitable operations in the area. The talk covered fries, fingerlings, the use of bamboo stakes, the huge hectareage of fish pens and cages and the involvement of poor fish farmers in the industry. This was held in a bahay kubo and behind us we had the hatcheries which looked like rice pilapils. Then we were taken to the lake which looked murky and rough filled with water hyacinth debris. We then proceed to two fish farm sites but unfortunately were not able to see much because most pens had been blown away by the typhoon.

Then it was off to a home-cooked regional buffet lunch at Campo where Cora, who heads the Laguna Historical Foundation, regaled us with Pila history and her involvement with its culture and heritage as a member of the very influential Rivera family. We were able to have a closer look at her rest house which is screened on all sides and tastefully decorated with vibrant green plants, Ifugao wooden gods and antique tables and fans. Her garden has an endless expanse of rice fields as an extension.





We then went off to Pila Town Center which has been delineated as a National Historical Landmark by the Philippine National Historic Commission. We headed for the Municipio located directly across the Church and managed to pay a courtesy call to the Mayor. Mayor Quiat graciously welcomed the BWA day-trippers and we had an interesting chat with him. He took us to the the Municipio's balcony overlooking the Town Plaza and the Church for a photo-taking session. Then we went to visit two heritage houses in Pila built in the early nineteenth century. There is a strong sense of preservation, heritage and ownership amongst the Pilenos. One house was Cora's which was built by the Rivera family who owned Hacienda Rivera in Pila. The other one was her cousin's just across the road. Both houses were a delight to see. Wide capiz shell windows open to airy and meticulously decorated interiors with intricate carvings and colourful painted ceilings. Beautiful wrought iron grills with different designs, cover ventanillas. Balustraded grand staircases made of cement are found at the side of the house leading to the caida. Both houses retain the bahay-na-bato template with the lower portion made from cement and retaining the wooden upper levels. There was a sumptuous merienda on offer of white Laguna cheese, puto, maja puti but unfortunately there was no time to eat it so we all made baon and headed off home to Manila by 4 PM having had a wonderful and educational time in Pila.

