

Musings from the Philippines, 2020

The Good:

- Personal services are still a bargain by U.S. standards. That includes salon services (hair styling, mani, pedi, massage). Full time household help such as housekeeper, cook, chauffeur, etc. will cost you around \$150 a month or less. A visit to a medical doctor, even a specialist, is \$8. \$10 without senior discount. If you have major dental work, have it done in the Philippines, and you'll save enough money to cover the air fare and have a vacation to boot.
- Local food is cheap, just don't go to the fancy "fusion" restaurants.
- Filipino food is going mainstream in the U.S., as predicted by the late Anthony Bourdain. From Seattle to Boston to New York City, Filipino American chefs are opening fancy restaurants.
- Seniors get 20% discount on restaurant food, hospital procedures and medicine; shows are free in some cities like Makati.
- With ride sharing Grab, it is easy to get around. The cars are newer, clean, drivers young and clean cut, fares are preset, unlike taxis. Just be aware of "surge" pricing.
- Best tasting food and fruits in the world. You don't need to import from Mexico or Latin America. Fresh off the tree. No fruit comes close to the mango (watch for my essay).
- Flowers bloom all year, no need for greenhouses.
- Filipinos still have very strong family ties.
- Our skills are in demand all over the world, from nurses to math teachers to merchant marines. One fourth of merchant crews are Filipino.
- Air pollution is bad, but nothing like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the top three. New Delhi is called the gas chamber, Manila is not there, not by a long shot.
- If you have a credit card, subscription or other issues requiring a call center, most likely you will be speaking with a Filipino/Filipina. They do a good job of hiding accents. They never volunteer their location. I always ask, "how's the weather over there." (One added chuckle is that during this pandemic, you might hear a rooster crowing in the background. Some are working from home, and there are hardly any neighborhoods without any roosters. Call at 5:00 pm EST, 5 am over there, and you might hear a cacophony of crowing.)
- Where else can you swim with the whale sharks? No, I haven't done it yet.
- It used to be 7,107 islands, but modern technology has increased the number to 7,641. That's another 500 islands to explore!

The Bad:

- During rush hour, you'll be going along at 5 miles an hour. One of my nephews commutes about 8 miles to work, and it takes him 1.5 hours each way. Manila and Bangalore (India) have been identified as having the worst traffic in the world. Of course, south Manhattan isn't much better, around 10 mph.
- Some corporations are building dormitories for their employees, to reduce their commute during the work week.

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- Drivers are rude. Pedestrians cross the street at their own risk. Traffic lines or lanes don't mean anything.
- Compared to other Asian airports, Manila's NAIA is a dump.

And the Ugly:

- Manila proper is the most densely populated city in the world at 110,000 per square mile. By contrast, New York City is around 26,000. But Manila still keeps building condominiums.
- Metro Manila is dirty. Even the high end cemetery Loyola is dirty.
- Squatters aka "informal settlers" have moved into the largest cemetery. Wonder what they do for Halloween?
- CR's (comfort room or toilets) are filthy. Bring your own wipes and sanitizers. At least in the malls, there is an attendant that keeps them clean.
- The Philippines is one of the top producers of plastic waste per capita, mainly due to single use items. Most people cannot afford to buy in bulk.

Doggerels

On Taal Volcano

Greetings from Manila
Where there is no thrilla
Taal volcano is resting
The ashes and sulfur aren't spewing
Pele the goddess is contemplating
To their homes the citizens are returning
But the people are still fearing
They know the big one is coming

After the Eruption

But no sooner had the ashes stopped spewing
And the lava ceased bubbling
A newer more sinister creature was spreading
From animals to humans they were jumping
Or perhaps from a lab were escaping

On the Coronavirus

The Chinese find it amusing
To catch wild animals for feasting
But within these animals are lurking
Tiny creatures poised for attacking

Now the whole world is panicking
For what the Chinese were spreading
Perhaps people are thinking
Of the 1918 pandemic recurring

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But it's our habits we must be changing
Wild animals we should be admiring
Instead of our slaughtering
And with a camera do the shooting

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