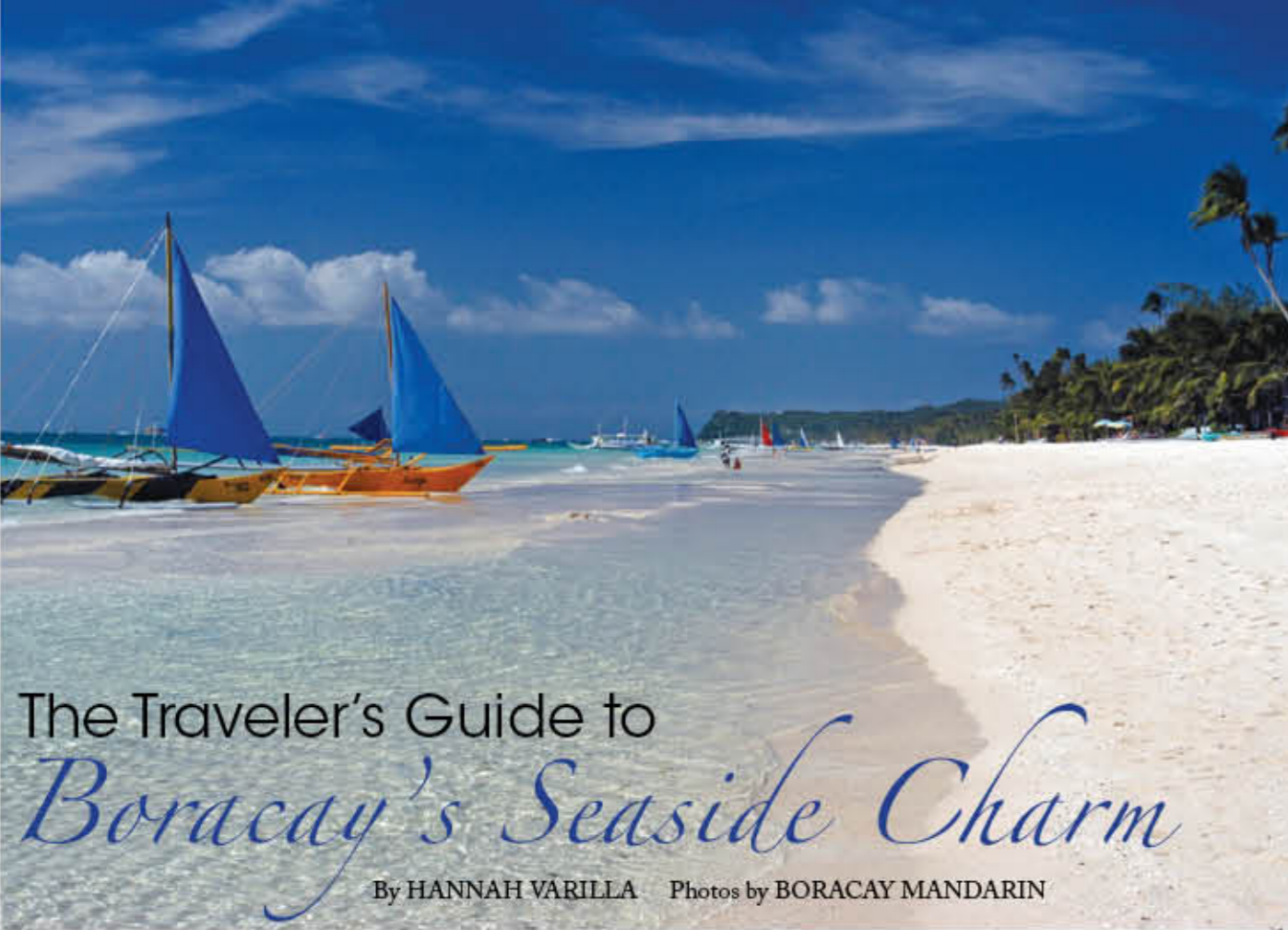


Boracay's white-sand beachfront fronting the hotel



The Traveler's Guide to Boracay's Seaside Charm

By HANNAH VARILLA Photos by BORACAY MANDARIN

The island getaway. The sinful indulgence of a summer escapade. I wonder how just a few of these cliché statements from most of Boracay's seasoned travelers still ring true, as I jet off to a long-weekend Boracay trip. Is everything still heavenly sinful on this island? A serious rhetorical question to ponder on as I assume my idyllic hotel destination.

The plane touches down safely and I get that heady feeling again, of seeing all sorts of contrasting blues, pale and dark, of the sky and sea, as if almost merging at some point beyond the horizon. Heavenly indeed.

We are ferried off safely into the Cagban jetty port. Our hosts from the Boracay Mandarin Island Hotel, Christina and Kristine Po, daughters of Robert Po and Lily Ng-Po, come to meet us there. The Pos have been managing the Boracay Mandarin for almost 3 years now. With a yacht ride en route to the hotel, I imagine the response to my initial travel question is gearing up for its more exciting conclusions.

Boracay Mandarin Island Hotel
It was getting dark, so we head off to Boracay Mandarin. Situated in Boat Station 2, this white colossal hotel is all aglow at night, with a swimming pool of only 4 feet deep, ideal for lapping. This Triple A Boracay hotel is actually U-shaped, which maximizes the number of the

► page 3

A 4-foot-deep swimming pool meant for lapping



All rooms offer guests a seafront view

Hold out for the best, though, because the Grand Deluxe Poolside adds to the whole honeymoon excitement with the Tatami bed, a low, Japanese-inspired, mattress-like bed almost set near the floor. The Presidential

and Ambassador Suites, meanwhile, both boast of two rooms fit for VIPs, with iPod docks, 40-inch flat-screen LCD TVs, private bars and exclusive lounging areas.

The complete hotel experience can never be narrated without food. The Boracay Mandarin's Don Vito Ristorante Italiano offers one of Boracay's bestseller pastas, wood-fire oven-baked pizzas, and extensive signature wine selection.

Crystal Cove
And how to answer the other part of my question in terms of sinful? Sinful is relative, particularly to the serious, Spartan-shoe wearing, island-hopping types.

Crystal Cove across Bulabog Beach was once meant to become a mini-zoo of sorts, but has evolved into a famous contender for picnics with a beautiful sea view. I am fascinated by Cave 1's particularly steep spiral staircase entrance into an underground cave where one can wade. Hang on to the rope though, because high tides can actually cause waves to fill the whole underground cave and swallow visitors alive. To get my picture beside a humongous limestone rock further inside, I may as

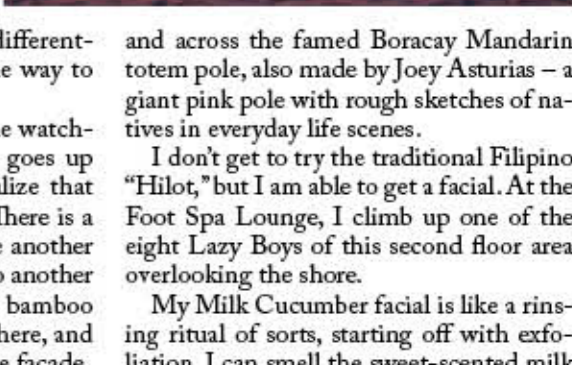
well have played hopscotch on different-sized rocks lining the cave all the way to the end. On the way to Cave 2 is a stone watchtower called Baywatch. The hill goes up and down repeatedly, until I realize that Cave 2 is just a few miles away. There is a beautiful little lounge area before another steep stone stairway descends into another underground cave. A beach-feel bamboo set of chairs and table are found here, and across it is a mini-bar with a stone façade.

Not enticed yet? Then move out of this area and go forward some more, back to Cave 1. You will pass by a hidden sanctuary housing endangered birds such as a camera-shy kingfisher, a huge coil of a snake locally known as *sawa*, and even two baby eagles. No petting though, as this will cost you a fine.

I trek back up Cave 1's peak and notice a set of five seats, all shaped in the form of cupped hands. I imagine nestling myself on one of them as I gaze beyond the comforting view of the sea. The long hike up and down Crystal Cove will pose a serious life-changing question to serial chain-smoking junkies. But then there's gelato. A wonderful treat after a long trek!

Mandarin Spa
It's a good thing the Boracay Mandarin wasn't done spoiling its guests just yet. For the final VIP treatment, I head over to the second floor of the Mandarin Spa, located on the hotel's ground floor

Boracay's sunset of pinkish hues across sky blue



and across the famed Boracay Mandarin totem pole, also made by Joey Asturias – a giant pink pole with rough sketches of natives in everyday life scenes.

I don't get to try the traditional Filipino "Hilot," but I am able to get a facial. At the Foot Spa Lounge, I climb up one of the eight Lazy Boys of this second floor area overlooking the shore.

My Milk Cucumber facial is like a rinsing ritual of sorts, starting off with exfoliation. I can smell the sweet-scented milk used as a moisture mask for the next step. Afterward, I feel my eyes wander to the spectacular view in front of me.

Seeing the sunlight hit the waves at the right angles and breaking at the shore, as a kite-surfer tries his best to keep his head, the white-sand beach never ceases to take my breath away, even on this Lazy Boy inside the Spa. The last thoughts in my head as I drift into sleep are the real answers to my previous questions regarding Boracay: it's exclusive, spontaneous seaside charm is not temporary at all, and keeps this Island a serious travel destination.

The traditional Hilot massage highlights the Mandarin spa treatments



Write and Win at Dusit

After its successful launching last year, the "My Grandest Dusit Thani Manila Experience" Blog Writing contest is now open for the year 2010 for all of Dusit Thani's valued guests.

Share your grandest experience at Dusit Thani Manila! Guests who avail of an overnight stay in the hotel from June 1, 2010 to June 1, 2011 are entitled to join the contest and create as many blog entries as they can using their own personal blog sites. Blog entries, which must have a minimum of 200 words, must be a creative account of the guest's enlivening stay at Dusit Thani Manila. Bloggers may also include anecdotes on the hotel's food, warm service from the hotel staff, and share with other travelers worthy finds in the neighborhood and other travel tips.

Entries will be judged based on style, content and uniqueness of the blog. Only three entries will be chosen and will get a chance to win luxurious prizes such as overnight accommodations at the Presidential Suite, Devarana Spa treatments and gift certificates to the hotel's specialty restaurants.

"We take all the insights from our guests by heart and derive inspiration from our efforts that made a truly lasting impression to them. After all, our only aim is to make our guests happy," said GM Prateek Kumar.

rooms with a balcony and gives guests a view of the sea at all times.

Out of the 52 guest rooms and suites, all equipped with a private bathroom, split-type air-conditioning system, flat-screen TV with cable, mini-bar and digital in-room safety deposit box, my friend and I are given a Premier Sea View Room with a gracious bedroom welcome. Rose petals shaped as a heart were strewn on the bed covers, and some of the freshest fruits of Panay islands greet us with succulent sweetness.

The room smells of the same old wood architecture, with all the luxe and glam appeal of darkwood furnishing. I'd like to think the interior's charm comes from the light Mediterranean touches, with a twist of contemporary Filipino design.

I am fond of plopping down on hotel beds, and this one in particular affords me serious comfort. After walking a 3-kilometer stretch with the girls, I fit onto deep REM sleep, just like a light bulb switched off instantly.

For those feeling more lavish, the Grand Deluxe Poolside rooms are decked with a luxurious bathroom, with beautiful wall carvings by Filipino artist Joey Asturias.

Enjoy the ambience, excellent food and great service everytime you dine with us. Whether it's Asian, Continental, Filipino or Mediterranean cuisine, we have it all for your satisfaction.

ASYA
Filipino-Asian Restaurant

ASYA FILIPINO-ASIAN RESTAURANT
G/F Centris Walk, Eton Centris
EDSA cor. Quezon Avenue, QC
Tel. 994-8467, 738-4938 to 39
asyarestaurant@yahoo.com
www.asya.com.ph



ATOMIC SUSHI ROLLS

DUO
Steakhouse & Wine Bar

DUO STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR
G/F Serendra Plaza, Mc Kintley Parkway
Fort Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City
Tel. 856-1200, 856-1300
duorestaurant@hotmail.com
www.duo.com.ph




USDA PRIME RIB EYE

Zuni
Restaurant and Wine Bar

ZUNI RESTAURANT & WINE BAR
G/F Greenbelt 5, Ayala Center
Legaspi Village, Makati City
Tel. 467-3931, 757-0361 to 62
zunirestaurant@yahoo.com
www.zuni.com.ph



DUCK CONFIT IN RASPBERRY SAUCE



MANILA

OVER 400 ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS ON THE QANTAS A330

SYDNEY BRISBANE MELBOURNE ADELAIDE

US\$565*
return from

*Low season economy airfare for departure between 4 October 2010 and 14 December 2010. High season economy airfare from US\$679 for departure between 15 December 2010 and 14 February 2011.

Starting 1 November 2010, the Qantas A330 will be flying from Manila to Australia four times a week. For bookings and inquiries, please call 812 0607 or email mnsales@qantas.com.au. You may also visit a travel agent near you.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: Agents may charge service fees and/or card fees which vary. Prices quoted are in US Dollars and correct as of 3 October 2010. Airfares do not include taxes, surcharges or fees. Limited availability. Cancellation fees and other conditions apply – ask for more details.

ASC reference code: Q00SN092310Q
QF 4418-3200x3805sydney.indd 1

15/10/09 2:59:09 PM