

The Philippines

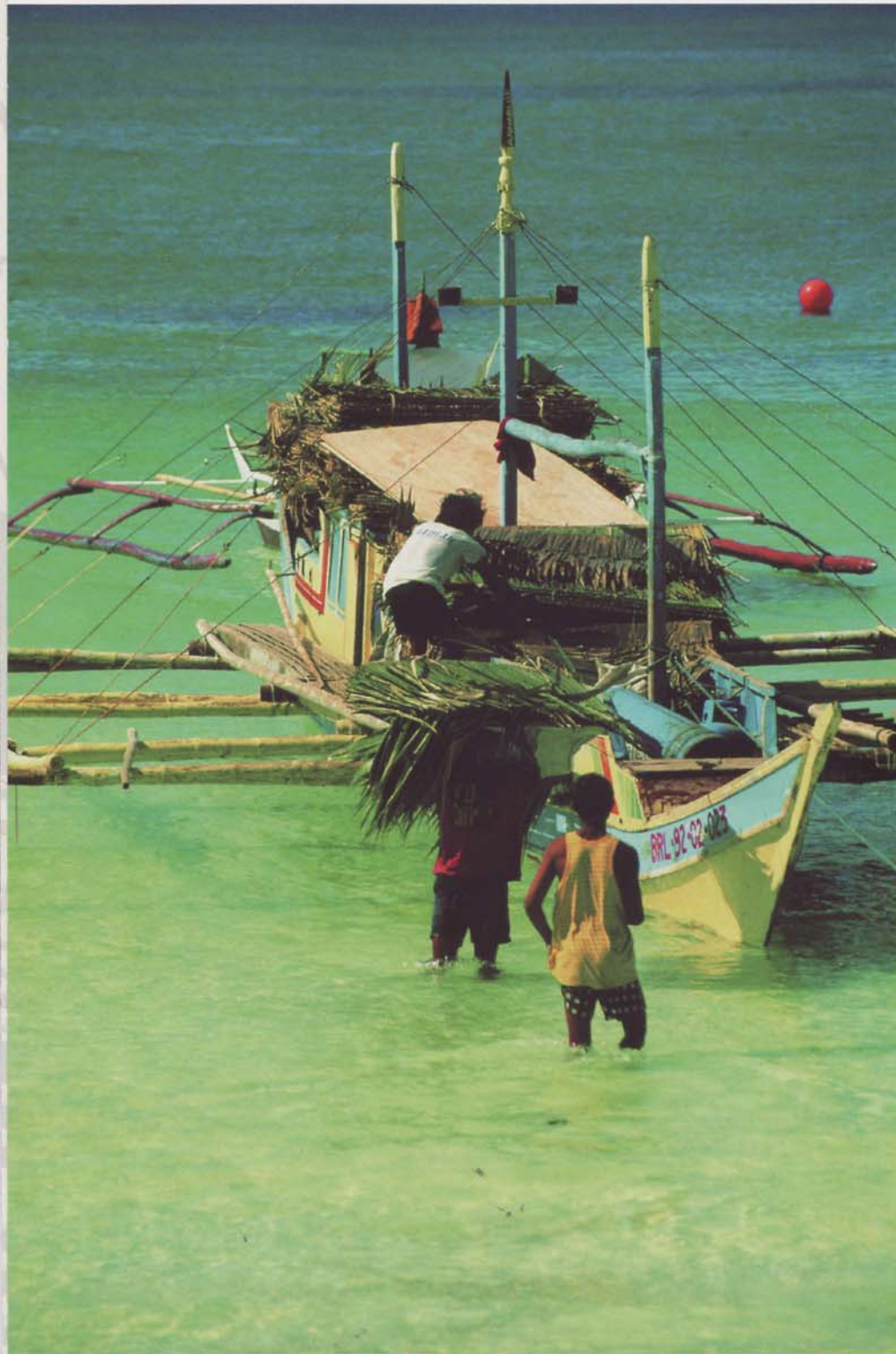
Southeast Asia Specialist, Natalie Lewis, recently travelled to the Philippines to research this often overlooked destination.

The flight from the UK was a long one, however, arriving in the capital, Manila, was like entering a different world. This huge cosmopolitan city is divided into several districts – Makati is the busiest and where the best hotels and shopping centres are. However, a city tour with my guide, Arnie, revealed the smaller and less-visited suburbs where markets are bustling with local life, pigs are roasted on spits to create the national dish of Lechon, and the Chinese cemetery opens up its huge and impressive mausoleums.

The city of “No” – “No Parking”, “No U-turn”, “No Waiting” – so it is no wonder that most people travel by tricycle!

All too soon it was time to head to northern Luzon and the renowned rice terraces of Banaue. I made this journey by road which takes most of the day. With my personal guide and driver I was able to stop at many places along the way to take photos of the magnificent scenery and stretch my legs in the welcoming roadside villages. In the late afternoon, I checked into my hotel and headed to my room where I opened the windows, stepped out onto the terrace and marvelled at the view. Lush green rice terraces clinging to the sides of the hills as far as the eye could see – it literally took my breath away. I was to spend the next three nights here, exploring the stunning scenery and experiencing the local culture and customs. Although I was lucky enough to have a private car, the residents of the Banaue area like to travel around by jeepney. These colourful taxis are used like buses, and have all kinds of people and livestock inside with the braver passengers clinging to the sides and sitting on the roof.

The spectacular rice terraces in the Banaue area are known as one of the wonders of the world and really do live up to this title. Constructed over 2,000 years ago by the Ifugao people, this elaborate irrigation system





The Chocolate Hills

is still used today to cultivate rice – the staple food of the country. In my three days I managed to see much of the region, sometimes travelling by car and sometimes taking easy walks along the mud-walled terraces themselves.

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With many happy memories I returned to Manila and caught a short flight to Cebu where I stayed at the superb Shangri-La Mactan and spent a few days relaxing on the beach. There is plenty to see in Cebu, said to be where Magellan first landed when he discovered the archipelago in 1521, and on my whistle stop tour I saw the Chinese cemetery, a Taoist temple and some architecturally splendid Spanish colonial churches. Whilst in Cebu I also took a day trip to Bohol, whose capital, Taglibaran, has a population of only 20,000 and was introduced to me as the city of “No”. There are hundreds of traffic rules – “No Parking”, “No U-turn”, “No Waiting” – so it is no wonder that most people travel by tricycle! The upside of this is that Bohol is said to be one of the greenest and cleanest islands in the archipelago with some beautiful beaches. It is most famous, however, for its chocolate hills - a luscious green when I was there, but they do turn brown later in the year

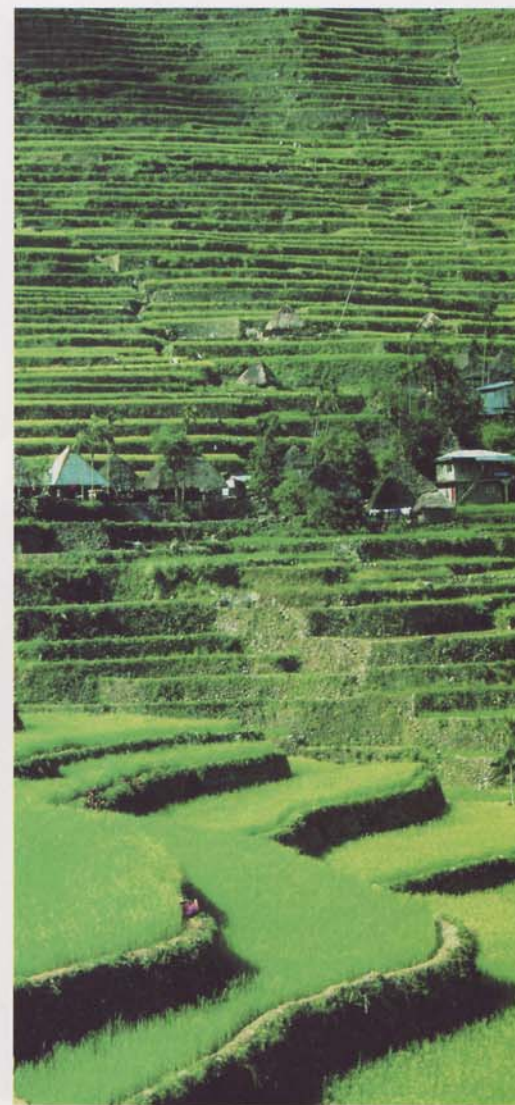
and it is this colour that gives them their name. Close by and accessed by a bridge from Bohol, the Panglao Island Nature Resort is one of the few places in the world where you can see the tiny tarsier monkeys in the wild.

From Cebu I took a ferry across to Boracay, renowned for its perfect “White Beach”. I stayed at ‘Fridays’ which sells itself on having the finest, most pure white sand on the best beach in the world, it was difficult to argue with the claim. Boracay offers everything you would expect from a thriving beach destination – watersports, dive courses and massage. The perfect place to end your visit to this amazing, under visited destination.



Travel file

If you are inspired to travel to the Philippines, a 14-night tailor-made trip following a similar itinerary to Natalie would cost from £1,395 per person on a twin share basis, inclusive of international flights. For further details please call Natalie on 01869 276 246.



The Banaue Rice Terraces