

Manila: a beautiful city

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MANILA: A Beautiful City The Manila tour was a very challenging and interesting experience for me, since I am not that familiar with those places that we have gone by. Although really very tiring, I had fun throughout the trip and enjoyed it so much. Our group did the tour last August 8, a Monday. First stop was the famous church here in Manila, the Quiapo church. The church is located in " old" Manila just north of the Intramuros. It is known for the Black Nazarene statue that is paraded through the streets every January 9th. The Philippine people believe that if they touch the statue they will be granted a miracle. Its appearance gave me a very nostalgic feeling and inside was very solemn and dignified. When we were there, they were holding a mass and we were not allowed to take pictures. Outside the church was a different matter with hordes of souvenir and religious icon vendors. There are hundreds of street vendors selling clothing, watches, sunglasses, purses, and bootlegged DVDs and software and much other stuff. This is the place where the locals shop so; you will definitely get good deals. However, make sure you keep an eye on your wallet and valuables because of the pickpockets. (Thank God we did not encounter any!) Next stop was the Escolta, Regina and Calvo building. It was a very long walk, since no one in our group knew and is also not familiar with these places. Thses architectures were built during the American colonial period and the art deco was very evident. We were not able to go inside Regina because of the policies followed there, same with the Calvo building, but we were able to take pictures outside. Escolta, Manila, once had the informal name " Queen of the Streets". During the final years of the Spanish Occupation, Escolta Street had the reputation for being the best of the trade districts in Binondo,

Manila, and the originally Chinese merchant district in the capital. It is famous for having the downtown office of the Manila Times located there. Old photographs show horse-drawn carriages on a cobble-paved street. Buildings were generally of two stories under peaked roofs running parallel to the street. It's still a very busy place, but the carriage trade is long gone. Along the way, was the Capitol theater opened in 1934, when the Escolta was still stylish with Juan Nakpil, as its architect. The Regina Building on the other hand, was once the headquarters of insurance companies--for example, Provident Insurance, now the Spanish-owned Mapfre Asia. Now the building appears on a set of Filipino heritage stamps. Another walking distance was the Chinatown, or Binondo. It was for a long time the city's--and the country's--financial centre. It's a relationship that goes back to the Chinese community that the Spanish authorities encouraged here. A sea of people - that was my overriding feeling after visiting this place. If you want to have a food binge, this is the perfect place where you should go. Food in this area is simply delicious and the place is great for just walking around, discovering things. The Binondo church was a very nice historical church in the heart of Chinatown. Inside were, beautiful paintings on the ceilings and you can just feel the history of the church. The church was built for baptized Chinese, a community of which Lorenzo Ruiz, with a Chinese father, was part. The beauty of the facade is not something that one sees everyday. There is a sense of continuity; one wouldn't know where the new structure began to meet that of the old structure of the Bell Tower. Going inside, we were thinking twice about taking some photos of the interior, but we cannot resist capturing the beauty of what was inside. Upon entering the church and

to your right, you will see this image of the crucified Christ. The most impressive part and one that is easy to miss are the frescoes painted on the ceiling of the church. The paintings may not compare to the ones found in the Sistine Chapel, but the ones found on the ceiling of the Binondo Church are unique in their own way. They depict all of the mysteries of the Holy Rosary, again showing the patrons' devotion to the Blessed Mother. Final stop was the Intramuros. We did the tour around, riding on Gama's car because all of us were very tired and the place was so huge. Intramuros means "within the walls" or "inside the walls" and true to the name, it's a walled city inside city of Manila. Intramuros was constructed in 16th century by the Spaniards during their occupation of Philippines. The place has since then seen several wars and occupations. After Spaniards, Japanese and Americans occupied the country. Built mainly with stone blocks and lovely landscaping, by and large the place still is in a good condition. However, a few spots which had been destroyed in the wars were reconstructed. There are cells where Dr. Jose Rizal and others were imprisoned until his execution. The most amazing thing is the metallic foot prints symbolizing the path that Dr. Rizal was dragged on from his cell to the spot he was executed. Inside were the other famous places, such as the San Agustin Church/Museum, Fort Santiago and the Casa Manila. Casa Manila or the 'Bahay na Bato' during this time was not available for visiting. Its style is considered by the Intramuros Administration under the name "Spanish," though in reality it's indigenous, traditionally with an adobe ground floor and an upper story of wood. The San Agustin museum has a large collection of Catholic religious objects, including 18th century horse-drawn carriages used during Holy

Week, crucifixes, many paintings - some sadly for which the painter is unknown - and vestments. Although the latter room seemed to be closed off. The museum has two floors. One can enter the San Augustin Church's choir loft to look down on the pews and altar. There are at least 10 large rooms or halls. The whole complex has a Spanish feel to it - not surprisingly. A ground floor passage leads to Father Blanco's Garden which is also reviewed separately. San Augustin museum is a gem.