



The Rizal monument at Luneta Park. (Opposite page, clockwise from top left) Binondo Church; a *kalesa* (horse-drawn carriage) in front of Malate Church; ruins in Corregidor; street in Intramuros

I Keep Coming Back To Manila

Writer, host and amateur historian, **CARLOS CELDRAN**, is an amusing and expert guide to 10 of Manila's most interesting nooks and crannies

1. Intramuros. No trip to the Philippine capital is complete without visiting the site where the city all began. Formerly a 15th-century bamboo fortress belonging to Sultan Sulayman, Intramuros grew into an ecclesiastical enclave of seven Roman Catholic cathedrals before being pummeled to the ground by the US Army at the end of World War II. In 1979, the walls were restored, thanks to the efforts of the Intramuros Administration, and the oldest part of our megalopolis regained much of its medieval European flavor with the added benefits of fine dining and better shopping options. Places to visit: Fort Santiago and the Jose Rizal Shrine, Casa Manila, Bahay Tsinoy (Museum of the Chinese), The Ruins of St. Ignatius, and The San Agustin Church and Museum. Places to eat: Ilustrado Restaurant; and shop: Silahis Handicrafts, Trade Winds Bookstore, and Galeria delas Islas Art Gallery.

2. The Cultural Center of the Philippines. Built in 1969, three years after New York's Metropolitan Opera House and five years before the completion of the Sydney Opera House, the CCP's floating travertine marble volume is perhaps the most iconic representation of Manila's rich trove of 1960s brutalist architecture. Monumental it may be from the outside, the CCP's curvaceous interiors possess a grace and elegance rare to structures built during an era more known for its forbidding concrete chunkiness. And if visiting its many

exhibitions and ogling its elegant lobby may be enough for some, I recommend catching an opera, a dance performance, or a concert if you want to truly complete the experience. Most coveted spot: Partierre Room 25, former private box of former First Lady Imelda Marcos. Companies to watch: Ballet Philippines, Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra, Tanghalang Pilipino, Philippine Madrigal Singers, and The Bayanihan Dance Company.

3. The National Museum, Luneta Park and Paco Park. Although many folks forget that there is anything behind the Jose Rizal Monument, the Luneta Park is still a cornucopia of cultural sites and local flavor. Nearest to Manila Bay, visit Museo ng Maynila (Museum of Manila, the former Army and Navy Club) and the Manila Hotel for a glimpse of our pre-WWII grandeur, before you trot past the Rizal Monument itself and into pocket gardens dedicated to China, Japan, Jose Rizal's execution, and the Philippine Arts, which flank the monument. Further up toward Taft Avenue, visit the stunning, newly restored, professionally run, and immaculately clean National Museum of the Filipino People where you can see the treasures of the San Diego Galleon and gaze up at the awe-inspiring "Spoliarium" by National Artist for Painting Juan Luna. Once you are all done, have a *halo-halo* (a dessert made of shaved ice, milk, ice cream and fruit) at Barbara's at

the Orchidarium by Agrifina Circle. Sundays are especially interesting as the place is packed with locals watching movie stuntmen rehearse or listening to a free concert by the bandstand. If you are still up to it, walk up toward the Instituto Cervantes Spanish Cultural Center next to the Casino Español, before hanging a left to the 400-year-old former cemetery, Paco Park. Wear practical shoes and dress light.

4. American Memorial Cemetery. Nestled in the middle of burgeoning Fort Bonifacio Global City, this is the world's largest memorial to American war dead and the greenest and most breathtaking of settings in Manila's central business district. The cemetery memorializes members of the US military who gave their lives in battles fought in New Guinea and the Philippines at the close of World War II in the Pacific. Over 17,202 carved marble headstones sit amid 615,000 square meters of obsessively manicured gardens full of tropical plants and trees. It is both haunting and majestic. And although jogging and picnicking is obviously forbidden, just wandering under the trees and along its hemispherical walls of trani limestone carved with the names of 36,282 individuals who rest in unmarked graves is an experience not to be missed. It's a perfect place for reflecting upon the power of the human spirit and the senselessness of war.



5. Corregidor Island. This nine-square-kilometer tadpole-shaped island at the mouth of Manila Bay and in between the provinces of Bataan and Cavite is the closest respite from the craziness that is Metro Manila. Less than an hour away by air-conditioned ferry from Manila, the island is a historical monument, adventure playground, and nature reserve all rolled into one. Once a Spanish customs-inspection area where all the ships that passed would have their papers corrected—hence the name Corregidor for “corrector”—it was renamed Fort Mills by the Americans and became a US military installation before being blitzed into oblivion at the close of World War II. Since 1994, the Corregidor Foundation has cleaned up the island and turned it into a national shrine and protected nature reserve. It is now one of the most popular tourist attractions of the country. Check into the charming Spanish-style Corregidor Inn for an overnight stay, or take a daytrip to hike through their secondary growth jungles and wander about the ruins. The juxtaposition of ruins and overgrown jungle foliage are reminiscent of Angkor Wat or Delphi—except that you aren't looking at the remains of the Khmer or Greek empire, but that of the American one.

6. Cubao. Located right smack in the center of Metro Manila, Cubao is accessible from all points of the city by all forms of transportation. It was built in the late 1950s in the literal

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MANILA'S FINEST ADDRESSBOOK

A guide to these places and how to get there. Clip and save

- American Memorial Cemetery**, Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City, open everyday 9am-5pm, except Christmas and New Year's days
- Bahay Nakpil Bautista**, Calle Barbossa (A. Bautista Street), Manila
- Bahay Tsinoy Museum**, KAISA-Angelo King Heritage Center, 32 Anda cor Cabito streets, Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-6083
- Barbara's Restaurant**, Plaza San Luis Complex, Gen. Luna St., Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-3893
- Binondo Church**, Plaza del Basco, Binondo, Manila. From Taft Avenue or Maria Orosa St., Malate, hail a jeepney bound for Divisoria. The jeep will pass right in front of the church
- Casa Manila**, Plaza San Luis Complex, Gen. Luna cor Real Streets, Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-4084
- Casino Español de Manila**, 855 TM Kalaw St., Ermita, Manila, tel (2) 524-5508
- Club Mwah** 3/F The Venue Tower, 652 Boni Ave., Mandaluyong City, tel (2) 535-7943
- Corregidor tours**, Sun Cruises CCP Terminal A, CCP Complex, Roxas Blvd., Manila, tel (2) 831-8140, corregidorphilippines.com
- Cultural Center of the Philippines**, CCP Complex, Roxas Blvd., Pasay City, tel (2) 832-1125 to 39, culturalcenter.gov.ph
- Galeria delas Islas Art Gallery**, 744 Calle Real del Palacio (Gen. Luna St.), Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-2111
- Hobbit House**, Arquiza St. corner MH del Pilar, Ermita, Manila, tel (2) 521-7604
- Ilustrado Restaurant**, 744 Calle Real del Palacio (Gen. Luna St.), Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-3674, ilustradorestaurant.com
- Instituto Cervantes Manila**, 855 TM Kalaw St., Ermita, Manila, tel (2) 526-1482, manila.cervantes.es
- Manila Hotel**, One Rizal Park, Roxas Blvd., Manila, tel (2) 527-0111, manila-hotel.com.ph
- Manila Chinese Cemetery** is accessible by LRT (get off at the Doroteo Jose stop and walk 20 minutes to the entrance at Felix Huertas) or by cab. For a few hundred pesos, hire a guide at their management office to take you around the mausoleums, or go to oldmanilawalks.com two weeks ahead to reserve a spot on Ivan Man Dy's monthly walking tours
- Manila Orchidarium and Butterfly Pavilion**, F. Teodoro Valencia Circle, Rizal Park, Manila, tel (2) 527-6376/78
- National Museum**, Executive House Bldg., P. Burgos St. cor Taft Ave, tel (2) 527-1215, nmuseum.tripod.com
- Paco Park**, San Marcelino St., Paco, Manila. From Taft Ave. cor Padre Faura St., take a cab or hail a jeepney bound for Paco and get off on Padre Faura St. The park is a few minutes' walk away
- Po-Heng Lumpia House**, 521 Q. Paredes St., Binondo, Manila
- Quiapo Church**, Plaza Miranda, Quiapo, Manila. Take a cab or by LRT, get down on Carriedo station; or by Pasig River Ferry, get off at Quiapo station
- San Agustin Church and Museum**, Gen. Luna cor Real Streets, Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-4025.
- Silahis Arts and Artifacts**, 744 Calle Real del Palacio (Gen. Luna St.), Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-2111, silahis.com
- Tradewinds Bookstore**, 744 Calle Real del Palacio (Gen. Luna St.), Intramuros, Manila, tel (2) 527-2114



Plaza Ruiz, Sta Cruz

backyard of magnate Amado Araneta's home. All cab drivers know where it is, every EDSA bus passes there, but it's the MRT or LRT2 lines that you must use if you want to get there fast and in air-conditioned denial of the road below. Once there, visit Farmer's Market, the city's largest and cleanest open-air *palengke* (wet market) and wander through aisles upon aisles of local produce, food and flowers. For shopping options, uber-luxe Gateway Mall caters to the high-end crowd, while Farmer's Plaza has more affordable options. Around sunset, after dining in one of the restaurants ringing the Araneta Coliseum (Manila's answer to Madison Square Garden), be sure to visit Cubao Expo—a small 70s-type strip mall that boasts a funky mix of wholesale retail shoe stores, vintage shops, bookstores, art galleries, and a really cool indie moviehouse. The fun begins when the sun goes down.

7. Binondo Church and Chinatown. One of the city's oldest districts and chock-full of Chinese flavor, it's dirty, cramped and enthralling all at once. Start off at the 200-year-old Binondo Church, with its antique fountains and converted pagoda belfry in front. From there, visit the Po Heng Lumpia Shop in the lobby of the Art-Deco building Uy Bin Tin, then visit Carvajal, the market street of Chinatown.

8. Manila Chinese Cemetery. Built on land formerly owned by the Dominican order of the Catholic Church, The Manila Chinese Cemetery finds its beginnings in the 19th century as a resting place for Chinese who were denied burial in Catholic cemeteries or who could not afford to send their remains back to China. But with the onset of Chinese Communist rule, the Chinese Cemetery has become host to not only those of simple means but also the cognoscenti and elite of the Philippine

Chinese community. Apparently, the cemetery itself is the only one of its kind in the world. Since it's tradition to hold vigil by the grave of a relative, elaborate mausoleums (complete with bathrooms and kitchens) were built to ward off the harsh Philippine sun. And not only is the place relevant for its sociopolitical history, but for its architecture as well. From its plain niches, elaborate Art-Deco and Art-Nouveau structures, to minimalist mid-20th-century modernism, the cemetery is a lesson in Philippine architectural history. Aside from the mausoleums, other sites of interest include the Chong Hock Tong Temple (the city's oldest), Liat See Tong (Martyrs Hall), which honors Chinese community leaders who were executed by the Japanese during World War II, and the Carlos Palanca (Tan Quien Sien) Memorial.

9. Quiapo Church. Truly the heart and soul of the city. Makati and Ortigas Center may show you what the Philippines wants to be, but Quiapo will always show you what Manila is all about. It's a daily fiesta at the Quiapo Church and Plaza Miranda fronting it. Crazy, noisy, colorful and full of hawkers, fortunetellers and devout believers of the Catholic faith, it's a circus from the 14th century with cell phones. Visit candle vendors and snake-oil salesmen at the Herbalist Market on Evangelista Street, check out the shopping options on Carriedo Street, or root through all the traditional handicrafts on sale underneath the Quezon Bridge (a.k.a. *Ilalim ng Tulay*). If you are up to it, drop by Bahay Nakpil Bautista on Barbosa (A. Bautista) Street on the other side of Quezon Boulevard. It's a beautiful century-old *bahay na bato* (stone house) done in the Viennese Jugendstil Art Deco style and a museum to the history of Quiapo and the Katipunan. Once you are done exploring, be sure to climb up the back of the Quiapo Church (*Halik sa Itaas*) and touch the foot of the Black Nazarene, an ebony image of Jesus on his way to Calvary. It will give you luck and assurance that you will find your way back to Quiapo again.

10. Club Mwah and Hobbit House. Drag queens and dwarves, a strange but interesting mix and a perfect recipe for a good night out in Manila. Hobbit House is an institution in Manila's music scene. Opened in 1977 by Irishman and JRR Tolkien aficionado Jim Turner, it was originally located at the corner of Remedios Street and A. Mabini before moving to its current digs further north. And true to its namesake, the place has always been run and managed by little people. But beyond the novelty of being served beer knee-side by the charming Lilliputian waitstaff, Hobbit House is home to the city's best musicians and serves amazing food. Don't miss Philippine folk legend Freddie Aguilar play on Mondays. Meanwhile, halfway across town lies the best little drag extravaganza this side of the South China Sea. Part Las Vegas sideshow, part Broadway musical, and part jeepney, Club Mwah has raised the bar in Manila when it comes to strombotic displays of, well, gayness. And despite its offbeat location, the place is rather classy. With animal prints everywhere, chandeliers, gilded mirrors, and a "psychedelic" dance floor, this diva number is definitely not a dive. The show: a mix of showstoppers, power ballads and torch songs. The crowd: a mix of Manila's perfumed set, movie stars, expats, tourists and transvestites—and those who love them. ■