Vampire Bats, White Monkeys and Blue Flashes

September 1, 2008 By David Weiss

Today marks the beginning of my second week here on Eva?s Island. It?s a tropical island located approximately 316 kilometers (about 200 miles) south of Manila and 2 kilometers off the northwest tip of Panay island in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. At one time a Southeast Asian bohemia, in recent years the island has become one of the most famous tourist destinations of the Philippines, much in the way that Negril, in Jamaica, was transformed in the late 70’s. Generally, the travelers come from China and Korea, with a handful of European visitors who also come to see the world’s most beautiful beach,“White Beach.? At sunset, we all gather on the beach to see the ”blue flash" - a brilliant streak of florescent blue light that shoots across the sky just as the sun dips below the horizon.

The island is shaped like a dog bone. It is 7 kilometers long and the narrowest spot is nearly 1 kilometer wide. Its land area is approximately 1, 083 hectares. At latest count, its inhabitants consisted of approximately 6,000 Filipino locals and a smattering of European expatriates. To the best of my knowledge, I am one of only three Americans who live on the island. Geographically speaking, the island is part of the municipality of Malay in the province of Aklan, which is located in Panay, one of a cluster of islands that constitute the central section of the Philippine archipelago. It is home to one of the largest colonies of Large ?Flying Fox? bats (Pteropus vampyrus,) in the world. With a wingspan of almost 6 feet, the bats are the largest species in the world, and while the name evokes, well, you know who, the giant bats actually eat only fruit. At sunset, the bats leave their jungle habitat and fly as far as 30 kilometers to neighboring islands in search of food. Other wildlife inhabiting the island include a rare species of white monkey, and several species of VERY large insects whose names I haven?t learned yet.

Eva?s house is on the West side of the island. The house is in the island style - open to the elements and roofed in thatched banana leaves. Red flowering hibiscus and bougainvilla vines climb the outer walls and reach into our living room, which overlooks a small blue bay. Eva and her late husband, who died from AIDS 15 years ago, designed and built the house with their own skills and help from the locals. The house also has a guest suite, and with any luck, I?ll be able to

persuade Cupcake (my HIV positive vampire ex-girlfriend) and Ginger (the ghost who lived with us in New York,) to come live with us here. I haven?t told Cupcake that the bats here only eat fruit, but the island is so stunning that I have a strong feeling that she won?t mind at all!

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