

Tropical *news*

BRINGING YOU THE LATEST NEWS
FROM OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS
AROUND THE WORLD

FEBRUARY 2007



Editorial Ramblings

There have been many times that we've thought about stopping production of our little newsletter, as so many people don't respond to our sending it out. In fact we even had one person asking us NOT to send it because he was having problems with viruses on his computer! He also went on to explain that he wasn't very computer literate! Who'd have guessed?

However, we've been very pleased to receive several appreciative e-mails from people since we brought in the new style (from the December (Christmas) edition), that it's made it much more worthwhile continuing to bash the computer keys. A big 'thank you' to all who've been in touch with your words of encouragement. It means a great deal to us.

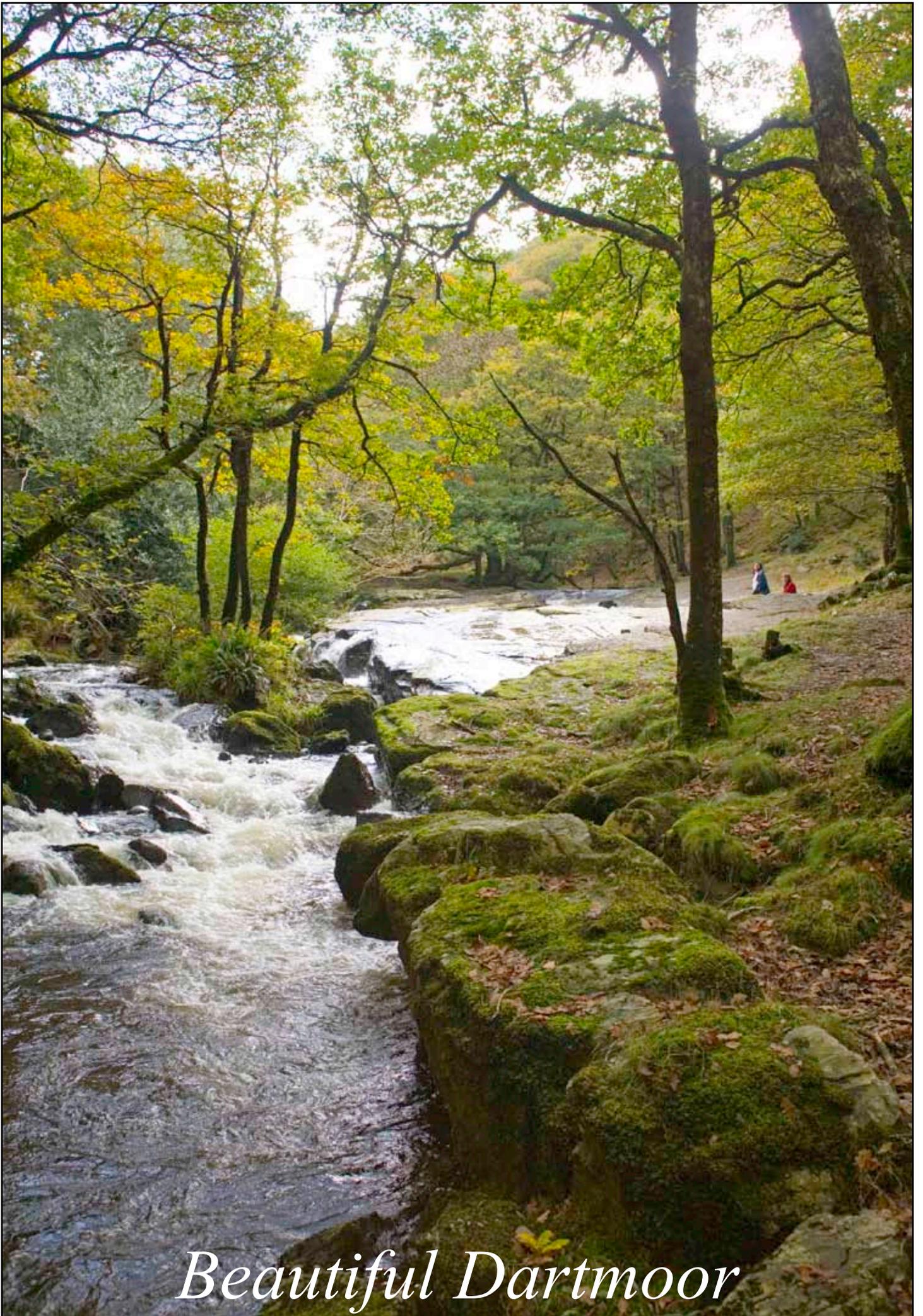
Judging from your comments, we are thrilled to know that you appreciate the photography and the large size cover photograph. Our series of '*Beautiful Dartmoor*' photographs also seems to be very popular. If you look very closely at the photograph on the next page, you will see Grace with our friend Valerie - but you'll probably need a magnifying glass! We understand that some of our readers have printed photographs from the pages and pinned them up in their home; so that really is fantastic. We've also been getting some interesting feedback on some of our scribbles of the written variety. The January 2007 edition in particular, brought forth some interesting e-mails regarding what was written in "*Alan's Reflections*". No doubt this edition will too as it likely to be a little controversial. However, all I can say is that whatever we write is a truthful account of life as we see it - wherever we are. No doubt we all see life from different perspectives and that is what makes life so interesting. We hope you will continue to enjoy our little magazine and please keep sending in your e-mails and letters. We love to hear from you.

One of the issues you may be able to help us with is that of colour. Most of you will read this magazine on your computer monitor, although a few of you receive printed editions. Whatever, we'd be most interested to know what you see!

One of the problems associated with producing anything on a computer is that of colour management. What you see on your monitor, or in your printed version, may not be the same as we see when we put the magazine together. The colour photographs that we see as perfect, with a great range of tones and good detail, even in shadow areas and nice bright colours, may not be what you see at home. We do strive to get all our photographs to be the best possible, but equipment does vary tremendously. What has brought this to mind is that even on the same equipment, with the same colour management settings, and even in the same software, a photograph can change its appearance. We set all our equipment (including digital camera) to the same colour profile; Adobe RGB (1998). This is NOT the default setting of almost anything - most equipment is set to a profile of sRGB. However, the gamut of colours available in Adobe RGB (1998) is much wider than sRGB and, as a consequence, some colours won't appear on your monitor or may appear a little dark. However, even if you change your colour profile it may not be the end of the problem. We've noticed that even on the same equipment, different software reproduces the same photograph in such a different way that you'd hardly recognise it as the same photograph! For example, we edit our photographs using Adobe Photoshop CS2. Even when we convert our camera RAW files to other formats they are very consistent - even when going from a full size 16-Bit .dng file to small image size .jpg (which is only 8 bit colour depth). However, when we view those files using ACDSee Pro Photo Manager (for example) there is a HUGE difference - even though the colour profiles of the software are the same. We've even noticed a big difference in the way some software (XnView) displays thumbnails in its browser, to the way it shows the same photograph when displayed for editing - on the same screen at the same time - both images being displayed side-by-side! For example, the cover shot of the December edition of Tropical News showed the interior of All Saints parish church in Okehampton. When we put the document together, the photograph looked perfect - even in the .pdf file format that we send you. However, when we viewed the same photograph in other software it looked dark and dismal - all the vibrant red colours and warmth of tone had been lost. Another thing that seems crazy is photographs that we've scanned don't display this same variation in display reproduction as those from the digital camera. Maybe it's the Adobe RGB (1998) colour profile that screws things up. We'd love to hear from you about this as we'd like to know if you have any problems of this nature - and how you overcame them.

Alan & Grace

Cover photograph: Carabao at work on a small farm near our home in Alaminos, Philippines.



Beautiful Dartmoor

Welcome Home, Uncle Rizal

We were SO pleased to see our Uncle Rizal in our home a few days ago (early January 2007), as it's been some years since we were together. During this time Uncle Rizal has been working with the United Nations, first in East Timor, then in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and this is the first time in six years that we've all been in the Philippines at the same time. Welcome home, Uncle.





Welcome, and Happy Birthday to Juanita



We have a new addition to the family!

Juanita (more usually known as Nené), has come to live and work with us. She celebrated her 24th birthday with us on 5 January. As you can see (*below left*), Little Lad loves taking her around on his motorcycle!

Juanita is an enthusiastic singer (loves Karaoke!), and is the first one packed and ready to go when anyone even mentions going travelling!





On the buses

Not having a car in this country provides quite a lot of entertainment. Although driving here is entertaining too, one can have just as much, if not even more fun, on the buses as in one's own car and experience first hand what travelling here is all about.

The most entertaining buses are usually those without on-board TV/video and without air-conditioning. Buses for masochists - but a lot of fun.

Management decided that we needed to go to Dagupan. Perhaps I should explain that Management is also known as Grace, my wife, Honey, Sweetie or some other endearment. Waving goodbye to Little Lad (whom we left with Mum and Nené, his nanny), we crossed the road outside our house and waited for the next bus to arrive. Timetables don't, in reality, exist in the Philippines. Everyone jokes about Filipino time, where you don't need a clock - only a calendar; and that doesn't have to be the correct year. Anyway, within a few minutes a bus lurched into sight and groaned to a halt next to where we stood. We climbed aboard the antique, over-used and under-maintained wreck (maintenance is an English word not used, or even known about, in Filipino vocabulary) and found a seat next to the only Perspex window not opaque - it must have been a new one, fitted sometime in the preceding 10 years.

The interior of the bus was a mixture, not exactly a riot, of colour. Blue, green and sea-sick green blended nicely with the painted red centre isle and the bright red plastic tulips that sprouted from a holder secured to a horizontal bar running across the width of the bus, just in front of the driver and above his head level - and which supported two large mirrors so the crew could check their hair style, make-up or any pretty young lady they fancied amongst the passengers. From a shelf at the bottom of the windscreen, like a window sill, sprouted a bunch of vivid sunflowers - also plastic.

We stopped next to the butchers shop. I use this term rather loosely as I wouldn't really wish to insult the master craftsmen butchers I'm used to seeing in this type of shop. The shop was an old, blood-soaked, wooden table parked on the side of the street next to a little concrete bus shelter. On the table were lumps of meat that, once the flies cleared, could be identified as chopped-up pig. And I do mean chopped-up. It certainly wasn't butchered. It appeared to have been chopped up by a serial killer let loose with a machete. These lumps of meat could be bought by anyone brave enough to eat it - and shoo away the flies.

On we went, the bus gradually filling with more masochistic passengers. The conductor made an attempt to fit the back rest of a nearby seat to its frame using just friction and gravity to secure it. Needless to say perhaps,



The bus to Dagupan (above) or an alternative form of public transport, the tricycle (below). There were also three or four guys inside the sidecar as well as the one sitting on the roof!



but his courageous attempt failed dismally and the errant back rest ended up on the floor from where it was later picked up and wrestled into place by three passengers who pinned it back in its place by the sheer weight of their bodies - which also prevented the loose seat cushion they were sitting on from escaping and joining in the with the same sort of fun that the back-rest had enjoyed during its brief period of freedom.

As we climbed a hill the noise from the transmission rattled louder and louder. The driver very delicately changing gear as though the linkage from lever to gearbox was somewhat fragile, like the rest of the bus. Despite his heroic efforts, the noise of clashing gears occasionally rose above the other sounds from the transmission.

Eventually the bus wheezed its way into Dagupan where I could relieve my painfully aching limbs from the torturous seats.

Alan's Reflections

How many people have you *known* who have been murdered? At a guess, I'd say not many, and probably none at all. Certainly, when living in peaceful England, I didn't know any at all. And yet here in the Philippines, a country with a reputation for non-violent, friendly and gentle people, it's a different story. As examples, and this barely scratches the surface, three of Grace's family have been murdered in a family feud. Nené's father was murdered in a drunken quarrel and the father of a former friend of mine (when I lived here for almost 4 years before going to the middle east) was murdered for (allegedly) refusing to sell his land to a local politician. When I first came here in 1997, I read a newspaper account of how a young girl was robbed and murdered in a Jeepney - for the princely sum of 30 Pisos! - almost nothing (at the time, there were 40 Pisos to one British pound). Few of the murderers seem to get caught, let alone punished. The law in this country doesn't seem to work - at least for the poor (and that is almost everyone). There are no rich guys on death row here! But there again, I suppose justice is only for the rich wherever you are. Crime is a normal way of life here. One single mother with two daughters had her home burned down - totally destroyed (I saw the remains) by (allegedly) her next door neighbour who wanted her land. She then had to rent a home for her family and he (the neighbour) took over her land. She can't afford lawyers and the police don't care, so he gets away with his crime. Grace is worried that someone else in the family will be murdered if we don't make the final payment (only a small sum) to an incompetent contractor for a job done on the house (yet to be completed after more than a year!). Shortly after writing this, Grace and I had just gone to bed. Prior to us falling asleep we heard the sounds of a fight in the neighbourhood very near our home. We just kept our heads down!

Another aspect of life here, totally unknown to me when I lived in England, is all the scrounging that goes on. People, even complete strangers, will ask me for money and are mortally offended when they don't receive any. They are even more offended if they happen to be members of the family, no matter how far distantly connected. I was explaining to the family that this just doesn't happen in my society. Even when you're down to your last penny - or worse, as I have been, one never asks anyone, not even your children or rich family members, for financial help. We had a request for money the other day (yet again). I asked Grace why this was and she said he needed the money (despite the fact that he was able to buy a new motorcycle a few months ago (from money we paid him for some land and are still awaiting the paperwork to be sorted out for the transfer - he spent the money required to

do that on the motorbike). I said to her "Would he ask us if we weren't living in the Philippines?" she said "No." "Will he die if we don't give him the money?" "No." "Then he doesn't *need* it - he only *wants* it."

Like most Filipinos, he assumes that if there is a white person around, he is rich and therefore a target to be scrounged from (or, in some cases, to be stolen from). I used to work with a Filipino teacher and discussed this with him one day. He said that although stealing wasn't good, it was OK to steal from foreigners!

There is, of course, the fact that many of the male population are unemployed - most of them because that is what they choose, as there is always work for those who want to work. I know a young man who has a family to support and absolutely refuses to find a job and provide for them - even though he has received a good education (to Bachelor's degree level). He would rather scrounge what he can from others in the family (putting a great burden on those who do work) and sit around doing nothing all day. He is even too lazy to take his eldest son to school, so the poor child doesn't receive any education (there is no compulsory education in this country - another poor reflection on this hopeless place). The same child suffers from asthma and needs a nebuliser, but his father is too lazy to go to work even to buy one of these for his son. Another man I know has six children. He told me that he could only afford to educate two of them - then he gave up his well paid, full time job, so that he could work only part time - he wanted more time 'to rest.'

Of course, they aren't all like this. Those who aren't are usually those who have left the country to work abroad - so they can send money home to support all the scroungers. As a result of this 'brain drain' (and the generosity of those who do work) there is a higher percentage of the population who are lazy than would normally be the case. There is also a higher percentage of the population who are 'bo-bo' than would normally be the case, as the clever people, who are prepared to work, have left the country.

I was explaining to Grace's mother, only this morning, that I knew a man in England who had a lazy son. He gave the son a warning that if he hadn't found a job after one month, he would be kicked out of the house. After one month of the boy continuing his lazy ways of sleeping all morning and going out to spend his welfare check on drinking with his friends later in the day, he still hadn't even looked for a job. He came home one evening after he'd been out with his friends to find all his possessions piled up in the garden and all the doors locked. It was the best thing that ever happened to him. As a result he had to find work, find a home and support himself - which he did.

One inevitably asks '*What sort of society is this?*' It is still a mystery to me even after all these years (ten) of being here and/or living with Filipino people.

Ten years ago an American colleague remarked that the biggest reflection on this country (Philippines) was to be seen when we looked out of our classroom overlooking the American Embassy on Roxas Boulevard in Manila; thousands of people, every day, queuing for hundreds of metres down the road, just to get into the embassy to get a visa so they could get out of the Philippines. His following remark was that you never saw anyone queuing outside the Philippine Embassy in Washington, trying to get out of the USA and into the Philippines!

Sadly, that situation has only got worse in the last decade. Now, apart from the even longer queues outside the USA Embassy, there are many other countries where Filipinos are trying to escape to - including the U.K. Australia, New Zealand and especially, Canada.

One, of course, must ask why this is the case. It's mainly down to money. When I first came to the Philippines, there were 40 Pisos to 1 British Pound - and people were desperate to get out even then. Now there are 96 - and it has been 106 at times. The cost of living has gone up but salaries haven't gone up to match. Grace's sisters too have joined the exodus - going to Qatar where they both now live and work. Nadia left a well paid job in a fairly senior position working for Acer computers. She worked lots of overtime and still couldn't make ends meet. Now she has a secretarial job, works far fewer hours and earns a lot more.

Our neighbour, here in Alaminos departed for Canada only this week. He will leave his family in Manila for two years until he has established himself there, then sponsor them to join him. He said it was worth the two year sacrifice to give his children a future. I hope it works for him. This situation doesn't always have a happy ending. Some years ago, the wife of a dear friend of mine emigrated to Canada for exactly the same reason as our neighbour. My friend stayed in Manila with their two delightful young daughters to whom he was (and is) devoted. After quite a short period of separation, he told me that only the girls would be going to Canada after all. His wife had made a new life in Canada without him - and wouldn't be sponsoring him to join her.

For me, living in the Philippines is like living in an enormous lunatic asylum. The incessant noise and other pollution, overall environment, bureaucracy, appalling standards of everything, frustrations and the general stupidity that exists here (common sense does NOT apply) mean I'll very pleased to get out of here myself. I'll give you a few examples of what I mean:

As part of the recruitment process for a new job, I was sent to the American Hospital in Manila for a medical examination. When I got there, there were a lot of people waiting to go into the room. When the room was

unlocked, everyone trooped in. As there were so many, I sat and waited for the queue to disperse. When there was only me and the receptionist in the room, I went to see her and introduced myself. She told me to take a numbered piece of cardboard that was hanging on the door knob. I said "Why? - I'm the only one here." She insisted that I took a number. Again I asked why, but she insisted so I humoured her and walked across to the door to get it. On returning to the counter, she took the number, put it on her desk - without so much as glancing at it, and attended to me. There was a procedure and she was going to follow it regardless - come hell or high water! Not one shred of common sense or flexibility would be tolerated!

I went to buy a loaf of bread from the baker. I queued up and told the girl what I wanted. Instead of giving it to me, she wrote my order onto a form and gave it to me. I then had to walk across the shop, queue again to pay the cashier, who stamped and signed the form and sent me back to queue yet again at the counter I'd started from. Giving in the now stamped and signed form, I was able to obtain my loaf of bread. The time wasted was unreal!

In another bakery I used to frequent, the sales girl couldn't understand why I stopped her cutting the chocolate cake into the slices I'd asked for. To her, the fact that she'd just used the same knife to cut slices of Pizza and the blade was now covered in tomato sauce was irrelevant. The concept of contamination didn't enter her head at all (the same girl, using a calculator and an electronic till, could *never* add-up the bill correctly either - ever!).

In Shakey's Pizza - if you order a set meal that includes a dessert, you'll get it ALL on the same plate - main course and dessert together!

I went with a friend to pay her electricity bill. To carry out this minor transaction required her to queue-up at three different windows - and she has to do this every month!

I went to a huge supermarket, put my shopping in a basket and went to the checkout. There were very long queues of people waiting. Spotting a supervisor, I went to complain that there were only two checkouts open and very long queues. I asked her to open some more checkouts. "We don't have enough staff, sir." was her response. So I said "I can see six staff who are standing around chatting and not working - look - over there; there (pointing)." Very reluctantly, she opened another checkout and I was served. I doubt that it stayed open for long. The week before, a Swedish man I knew was in the same situation. After a failed complaint, he dumped his basket of shopping on the floor and walked out.

I stayed for a month in a hotel. Every day I ordered the same, very simple breakfast. Every day they got it wrong!

A former acquaintance of mine, from Sweden, owns a factory

producing specialised machines for use on tankers (ships). He told me that every single machine had to be tested before being despatched. He said they usually didn't work first time as the assemblers rarely got it right and it had to go back to be corrected. They would forget to tighten a screw, or leave something out. It was normal for it to be wrong first time, even though many of the people had been doing the same job for many years. He said that in Sweden, he would only test one machine in a whole batch and rarely would there be a problem.

In the last ten years, there has been NO progress in the Philippines - only decline. Outside of Africa, there can't be too many countries around the world where this is the case. Even those other countries hit by the 'Asian Currency Crisis' some years ago, have largely recovered and are making progress. Not here. As an indicator; despite a rising population, more than 1000 hospitals have closed in the last five years. When we took our little lad to the hospital, the 'doctor' tapped his chest with a finger and declared that he had asthma! No tests - just a finger tapping! All the bright Filipinos have departed this place.

A couple of weeks ago we visited Bolinao to take some photographs. Whilst we were there we inspected a property that's for sale. It's like something you see in up-market property magazines or the home of film stars. It's on top of a high hill and the view over sea and land is breathtaking. I'm crazy about the place - I've never seen anything like it in my life. Of course, the construction is poor and it needs

money spent on the place, but the WOW! factor is fantastic (*photographs below*). We won't be buying it. Grace listed a lot of good reasons why we shouldn't and ended up by saying that she never wants to live in the Philippines again. Sad to say, not many people do - if they have the choice. In less than 110 years of independence, this is the country that the Filipino people have created for themselves. They've made such a mess of it that they now don't want to live here! As a former colleague remarked many years ago; "Filipinos must love living in shit, otherwise they wouldn't - they'd improve things." There is a thought that the three 'P's in Philippines stand for Poverty, Pollution and Prostitution. Those who do want to improve their lives just escape to other countries - they don't do anything to improve their own country, other than to support the corrupt economy with all the dollars they send home to support the scroungers. Surprisingly perhaps, the Philippine government actively encourages this 'brain-drain.' Those who do stay here just blame the government for everything but make no effort to change things either. It isn't beyond comprehension that, not too far in the future, the majority of *resident* Filipino people will be useless illiterates, unable to think for themselves (and thereby totally compliant to the will of the corrupt and exploitative leadership), living in abject poverty; the country being supported totally by the rich exploiters (making a fortune!) and the overseas contract workers.

As for me; I'm escaping too! I hope never to return.

Alan



