

World Journey from Imabari: The fourth country, Republic of Philippines

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I visited Republic of Philippines after Laos. Philippines consist of 7107 islands. The country is associated with the image of tropical islands, mango and beautiful sea. Actually I had stayed there before this trip to study English for three and half months. Two months had passed since I had left there. Studying English in Philippines is getting more and more popular these days. So I think many of you know about it. There are more than 80 languages in Philippines and Tagalog is the official language. However, English is widely used because Philippines was once a colony of America. For example, the announcement in malls is English. Teachers use English at schools. It is the second official language.

Some of you may believe that America or Canada is better than Philippines to study English. Personally though, my English improved thanks to studying in Philippines. I had studied in Japan before that. I happened to meet my teacher in Thailand after I finished studying in Philippines. He said that my English was better than before. I was glad to hear that. (I know there is still room to improve.) Studying in Philippines is more reasonable than in America or Canada. Besides, one-to-one lesson is main stream in Philippines. Originally Koreans started the English lesson business in Philippines. There are a lot of English schools run by Koreans. The school I went was also managed by Koreans. I had nothing to complain about it. (It might not be a good choice for those who don't like spicy food because most of food they serve is Korean...)

Students there were from various countries; Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan. So I could make friends from each country and learn a lot about their countries. However, there was one student from China who didn't have a good impression of Japan. He kept away from the Japanese students including me. Gradually though, he started to talk to us and have lunch with us. I believe that he hadn't had any chances to be involved with Japanese people before that. That is why he behaved that way at first. Our environment and education have a great effect on our attitudes.

Fortunately, I experienced something that I can do only in Philippines. It was whale shark watching. Oslob, the southern part of Cebu Island, is famous for wild whale sharks. Local fishermen have succeeded in feeding them so you can swim with whale sharks, snorkeling or diving. Amazingly, the probability of seeing them is 100%. Because the water is quite shallow and with high transparency, it is good for beginners. At first, we listened to a safety talk. They said you must pay a fine if you touch any of the whale sharks. If you hurt them, they may stop coming there. Of course the safety of the participants is important, too. There are about 300 kinds of sharks in the world. Only below 10% of them are ferocious. I've never heard of a whale shark attacking humans. However, ensuring safety has to be top priority. (If whale shark comes to a diver and he/she cannot avoid touching, it is an exception for the penalty.)

At last, I got on a boat with a snorkel and a mask. It was a weekend and there were a lot of boats. A few minutes later, I saw a huge shadow around the boat and instantly knew that it was a whale shark. I jumped into the water watching the whale shark, which is over 10 meters long. It was fantastic to watch it swim gracefully in the sea. What is more, it was awe-inspiring when the whale shark opened its huge mouth and engulfed fish. I could see four whale sharks in total that day. They said that how many whale sharks you can see depends on circumstances. Sometimes you can see more than ten. The cost is reasonable; 2000 yen for snorkeling, 5000 yen for diving. (The fee goes up if you book through Japanese travel agency.) You can do it reasonably if you use local buses by yourself.

After swimming with the whale sharks, I tried balut, the local specialty in Philippines. It is a boiled egg, which is just before hatching. It is between a normal egg and hatched one. Some are grotesque and others not so much. It is a lottery how far it has grown in the egg. I peel the shell of the egg, sip the soup first, which is good. The texture of the balut is like hard egg. As for the taste, it is beyond description. I have never tasted that kind of food before. It was not bad but I will never try it again because of the visual image.



Translated by Fumi Kogoe (小越二美)

