



MTS. IGLIT & BACO NATIONAL PARK

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General Information on Mindoro

Mts. Iglit & Baco National Park lies at the heart of Mindoro, an island in Southern Luzon believed to have been part of the land bridge connecting Palawan and Luzon by which some of the Philippine's ancestors migrated from mainland Asia and Borneo. Today, the island is divided into the provinces of Mindoro Oriental and Mindoro Occidental and is home to the Mangyans who have been long known to be its caretakers.

The Mangyans: stewards for time immemorial

Anthropologists have divided the Mangyans into several sub-groups: Iraya, Batangan, Hanuno'o, Alangan, Ratagnon, Tagaydan (or Tadyawan), Buhid and Pula. Some of the groups are believed to have been coastal dwellers, roaming the island at will, but have since retreated into the mountains to avoid religious conversion by migrants. Today, they inhabit the remote forest interior, and their numbers are largely unknown.

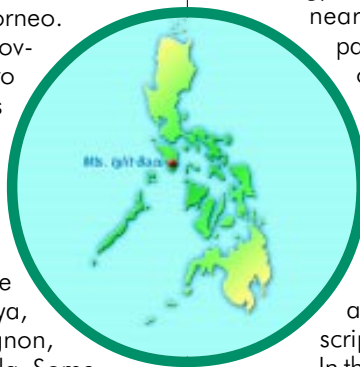
The Mangyans are traditionally nomadic within their territory and settle temporarily where food is found. Extended families set up loose clusters of bamboo huts with thatched roofs and raised floors. There are no formal leaders or social classes, and elders settle community disputes. The men usually wear a loin cloth made of pounded bark and carry a bolo and betel nut container. Women wind a coil of woven nito and rattan around their hips and fasten a piece of pounded bark to it as

a breechcloth. Both men and women chew the betel nut, causing their lips to be permanently stained red.

Mounts Iglit and Baco are home and source of food and livelihood to the *Batangan tau-buid* and the *Buhid* Mangyan. They grow crops of corn and sweet potato near their huts. Cassava, rice, bananas, papayas, avocados, squash, beans, taro, and other vegetables supplement these staples. They gather edible forest products and trap wild pigs and chickens. They also raise domestic stock.

Both tribes are distinguishable for their earthen tobacco pipe-smoking habits, and share a passion with their fellow Mangyans for the betel nut. The Buhid are said to be highly literate, writing in ancient scripts similar to the Tagbanua of Palawan.

In their contact with the lowlanders and people from the city, the Mangyans have consistently stressed their desire to maintain their cultural identity and ancestral domain. They assert their right to use resources for their physical sustenance and cultural survival.



Mounts Iglit & Baco National Park

Mts. Iglit & Baco National Park encompasses at least eight major river systems and has a rugged terrain composed of slopes, river gorges and plateaus. Approximately 75% of its land area lies in the province of Occidental Mindoro comprising the municipalities of Sablayan, Calintaan, Rizal and San Jose. The remaining 25% lies within the province of Oriental Mindoro, in the municipalities of Pinamalayan, Gloria, Bansud,

Bongabong and Mansalay. This totals to about 97,000 hectares.

The Park has the biggest remaining population of Tamaraw (*Bubalus mindorensis*). Found nowhere else in the world, it is one of the most seriously endangered large mammals, and has become a principal concern of the International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Species Survival Commission. Only 70 heads exist, based on the last survey conducted by the Protected Area Office. Because of the endangered Tamaraw, the Park was initially established as a game refuge and bird sanctuary with an area of 8,956 hectares. In 1970, the area coverage was enlarged to 75,445 hectares and converted into a national park. The Tamaraw is also the reason why the Park has been declared as an ASEAN Heritage site and is being considered as a World Heritage Site.

The diverse habitats of the National Park support various forms of wildlife. Tamaraw, Philippine Deer and Wild Pig inhabit the grasslands. The Mindoro Cloud Rat as well as a number of bird species endemic to the island such as the Mindoro Imperial Pigeon, Mindoro Scops Owl, Black-hooded Coucal, Scarlet-collared Flowerpecker and Bleeding Heart Pigeon are found in the mossy forest of the highlands and peak summits. The Park forests also harbor the endangered Jade vine and other rare plant species.

Reaching the Park

The Park is about 130 km south of Manila. It may be reached by plane and inter-island vessels from the ports of Batangas and Manila.

Traveling by Plane, Land and Sea

By plane. Air Philippines [02.8437770] and Asian Spirit [02.8403811] alternate daily in flying passengers from Manila to San Jose, Occ. Mindoro. One-way fare costs PHP1,500/person.

By land and sea. The following buses from Manila reach the Batangas Port in 3 to 4 hours. One-way fare costs PHP 90 to PHP 120/person: Tritan Bus [02.9251758] with terminals in Taft Avenue, Pasay and EDSA corner Timog Avenue, Quezon City; BLTB with terminals in Malibay St., Pasay City [02.8335501] and Ali Mall, Cubao [02.9131525]; JAM Lines in EDSA corner Monte de Piedad St., Cubao, Quezon City [02.4149925] and Buendia Avenue corner Taft Avenue, Pasay City [02.8313178].

From Batangas, Viva Shipping Lines [043.7522486 or 7231422] and Montenegro Shipping Lines [043.7232964] have boats that leave daily for the port of San Jose, Occ. Mindoro where the Park's Protected Area Office (PAO) is located. From San Jose, the Viva Shipping Lines boat sails to the port of Sablayan where another entry point to the Park is accessible. Montenegro Shipping Lines also has three trips daily from Batangas to Abra de Ilog from where the visitor can travel by land to Sablayan or San Jose. The Aboitiz Shipping Lines [02.5210240] has trips to San Jose on Mondays only. The trips last for 12 hours and cost PHP 200 (economy) to PHP 400 (one-way).

The PAO can be reached by a 15-minute tricycle ride upon arrival at the San Jose Port. From the Sablayan and Abra de Ilog ports, buses or jeeps bring the visitor to the PAO for about PHP 150/person (Sablayan to San Jose) and PHP 300/person (Abra de Ilog to San Jose).

By ship from Manila. M/V Nikki Moreta Shipping Lines [02.7216480] leaves Pier 6, South Harbor in Manila once a week and reaches San Jose in 12 to 14 hours overnight travel. One-way passenger fares cost PHP 350.00 (economy) and PHP 400.

Access routes to the Park. From the PAO, the easiest access to the Park is through a 30-40 km road to Brgy. Poypoy, Calintaan, Occ. Mindoro, where motorcycles or power-driven jeeps follow the old national highway and Anahawin River watershed. Another access point is through the Tamaraw Gene Pool Area in Sitio Canturoy, Manoot, Rizal, Occ. Mindoro. From here, one can trek through the Bugsuanga River via Mt. Wood, then across Lumintao River and finally to the Tamaraw habitat at Sitio Magawang. One can also trek through the Mangyan Alangan settlement at Kulasisi, Barangay Batong Buhay, Sablayan, Occ. Mindoro up to the Mongpong River headwaters. Another route would be to follow the Patrick River from Barangay Pag-asa, Sablayan, Occ. Mindoro to the Catherine River, which drains on the northern slope of Mt. Baco.

Access via Oriental Mindoro is through a trek through Bongabong River from Barangay San Mariano, Roxas then to the Rossana River which leads to the eastern section of the Park.

Protected Area Office (PAO)

The PAO, located at the LIUCP Bldg. in San Jose, is responsible for the administration of the Park. It provides information and services such as trail guides and camping guidelines. It also maintains a guard post at Sitio Magtangcob, Calintaan, Occ. Mindoro.

Visitors are advised to inform the PAO of their travel itinerary, number of climbers or visitors and purpose of visit a few days before intended arrival.

Local Eco-tourism Destinations and Activities

The National Park, with its pristine beauty and diverse animal and plant life, can accommodate limited eco-tourism activities such as camping, mountain climbing, bird- and Tamaraw-watching.

Tamaraw-watching. Watching Tamaraw grazing in the wild is a relaxing activity. The visitor will be spell bound by the surrounding seascape horizon on the west side.



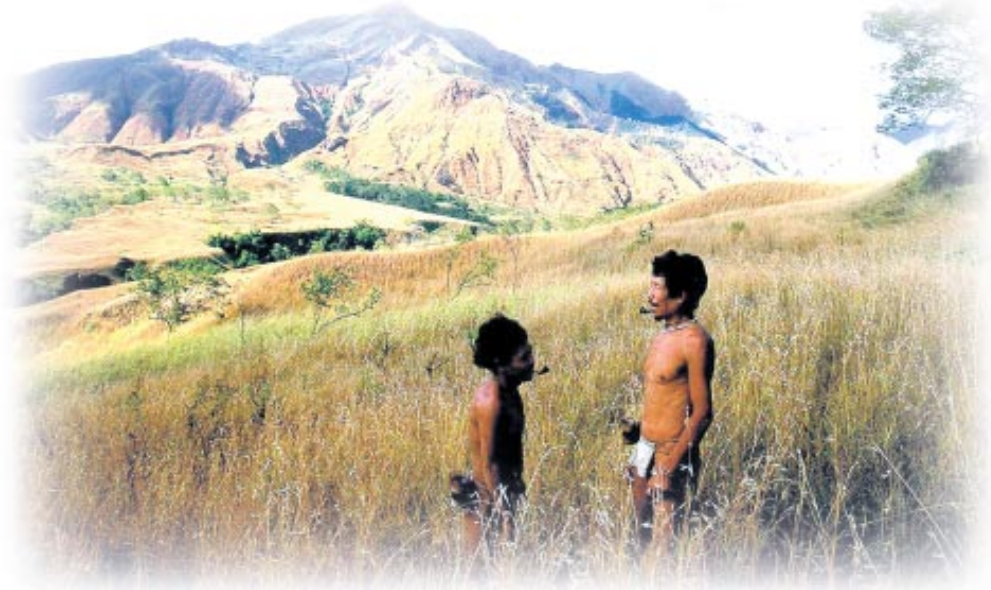
Photo courtesy of UPLB-FI

Tamaraw observation in captivity at the Gene Pool. Visitors can observe the Tamaraw breeding activities at the gene pool project in Sitio Canturoy.

Bird watching. Birdwatchers will enjoy observing the birds endemic to the Park as well as other interesting ones like the Blue Shortwing, Island Thrush *Turdus*, Blue-headed Racket-tailed Parrot, Barred Graybird, Philippine Bulbul, Mangrove Blue Flycatcher and Mindoro Canegrass Warbler.

Mountain Climbing. To climb Mt. Iglit (1,432 m a.s.l.), start a one-hour trek from Barangay Poypoy, Calintaan, Occ. Mindoro to Station I at Sitio Magtangcob. Another three-hour hike will bring you to Station II at the foot of Mt. Iglit. From here, one can start an ascent to the summit, which will take four to five hours. Climbers can descend to Station III at Magawang, where Tamaraws can be seen roaming at any time of the day. At present, there are no recorded ascents to the peak of Mt. Baco (2,488 m a.s.l.) because of inaccessibility.

There are no fixed charges for porters or guides, although a fee ranging from PHP 300 – PHP 500/day is considered fair. Aside from following the general camping guidelines, visitors are advised to observe and respect the culture and sacred sites of the Mangyans living within the area.



Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro. Sablayan is the central town of mainland Occidental Mindoro, which is located 91 km from Mamburao, and 73 km from San Jose. After a visit to Mounts Iglit and Baco National Park, one can take a 2½-hour (by jeepney or mini-bus) side trip to the many attractions in Sablayan. Sablayan is guarded by two sentinel islands, Pandan Grande and Pandan Piqueño, which serve as wave breakers and ideal hiding places for boats during typhoons.

Pandan Grande is a three-hectare islet, blessed by a lagoon and white sand beaches. The area was developed by a French national into an international beach resort, dubbed in the International Tourist Guidebook as one of the "Philippines' Top 10". The islet can be reached by a 15-minute boat ride from Sablayan Port,

and has 20 native cottages and a restaurant serving international cuisine. Scuba diving facilities and instructors are available.

Pandan Piqueño is an islet with virgin forests. Like Pandan Grande, this is an atoll with scuba diving possibilities.

Apo Reef Natural Park has an area of 15,792 ha including land and water areas. It was declared a protected area in 1996. A wonderful site for snorkeling and scuba diving, its crystal blue waters cover coral reefs teeming with a wide variety of marine life. The reef is home to 385 species of colorful marine fishes, including sharks, stingrays, mantas, tropical fish and morays, as well as 500 species of soft and branching types of hard corals. Apo Reef has three islands, namely Apo Island, Apo Menor (Binangaan Island) and Cayos del Bajo, all with white beaches. The islands are accessible by motorized banca.

Parola Park. Parola Park is situated on the hilly coastal portion of Sablayan, where the historic watchtower (parola) was established sometime in 1861. This was used by the early Sablayanons to guard against Muslim pirates who used to raid the area. Round the clock watchers would signal the people to hide whenever Muslim vistas were sighted. In 1896, the parola was equipped with bells that rung musical chimes. In later years, a church was built

but is now in ruins. The parola still stands as a historical landmark in Sablayan.

Park entrance fees

Park entrance and other similar fees are currently being discussed by the Protected Area Management Board as of this writing. Nevertheless, expect fees to be around PHP 50 for locals and US\$10 for foreigners.

Best Time to Visit

The dry months of January to May are the most appropriate time to visit the Park.

Accommodation

Rooms maintained by the Protected Area Office at Station I, Sitio Magtangcob and Station II at Sitio Iglit are available. The Office recommends a rent of PHP 100 per person per day.

Food

The eateries found in the different municipalities serve abundant fresh seafood and meat dishes. Each meal costs from PHP 40 to PHP 60.

Backpackers usually bring pre-cooked or canned food, and prepare their meals at the campsite. **S**

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