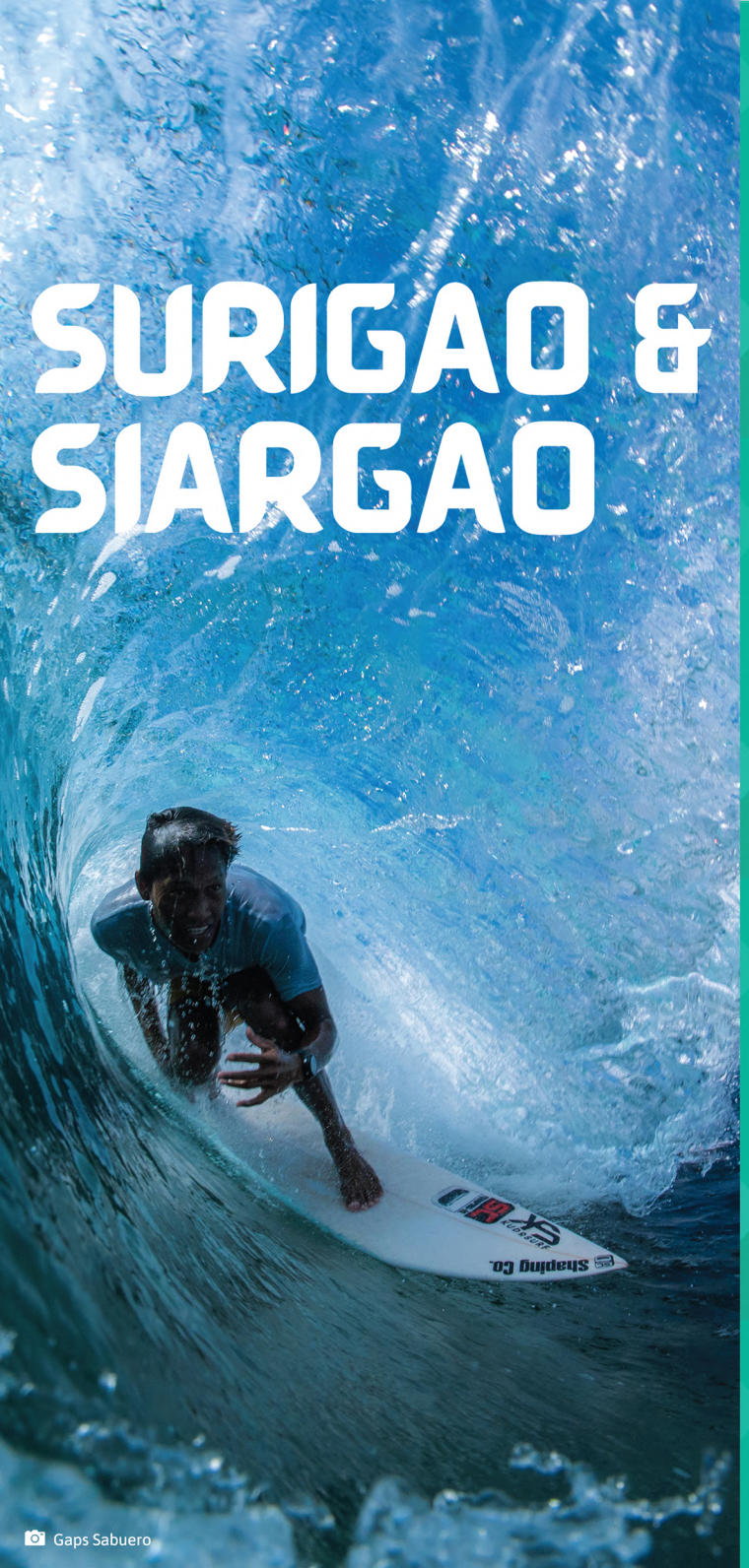
SURIGAO & SIARGAO



Gaps Sabuero

INTRODUCTION TO SURIGAO AND SIARGAO

Surigao City, provincial capital of Surigao del Norte in the northeastern part of the Philippine island group of Mindanao, was a crucial port town in the region under Spanish rule in the mid 1600s.

Fast-forward a few centuries later, it still remains its port-town duties, but mostly for travelers who come for its beaches, caves, waterfalls, whirlpools, rock formations, forests, mountain ranges, and other natural gems.

Surigao has also turned into a jumpoff point to nearby island Siargao, which in the past three decades has grown into the country's surf capital, hosting the International Siargao Surfing Cup for over 20 years now.



Tommy Schultz



TAKTAK FALLS, STA. MONICA, SIARGAO

Taktak Falls isn't exactly of lofty, powerfully gushing stock. But it is a nice reprieve from all the saltwater and a chance to get away from all the surftown hubbub; to lounge in what would feel like a cool whirlpool with equally cool cascading water overhead.



ENCHANTED RIVER

Hidden in the jungle of Hinatuan in Surigao del Sur is the recently discovered Enchanted River. Named for its piercing sapphire hue, the river, which is crystal clear even in its deepest parts, is also home to schools of fish that suddenly appear at certain times of the day.



NAKED ISLAND

True to its name, Naked Island has no trees, rocks, or shade, save for a shell-shaped tract of talcum-fine white sand gently surfacing from clear azure waters. This sunbather's wonderland is also small enough for one to run its entire circumference in minutes.



BLUE CATHEDRAL

While diving in Siargao is still at its fledgling stage, Blue Cathedral is fast becoming a hotspot for cave divers. It features a vertical tunnel through an underwater rock formation, which leads to two caverns and a chance to swim with barracudas and schools of various pelagic fish.



MAGPUPUNGKO ROCK POOL

Magpupungko is to “sit” or “squat” in the local dialect, a fitting enough coinage since most visitors sit on tiers of the rocks that embrace the clear tidal pools wrought by the Pacific Ocean water. At the center, though, the water is deep enough to dive in. Aqua shoes recommended.



GAME FISHING

Siargao’s mostly unexploited waters and proximity to one of the country’s deepest ocean trenches make it a prime spot for game fishing. Guided fishing tours may be arranged where travelers go by chartered boat to the province’s deepest parts to catch fare like 200-kilo marlin or yellow-fin tuna, among others.



BEACH

Kilometer upon kilometer stretches of beaches framed with diverse landscapes from fine white sand to pebbles to rock formations are major trademarks of the province, and there is much waterside fun to be had even for non-surfers. Some travelers come for the action; others revel in the serenity of Surigao’s unsullied seafronts.



BUCAS GRANDE

Just off the coast of Siargao, this modest island municipality is a glorious microcosm of nature’s finest; untouched beaches, flourishing reefs under clear water, lush islets, unspoilt caves, undiscovered lagoons and lakes, gorges shrouded in limestone cliffs, and a thrilling inventory of marine life and tropical flora.



CLOUD 9

Though it isn’t the only surf spot on the island, Cloud 9 put Siargao on the surfing map. Named after the chocolate bar foreign surfers purportedly used to prolifically snack on, it is world-famous for its high, thick, rumbling barrels. It’s also the site of the international Annual Siargao Surfing Cup.

FUN THINGS TO DO



Find out if you're a goofy foot

In surf lingo, a goofy foot is one who puts their right foot in front when on a surf board (natural-foot folk put their left). In short: when in the surfing capital of the Philippines, you might as well learn to surf. There are enough minor breaks in Siargao for beginners and surf lessons (with board rentals) abound in majority of the resorts.



Make friends with jellyfish

Sohoton Cove in Bucas Grande Island has a lagoon where travelers can swim along with stingless jellyfish. The jellyfish are not strictly stingless, but their sting is so mild people hardly feel it. Swimmers go into the lagoon via paddle boat so as not to contaminate the water with fuel, and are instructed not to apply sunblock as the jellyfish arez sensitive to chemicals. Also remember that jellyfish easily get dehydrated, so refrain from lifting them out of the water.



Have seafood for breakfast, lunch, and dinner

Considering the island province's location in rich open waters, an abundant supply of fresh fish and seafood like marlin, tuna, lobster, crab, and prawns is par for the course—all at a fraction of what they cost in mainland Manila. While you can have them in most restaurants, you can also get them fresh from the market and have your resort cook them for a minimal fee.



Get lost on purpose

Surigao City and Siargao have still retained their quaint small-town charm and are ripe for exploring via rental bike or motorcycle. Experience a medley of small roads and off-road trails weaving in and out of fishing villages, fields, hills, coastlines, and forests. Immerse yourself in the community and local culture by experiencing the province firsthand and outside the confines of an itinerary.



Make like your caveman forebears

The province is a spelunking paradise replete with caves, most of them largely untouched or minimally developed. Some caves are your standard cavernous great halls with intricately formed stalactites and stalagmites, while others are a network of multiple caverns and tunnels through which you have to crawl. Some are embedded in forests and mountains, while others are located seaside where you can hear the echo of waves crashing outside.

THINGS TO KNOW

How to get there

The Surigao Airport accommodates direct flights from Manila and Cebu. From the airport, you can then take a tricycle or rent a van to your destination within the city. Downtown is but three kilometers away. From Surigao City to Siargao, you can take a two- to four-hour ferry to Dapa, the main port in Siargao. Manila has flights going to Siargao's Sayak Airport via Cebu City.

How to get around

In lieu of taxi cabs are tricycles and habal-habals that can take you around Surigao City and Siargao. A tricycle ride from Sayak Airport in Siargao to General Luna, where most accommodations are, takes about an hour and a half. Habal-habals are motorcycle cabs with extended passenger benches to accommodate more than one passenger behind the driver. Both tricycles and habal-habals can take you to distant and remote points of interest for a pre-agreed fee.

Where to stay

Many travelers use Surigao City as a springboard to Siargao Island and surrounding parts that feature the best of the province's natural assets. It might be practical to stay within the downtown area near shops for last-minute provisions. Resorts in Siargao are highly concentrated in General Luna, a veritable surfers' town with lodgings that run from luxe to basic. Book accommodations and plan your itinerary well in advance.

Internet

Many resorts and expat-owned establishments have WiFi, all with different charging schemes—from free to partially free to paid; but there are also those that don't. On-the-go options are pre-paid local SIM cards, pocket WiFi devices, and USB dongles. All mobile carriers have cheap data bundle offers; but note that some areas may not have cellular signal.

Language

The official dialect is Surigaonon, a Visayan sub-cluster dialect which may have started out aboriginal but has adopted certain vocabulary from Cebuano over time due to settlers from Cebuano-speaking parts of the region. Locals are used to tourists and can transact in Tagalog and, as loyal patrons of American TV, English (in varying levels of fluency).

Currency

Philippine Peso
About Php 55 = USD 1
as of April 2023

Time zone

UTC/GMT + 08:00

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