



WORLD-WORTHY. From top: A patch of white beach at Shangri-La Mactan; the Cebu International Convention Center (CICC); and Kenneth Cobonpue furniture at the Asean Summit held at CICC last January.

FROM CEBU TO THE WORLD

On my last visit over the weekend, I chanced upon Abaca, a relatively new restaurant just down the road from the Shangri-La, whose menu rivals that of similar restaurants in Hong Kong or Singapore, but surpasses it with a setting the said restaurants surely cannot replicate. Even a restaurant by the Hong Kong harbor cannot match the view of a slice of the Mactan Channel, painted on like a canvas with the dancing branches of *talisay* trees, around which Abaca's dining patio was built under a roof of stars. In charge of marketing the restaurant, which is really just the dining outlet of the soon-to-open nine-room boutique hotel of the same name, Anna Ido Hyatt, wife of Australian chef Jason Hyatt, is a Korean who lived in Hong Kong, among other cities in the world, for many years. To her, Cebu is a dream come true. "I didn't realize how suffocating Hong Kong was until I came here," confessed this world citizen, who cited that a few days in Cebu was all it took to cure the allergies that made her 10-year-old miserable in Hong Kong for many years.

Moreover, as the educational hub of Central and Southern Philippines, Cebu prides itself with an ample supply of graduates in most fields from any of its nine universities and over 30 colleges. It is promise land not only for students but also for investors in search of skilled and efficient workforce. Our tour guide, Renz Noval Jr., a native of Bukidnon, has since he was 17 made Cebu his home and is now on his way to his dreams by sharing his love of the province with up to 20 tour groups every month.

Without a doubt, the world is welcoming Cebu with arms just as open. The growth rate of its export of such items as furniture and houseware, toys and gifts, and fashion accessories for the past five years has averaged close to 20 percent, higher than that of the Philippines and any of its other provinces. What's more, while Cebu comprises only 1.6 percent of the country's total land mass and only four percent of the total population, it is responsible for over 11 percent of total Philippine exports.

As Cebu aims for the world, more and more world-class Cebuanos are emerging, further securing Cebu's place on the world map. Fashion designer Monique Lhuillier and furniture genius Kenneth Cobonpue are only two in this growing list of celebrated names in the global register. Cebu has every reason, indeed, to want to have its own identity. In the meantime, the rest of the Philippines can share in its pride and, more important, learn to achieve it. ■