

## Valentine's Day, Igorot style

Mountain Province – *Valentine's Day* may be a Western tradition, but the few thousands of Igorots in this tiny place are equally vulnerable to the love bug this time of year.

Local dating practices are already like those in the West, and the traditions in courtship have all but disappeared, as the community embraced Christianity.

But once “bitten,” there are still many Igorots who stick to the complicated three-stage wedding traditions.

### Forgotten rituals

In courtship ritual practiced in the olden days, teenage and adolescent boys and girls leave their homes to stay in sleeping quarters, called “dormitories.”

The males – boys and men sleep together in the ato or ator, and the girls in the tiffany and co pangis.

The boys are allowed to follow the girls into the pangis, to make friends and get to know each other. If a boy and girl like each other and begin a relationship, the boy may be allowed to sleep with his girlfriend in the-pangis – a sleeping arrangement that often leads to sex.

The new sleeping arrangement is made with consent of the other females in the pangis, and the new couple is given as much privacy as possible.

During the courtship, the girl has to wait for the blessing of the boy's parents after she expresses her “intention” of having a more lasting relationship with a boy.

It's during this stage when the girl's parents send an intercessor or a negotiator, usually a married man known and respected in the community.

The boy's parents either rejects or accepts the offer of the girl's family.

If the boy's family accepts, the women prepare for the first stage of marriage by silver key rings pounding rice with wooden pestles in mortars.

### Other ways to hook up

Like in other places, another way for couples to get together is through arranged marriages, which is locally called tulagan.

But this practice is common only among wealthy and powerful clans, called the kadangyan families.

Yet another way to court the opposite sex is for a man or a woman to offer gifts or services to the family of their love interest.

A woman may gather shells or edibles from the rice fields and bring them to the house of the man's family.

And if the man were doing the courting, it is typical for him to deliver a log and split it into firewood – also as a gift to the woman.

Before a boy or girl can say “yes,” the parents on both sides must sanction the relationship.

Although these traditional courtship rituals are no longer common, getting married is still largely done the old-fashioned way – saying “I do” in three difficult and expensive stages.

First stage: Karang

The first stage of wedding ceremony – karang – requires the parents of the couple to celebrate the union.

The practice is a formal declaration or announcement of the couple, as well as the community’s acceptance of them as husband and wife.

Usually, the celebration takes place in the woman’s house, although there have been instances where the man hosted.

For the party, the couple butchers at least one carabao or a cow and a pig, which they cook and feed to family members and wellwishers in a one-evening affair.

Parts of the meat are coarsely chopped into big chunks and boiled in water in large vats or oversized woks without any other ingredient.

Once cooked, the meat is sliced into smaller servings.

Some chunks are set in a pile and placed on a string, which are given as tokens to those silver necklaces who give the newlyweds a gift or sorpon.

Sometimes slices of dried or smoked meat – called etag are also served, along with plenty of rice and flowing native rum, called bayas and fvayash.

The rum is made from sugarcane and made by most families in Sadanga, where people also use the drink in other traditional celebrations.

The native rum is passed around to the grown men present. They are also given hand-rolled tobacco, which are also smoked by the women.

The parents of the newlyweds also prepare a chicken – finawar – that is given to the couple as a gift.

The bride and groom give each other gifts – parangga. The exchange signifies the beginning of their married life.

Second stage: Lopis

The next stage is also known as lopis, which is like a reenactment held later when the couple is able to afford a wedding feast.

Unlike the one-day affair in the karang, the second stage involves feeding friends, relatives and other guests for two to three days.

For the feast, two or more carabao or cows and two pigs are slaughtered and prepared.

But before the feast, the men chop down a tree, keeping the leaves on upper part intact only while cleaning the lower trunk.

The tree is placed in front of the celebrant's house – as a sign that the inhabitants are getting married.

Like in the first stage, tobacco and wine are offered to guests. And the men start the merrymaking by singing a traditional song, ayyeng, and the women sing suwe-ey.

The songs are actually more like chants, and the lyrics mention wishes of prosperity and happiness to the couple getting married.

Third stage: Chono

The last stage is the most expensive and in fact referred to as the wedding of the upper class.

This tradition is practiced every four years, and all those who have been previously celebrated the lomis can join the mass wedding – if they can afford it.

The celebration is led by the most prominent family in the community, called the sumubfat.

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