The main reason I created this site was to provide information about pre-hispanic architecture of the Philippines. There is a lack of information on this subject and I wanted to at least start a foundation that others can build upon. I hope people will view this site as a springboard for further research in the area of Filipino Architecture and strive to keep our history and culture alive.

Before we begin to study the architecture of the Philippines, you must first understand the people and the culture from which it arose, and also their historical background. The first inhabitants of the Philippine Islands arrived between 300 and 200 B.C. They were of Malay-Polynesian descent. The people lived in groups of 30-100 families in societies known as barangay. They were mainly an agricultural and fishing people, others were nomadic. Trade with mainland Asia, especially China, was established by these people. In the 14th century, Islam was introduced.

In 1521, Magellan stumbled upon the islands in his attempt to circumnavigate the world. This was the introduction of the Philippines to the western world. What followed was 300 years of rule by the Spanish and the acceptance of Roman-Catholicism, which led to the building of many great Baroque churches. In 1898, sovereignty was given to the Philippines and rule by the United States began. The Philippines gained independence in 1946.

The climate in the Philippines is a tropical monsoon climate. The annual lowland temperature is 80 degrees F (27 degrees C). It is marked by wet and dry seasons. The dry season lasts from March to June and the wet season lasts from July and October, with the remainder of the months a mixture of both.

Ancient Filipinos lived in big settlements along sheltered bays, coastal areas, and mouths of rivers. Interior settlements were established at the headwaters and banks of rivers and their tributaries. The houses were usually constructed side by side along the river banks or seashores. This type of settlement could be found in Cebu, Leyte, Bohol, Panay, Cagayan, Manila and others. Other types of settlements included clustered communities and scattered communities on the inland hills and plains.

These ties to the water made it the most practical location for a community. The water was a major source of food like fish, shrimp, and shellfish, which were easily harvested around the communities. Transportation on and along the rivers and streams was also practical. Also, the alternative, the primary forests, were not strategically attractive environments for settlements.

These early settlements were also rather mobile and non-permanent. The slash-and-burn agriculture practiced by the Filipinos caused them to search for new land, because if the land is cultivated and harvested, secondary growths and tough grasses made it difficult to recultivate.
Philippine architecture responds to the climate. Although there are many variations, which will be discussed in the Northern and Southern Strain section of this site, generally the roof of the first Philippine houses, *nipa* huts, or *bahay kubo*, were high pitched and usually open gabled to allow for ventilation. The steeply sloping pitch also protected from the wind and rain in the typhoon season. The roof also provided wide overhang eaves, to provide shade from the hot sun.

These houses were elevated three to four meters of the ground, supported by wood or bamboo. There were usually four or more of these support posts. This aids in air circulation beneath the house. This space underneath the house, called the *silong*, can also serve as a workspace, a storage space, a granary, a pen for livestock, and one source says it once served as a place to bury relatives (?). In addition, the raised structure sits out of the flooded ground if located next to coastal or riverine areas, and also keeps small rodents and other creatures from entering the main structure. A ladder, *hagdan*, is used to enter the main structure. It could be drawn up at night or when the owners went out.

The structure was usually four-walled with *tukod* windows. These windows had swinging shades, which could be propped open during the day. There was usually one simple multi-use space on the interior. This space could be used for cooking, eating, and sleeping. Sometimes the cooking was done over an open fire built on the heap of earth in one corner or partitioned off in a space in front of the ladder. Sometimes, there was an open front porch, *pantaw* or *batalan*, where jars of water would be kept to wash dishes. This gallery also served as an anteroom or lounging area. The structure could easily be added to, should the need arise.

The materials used in the Filipino house are found near the site. Depending on the ecology of the area, the materials may differ around the Philippines. The major building materials are: bamboo (*kawayan*), rattan (*yantok*), various native woods, native palms like palma brava (*anahaw*), and *nipa* palms, cane, and cogon, a long grass, for thatching. Stone and clay are sometimes used as well.

With a bolo and the knowledge of house construction, the early Filipino could construct a hut in just a few hours. These Pre-Hispanic Filipino lowland houses had a light structure on top, and heavier materials on the bottom. This helps in resisting the earthquakes that occur in the Philippines. The light structure is also beneficial if the house was toppled by earthquakes or typhoons, leaving the occupants with little injuries.

The early Filipino house was constructed without the use of nails or pegs, which were not available. The frame was tied together with rattan or other materials.

The walls were made of bamboo and *nipa*, dried grass, wood, or siding made from splitted and pounded green bamboo halves. The materials were lashed or woven to keep the interior water tight. The floor was composed of bamboo slats (*tinilad*, *tilad*), usually placed convex sides up, that were spaced apart to increase ventilation and allow dirt to fall through. The roof was made of *nipa* shingles or *cogon* thatch.

The houses are usually constructed by the head of the family, the whole family, or the family and their friends. Most early Filipinos are capable of building their own houses and could complete them in a couple of days.
Images of pre-Hispanic Filipino houses:

Nipa
In addition to the nipa hut, houses built in the trees were another form of architecture in the Philippines. The Bagobos and Kalingas people used this type of house for protection from enemies and wild animals on the ground.

In the southern islands of the Philippines archipelago, the Moros of Mindanao had distinct architecture of their own. It was brought with them along with the Muslim religion. The datu, the chief, lives in a torogan and is a symbol of power for the Moro people. Built off the ground on posts, these posts of the torogan sat on top of rocks which served as rollers to prevent damage in an earthquake. The roof was made of palm frond thatching with three tiers. The three tiered roof symbolized the Javanese and Balinese Mt. Meru, the temple building representing the cosmic mountain in the Muslim religion. The brightly painted wood carvings under the gable of the torogan emphasized the religious and hierarchical significance of the architecture as well.