Understanding the Igorot Culture
Giving Meaning to One’s Visit in Mountain Province
‘The Dos & Don’ts, the Buts’¹
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Introduction:
This presentation intends to give tips for visitors or tourists. It is summarized in the ‘DOs’ and ‘DONTs’ to give meaning to one’s visit in Mountain Province. This presentation does not include the profile of Mountain Province, the tourist destinations which you already find in existing brochures. Rather, it gives a brief cultural background as well as the Igorots’ lifestyle as reflected in their ethnic attire, chants, dances, rituals, etc.
A. Getting to know Mountain Province:
Singing the Mountain Province Hymn composed by Sofia Bacwaden,
“Hail! Mt. Province, Hail, Oh! Hail, the land of all Mountaineers free; Majestic mountains, rivers, vale, God’s gift to all, we extol thee!” readily puts one’s mind to appreciate the beauty of nature, the handiwork of God.
The first Lang-ay Festival in 2005 was conceptualized by the people of Mountain Province initiated by the culturally-inclined Gov. Maximo B. Dalog to feature the offshoot of the significant indigenous technologies and indigenous knowledge of the Igorots. basically on the Kabunyan-inspired tapey making, the environmental-friendly technology of rice farming; and the ethnic designs in back strap weaving.
At present, the Lang-ay Festival expanded to showcase the tangible cultural heritage and intangible culture, manifesting the cultural sense of *inayan, kasiyana*, the core values, of which all other Christian values like community sharing, are anchored to. In the context of development, the concept to guide participants is encompassed in the 2007 Lang-ay theme, “Moving Forward, One Community, One Heritage” translated as “*Enfoweg tako ay sumya, Sinpangili, Gawis ay Ugali*”
B. Tips for Travelers/Tourist: DO’s, DON’Ts, BUTs

DO’s:
1. Find a place to stay to make known your presence. You can register in any of the following:
DO’s

1a. Registered Hotel/Hostel or Inns. These are available in Sagada, Bontoc, Bauko;

1b. Registered Homestays are available in Sagada, Kadaclan, Barlig, and Sabangan.
1c. Lodging houses are available in all other municipalities with minimal fees.
2. Understand the culture, be it material or tangible, immaterial or intangible

in terms of the following:

2a. Food and drinks or beverages: Every Igorot is familiar with *etag, tapey, pinikpikan, sabeng*. In most rituals, *tapey* is freely made and freely shared. As offering, it is a way of expressing the biblical phrase “All things come of thee, Oh! Lord, and of thine own have we given thee”.
Do’s

2b. Significant Sacred Places: Patpatayan, dap-ay/ato, sacred water sources, forests. Social protocols dictate that these places be revered and protected. These sacred places are believed to have spirits dwellers in control of their uses for good or bad.
2c. Priceless Heirlooms: Beads, rice wine jars (*gusi*), gongs, *solibao*, bolos or other tools. These are priceless that should be preserved and protected and not to be sold but to be passed on as inheritance.
2d. Indigenous Dances, Literature, Music and Chants:

**Literature:** The Story of Lumawig; Gatan in Search for Bangan; The Creation of Earth by Kabunyan.

**Dances:** Eagle Dance, An-aninnit, Sadngi, Ballangbang, Takik, pinanyowan, boogie, tupayya, sakuting, etc.

**Dance-Chants:** Balassibasem, Digdigwi, Dallok, etc.

**Chants:** Aya-ay for the Bontoks, Surwei, Dungyasan, Dossayan, Kulipanpan, Uggayam
3. Understand cultural practices or systems of rites commonly adhered to and its significance such as:
3a. Sipping of *tapey*. The people are prayerful and ritualistic and with a jar or glass of *tapey* when offered, they pray for peace, prosperity and abundance. Sharing *tapey* in the same cup with visitors after it had been offered to Kabunyan is a symbol of hospitality and friendship. As guest, take a sip not to offend the host but do not take much.
3.b. Observe the performance of community or family rituals for specific purposes if you have the opportunity;

- Community rituals of thanksgiving for all blessings for peace, prosperity and abundance. Ex. Lang-ay Festival, Am-ammong, begnas, chono, or dono
- Family rituals to drive or appease spirits causing illnesses. Ex. *daw-es, senga, mangmang*
- Rituals to welcome or rituals of request for a safe journey, etc.
4. Buy Mountain Province local products or ethnic costumes to show appreciation, *(tapis, g-string, crafts, woven materials, ethnic-inspired cards, frames, decors, agricultural products)*. Visit the Pasalubong Center at the Provincial Plaza in Bontoc. Your patronage will support the livelihood of our local artisans.
5. Visit the Provincial Tourism Office and the Bontoc Museum to get more information about Mountain Province and Cordillera. There are CDs, tapes, books etc. related to culture for sale.
6. Ask for more information from any Police Station or information office in any Municipal Office.

7. Share what you have and what you know. By sharing you will be blessed more and more. Kabunyan is great.
DON’Ts for Tourists:

1. Don’t litter anywhere most especially in sources of water, sacred places, etc. You could be fined for doing so. In serious offense committed, you have to provide the animals as sacrifice in the rituals to appease the spirits, aside from cash.
Don’ts

2. Don’t fish in rivers with the use of chemicals and electronic gadgets.

3. Don’t leave your things unattended (in markets, stores, busses, etc.) “In every mountain, there are snakes” just as in every community there are snatchers.
4. Don’t sell any prohibited drugs or use fake money especially in far-flung barangays because they are as clever too. Likewise do not buy Marijuana or shabu from local residents.

5. Don’t ignore signs and symbols usually found in community entry sites, in fields or in houses as they may mean ‘No Entry” in a community with local holiday (tengaw, obaya). This is still adhered to in some communities in Bontoc, Sadanga, Sagada, Besao, Tadian, Bauko, and Sabangan.
6. Don’t go to strange or sacred places like caves, thick forests, rivers, without any guide from the local community. There could be unexplained unwanted experience you may encounter.

7. Don’t buy any of the Igorot heirloom, especially if antique, like Chinese jars, gongs, beads, precious gold earrings, from underage or youth dealers without the knowledge of their elders as you might be in trouble soon.
8. Don’t sell or barter guns and other ammunitions to the community folks who may buy out of curiosity.

BUTs to guide tourists:

1. Explore the natural resources **but** do not claim them as yours.

2. Use **but** do not abuse. Use all available natural resources **but** they deserve to be protected and preserved.
Buts

3. Learn facts from the artifacts but you do not have the right to copyright.

4. Drinking tapey is sharing but could be daring if too much.
5. Learn from indigenous knowledge and indigenous technologies but acknowledge when published.

6. Visit indigenous institutions such as the dap-ay/ato/ator to observe living traditions but observe social protocols per instruction of the council of elders.

7. Live with the culture when in Igorot land but you can always introduce your culture for global assimilation.