Life-size images of Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles during the Last Supper can be found in the National Shrine of St. Joseph right at the very heart of Mandaue City. Although I have seen quite a number of Last Supper scenes in other parts of the country, this one is unique since each life-size figure is carved separately from the other. Garbed in a variety of strong colors, the images seem to come alive as each are seated on a table to complete a scene of men having dinner with their master for the last time. It was inaugurated during the quadricentennial celebration of Cebu as a diocese. The entire rendition is titled Señor de Cena although it seems that the correct term should be La Ultima Cena.
This magnificent work of art is housed in a chapel near the main altar of the church. Just below the table where the statues are arranged is a reliquary containing the relics of the apostles. Relics are fragments of a person’s bone or a part of his flesh and preserved in a metallic case for veneration. This one got me interested while looking at Tuscany Villas over the internet for that perfect holiday home. Note that the church itself is historical although only the gospel and epistle sides of the walls remain from the original. The walls of these part of the church are almost two-meters thick.

Outside the church is the town plaza and the city hall, formerly called Mandaue Presidencia, which was inaugurated on September 12, 1937.
Amidst the hubbub of human traffic and motorized vehicles at the Mandaue centro is an old house that will capture your fancy. It somewhat reminds me of another house that has been transformed into a Bed & Breakfast for backpackers who are in a constant lookout for cheap hotels. Known to have been built in 1909 it is one of the remaining early American-era houses in the city that has been remarkably well-preserved. Despite its monicker as the industrial hub of Cebu, Mandaue also has its own share of old houses and historical structures that add up to the bigger picture of Cebu as a heritage destination.
The house is so-called after its owner, Luis Cabrera, who owned a pharmaceutical business. Luis was born in 1878 and was married to Alberta Cabrera. They had seven children. The current caretaker, Alberto Cabrera, narrates that the house actually had already existed before 1909 when his grandparents got married so it must be a little more older perhaps dating back to the turn of the 20th-century.

The lower-level of the house has been transformed into a mini museum. Old furnishings that would have been disposed of and some curios that would have been stowed
away in a bodega are now neatly arranged and displayed. A particular glass display case contains some family heirlooms including the umbilical cords, preserved and embellished with ties, of the seven children of Luis and Alberta. The umbilical cords are somewhat an oddity but it is actually a practice for some old families to preserve it as a keepsake.

Another display case contains Spanish-era documents such as various deeds of sale, birth, baptismal, and confirmation records, a handwritten last will and testament of Fr. Lucio Mendoza of Mandaue in 1895 and another handwritten last will and testament of Don Luis Cabrera Sr., among others. There are also antique tables, benches and bookcases. One particular bench for example is made of solid hard wood and embellished with intricate rococo carvings.

Religious images being kept at the upper level of the house. The life-size image of San Jose (right) serves as the parish’s processional image during the annual fiesta.

More treasures await at the second floor where various religious images are displayed on top of an elongated table cum altar. The front part of the altar is generously decorated with carved floral relieves. A life-size image of St. Joseph made from pasta madera was acquired in 1914 and is Spanish in origin. It was entrusted to the family and has since been used as the parish’s processional image during the annual fiesta in honor of St. Joseph. There are also ivory images of the Nuestra Señora del
As I leave the house I signed my name in the guestbook knowing that someday I will come back again to visit this house hoping that it will still be the same remarkably well-preserved structure as it is today. Places like these give one an opportunity to connect with the past. We may not own the house nor may we be related with the owners and their ancestors but we all do share a common heritage as Cebuanos.

The Luis Cabrera Ancestral House is located in A. del Rosario Street, Barangay Guizo, Mandaue City. In Cebu City, jeepneys bound for Mandaue City are conveniently stationed at the Ayala PUV Terminal in Cebu Business Park.