

## Our Town: Boljoon

Posted: 03 Nov 2010 10:23 PM PDT



*A view of the mystical Ili.*

Some 103 kilometers down south of Cebu City is a town so steep in history that even today it still exudes an aura of its own wishing visitors to come back again to explore more. Named due to the abundance of springs of water, Boljoon, a 5th class municipality in the southeastern coast of Cebu, is a town like no other in the province. It is best known for its centuries-old stone church made more popular due to a fantastic postcard view of it when coming from the winding road of the famous *Ili*, a promontory that acts as a natural fortress thereby isolating the town from the north.



*A spring developed by then Governor Mariano Cuenco in 1933 affording residents a steady source of water for laundering clothes and other purposes.*

Visitors passing by Boljoon would usually focus their attention to the old stone church but there is more to discover as one immerses himself with the town. A day tour would not be enough and based on my experience it is better to stay overnight. Besides, there are a handful of accommodations in Boljoon and one of them is Mediong Beach Resort which is located right across the public market and just a few short walks away from the town's natural and historical treasures. The resort also provides a surreal view of the Ili at sunrise.



*Baluarte sa Fuente.*





*Details of the watchtower's parapet.*

My companions and I started our day early in the morning. After a dip at the resort's swimming pool, we decided to go in town to explore. We went first to the *Baluarte sa Fuente*, a watchtower located near the highway bridge. Although it seems that you would have to pass by private property to go there, the watchtower is still very much accessible for public viewing. A bit run-down and badly in need of a restoration, the overgrowth on the walls of the watchtower remind me of photos of certain parts of Cambodia's Angkor Wat. The design of the watchtower is not crude as compared with most watchtowers in the southern coast of Cebu. Somewhat hexagonal in form, it is made of finely-cut coral stones and has a well-conceived parapet at the top part.



*The old American-era wooden bridge that spans a man-made breach that diverted the flow of the river.  
Below this bridge are the remnants of a Spanish-era stone bridge.*

Opposite the way to the Baluarte sa Fuente at the highway is an old wooden bridge right beside the modern one which is made of concrete. This American-era bridge spans a breach that was created in the 19th-century to divert the flow of the river. Prior to creating this breach, the river used to flow towards the town thereby creating a swamp at the area where the old church stands. Diverting the river was necessary to provide more dry and flat land for the town's development and expansion. Interestingly, just below the wooden bridge are the remnants of the old Spanish-era bridge which was made of cut-stones.

Going to the old church, we passed by the public market which was fairly decent enough and then to a public spring at the back of it which was developed in the 1930s by then Governor Mariano Cuenco. A marker immortalizes Cuenco's legacy to the town. Today, the public spring is frequented mostly by locals who wish to launder their clothes with free flowing water. Also along the way are various houses owned by some historical personalities of the town.



*Dr. Dionisio Niera House, headquarters of the guerilla army during World War II.*

Walking the stretch of Patrocinio de Maria Street, the portal to the fortified church-complex of Boljoon came into sight. A product of the Augustinian Friar Julian Bermejo's determination to protect the town from slave raids in the 19th-century, some of the walls still stand along with the so-called blockhouse which was actually an armed bulwark although it is now being utilized as a belfry. Some of Fray Bermejo's works include the string of watchtowers that dot the southern coast of Cebu.





*Entrance to the fortified church-complex from Patrocinio de Maria Street.*

There is not one particular style that can best describe the old stone church of Boljoon. Dedicated to the Patronage of Mary (Patrocinio de Maria), the design of the church is an eclectic mix of styles and forms, a result of it being designed by the friars themselves instead of a schooled architect. The result however is still something that is unique, exuding a beauty of its own, one that locals can proudly call as its own.

When entering the church through the convent, one must first visit the baptistry where a classical *retablo* stands. Of all the Spanish-era churches that I've been to in Cebu, this is the first time that I saw a wooden retablo inside a baptistry. Go straight near the altar and you can spot three magnificent wooden retablos, one at the main altar and one for each of the wings of the church. Note also the flowery design of the pulpit's cupula.



*Patrocinio de Maria Church.*



*A wooden retablo at the baptistry of the church.*



A few walks northwest from the church compound will take you to the way going up the mountain where one of Fray Bermejo's watchtowers overlook the entire town. The arduous climb may set you back but with determination you can reward yourself with a very breathtaking view of the town and the rest of the Bohol strait. Explore carefully though and dress accordingly as the weeds along the way coming into contact with your skin might be itchy. Reaching the top, the watchtower comes into plain sight. If not for the overgrown grasses and weeds, the place would have been a perfect spot for a little picnic right after the demanding climb.

Now have you decided to go back to Boljoon?



*A view of the town.*

Ref.: [The Heritage of Cebu](#)