

The Red Light District of Angeles, Philippines, City of Fallen Angels

By M.J. Lloyd, Posted May 07, 2009



They like a good conversation. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/longhairthai/>

Prostitutes and Viagra vendors everywhere, Lloyd is the only guy under the age of 50 there...

As I stepped out of my hotel room door I was immediately surrounded by four hungry-eyed prostitutes. One of them, a very dark skinned Filipina girl whose father had probably been a black American soldier and whose mother was almost certainly a prostitute, grabbed my crotch with one hand and my buttocks with the other.

"I want you. You want me? I veerry good..."

She seemed hungry, and her eyes were strangely predatory. The other girls moved in on me, too, but not as aggressively, grabbing my bare, sweaty arms and asking my name and where I was from. Hash smoke and paranoia crept in on me and I began to panic that these girls had some kind of sinister agenda. I felt my side pocket to make sure I still had my wallet and keys and pushed past them to the front desk of the sadly misnamed *Hotel Paradise*. I stepped onto a porch filled with drunken old white men complaining about the heat and whores.

It was midday. The sun was unbearably hot and there was no one walking around. Across the street, two middle-aged Filipinos were leaning back on their moto-rickshaws, watching me. I drew a lot of attention from everyone, being probably the only white man under the age of 35 in the whole city. I was 19.

The black girl had followed me onto the porch and grabbed my arm this time. She cocked her head to the side and tried to look surprised as she told me:

"Hah! You Tom Cruise!"

She seemed elated with this insight and tried to rub her body against mine. I shook her off again and stepped into the street. A toothless, battered old woman approached

me and showed her hideous smile. I propelled myself down the dirty, potholed street with a foggy mind. My feet itched from the glassy, filthy, rancid dust that seemed to dig into me under the sandals. The tropical midday sun beat down on my head and cooked my scabby scalp beneath the long mangled hair. I tried to remember why I had left the hotel.

I strolled slowly down the dilapidated street. There was nothing exotic about this chaos anymore. I was merely a part of it. A construction crew was 'working' at the end of the block but nothing had changed from my first visit a few months before. The pile of dirt hadn't even moved. I climbed over it and back down to the infamous *Field's Avenue*.

Field's Avenue was the main attraction of Angeles. It was Disneyland for strange old white men dosed up on Viagra. One hundred and fifty go-go bars lined the blocks just outside of the Clark Airbase, a former US airbase. For years, the bars had serviced the needs of sailors and airmen, but now as the base was closed, they relied on 10,000's of old white men, flown in to drink and get laid.

As I passed the first bar, I was immediately waved down by a young woman in a skin tight leather dress. She smiled at me, and it was an honest smile.

"Where are you going? Come into the bar! We have lots of beautiful girls!"

I tried to think of an excuse, my mistake had been making eye contact. She grabbed me by the arm.

"C'mon! Come in! I'll introduce you to my friends! ... What's your name?"

I was heavily stoned and trying to think of a way out, but she kept pulling me. She was surprisingly strong for such a small girl. The prospect of air-conditioning in the bar hastened my surrender.

"My name's James."

"Oooo, Jaames... I like that name! C'mon, James!"

"Yeah... alright," I followed her through the front door into the main hotel area, where several old white men sat reading newspapers. They eyed me cautiously as I walked past, probably surprised to see someone from my generation in such a place.

The girl guided me into the bar, still pulling my arm, as if I was going to run away at the last minute. Eventually, after passing through a maze of doors and hallways, we came to the dark, heavily air-conditioned bar.

At least fifteen Filipinas dressed in skimpy bikinis were hanging out on the stools around the bar. There were no other men. I was directed to a chair in front of a small stage, and 6 or 7 girls ran up onto it to dance. The girl that brought me in disappeared, and a much older, fully clothed woman materialized at my side.

"Hello sir, what will you have to drink?" she asked me.

"Uh, San Mig Pale Pilsen," I replied.

The service in the bars was excellent, and the beer arrived a minute later with a napkin wrapped around the top in true Filipino style. Along with it she placed an iced glass. This would cost about US\$.60. I thanked her aristocratically.

"Well sir, do you like the girls?" she asked, motioning to the stage.

"Yeah, they're very beautiful," I replied, causing giggles among the girls.

"Yes. Which do you like?"

And there was reality. Not only was I respected despite my filth and hippie-ishness, but I could have any girl I wanted whenever I wanted- for a small fee. I scratched my itchy scalp for a moment, but declined the offer.

"I'm just here for a drink..."

The woman nodded understandingly.

"Okay," she said, then winked to the girls on the bar.

Immediately, I was surrounded by girls, climbing on my lap, kissing my neck, and massaging my crotch. I grabbed my beer and found myself deeply engaged in a conversation with one of them who complimented me on my physique and good looks.

"You like Asian girl?" she asked.

"Yeah, Asian girls are very beautiful." I replied, finding it hard to speak given the circumstances.

"You like sex wit Asian girl?"

"Haha... yeah... but... I don't have any money..."

The girls laughed believing it to be a lie, all white men obviously being rich and willing to pay for sex. She proceeded to unbutton my pants.

"You buy me drink?" she asked, pouting her lips.

My drink cost \$.60, but her drink would cost \$4, and that was how the bars really made their money. I managed to regain some of my composure for a moment, though I was still panting.

"Shit... I can't... sorry, but I just don't have any money."

She immediately jumped up and left, as did the rest of the girls. At that point, another foreign man walked in and became the center of attention. I finished my beer quickly, my heart still racing and wondering if I wasn't wrong to deny my physical instincts in such a way. I paid for my beer and left, leaving behind the calls of the girls begging me to stay.

I was blinded by the sunlight as I stepped back out into the sweltering street. The girl who had dragged me in smiled flirtingly.

"Come back tonight. I'll be here..." she said with a giggle as I launched myself down the street.

Almost immediately, the sun began burning down on me and I started sweating. It was well into the afternoon, but the heat only seemed worse after leaving the air-conditioned bar. I found myself wandering aimlessly through the side streets, fighting off hookers and taxi drivers as I went. The main trick was to avoid eye contact. Eventually, a young Filipino man stepped squarely in front of me, blocking my way forward. I had no choice but to look at him.

"Hey, you wan Viagra?" he asked, dropping his voice and indicating to me that it must be illegal.

I laughed at the idea. "I don't need it, man."

"What? Viagra? Yes you need!"

"No, man. Go sell it to one of these old fucks walking around."

"You need when you get drunk! You NEED! I have Cialis, too!"

"No."

"Cialis is better!"

"...."

He tilted his head, staring straight into my eyes.

"You need..." he didn't seem willing to let me pass and he was starting to make me think about it. "200 pesos (\$4)," he proclaimed with a broad grin.

I sighed, considering what I should do. I wondered what would happen if I did take Viagra. He smiled and produced a sample packet, fully sealed and official looking.

"Two hundred pesos, it's nothing."

Finally, I accepted, taking the money from my wallet and handing it over. He gave me the packet and I slipped it into my pocket discretely, slightly embarrassed at my most recent purchase.

I found myself tramping along in the dusty streets, still avoiding random prostitutes and street vendors as they pitched their respective services or products. The sun was finally easing off, but the residual heat and humidity left me soaked in sweat. I was starting to feel drained and exhausted.

I had a special treatment for this: Red Bull. Red Bull in the West has been weakened from the Thai version by the use of caffeine in place of more mysterious components. Red Bull in the Philippines (in all of SE Asia) is extremely powerful, and I was probably already addicted.

I stopped into a grocery store and bought two cheap, small bottles, downing the first and sipping lightly on the second as I walked back through the street, looking for somewhere to eat. I had in mind my favorite restaurant, *Rosalino's*.

It was literally a hole in the wall on the other side of the red light district, but had the best, cheapest, and safest food in town. It was always the same. The restaurant was full of fat, old white men, and they all had a young Filipina on their arms. Occasionally, there would be an older Filipina, but it was a basic law that there would never be a Filipino man or Western woman in the restaurant. Some of the men were already quite drunk and yelling at one another. I took a seat at the bar and a young Filipina waitress in a tight skirt handed me a menu with a smile. She remembered me from two months earlier when I had been there.

"Would you like the tacos again?" she asked, showing me her bright white teeth in a pleasant grin.

"Wow... you remember that? I didn't even remember that... yeah, those tacos were damn good..."

"Where did you go?" she asked.

"Over to the mainland, Thailand and Cambodia..."

"I want to go to Thailand, it is soo beautiful there, no? Do you like Thailand?"

"I guess I like the Philippines more."

"REALLY?!" she exclaimed, seeming surprised that a foreigner would say that.

"Yeah... What, you don't like the Philippines?" I asked, tongue-in-cheek.

"Well, I love my country, but it's so hard to live here. I want to go somewhere else to work and make money. I'd love to go to the United States, but it's so hard to get the visa... Maybe I will go to Dubai. There are many jobs there for waitresses... I'm just worried, you know?"

"Yeah."

"I don't want to be a prostitute. I'm afraid that if I go to Dubai I'll be a prostitute."

I could see the frustration in her eyes as she spoke to me. She was probably almost 30 years old and was obviously single and hoping to meet a foreign man who could save her from all this. The odds were not in her favor, but I said nothing, examining the menu.

"I'll have a pizza and San Mig Pale Pilsen," I finally decided.

"Okay." She scribbled on her pad and passed me the beer almost fully encased in ice.

I looked across the bar and recognized an Australian man that I had met before. He was in his mid-thirties, but worked as a drug smuggler and wore the signs of his profession in the lines on his face. I had bought hash from him the first time I visited the town, months before. I was feeling slightly hyperactive after the Red Bull fix and sort of waved to get his attention.

"Hey, what's up, man, you've been here all this time?"

He stared at me for a moment, obviously struggling to remember me through the haze of the past, but then I saw his reddish eyes lighten in the recollection.

"Oh... hey... what's up?" he was obviously completely high. "Oh... what? No... I was in Indonesia... business, you know. What have you been doing?"

"Wandering around... You're still involved in the same business?"

"Yeah, well, you've gotta make it somehow, and I'm sure as hell not going back to Oz..."

"I know what you mean... I'm going home pretty soon myself..." I sort of moaned at the idea, imagining the bleakness of March in Ohio.

My pizza finally arrived and my friend returned to his beer and sandwich. "Enjoy the pizza. It's good..." he said, nodding at my food.

After dinner, I found myself back at the *Hotel Paradise*, lying on a bare, stained mattress and smoking hash out of an aluminum foil pipe. I rested as the sun fell in the sky, wary of the looming night.

M.J Lloyd was born and raised on a small farm in rural Ohio. At the age of 18 he hit the road to Alaska with a meager savings and no plan. Over the next 2 years he wandered in search of real answers and a livable life. The journey has taken him through three continents, various loves, battles with the loneliness and insanity of the road, and extreme poverty. Though the lessons haven't been easy, he has learned much from the trail, and has reached a much happier and more peaceful understanding on the nature of his life.