

CasayForest Park

Our legacy for the future is silence, fresh air and preserved nature. A way to reconnect with yourself.

Cebu Island-Paradise in the Heart of the Philippines.

Cebu Island is approximately 300 km long and 40 km wide. It's capital city is Cebu City with a population of about 866,000 and has an international airport. The island is blessed with a mild tropical climate and is protected from tsunamis and typhoons by the neighboring islands of Bohol, Negros, Siquijor and Leyte. We live 80 km south of Cebu City on the southeast coast, between the towns of **Argao** and **Dalaguete**, only 4 km off the highway. We are easily reached by either bus or taxi as the island offers excellent public transportation.

Our Property

Our property is located directly on a 500 meter stretch of coast with lovely emerald colored seas. There are impressive 5 meter high cliffs along the coast and our beachfront is broken up by 4 beautiful, small bays that are partially covered with white sand.

Ten years ago our land was very barren without any mature trees. Since then, using many different planting techniques, we have planted and cared for over 3000 small trees, some of them being extremely rare. This has created a range of unique biotopes on our property.

Our main challenge was to overcome very harsh growing conditions, which included intense sunlight, salty sea air, and rocky ground with very little topsoil. The cliffs also suffered from an intense erosion problem. Due to the new plant growth more high quality topsoil was created, but unfortunately this was sometimes washed downhill after heavy rains. We collected this valuable soil and carried it in buckets back onto the cliffs.

The burning of any natural waste is strictly forbidden. Every dry leaf is collected and put on to large compost mounds. This has enabled us to create high quality topsoil that is now protected from erosion by the vast number of trees and lush undergrowth.

In the past large trees couldn't grow to maturity as they were regularly cut down to be used locally for timber and firewood. After a two year extensive education project, the use of information signs and posting security guards at night this practice has stopped. An undisturbed forest growth now allows for the official collection of needed wood. Additionally the soil gets replenished by normal leaf fall and tree cutting which helps create new humus.

We now have over 120 types of trees and bushes, including many types of fruit trees. For example there are 8 types of avocados, 5 types of mangoes, and 7 types of bananas. These provide us with enough fruit for family and guests. For this diversity we can thank the birds who transport seeds from afar and excrete them into the forest, creating new surprises for us. Unfortunately there isn't a natural water source, therefore we are planning to bore a well in the future.

Years ago the number of birds was countable, and even these were hunted for sport. We successfully convinced people to stop this hunting. This in combination with the growth and diversity of our forest has helped to create a wide variety of bird life. Thousands of birds can now be seen flying around, singing and twittering during the day, but also a special event at night. In rock outcroppings natural birdbaths have been created. These attract birds and encourage them to stay. Bird enthusiasts are very happily surprised to see the return of species that hadn't been seen locally for many years.

We are planning to build an enormous aviary using a net system strung over the large trees. The government is currently rescuing confiscated birds from the illegal trade market. These birds could be housed in our aviary, so that they could recuperate back to full health before being released back to their natural environment. Our hope is that these birds will stay in our region.

More and more people, including famous personalities have heard about our newly created nature park and have visited us. They have greatly enjoyed the peace and solitude, shade, clean air and wonderful beaches that we offer.

The Project –non intrusive eco-tourism helping to build a better future

- The creation of a nature park and provide employment. Furthermore improving the quality of life for our villagers and the surrounding communities.
- This is very important as we are seeing the disappearance of typical Asian social life under the influence and control of giant corporations and wealthy local families. Contributing to this negative development are the constant use of cell phones, watching commercially dominated T.V. and eating industrially produced unhealthy food. It is now considered a special treat to travel to the next town in order to have a fast food meal. Another special outing is to visit one of the many new gigantic shopping malls that are popping up all over. Window-shopping just creates more longing for poor quality, showy goods that are not really needed. Asia is fully embracing the worst of Western culture, even as the West is trying to reevaluate its value.
- So that families can provide better nutrition and that children can better learn, we pay our workers substantially more than the average pay.
- Knowledge and practical education about how to develop, protect and care for nature. This knowledge is mostly unknown and of little interest.
- Normally workers must provide their own food. We instead provide a healthy warm lunch, plus snacks and cool drinks during the workday. We feel this is the least we can do considering the hard physical work in extreme heat.
- I try through my presence here, calling on my vast past personal experiences, to offer useful suggestions to help the local people to live together harmoniously. I also offer conflict management and help with illnesses.

Meanwhile the Casay Forest Park has become well accepted, admired and respected by the local population. This is due partly to the close relationship that I and my family have built up within the local village. Even though we live outside of the village, our lifestyle is very similar to the locals. This is in stark contrast to most foreigners who tend to live in their isolated concrete villas behind barbed wire fencing.

Further Social and Cultural Facilities in Planning

- To build small guest and tree houses using local material. These houses will be built into the nature in such a way that in the future they will be “overgrown”, and therefore nearly undetectable.
- Visitors can of course enjoy the nature and sea, but they will also have the possibility to enjoy many other creative activities. Some of our planned courses include:
 - Planting and tree care and general nature planning

- Martial arts
- Chess classes and tournaments
- Tailoring, swimming, billiards etc.
- Learning musical instruments, cultural dance
- Many types of handicraft, for example pottery, basket weaving and wood carving. To build a simple yet well equipped joinery. I have already shipped many of my own carpenter's and joiner's tools, including carpenter's benches which are not found here.
- To build an original fitness concourse over hilly, forested terrain with many special obstacles, which could also be done with mountain bikes that could be rented from us.

Further Plans

- A small chapel for everyone who wants to find inner peace, also for church celebrations
- A large natural stone terrace located directly on the sea, to be used for weddings, baptisms, family gatherings etc.
- A small "healing, Yoga and meditation" center to encourage better physical and mental health
- A wellness facility with seawater and traditional Asian message
- The natural therapeutic feature adds a special relevance to our nature park
- An attractive open fitness center with training equipment and a sea view
- Sale of our own fruit and medicinal plants
We already grow some plants and in the future will increase the variety.
- A stage under the trees for our cultural program of theatre concerts and dance
- A project for orphans and city street children (I've already been working on this for 18 years), carried out naturally with loving and professional care
We offer many creative activities. In general the children and teen-agers can find and try out new life perspectives, that are not influenced by mass marketing advertising.
- Local hospitals will be able to regularly offer patients the possibility to spend relaxing and rejuvenating time with trained personnel in our forest and sea
- Schools, students and all interested people will be welcome to study the nature and conduct their own projects
- There will be no usual forms of advertising such as Facebook and posters, instead we will rely only on word of mouth. This will enable us to better honor our basic convictions and project goals. Mass tourism is not our goal and would be harmful to our park. We will still be able to host groups and tour buses, also with overnight accommodation.

Plans for the distant future

- We have already been protecting our marine world for 9 years, and have seen an increase in new coral growth. We plan to have a region of protected sea, which can also be used by conscientious divers.
- Our property offers sufficient possibilities for small restaurants with original ideas. Ideally we would incorporate the cooking traditions of different countries, and the staff could wear traditional clothing, while traditional music could be added for special atmosphere.
- Hosting romantic full moon parties. Also disco with moderate volume held under the colorfully lighted trees offering the possibility to enjoy dancing under the stars with a lovely night view of the sea.

I hope that guests will soon be able to stay overnight with us. Reliable people also as entrepreneurs are welcome to join our project with their motivation and experience to help create something special. Experts will be needed, naturally with payment. The possibilities we offer are truly boundless.

Angas/Casay-Dalaguete—May 2016

Sittich v. Berlepsch (Agricultural and forestry engineer)