

The Crow

Into the Heart of Paete, The Philippine Carving Capital

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Students of Grades 11 and 12, as early as 5:00 AM, filled the hallways of the school. They paced about in anticipation of the first field trip of the year, which would bring us to a number of places: the carving capital of the Philippines: Paete, Laguna, up the mountains to Pililla, Rizal, and a quaint stop-over at the humble Kawayan Farm Restaurant before embarking on the journey home.

At 6:00 AM, the students piled into the buses, scrambling to be with their friends. The bus brimmed with life as they settled into their places, and ID cards were handed out. Shortly after the elbow-to-elbow commotion in the buses, the students calmed as the 2-hour drive to Paete began. A serene and slow coast along the highway, accompanied by the soft mumbles of students admiring the scenery as the sun rose over us. After what felt to be a brief moment, we stopped; we had arrived at our destination, the town center of Paete, Laguna. Students stretched their legs, slowly emptying the bus as we were ushered into the first attraction: an ancient and beautiful Roman Catholic church of San Santiago Apostol. Founded a little more than 400 years ago and more commonly known as the Church

Photo: Alejandro Encabo





of Paete, it was built by hands long gone and filled with art by artists both named and unnamed, their pieces living on despite their age and wear.

Each artwork, from the murals to the hand-carved sculptures, story and history, were beautifully narrated by the members of the church, giving us a glimpse of what it would be like to be an artist during such a time, where poverty ruled over

the town, which had the artists painting with brushes made of cat fur and pigments mixed with volcanic ash. **Photo: Arkin Cruz**

The history of the cathedral is not the only story told; the history of the town of Paete is also significant. The town's name comes from the Tagalog word "paet," which means "chisel." This name originated from a misunderstanding between a Franciscan priest and the diligent local residents. When the priest asked the natives for the name of their town,



they mistook his question for an inquiry about the tool they were using to carve, which is called "paet" in Tagalog, or "chisel" in English. This confusion led to the town being named Paete, in contrast to other towns whose names honor Catholic saints.

After the lovely history lesson, we moved to the next building, the municipal hall, full of wood carvings of saints and angels. To us, it is a trinket, a neat artwork, but to them, it is their livelihood. We, as students, must understand the importance of these sculptures to the culture and life of the people of Paete.

Eventually, we were made to regroup in the town center, so we could be guided to a stage.

surrounding a single man with his tools and a block of ice, slowly melting in the daylight, and with speed and precision the sculptor began carving out the ice, slowly transforming it into an eagle. The



Photo: Arriane Tipon

students watched on, staring intently despite the heat, collectively in awe at the craftsmanship of the locals, whose talent and prowess were slowly revealed to us with every strike at the ice. Moments such as that one were a warm reminder of the things and people that lie outside what is beyond. The intricacies and rich layers of humanity within the local community run deep, like roots. As students, it is a privilege to be given the opportunity to witness the craft that has been passed on through lineages of artisans who have used their medium as a livelihood and a means to express themselves.

Be it an eagle of ice, or the Lord in a plank of *Kamagong*, each strike of the chisel is generations of experience being rung into the material.

After wandering, we returned to the municipal hall to attend a lecture by DTI on business. It discussed the ins and outs of regulations surrounding the development and registration of a business. The legal parameters of business include the requirement of registration, the singularity of a brand under copyright law, and other nuances that an aspiring business owner must keep in mind in order to legally and properly run a business. They also discussed the entrepreneurial mindset and its difference from the businessman's mindset.



Photo: Arkin Cruz

We left Paete behind us at 1:00 PM to begin our drive to Kawayan Restaurant. On the way, we stopped at the Pililla electric turbines. One must sometimes take a moment to marvel at the scale at which man operates in the modern world. We now create machines leagues taller than we could ever be, and we use them to power

our minuscule homes, numbering in the millions. After some much-needed sightseeing, we finally headed to our last destination, Kawayan Farm Restaurant, to enjoy a nice meal with our classmates and friends over scenic greenery in the typical bahay-kubo, a perfect ending to our tour.

Hours passed at the small hillside restaurant. The scattered laughter and the thick air that joy left behind filled the venue, and left a trail as we prepared to begin the journey back to school. What turned out to be a quiet ride home, full of tuckered-out students, topped off a day that will resonate in moments of silence, particularly towards the end of the school year. In the same way that the sun rose above us on the way to Paete, it sank beneath our feet before our very eyes as we made our way back, the orange light leaking through the curtains as if mimicking the warmth that we felt after such a trip. We arrived at school at about dinner time, and shortly after, we all went home, surely with a sense of relief and wonder. This trip was a strong reminder that our history, culture, and heritage are incredibly rich, and it is equally as important to be able to witness it.

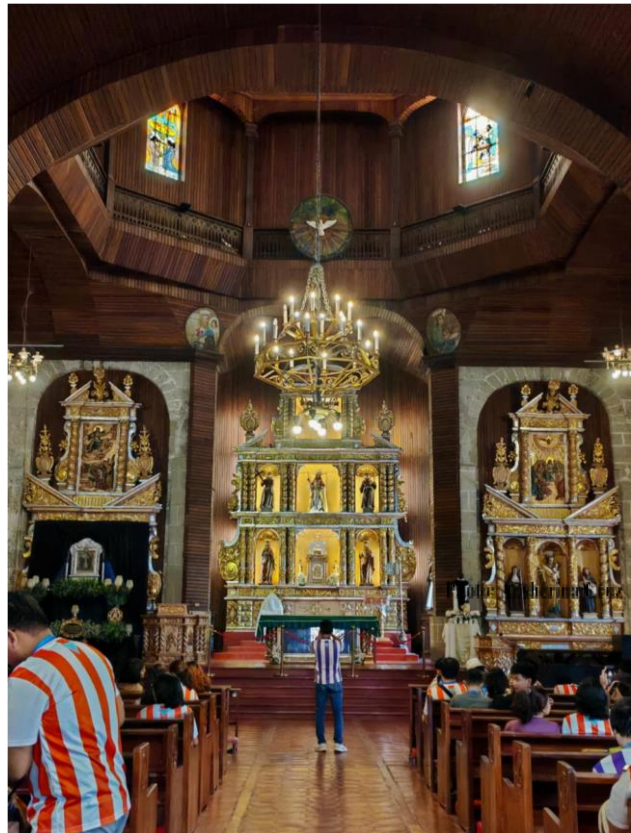


Photo: Alejandro Encabo