

The Altered-Native Guide to the B-Side: Baguio and Back in 30 Hours

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It is the climate that makes Baguio a perfect target for tourists tired of the metropolitan heat but not the metropolitan life. You can go to the mall and drink your tall cup of franchised coffee in 11 degree Centigrade cold, wear your thick sweaters and leather jackets and think of snow.

The city is a giant crispier. Vegetables, fruits, fish and meat are fresh to the nth degree.

Tourists can enjoy walking in its numerous well-trodden parks and sub-parks (so there they are, in large clusters of kitchy pompom bonnets, staring at hoards of other tourists walk past).

A typical Baguio vacation is about the strawberries and the ukay-ukay. Even about the visit to the latest SM Baguio mall (yes, everyone wants to know what walking in a mall with natural air-conditioning is like.)

But if you are a B-side traveller, an altered-native, you want, not more, but something else.

Warning: This is not for the faint-hearted. Sleep is optional. You can come straight from work or school or a bar, or even straight from the depths of some insomniac whim and do this. A change of clothes is optional. A toothbrush and some toothpaste you can get

anywhere. Bring a book like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* or Pablo Neruda's *Machu Picchu* to set the scene. Any Jeff Buckley tragic offering, ethereal Enya, irie rasta Bob Marley to set the sound. Bus tickets are not more that four hundred pesos. Every cab ride from anywhere to anywhere in Baguio is at most only forty pesos. The trick is don't think. Just do.

1. Ride Sally Ride!

Take the Friday midnight bus from the Victory Liner Station in Cubao. It is the closest to the North Express Way and you don't have to go through the hassle of the Manila traffic jam caused by the metro party crowd on their way to the various manila hot spots. Manila is hot, hot, hot and you want to play it quiet and cool. Always request for a window seat and enjoy the view of Manila melting away into the vast night road ahead.

Trust the station with its humble beginnings after the Second World War. Victory Liner actually came from that exclamation "Victory Joe!". And because the founder was a pre-war mechanic, Mr. Jose Hernandez Sr., trust that the seats and the spacing between them are comfortable for the traveller of long distances. This will be the only time you will get some shut-eye. So rest up. You've got six hours of dreaming to do.

2. A Rhinestone Cowboy at Holland Bakery

"Like a rhinestone cowboy riding out on a horse in a star-spangled rodeo..." shake Manila out of your hair by taking a cab from the terminal to the end of Lakandula Street and sit on one of those old wooden bar stools in the Holland Bakery where all the Baguio cowboys hang out. This is downtown Baguio, rough country at night known for its various cowboy fights but with honest quiet early mornings where you can observe the hard working market vendor and trucker Baguio come alive.