

# Soloviento & Manila Kiteboarding School: Calm, Cool, and Connected

Text by Timothy Jay Ibay  
Photos by Reu Dawner Flores



In this country of over 7,000 islands, with tropical weather enjoyed more than three quarters of the year, it's easy to fall in love with the sun, sand, and sea. And rightfully so, with the Philippines peppered with a variety of pristine beaches, there's a slice of paradise out there for you, whatever type of beach you may fancy.

But in this nation that claims to be "more fun," your aquatic frolicking options aren't limited to the seas. Recently, *Expat* met with a group of people who've found quite the alternative that mixes well with their sense for adventure, taste for still

waters, and an affinity for the wind. Nestled beyond the ridges and atop the hills of Cavinti, Laguna is the man-made Caliraya Lake—created by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in the late 30s after the construction of the Caliraya Dam, which served as a water reservoir for generating hydroelectric power in Southern Luzon. The lake was rediscovered in the 60s and has since become a haven for water sports and outdoor recreation.

This group of watersports enthusiasts has recently taken a slice of this area and turned into their own little sailing

playground. Soloviento part owner Art Palacios shares, "We've been going to this place called Caliraya Surf Camp for over 25 years. So my wife and I were talking, and we said that if ever we were going to own a place around here, I think this is the property." But Palacios and company didn't know who the owner was, so they continued going to Surf Camp, enjoying their windsurfing, fishing, and jolly good times with friends, even though it was a place that lacked the most basic of amenities like electricity and a proper bathroom. When Palacios and his friends finally got the property where Soloviento currently sits, they quickly addressed their



basic needs, along with their yearning for their own watersports haven.

Palacios shares that there are two ways to look at the story behind the name of Soloviento—putting together the two Spanish words, it means "nothing but wind," you could also look at it as "sol o viento," or "sun or wind." Whichever you prefer, though, is exactly spot on. Perched high on the mountain range of Sierra Madre, Soloviento is 1,200 feet above sea level and is just a few kilometers away from the Pacific Ocean. The trade winds that regularly ply the area awaken the still waters of Caliraya Lake and transform the tranquil scene into a playground for the vibrant kites and sails of its boarders. As one of the windiest spots in the country, Caliraya Lake's flat waters is ideal for windsurfers and kiteboarders alike, throw in the calmness and sense of privacy that subtly lures you in, and you've got the perfect getaway just a two and a half hour drive from Makati.

#### Learn to Hang-out

Soloviento is also home to Manila Kiteboarding School, an IKO (International Kiteboarding Organization) certified training center that offers one of the most comprehensive kiteboarding lessons in the country. The school offers four types of lessons for those looking to learn the intricacies of shredding the waters while



hanging on to their kites. The full course takes 3-4 days (or 9-12 hours depending on wind conditions), and takes you from the introduction to learning how to fly a training kite, to learning how to fly the actual kite, to controlling your kite and learning water skills, to board skills, to free riding. Once you complete the full course, which strictly adheres to the IKO standards, you're given an ID that makes you a licensed kiter, and the incredible freedom and thrill of being dragged by the wind atop your board that kiting entails. There are also shorter courses for both newbies and intermediate kites that last between 1.5 hours to 8 hours.

Manila Kiteboarding School founder and IKO Level 2 certified instructor Jay Ortiz curiously began his love affair with the water deep under it. An avid diver for over 10 years, he once ran a dive resort in Anilao, Batangas. His transition from deep into the waters to high above it began when he saw a lady windsurfer overtake their speedboat while on their way to a dive spot. "I was instantly amazed by windsurfing," Ortiz shares. He learned the sport, and watched a windsurfing competition, where his mind would be blown anew. Recalls Ortiz, "There were also kiteboarders at the competition, and my friend convinced me

to learn that sport as well." It turned out to be wise advice. A year after getting certified as a kiter, he was joining local competitions and a few years later, in 2012, he won a Kite Tour Asia course-racing event, and became sponsored by top kiting brand Cabrinha.

The Soloviento and Manila Kiteboarding School partnership is magic. There's the serenity of nature, and the thrill of both kiteboarding and windsurfing. It's a sublime view of the lake, and when the winds tune in to restore harmonic chaos, it's a view you want to be a part of. ☐

# EXPAT PICKS

Interviews by Richard A. Ramos

What's the big change that you want to see for the Philippines in 2013?



**Congressman Al Francis Bichara**  
Representative, 2nd District of Albay  
Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations

More employment. Foreign direct investors to be more or less be active. We don't have any investments now in the provinces or those outside of Manila. That is why there are more overseas Filipino workers now. More investments mean more employment.



**Santanina Tillah Rasul**  
Former Senator and NGO (Magbasa Kita Foundation) chairperson

It's the implementation of law and order. I want the law enforcers do their job and the citizenry to also bear responsibility. In addition, I come from Sulu. I want to maintain, if not restore, peace and order there in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.



**Tony Aquino**  
President, Ayala Land Corp.

I want to see continuous progress and business deals in the Philippines so lots of opportunities await Filipinos as well as visitors.



**Paniti Uthairat**  
Department of Int'l Trade Promotion  
Ministry of Commerce-Thailand

As members of the Association of Southeast Nations or ASEAN, we want to have more cooperation between the Thais and Filipinos in every aspect possible. On a global scale, my views are similar to the ASEAN—Equality of people, well-being, and concern for the environment.