



Luxury by the sea

In Kandaya Resort, writer Vic S. Sevilla and photographer Henry Ferrer discover a stunning place for a getaway in a hidden paradise in northern Cebu

Like a jagged knife, the island of Cebu pokes its northern point upward, nearly stabbing the coast of northern Leyte. On its tip lies the seldom heard, and even more seldom visited, municipality of Daanbantayan. Basking under the tropical sun and caressed by the gentle rise and ebb of the Visayan Sea, this comparatively serene side of vibrant Cebu is slowly coming into its own – thanks to the presence of blonde sandy beaches lacing its shores. Foremost of these is found in Kandaya Resort, a gem of a destination hidden in lush gardens and tropical foliage, and hemmed by the blue sea in its northern flank.

Of legends and luxury

Kandaya comes from the term “kang Daya,” meaning “Daya’s place.” According to an oft-told tale, Datu Daya was a legendary tribal chief of an early Malay settlement in what is now known as Daanbantayan. The new settlers cleared the surrounding forests to establish a progressive community. Jutting out into the sea lane between Leyte and Negros islands, Daanbantayan became a bustling trading port.

Its location facing the open sea, however, also made it vulnerable to marauding Moro pirates who frequently attacked the village. They pillaged the village and abducted women and children. Consequently, Datu Daya had a bantayan or watchtower, constructed to help warn the village of coming pirates and give the warriors time to defend the town. Datu Daya was thus idolized for his deed.

Kandaya continues on. On our visit, I got acquainted with the new Kandaya – a resort of legendary luxury. Laid out on seven hectares of landscaped gardens, Kandaya Resort is built with utmost respect for the natural surroundings. Pocket gardens of trees, palms, grass, tropical ornamentals and colorful blooms lent coolness to the ambience despite the blazing sun, as balmy breezes blew from the sea.

Dominating the landscape is a two-storey complex of a simple linear style, which houses eight luxurious suites. The off-white walls are marked by interjections of colorful abstract paintings made by the owners’ daughter, visual artist and designer Arlen de Guzman. The idea, it seemed, was to create a synergy between modern and traditional styles by combining Filipino craftsmanship and interiors with modern architecture.

“The owners wanted to showcase contemporary Filipino design without going too contemporary or too ethnic. Each room is designed to encompass modern luxury comforts with warm tones and subtle Filipino heritage,” explains the resort’s general manager, the affable Fritz Sommerau.

Fronting this sleek structure is a large, rectangular infinity pool facing the



sea where sun worshipers repose in the light and take occasional laps, and children shriek in delight at the coolness of the water. Lining the expansive and immaculate breakwater are oversized orbit love seats that look more like modern sculptures than conventional lounges, exquisite examples of functional art.

Radiating from the west side of the building are 22 handsome villas with private gardens that are veritable homes of supreme beauty and comfort. I had the rare pleasure of living in one the villas during my stay, and the experience was one of exquisite indulgence. The pod-shaped bathtub overlooks a quiet garden of bamboo trees and flowering shrubs. And my large bed faced a glass, floor-to-ceiling sliding door that opens into my own infinity pool in a mosaic of blue tiles, and a view of the beach and sea. Outside, hanging from the Indian almond trees are enormous swing lounges: a tempting invitation to meditate amid the peace and quiet, or drink in the allure of the crystal blue sea while the soft murmur of the waves lulls one into an undisturbed nap.

The Kandaya sea

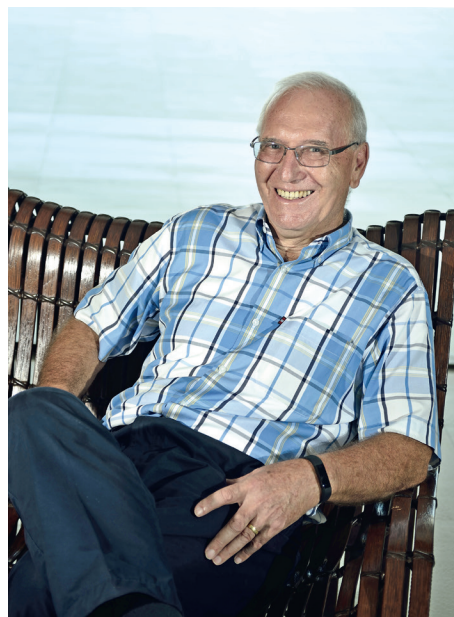
While the accommodations and the facilities offer superb amenities, the heart of Kandaya Resort remains to be the sea, caressing its sandy beach. It's colors provide an ever changing backdrop that certainly cast its spell during my brief but memorable stay. It's a palette of varying shades of blue at midday, lending coolness when the sun takes control of the sky. At dawn or at dusk, it's a mirror of colors – of molten gold, intense pinks, purple and indigo – when the sun is rising or setting in the horizon.

At Kandaya's famed beach, one may dive into the clear waters of the sea and swim a few laps, or simply sit on the sand and commune quietly with nature and with one's inner self. Beachcombing may acquaint one with a variety of sea creatures that call the water's edge their home. The more adventurous, however, may enjoy any of the watersports activities such as the banana boat and flying fish rides, jet skiing, hobie cat sailing, or taking rides by pedal boats and paddle boards. I've also seen kayaks slicing the serene waters, gliding gracefully between sea and sky.

On our second day, Michelle Lawrence, the resort's soft-spoken and gracious operations manager, took us to a day tour of Kandaya Resort's private beach on Malapascua Island. Here, the water takes on an intense turquoise hue and the sand is powdery white. One may snorkel or dive at the famous Coral Garden and swim with gentle thresher sharks, or witness the courtship and coupling of colorful parrot fish. Later, under a white beach umbrella and the shade of towering coconut trees, we lunched on the sandy shore – devouring grilled seafood, crisp salads and fresh fruits with gusto.

Opposite page: (From top to bottom) Michelle Lawrence, Kandaya Resort's operations manager and trained horse riding instructor, takes Stardust for a walk. A wooden playhouse at Kids' Corner encourages children to play outdoors. The rooms at Kandaya echo subtle elegance with wide windows that open to magnificent views. Kandaya's large infinity pool. This page: (From top to bottom) Under the shade of lush trees, the visitor may rest and snack. The private pool in one of the villas overlooks the blue Visayan Sea. A large Indian almond tree gives shade to the lounge chairs by the beach. The rooms are expansive, with wooden details and earth tones to give a homey appeal.

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The heart of
Kandaya Resort
remains the sea,
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Nature rules

While a majority of resorts and hotels take the well-being of the environment into consideration in many aspects of their operations, Kandaya Resort goes further in taking an active involvement in ensuring sustainability and lesser carbon footprint.

Adjacent to the resort is another seven hectares of land planted with coconuts, and incorporates a compost and organic garden called “Hardin ni Milagros” (Milagros’ Garden). Here, the resort grows its own vegetables, salad greens, fruits, herbs and spices. “The water well is the core of our organic garden operation. Of course, over the past two years, we have expanded and we still continue to do so, in order to offer our guest the freshest, pesticide- and chemical-free, organically-grown salads, fruits and vegetables,” Sommerau informed us.

Beside this is Kuwadra, Kandaya’s spacious riding facility where one can learn horseback riding and kids can help groom the resort’s ponies. In the stable are six magnificent horses, which include a chestnut colored quarter horse named Kingford, the beautifully speckled Anglo-Arabian named Stardust, and the spirited bay Andalusian called Vinas. Meanwhile, the Pets’ Corner is a sanctuary of pets and domestic animals (lovebirds, cockatiels, ducks, turkeys, chickens, goats and hamsters) where children can get their first introduction to animal life and help develop in them a love for nature.

The food at Kandaya also carries out the management’s commitment to the environment. Because the resort grows many of its ingredients, food in its dining outlet, Kusina Restaurant & Bar, retains much of the freshness, flavor and nutritional value of vegetables, fruits and herbs. “The



concept of ‘farm-to-table’ defines the culinary process we use at Kusina,” says chef Jose Gerardo Magsino. “As much as possible, we try to maintain the natural flavors of the ingredients in the food we serve. Ingredients that we cannot grow here, we buy from local reliable suppliers – farmers and fishermen – as a way of supporting their livelihood.”

World-class Filipino craftsmanship combined with modern amenities, first-rate service infused with traditional hospitality, the spellbinding beauty of nature punctuated by sleek edifices – Kandaya is a melding of the opposites into one harmonious union. This is best exemplified by the rising and setting of the heavenly bodies in the sky. “Picture this: at our Kusina Restaurant & Bar you can sit al fresco at the table, enjoy your breakfast and watch the sun come up in the morning. On the same spot, you can turn your chair by 180 degrees and watch the sun go down in the evening,” Sommerau pointed out. In Kandaya, every guest leaves with the gratified feeling of having enjoyed and experienced the best of both worlds.



Opposite page: (From top to bottom) Kandaya Resort offers sunset cruises for wine and dining in the golden glow of the setting sun. Kandaya’s GM Mr. Fritz Sommerau. Kusina Restaurant & Bar serves a delectable line-up of treat, among them, Seared Tuna with Passion Fruit Vinaigrette, Grilled Chicken with Fresh Garden Herb Salad and Mangoes, and Steamed Grouper with Tarragon Coulis. The boutique near the lobby sells premium items for a stylish stay at the resort. Kandaya’s warm service and hospitable staff have won such coveted awards as Sun Star’s Best Destination 2017, 2018 Trip Advisor’s Travelers’ Choice, and Booking.com’s Guest Review Awards 2017. This page: (Top to bottom) The large pool in a mosaic of blue tiles invites one to swim. At night, Kusina’s bar makes for a perfect after-dinner hang out for wines and spirits. Sky and sea converge into one beautiful view.