



MT. PULAG

NATIONAL PARK

► By JOJI BALCITA AND JIMSON SOLATRE

General Information

Rising to 2,922 meters above sea level, Mt. Pulag is the highest peak in the island of Luzon and the second highest in the Philippines. The Park covers 11,500 hectares and lies along the Grand Cordillera Central Mountain Ranges, encompassing portions of the provinces of Benguet, Ifugao and Nueva Vizcaya.

The summit of Mt. Pulag is covered with grass and dwarf bamboo plants. At lower elevations, the mountainside has a mossy forest veiled with fog, and full of ferns, lichens and moss. Below this is the pine forest growing on barren, rocky slopes. Falls, rivers and small lakes mark the area.

The Park has a large diversity of flora and fauna, many of which are endemic to the mountain. Its wildlife includes threatened mammals such as the Philippine Brown Deer, Northern Luzon Giant Cloud Rat and the Luzon Pygmy Fruit Bat. One can also find several orchid species some of which are possibly endemic to Mt. Pulag, and other rare flora such as the pitcher plant.

Indigenous communities living in the area are the Ibaloi, Kalanguya, Kankana-eyes and Karaos who, with their rites and traditions, regard the mountain as a sacred place. They have a rich folklore about ancestral spirits inhabiting trees, lakes and mountains.

Agriculture, both subsistence and market-oriented, is their major livelihood. Crops grown include rice, cabbage, potato, carrot, beans, snow peas, tomato, lettuce and sweet potato.

Reaching the Park

Metro Manila – Baguio City

Partas, Dangwa, Dagupan and Victory Liner buses

stationed in Manila leave for Baguio every hour; the ride takes about six to seven hours. Prices range from P250 to P270 per person.

In Metro Manila, Victory Liner has stations at Caloocan City [02.3611506 or 3611514]; Pasay City [02.8330293 or 8335019] and Cubao, Quezon City [02.9213296].

Dangwa Bus terminal [02.7312859] is located at Dimasalang St., Manila and Aurora Boulevard, Quezon City.

Dagupan Bus terminal [02.9296123] is located at EDSA corner New York St., Cubao, Quezon City.

Partas Transportation Inc [02.7249820 or 7257303] is located on Aurora Blvd. Quezon City.

Baguio City – Ambangeg - Kabayan

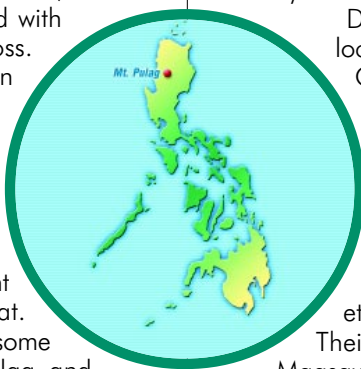
From Baguio, Norton Trans buses leave for Kabayan in the morning. They reach Ambangeg after 3 to 4 hours. Tickets cost P 60.00 to P 65.00 per person.

Their terminal is located in Baguio City on Magsaysay Avenue.

Daring visitors can drive their way to Ambangeg using a four-wheel drive vehicle through rough, unpaved roads. From Baguio, take the Ambuclao road going to Bokod. After 63 km (about three hours), one will reach Ambangeg.

Ambangeg/Kabayan – to the park

The Visitors' Center and Protected Area Office is located in Ambangeg, Bokod. Going to the Park entrance gate located in sitio Babadak, Bashoy takes about 1-2 hours hike from Ambangeg through a 12-km rough road. Another entry to the Park can be reached if one continues along the valley road leading to Kabayan Poblacion and later on to Buguias. Nine kilometers north of Kabayan Poblacion a steep winding side road leads to Barangay Ballay and thereafter to Barangay Tawangang, bisecting



the northern portion of the Park. Beautiful lakes are spotted along the Ballay-Tawangan stretch as one nears the mountain pass.

Protected Area Office

The Protected Area Office [0919.5539-647] is responsible for the administration of the Park. It provides information and services such as trail guides and camping guidelines. It has a liaison office in Baguio City [074.4447428]. Visitors are advised to inform the Office of their travel itinerary, number of climbers/visitors and purpose for the visit a few days before the intended arrival.

The Office provides the following recommendations to visitors:

- Camp only in designated campsites and walk along the trails to avoid damaging to vegetation and loosening of soil.
- Do not hunt or collect plants.
- Pack your own trash and carry it home or deposit it in designated pits.



- Hire local tour guides. The trails are tricky.
- Do not light fires.

Local Ecotourism Destinations and Cultural Activities

Bird watching. The Park is one of the most valued in the Philippines due to the unique diversity of birds. It is home to 76 bird species, 30 of which are endemic to the Philippines and nine are endemic to Luzon.

Grassland Trail. A hike to the grassland mountaintop is a relatively easy climb. From Sitio Babadak, Bashoy, the trail goes through the pine forest, then further up across the mossy forest, to the summit. The hike should start at early dawn in order to catch the spectacular early morning view of the Cordilleras. Mountaineers say the best sunrise in the Philippines can be seen from there.

Akiki and Lusod Trails. These steep 25 km trails offer a bigger hiking challenge—a steep climb from Kabayan through the different ecological zones to the summit. Going down from the summit, one can take the trail going through an old-growth forest into the remote

village of Lusod, home of the Kalanguya People. *Ba-ay River, Ta-aw Valley.* From Lusod, one crosses a hanging bridge over the Ba-ay River to get to Ta-aw Valley, a rainforest full of giant oaks and pine trees.

Ambulalakaw Lake. The lake is located close to the mountain pass along the road leading from Barangay Ballay to Tawangan. After a 150-meter hike from the road, one is rewarded with the view of a pristine, spring-fed lake surrounded by mossy forest. The Kalanguya believe that their ancestors live there.

Kabayan Mummies. Kabayan is known as the “seat of Ibaloi culture.” As early as the 13th century, the Ibalois are known to have their dead mummified and preserved in caves. Some caves served as mass burial grounds. The area accounts for about 120 known burial caves. Residents are now very protective of the mummies since many of these were stolen or defiled by visitors. A small museum located in Kabayan Poblacion displays Ibaloi artifacts, traditional clothing and some mummies.

Fees

Park entrance fees are paid at the Protected Area Office. Locals pay P100, while foreigners USD15. Those who stay overnight have to pay an additional P50 per night per person.

Best Time to Visit

Visit Mt. Pulag preferably during the months of November to March when the weather is dry. Visitors should bring cold weather clothes since temperature, normally ranging from 16-20 °C, can sometimes go as low as 8 °C. Extreme coldness is expected as one reaches the summit where frost is usually found during the months of January and February. Those aiming to reach the top are advised to bring thick clothing, tents and rain jackets since afternoon

storms are frequent.

Visitors planning to visit in the months of May to August are likely to encounter thunderstorms. In case of emergencies, they could take refuge at the ranger station in Sitio Babadak, Bashoy.

Accommodation

In Kabayan Poblacion along the valley road, rooms are rented at P100 per person per night by the Kabayan Multi-Purpose Cooperative.

In Ambangeg, backpackers can set up their tents at the campsite located near the Protected Area Office.

Food

Palenas Eatery in Kabayan Poblacion serves abundant portions of meat dishes. Vegetables are grown all over the place, but are hardly found on the daily menu. Each meal costs from P40 to P60.

Backpackers usually bring canned food; they cook rice at the campsite. Bring gas-fueled portable stoves or rent one from the Office since gathering of fire wood in the park is prohibited. **S**