

# Capissaan: Vizcaya's world-class cave system

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KASIBU, Nueva Vizcaya—During his childhood days, Ifugao Richie Angcuna could only wonder what lay beneath the cave in his native village of Capissaan in this town.

Little did he know the cave was home to endless wonders of nature Ifugaos and locals can be proud of.

“We only catch fruit bats a few meters inside its entrance, we did not know what really lies beyond the resting place of the bats,” said Angcuna, now a 23-year-old cave guide.

For years, the cave served as a regular place for migrant Ifugaos to catch fruit bats as a native delicacy, not knowing it has more to offer than food on their table.

The fruit bats, locally known as “*Kaliputo*,” acted as mere guards to keep the ordinary eye from seeing the beauty inside the caves, which is now touted as one of the world-class tourism destinations of the country, Angcuna said.

It was in the late 1990s when a group of mountaineers and spelunkers of Sang-at Salug Outdoor Club and GAIA Mountaineering Club stumbled upon its beauty while on an adventure, searching for alternative tourist attractions in the province.

Their discovery buried the setback of the province's tourism industry after the 1990 earthquake led to the tragic demise of the Salinas Salt Springs, the once world-renowned attraction in Bambang town that was considered one of the eight natural wonders of the world.

Its untimely death, however, led to the new life for local tourism in the Lion-Alayan cave system, which can be reached through a four- to five-hour ride from either Bambang or Solano towns.

It is touted as the fifth-longest cave system in the country and is ranked among the best geologists' paradise.

Marichelle Costales, supervising tourism officer for Nueva Vizcaya, said the Capissaan cave is now the major tourist site in the province, attracting young and old tourists alike from here and abroad.

Each year, hundreds of tourists marvel at its beauty—its varying rare calcite formations and unique stalagmite and stalactite features include a subterranean river that adds as a satisfying adventure for one aiming to traverse its four-kilometer length.

Part of the multi-chambered cave network are the Lion and Alayan Caves, measuring 4.2 kilometers.

To reach barangay Capissaan, tourists who choose to ride a bus bound for Tuguegarao City must endure a six- to seven-hour travel time before reaching the towns of Bambang or Solano, where they can ride a jeepney bound for the barangay.

It takes about five hours to reach Barangay Capissaan from Manila because of its rough roads.

In 2001, the 1st National Caving Congress was held in this province, particularly in Barangay Capissaan, where the cave systems were earlier discovered and gained national recognition.

Tourism officials here said they have placed rules and regulations for tourists looking to visit and trek the cave systems, to protect its natural formations from indiscriminate human activities. Some villagers were also tapped as cave guides to provide employment and livelihood opportunities in the area.

Aggressive information education and communication campaigns are also being conducted among the villagers of Barangay Capissaan and its adjacent areas, to instill environment awareness and protection within the cave system.

The provincial and national governments are pushing to promote the cave as an eco-tourism attraction, Costales said, and one of their major projects is the ongoing completion of the concreting of the road leading to the cave system, making it easier for local and foreign tourists to reach it.

The government of Kasibu is also developing amenities and facilities near the area to provide comfortable and convenient accommodation for tourists.