

# Palau experience was inspiring

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With less than 200 days before Guam hosts FestPac 2016, I am reminded of the time I spent as a FestPac tourist. My husband Art and I were enticed to attend FestPac 2004 in Palau (Belau), as Continental Air Micronesia offered a special fare with a hotel stay at the scenic Carolines Resort.

The flight was relatively short. Immediately, I was mesmerized by the natural beauty of Palau, with its famed Rock Islands greeting us. The hundreds of green-topped tiny islands jutting over turquoise gleaming waters is a sight I will never forget. FestPac 2004 would be my first time in Palau and my first experience at the Festival of the Pacific Arts. I felt giddy with excitement for all that laid ahead.

The Carolines Resort was comprised of eight wooden, A-frame Palauan style cottages tucked high in the jungle canopy on the outskirts of Koror. It had a picturesque view of the Philippine Sea and the walk up to our private bungalow was lined with beautiful tropical flowers. While Art felt like Robinson Crusoe, I felt like I was a newlywed on our honeymoon, living in a treehouse on an island paradise.

After a short time in our room, we drove to the festival site in the middle of Koror. The festival village was lined with huts from the 27 island nations. The festival theme for 2004 was “Oltobed a Malt: Nurture, Regenerate and Celebrate.”

Displays included traditional weaving, wood, bone and stone carving, tapa making, tattooing, medicine, healing arts, canoe and navigational crafts, song and dance. The contemporary arts were visual arts, theater, jewelry, photography, film, costume and



fashion design, and floral arts. For the first time in FestPac history there was a “jam” hut for musicians to express themselves freely.

Over 2,700 participants from 27 countries attended the festival in Palau. There were representatives from Taiwan/ROC and West Papua (Indonesia). There was a flotilla of paddling and sailing canoes from Yap, the CNMI and Palau. The Palau Visitors Authority estimated that an additional 2,700 non-participating visitors came for the festival. Art and I were two of those visitors.

We thoroughly enjoyed watching artisans create and share their crafts, stories and cultures. It was mind-blowing to be present at what is considered the Olympics of Pacific Arts. At every turn, Art and I were immersed in a special gathering of unique people, cultures and entertainment.

Traveling to new places is idyllic when you connect with the locals. As we made our way around Palau, we met up with the family of the late Kimiko Murphy of the Palauan Murphy clan from Tamuning. They graciously volunteered to be our guides to the new capital in Babel-

daob.

Halfway through our trip, we noticed that our rental car was extremely low on fuel. And there weren't gas stations anywhere on the island. And in true Palauan style, someone called someone, who called someone on a phone. In less than 30 minutes, someone delivered and filled our car with gas. We learned that in the remote areas of Palau, people sell gas out of their houses. Our tour ended in true Palauan hospitality — a delicious, home-cooked Palauan dinner.

The rest of our trip was spent enjoying the food and venues. We shopped, visited the Palau Museum and ate daily at Yano's Market. The barbecue fish and giant clam in coconut milk are what keeps me dreaming of my return trip to Palau.

Palau was clean. The roads and villages were well-maintained. There were people sweeping along the roadways daily. The festival grounds were well planned and kept clean. The one inconvenience was traffic and the difficulty with finding parking.

My Palau experience inspired me to help with our upcoming festival. We're hosting the largest gathering to celebrate our Pacific identities! Invite your family and friends.

Be a part of the festivities by volunteering and attending the festival.

And let our hospitality shine, say “hafa adai,” wave, and smile to all our visitors.

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