

THE FILIPINO E-MAGAZINE IN EUROPE

# Roots & wings

CULTURE PEOPLE PLACES

*-on this issue-*

MARY GRACE SVENSON

STRANGE SPACES

FIL-SWISS MILESTONES

A SOJOURN TO CHINA

*February of 2018*



Welcome to  
Roots&Wings,  
the emagazine  
dedicated to Euro-  
Pinoys.

Having been a Euro-Pinoy for over four decades, I know what it means to be one. Being a Euro-Pinoy means, amongst others, that one is at home both in Europe and in the Philippines. Being at home means having your heart in your home and your home in your heart. Home is not only the four corners of a room or the various rooms in a structure, but rather home is the various corners that make up the community where we belong.

The Pinoy communities in Europe with its myriads of wonderful corners continue to grow, thrive and evolve in a brighter and promising direction. Let us take the Euro-Pinoy millennials as an example. They are brimming with all sorts of potentials while curious and eager to know more about their roots. Let us nourish these sentiments for here lies great opportunities for glocal progress when people learn from each other and exchange good ideas and practices.

Networking. Working in a net. This new year 2018, let us devote more time and resources in finding ways and means on how we can network successfully. We all want to do good but we have to do it more effectively so that our communities may enjoy the fruits of our efforts.

A few weeks ago, the Filipino Artists Association of Sweden was launched in Stockholm. Spearheaded by Aya Sunga Askert (complete name is Maria Filipina Sunga Askert) it aims to gather established and

# Dear Kababayans

emerging artists, designers, poets, writers to enrich, encourage and promote each other's creative talents in this northern European country where at least 75% of the land area is covered with wild blueberries. (But that is another story). Watch out for this group! They might blow your mind with their boundless and multi-faceted originality.

One of the highlights of this issue is our Artist in Focus pages. Mary Grace Svensson's artworks are mindblowing! Thanks to Aya for this amazing maiden article.

With thankful hearts, we welcome two new editors in our team - Aya Sunga Askert (yep, you read it right) is our new Bureau Editor Sweden. A multi-talented lady with many strings in her lyre, Aya is also our first Literary Editor whose wish it that more of us write poetry, stories, essays etc. Aya has been writing poems since her school days and on page 24 you can read her Tagalog poem "Gubat Sa Kadiliman".

Lorna Real del Rosario is our new Bureau Editor Ireland. A software engineer, Lorna loves travelling, learning new cultures and has a passion for experiencing varied cuisine. Read about Lorna's sojourn in China and we can learn something from her first-hand experiences.

As I bask in the tropical warm weather surrounded by amazing flowers and chirping birds that our homeland offer us this time of year, I think of family and friends back home in Europe, braving the snow and the freezing temperature. Hang on - after the Winter, comes the Spring! Or better still, come and spend your winters in the Philippines!

**Rachel Hansen**  
*writing from Hamilo Coast in  
Nasugbu, Batangas*

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Roots&Wings Filipino Magazine in Europe



MARY  
GRACE  
SVENSSON

# IN VIVID COLOR

as interviewed by Aya Sunga Askert | Stockholm

*Through vivid brush strokes of vibrant hues, striking lines and curves, Mary Grace conveys her innermost emotions.*

## Why did you become an artist?

I actually painted for the first time when I was in the middle of depression during the Spring of 2014. I was confined at a hospital and one of the patients there who had been into painting lent me some watercolors and brushes. Since then, I have never stopped painting.

I paint when I'm happy; I paint even when I'm sad. My paintings reflect my emotions: It's my therapy and my stress-reliever. However, I didn't feel that I've become an artist until my first solo art exhibition last winter in 2015 where I sold some paintings.





## How do you describe your art?

Most of my paintings are about myself as a mother, as a woman and as a kid. I fill them with striking colors to express playfulness and happiness. I relax my brain when I paint: I just let my fantasies flow and the result is always surprising. I paint like a kid without the “must” word. For me art is for everyone. Everyone can paint if you give it a try and dare to do it. I always say: get a canvas, brush, some acrylics and just paint. You will be surprised with the outcomes you have made for yourself. You will be proud of what you have produced and you will feel good.

I never use pure water with acrylic paints; I experiment a lot. I dilute acrylics with a mixture of sugary liquid like juice or coca-cola, and sometimes I blend it with coffee or just with sugar. By doing so, my artwork will achieve stronger colors and It will make it look more like an oil painting.



## Where do you get inspiration for your art?

Architecture is one of my inspirations, which I studied at the University of the Philippines: lines, shadows, and curves. When I am painting, it's my way of reminiscing how working with architecture would be like. You draw something and you have an outcome that everyone can see and appreciate. My other inspiration is my emotions. I paint when I am happy and when I am sad. So basically, any feeling is a painting session.





## What are your future plans?

Right now, I am determined to finish my Aspirant Program in Linköping University so I can get my architect license. I finished my Bachelor of Science Degree in Architecture at Technological University of the Philippines and I would like to work as an architect here in Sweden one day.

I would like to start a group painting circle. It would be great to facilitate art sessions for all ages. A valuable outcome through painting will generate by sharing my knowledge in arts and that will be my way of helping others. One of my dreams is to do a solo art exhibition in Philippines so I can share my paintings to my family, relatives, and friends there.

At the moment, I am preparing my artworks for an exhibition with other two

filipino artists in Stockholm, Aya Sunga-Askert and Helen Svengaard. Our oeuvres will be showcased on September 14-20, 2018 at Galleri Bellman in Stockholm. This year, I would also like to devote myself to our newly formed group FAAS—the Filipino Artists Association in Sweden. As one of the board of directors, I would like to help to attain the group’s mission which is to give support to fellow filipino artists. We aim to enrich, encourage, and promote each other’s creative growth and excellence through collaboration, mentorship, and networking. So I’m calling out to established and emerging artists who are based in Sweden to join us.

Be a part of our family and share our advocacy, kababayans! **R+W**

*“Most of my paintings are about myself as a mother, as a woman and as a kid.”*

NEWS

# 60 Years of Fil-Swiss Diplomatic Relations

with reports from  
Betsy Von Atzigen | St. Gallen

A milestone is an “efficacious sign,” defined as a sign that causes or brings about what it signifies in the very act of signifying it. So, what remarkable milestones have been put in place in Switzerland and Liechtenstein among the Philippine-Swiss community? What significance have they brought upon the Filipino-Swiss people?

The ‘Pinoy-Swiss’ community has naturally peaked its existence here and at home in the last couple of years with these milestones: 60 years of harmonious and productive diplomatic relations between two beloved countries, the Philippines and Switzerland (1957-2017) as well as the 50 years Evolution and Progress of ASEAN - the Association of South East Asian Nations (1967-2017).

The community has been greatly encouraged by decades of achievements in the field of economic cooperation under the Free Trade Agreement and Joint Economic Commission, vocational-technical education, scientific cooperation, bilateral relations, Swiss chairmanship of Transition Justice and Reconciliation Commission (for Mindanao) and cultural exchanges.



(Above) Celebrating Filipino culture with the Zuger Family of Dancers.

In a fitting gesture, year-long celebrations were made in Switzerland’s major cantons highlighting who we are, where we come from, the fruits of partnership between these two nations and a common vision for the future. These landmark celebrations spread on the covers of what factual history (vs fake news) feeds the current and future generations. What has been seen, heard and read online and in print media remains the pride of our people.

From a distance, a glance of the shimmering alps of this nation brings to mind a person responsible for what has been- the inspiring and able leadership of one extraordinary Philippine Ambassador.

## Joselito A. Jimeno

He came to Berne in August 2016, tuned the hearts of community leaders at his first invitation of community representatives to get to know each other and decisively plan more so, actualise the 2017 milestones.



(Above) Ambassador Joselito A. Jimeno alongside leaders in the Filipino Community in Switzerland.

The historic events were launched in a diplomatic reception at the Rathaus in Berne (the capital’s city hall) commemorating Philippine National Day and the 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations. This was followed by a grand Filipino Fiesta, a first, participated by more than 8000 organisers and guests held at Waisenhausplatz, a central plaza in the Old City of Berne across the Swiss Federal House. These beginnings laid the ground for Fil-Swiss fame and pride.

The succeeding fiestas in Cantons Geneva, Zürich, Basel, St. Gallen, Lugano brought to the fore Filipino-Swiss music concert talents; the performing, visual and Arnis martial arts exhibitions; lechon, pansit and adobo fiesta dishes and tropical fruit galore; handwoven products and handicrafts, Filipiniana costumes, ornaments and everything else Filipino.

This grandiose celebration was enhanced by the tracing of the footsteps of Philippine

national hero Dr. Jose P. Rizal who visited the cantons of Schaffhausen, Basel, Berne, Lausanne and Geneva in 1887.

Worthwhile year-round events included recognition of Filipino-Swiss ‘Shooting Stars’ as they make inroads in Philippine healthcare, second generation musicians, contemporary artists, women empowering women, lectures on Philippine history, recognising the rags to fame life story of Manny Pacquiao in a movie night ‘Kid Kulafu,’ and further contributions toward a bright Philippine-Swiss future.

This Extraordinary Ambassador came to Berne 30 months ago. As he came, he spoke less, shook hands and treated community leaders to a buffet of pansit, lumpia, Schinken and sweets. In mid-January 2018, once more he spoke less, shook hands, treated all to a sumptuous table and bade individually Adieu for a fresh posting in Honolulu, quoting his own expression ‘for another paradise.’



## De La Salle University welcomes global business icon, Jack Ma

words and pictures by  
Donna Manio | the Philippines

In an open dialogue with students last October 25 at De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines, Alibaba Group Founder and Executive Chairman Jack Ma encouraged students to continue finding opportunities despite constant failures.

Sharing that he was not a great student as he failed a number of times in his entrance exams, from primary school to middle school to college, he said that they should pursue the dream they are most passionate about. He likewise shared his insights and experiences about success and failures, the future of entrepreneurship, and his advocacy on social development.

“How can young people have opportunities? We should enable them by technology and we should improve the education system,” he said, as he noted the importance of constant learning and development.

He highlighted the importance of UN social development goals as well as mission and



responsibility. He also shared some words of encouragement with the audience, which was comprised of students, educators, and leaders in the business sector.

Best known for his innovation as an e-commerce enabler, Ma has received numerous awards from prestigious global institutions such as the “2015 Entrepreneur of the Year” at the Asian Awards and the “2009 CCTV Economic Person of the Year Award: Business Leader of the Decade Award.” In addition, Ma was named 30th Most Powerful Person in the World” by Forbes Magazine in 2014, “Business Person of the Year” by Business Week in 2005, and “World’s 100 Most Influential People” by Time Magazine in 2009.

As a leader and philanthropist, he has supported and served in various advocacy and socio-civic organizations which include: Being the Founder of the Jack Ma Foundation, Co-Chairman of Paradise Foundation, Special

Adviser to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for Youth Entrepreneurship and Small Business, United Nations Special Advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals, and Member of the Global Board of Directors of The Nature Conservancy.

During the event, which was also attended by faculty, staff, alumni, and donors, DLSU conferred on Ma the degree Doctor of Science in Technopreneurship, honoris causa. “This is a great university with a long history and a great mission, and the thing that I feel most excited about is that this university carries the SDG or the Sustainable Development Goals. As one of the UN’s advocates for that, I feel extremely happy for our school to continue this mission,” he said.

In the same visit, Ma had the opportunity to visit the University library, which featured an exhibit on the University’s business incubation initiatives and local projects in line with UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CROSS  
AN ENTIRE OCEAN AND BEGIN A  
NEW LIFE?

*Wander through the cobblestoned streets of Central Europe in the dead of winter after decades in a land of eternal sunshine, and find out what it means to move to a city where beer is cheaper than water. For anyone who has ever thought about moving someplace else, or ever experienced what it means to be caught between two cultures, STRANGE SPACES is a relevant read.*

from the works of Lily C. Fen | Switzerland

STRANGE SPACES is a collection of essays about Prague and Manila: a look into the cultural, behavioural, linguistic, and commercial characteristics of two cities from such different continents. It is also a story about losing and finding oneself. The following is an outline of the collection:

# STRANGE SPACES

A SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

## INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic and the Philippine Islands are introduced. A brief take on how this book began can also be found here. I talk about how I was writing my way back home, with the hope that I would bring together two worlds that were geographically and culturally distant from one another.

## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

This chapter discusses the word expatriate in English, juxtaposed against the Filipino translation of the word. Here, I delve into the notions of what one leaves behind and how one can change when living between two worlds.

1  
IN A CONSTANT STATE  
OF GRAY

Paired with the idea of sunny versus gloomy weather, I talk about the differences in demeanour and behaviour between Prague and Manila. I surmise that people in sunny places find it much easier to smile often, while places with gray weather tend to inspire frowning. Where does that leave the new arrival in town?

2  
WHERE BEER IS  
CHEAPER THAN WATER

This chapter is focused on—you guessed it—beer. I write about how beer is perceived by the Czech people as their “liquid bread,” the stuff that gives them sustenance and an opportunity to connect and bond with each other. Since I write about both countries in every chapter, I also write about how beer is enjoyed in the Philippines.

3  
INTO THOSE TINY  
SPACES

Public transport plays a starring role in this chapter. I illustrate how precise things are in Central Europe, while there is an adventurous sense of chaos in the midst of over-crowded Manila and its colourful jeepneys.

4  
THE “IT” THING TO DO

The “It” thing to do often changes with the times. In this chapter, I talk about language and the uncanny similarity of language histories between the Czechs and Filipinos as they each had to learn the tongue of a foreign people who ruled their lands. If speaking Czech became the “it” thing to do amongst the 19th century’s elite in Prague, could it be that Filipino will follow suit in its own time in Manila?

5  
THE TIES THAT BIND

Are there different ways through which people connect and build relationships? In The ties that bind, I discuss how Asians love to connect over food, while Czechs need to bond over pints of beer. The details are different, but the social desires are the same, no matter where you are from.

6  
A LOT TO LEARN

Is capitalism synonymous with smiles, while communism equates frowning? What is service like in the Philippines, and how is it different in the Czech Republic? Here I share a few anecdotes about being served by people from both cultures. What can both cities learn from each other?

7  
ON A PLATE

Food seems straightforward enough, but where do the differences in behaviour and food choices lie, once allowed to delve deeper? In On a plate, I write about food portions, the sense of individuality in the west, and the collective mentality of the east.

8  
THE TASTE OF HOME

When we leave home, do we ever find ourselves looking for the taste of the familiar? In this chapter, I talk about the power of a mother’s cooking. What are we looking for when we bite into something that can bring us back to our childhoods?

9  
TRICKLING TRAILS OF  
BLOOD

Is an umbrella really only used for the rain? Or are there other parts of the world where the umbrella is used to ward off too much sunshine? Here, I discuss the great differences between temperate and tropical climates, and how to deal with one or the other when a visitor is not used to it.

10  
A CERTAIN KIND OF  
LIBERTY

When you shift between cultures and

countries, what parts of one city can you carry into another? What other bits and pieces must you discard upon entering a different social situation? When caught between cultures, what is one to do?

11  
PATCHES OF GREEN

What do people do for leisure in different parts of the world? Patches of green attempts to get into the subject, as I introduce parks and the Czech love for the outdoors. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is the South East Asian attachment to air-conditioning and shopping malls.

12  
BUILD THE DOOR

How do you build a life and make a way for yourself in a completely new space? This chapter revolves around the tasks of building new friendships, forging new bonds, and creating a new career path, all at lightning speed for the expatriate.

13  
DRESSING FOR AN  
ETERNAL SUMMER

What defines beauty? Is there only one definition, or is that relative? This is what I discuss in this chapter, calling to mind different ideas of beauty and grooming in

Prague and Manila. In the end, I found that the lesson behind it all was not to lose one's sense of self despite crossing continents.

#### 1 4 THE EXOTICNESS OF BLUEBERRIES

What is more exotic? The coconut or the blueberry? The longer I stayed in my adopted country, the more I found that even this was relative. Blueberries to a Filipina, and coconuts to a Czech fell under the same definition of that which was mysterious and romantic.

#### 1 5 WHAT GOD MADE

Getting into a more travelogue feel, I write about the fantastic water-related activities, flora, and fauna of the Philippines, and likewise discuss the historical towns and architectural gems that can be found in the Czech Republic.

#### 1 6 THE ART OF SAYING 'NO'

In the end, both Filipinos and Europeans aim towards the same goal: to be considerate to the person with whom they are speaking. The way they do so are polar opposites of each other, however, and in this chapter, I touch up on some examples of this occurrence.

#### 1 7 THE 'TINGI' CULTURE & COMMUNISM

Are there really parts of the world where one can buy just one cigarette stick at the store? Was there really a time when there was only one set of shoes that could be bought for school for the autumn term in Prague? I talk about being a consumer in both cities in this chapter, sharing that a few years after my move to Europe, I had become independent of the power that material things once had over me.

#### 1 8 LIGHT OF THE HOME

Who is the light of the home? In this chapter, I attempt to understand the similarities and differences between Czech and Filipina women. Are they really worlds apart?

#### 1 9 A MEMORY IN YOUR POCKET

Leaving home meant remembering and forgetting. This chapter explores how people in the two cities I lived in remembered what was gone, or how they were willing to move on and forget some things, including matters of life and death.

#### 2 0 SLIPPING AND SLIDING INTO THE QUAGMIRE

This chapter brings to the foreground the subject of prayer, faith, and spirituality. I discuss how I began to lose my footing culturally and spiritually, as I met sets of new people whom I could only perceive through my South East Asian eyes.

#### 2 1 HOME

I never thought of getting to the bottom of the question "What is home?" until I left mine and had to create a new one someplace else. This chapter talks about the definition of home: the physical space, the way people run a household, and what it means to truly be home.

#### 2 2 GRIT

If nations were bathroom tiles, I must be the grit that holds the tiles together. Somewhere between leaving Manila and learning to live in Prague, I found myself sliding off one tile, and unable to climb into another. I fell, instead, into that space between the tiles, that cement that holds all the shingles together. This chapter concludes the lessons behind this entire collection of essays.



# Gubat sa Kadiliman

isinulat ni Aya Sunga Askert | Stockholm

Mundong mistulang kaharian ng gubat  
Matinik, masukat at sadyang malawak  
Pebong marilag naghihirap sumikat  
Kaya't karimlang buktot dito tatapak

Sa gubat na ito maraming nagkalat  
Asal-Abel man o sa kapwa nanghahamak  
Sa inog ng daidig nakikibalikat  
Kahit ang tadhana sila'y isinadlak

Ang salaring tigre na hari sa gubat  
Matakaw sa laman at ganid sa pilak  
At ang mga dagang kanyang kaakibat  
Kahit sa tungkulin matakaw ngumatngat

Ang mga ahas sa katoto'y di tapat  
Anumang butas kanila'y tinatahak  
At ang mga lorong magdamag sumasatsat  
Dila nila'y may tali, sa tsismis  
nagpapahatak

Ang mga ibong sa langit nakikitapat  
Sila'y masusunog, sa lupa'y lalagapak  
Ang mga kuwagong sa gabi'y nagpupuyat  
Masangang ang amoy, puri'y napalubak

Daidig na anak ng kaharian ng gubat  
Dito'y kagimbal-gimbal, kasindak-sindak  
Kagubata'y sa salamin naging alamat  
Kasamaa'y sumisigaw, humahalakhak



# WINDMILLS OF LOVE

words by Liza De Vera-Preiczner | Austria

I had a long chat with a dear old friend from the other side of the planet (thanks to FB, Skype & the likes!) and just like any other friends, we had much catching up to do. During our conversation she asked: “Don’t you want to settle down again? We all know that you had a near perfect marriage to Karl but he’s been dead for almost 10 years now! Perhaps you should give it another try ‘cos nothing is more wonderful than finding a special someone who will share your life.”

It actually took me a while to respond before I could say to my friend that I did try! In fact, I entered a relationship 3yrs. after my husband died and that love affair lasted for almost 5yrs. However, much as we both tried hard but there’s a world of difference between our characters, how we view life and what we expect or deem the future must be. Another factor that caused the breakup was the obvious lack of chemistry between him and my daughter. That is something I cannot and never will compromise. Because at the end of the day, my priority will always be my child!

After the bitter separation, this time I bounced back immediately. How? By agreeing to rekindle an old relationship with someone from my past; a person who shared almost 14 years of my life prior to my marriage to my late husband. Having known him for almost 38 years now, I thought it would be easy to retrace our old tracks. And remember the saying that old shoes shall always fit perfectly! This man has been a great part of my youth, had a huge influence in my life and for who back in those days, I was willing to sacrifice anything and everything, turn away from my own traditions, values and faith just to share his

life. But back then (in fact even until now), our cultural differences are wider than any ocean.

But having crossed paths again after so many years, we decided to give it one more try. Hoping that perhaps we can renew the passion we once had for one another; and now that we are both ripe from the countless lessons of life, both free and unattached, then perhaps this time it will be sweeter, that this time it will last forever. I was even surprised how easily and effortlessly he won Karla’s heart. How in such a short span of time, she began to admire him, accept him and genuinely enjoy having him around! On the outside, his and mine was like a happy patchwork family. But truth is, I was not happy, and perhaps neither was he.

The cultural constraints of the past were creeping back, the unequal footing is slowly settling in, yet again! I can’t blame him though, for that is the way they were raised. Where women are expected to be resilient and forgiving no matter what, and that we must remain ever obedient and submissive. But because of our long history, I shall always love him and there will remain a special place in my heart reserved just for him. However, we cannot share a life together regardless how comfortable and sheltered or gratifying it will be. I didn’t allow myself to be placed under anyone’s command when I was younger, how much more now that I have become an independent, strong-willed, matured person who is morally, spiritually and even financially secured. No one can ever clip my wings.

Yeah, life sometimes does play games with us!!! Then my friend asked: “If that is the case, how do you see yourself in the future if you remain

alone?” Well I replied: “Who says I’m gonna be alone? Nobody knows what’s in stored in the coming days altho’ one thing is definite! I won’t go searching, moreso chasing after a partner. If he comes then so be it. But if there’s none, then c’est la vie! Being with or having a man is NOT a Be-All-End-All thing. There are a thousand other matters to involve yourself with that is just as meaningful and satisfying. I have my cherished friends who keep me company and the devotion of my beloved family most especially my daughter Karla, whose future I must help to shape and secure. All I can ask from God rightnow is to continue watching over my loved ones, let them be safe, happy and healthy.

As for me, there’s my theatre art and my passion in writing! It has been a while now since I got in the thick of stage production and I do miss it very much. Maybe I should soon make a comeback! Lastly, there’s the whole world before me, or at least the remaining 40% that I haven’t seen yet. It’s simply lying there waiting to be explored! If given three personal wishes, I would ask to remain healthy for a very long time; someday stand before Iguazu Falls in Argentina to see and behold her incredible beauty! They say that it’s an awe-inspiring visceral experience, and that the power and noise of the cascades, a chain of hundreds of waterfalls nearly 3km in extension is something you shall never forget. Now, that is the ever lingering hunger of the gypsy in me!

And as my final wish, I would like to be together with my husband again, to look into his great blue eyes, touch his masculine face, to see him smile and hear his crisp laughter!

Yeah... someday, somehow, somewhere...



# SOJOURN

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## A FILIPINO EXPAT IN CHINA

Having lived in Ireland for the last 10 years now where it is seemingly quiet (with just a population size of about 4.7m), I could not contain my excitement upon knowing that I would be going to China for a month on a work assignment. I would say it was a notch higher, a better way to experience China. Of course, visiting The Bund (in Shanghai) and The Great Wall (in Beijing) is an icing on the cake.

Here are few things that I learned from my trip:

words and pictures by  
Lorna Real-Del Rosario | Ireland





Left: Among the eateries of Old Shanghai.

### MODERNIZED CHINA

While it's a known fact that China is one of the most densely-populated country, I was still stunned seeing it with my own eyes. There were people everywhere: parks, shopping malls and corner streets. I experienced standing in queues at the train stations, bus stops, cafes and restaurants. And the irony is that, amid a conservative culture, China has modernized their infrastructure to support their growing population. Shanghai has the Maglev Train that can run as fast as 430km/h, bringing you to the airport in just 8 minutes. They have high-speed trains for city to city trips. City buses and subways ply the routes at minutes' interval.

### ALIPAY & TAOBAO

China may not have the best Internet access in the world (it is fire-walled) and some sites (like Facebook) are blocked. But from what I've seen, their Internet speed was impressive for E-commerce (such as mobile payments, online shopping, etc.). My work colleagues took me to a restaurant and when we asked for the bill, the server handed us a slip of paper with a QR code printed on it. We opened the scanner and paid via the Alipay apps.

Taobao is a magic word in China. This is a Chinese online shopping website like eBay and Amazon that is operated in Hangzhou,

Zhejiang by Alibaba Group. Though I have not used it for shopping, they said that you can order and have it delivered on the same day.

### HOSPITALITY AT ITS BEST

Though I'm also an Asian, I still braced myself for a possible element of cultural shock. It helped that I have friends at work who made the transition easier for me. I guess it's the universal law of nature. People will be friendly to you if you show genuine interest in other people and their culture. Coming back from China, my luggage was filled with moon cakes, gifts and souvenirs. Our friends showed us Chinese hospitality at its very best. Even now that I'm already back in Ireland, we still communicate via Emails and exchange pictures via WeChat.

### IT'S ABOUT FAMILY

Chinese may have some influence to our Filipino traditions. When eating for example, it is a communal style, where everything is served on the table, shared by all diners, you fill your own plate with whatever you want and as much as you want. For a guest to join a family's communal dinner may not always be comfortable, but when I was there, I felt I belonged to the family. Not only that, I also noticed the significant respect they have for their parents and the authority their elders

**People will be friendly to you if you show genuine interest in other people and their culture**



have on them. In every major aspect, the parents are consulted, and up to a certain degree even in matters of the heart.

**REMEDY FOR LANGUAGE BARRIER**

Although many Chinese do not speak English and communication seem difficult, do not get frustrated. When posed with situations that are new to you, use them as opportunities to harness your strengths and develop new skills. Eventually, you will manage and walk through them with flying colours.

In restaurants, I looked at the pictures and got some help from other diners when placing orders. When doing grocery shopping, I listed items with their Chinese names. I always made it a point to bring my hotel's business card in Chinese to show to taxi drivers in case I get lost. I once went to a bank to buy Yuan (Chinese Currency) without uttering a word. I just handed a paper printed with English & Chinese:

"I want to change my 100 Euro to Chinese Yuan. Thank you."

"我想把我的100欧元换成人民币。谢谢。" It worked ... thanks to Google Translate!

**LEARN THE CULTURE**

In Chinese culture, did you know that:

With chopsticks, do not stick them vertically into your food when not using them, especially not into the rice. Do not stab or skewer the food with chopsticks. Vertical chopsticks look like incense burned during a funeral.

Clocks should never be presented as gift to others, especially to elders. This may mean shortening the life of the receiver. Sharing pears should not be done, as it means 'separation'/'

Even numbers are being more auspicious than odd ones. So, gifts are given in even numbers for the celebration of all occasions. If you receive a gift, you should not immediately open it in front of the giver. A meat dish should always be served on the table, it's a sign of prosperity. When visiting a home, wait for the host to invite you to sit down.

My stay in China was not perfect at all. There were days that pollution was very bad and face masks were needed. Joey had an allergic reaction to food. Yet still, it was a fantastic experience all throughout. Never a dull moment. Gained a lot of friends, and weight :). Picked up Chinese words and had a better understanding of their culture. *R+W*

**When posed with situations that are new to you, use them as opportunities to harness your strengths and develop new skills.**

THE FILIPINO E-MAGAZINE IN EUROPE

# Roots & wings

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