

MT. GUITING-GUITING NATURAL PARK

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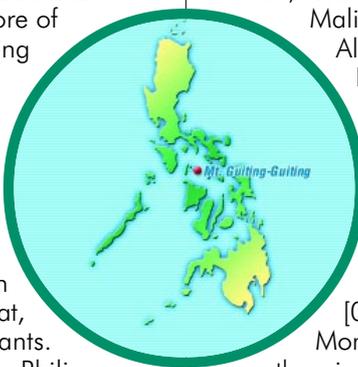
General Information

Saw-teeth shaped, Mt Guiting-Guiting is at the heart of Sibuyan, one of the seven islands of Romblon Province. "Guiting-Guiting", in the local dialect means jagged, which explains the name of the mountain. Its highest peak is at 2,058 meters.

The Island is known for its unique intact chain of ecosystems which starts with the grassland at high altitudes followed by undisturbed mossy and montane forests, biodiversity-rich lowland forest, intact mangroves and beautiful coral reefs. The core of the island is known as Mt. Guiting-Guiting Natural Park.

The island is one of the richest spots in the world in terms of density, diversity and endemism of flora and fauna. Some species exist only on the Island, nowhere else on earth. These include five mammals, the Greater Sibuyan and Lesser Sibuyan forest mice, the Sibuyan giant moss mouse, Sibuyan pygmy fruit bat, Sibuyan striped shrew rat and some plants. The Philippine Tube-nosed bat and the Philippine hawk-eagle, classified respectively as "endangered" and "vulnerable" are found in the park. Dugongs, dolphins and whales are sighted in the municipal waters.

The Island, composed of the municipalities of Magdiwang in the north, Cajidiocan in the east, and San Fernando in the south, has a population of close to 50,000, mostly living along the coast and at the foothills of the mountain range. Their main sources of income are farming, fishing and small-scale handicrafts. Indigenous People known as Sibuyanon or Mangyan Tagabukid live on the mountain slopes on the side of Cajidiocan and San Fernando. They represent approximately 1.5% of the total population.



Reaching Sibuyan Island

Sibuyan is located 187 nautical miles south of Manila and is reached by inter-island vessels from the ports of Batangas, Manila and Lucena.

Traveling by land and sea

- *By road from Metro-Manila to Batangas.* The following buses reach the Batangas Port in 3 to 4 hours. Fares cost P90.00 to P120.00 per person: Tritrans Bus with terminals in Buendia Avenue, Makati and Kamias St., Cubao [02.9251758]; BLTB with terminals in Malibay Street, Pasay City [02.8335501] and Ali Mall, Cubao [02.9131525]; and JAM Lines in EDSA corner Monte de Piedad St., Cubao, Quezon City [02.4149925] and in Buendia Avenue corner Taft Avenue [8313178].
- *By ship from Batangas to Sibuyan Island.* The following ships reach the island in 14 to 16 hours overnight travel: Peñafrancia of Viva Shipping Lines [043.7522486 or 7231422] leaves every Monday, Thursday and Saturday and reaches the pier in Magdiwang the following morning. One-way passenger fares cost P325.00 (economy) and P580.00 (first class with air conditioning). One can reach Sibuyan Island using a private vehicle. Peñafrancia accommodates vehicles as well. One-way transportation fees are: P 2,000.00 to P 2,500.00 for a car, P 2,500.00 to P 3,000.00 for a pick-up, P 3,000.00 to P 3,500.00 for a van.
- *Traveling by ship from Manila to Sibuyan Island.* Mary the Queen of MBRS Lines [02.2435886 or 2435888] sails directly to Sibuyan from Pier 8 of the Manila North Harbor. The travel takes 12-15 hours with the ship leaving Manila on Saturdays (5pm) and arriving in Cajidiocan, Sibuyan the next day (7am). One-way passenger fares are the following: Deluxe

P500.00 to P600.00; Economy P250.00 to P300.00. Transport of vehicles cost: P 2,355.00 for a car, P 2,890.00 for a pick-up, P 3,350.00 for a van. *Traveling by air and sea.* Asian Spirit [02.8403811-14] has 45-minute flights to Tugdan, Tablas Island, Romblon three times a week. A one-way ticket costs P 1,300.00. To reach Sibuyan Island, adventurous travelers need to hire a tricycle to reach the beach (a few minutes ride from the airport) and a pumpboat to sail the deep, open-sea waters separating Tablas from Sibuyan Island. Lifejackets are recommended. The fare has to be negotiated with the boatmen. It may reach P 3,500.00 to P 4,000.00.

Protected Area Office

The Protected Area Office Complex in Barangay Tampayan, Magdiwang has research and visitor centers where one can gather information on natural resources, history and culture of Sibuyan and gain a birds' eye view of the Island looking at the three-dimensional model displayed in the hall.

Local Ecotourism Destinations and Cultural Activities

Hiking. Climbing Mt. Guiting-Guiting up to the summit, compared to other climbs in the Philippines, is reputed to be one of the most challenging. Starting from Barangay Tampayan in Magdiwang, seasoned mountaineers take a four-hour hike to the 1,550-meter high Mayo's peak where they take a rest for the night. The climb to the summit starts early in the morning, taking four to six hours and much muscle flexing. The Protected Area Office provides hiking guides and porters who are paid P300 a day exclusive of food.

For a leisurely trek, visitors can take the cross-island trail starting in Barangay Jao-asan, Magdiwang and reaching Barangay España, San Fernando on the southern shore. *Caves.* Sibuyan has many caves that remain unexplored. Caves explored so far by speleologists are the following:

- *Campalingo cave in Barangay Campalingo, San Fernando.* It is located outside the boundary of the Natural Park. It takes approximately 30 minutes to hike from the barangay hall to the cave entrance.
- *Kapitan Berio Cave in Barangay Cambajao, Cajidiocan.* From the barangay proper, one takes an eight-hour trek to the cave, which includes crossing rivers and climbing steep hills. Legend has it that a certain Kapitan Berio who lived during the Spanish occupation of the Philippines hid there and was held captive by mysterious creatures in the cave.
- *Olango River Cavern in Barangay España, San Fernando.* It got its shape from the weathering effect of the river flowing through the cave. It is an hour's walk from Sitio Olango.
- *Cantingas River Cave in Barangay Lumbang Weste, Cajidiocan.* Starting from Lumbang Weste, one follows the trail through Sitio Hagimit, Lumbang Este, a steep climb through clearings, and a steep downhill trek to the Cantingas River. One has to swim across the river to get to the cave. The whole trek takes more than two hours.

On the island there is no organized cave guiding service. Only speleologists should explore them. For safety measures, the PASu (Protected Area Superintendent) and

the Barangay Captains should be informed ahead of any expedition.

Waterfalls. Cascading, multi-leveled falls abound: Lambingan and Cataja falls in Magdiwang; Cawa-cawa falls in Cajidiocan; and Busay, Lagting, Libtong and Magu-ilong falls in San Fernando.

Rivers. Ideal for picnics especially near natural pools, these include Cantingas and Oyango Rivers in San Fernando; Dalipi and Gaong Rivers in Magdiwang, and Cawa-Cawa River in Cajidiocan.

Diving. Dive sites are found around the island. Sibuyan Divers in Magdiwang provide boats and a limited number of dive equipment sets which are rented at P500 per dive; visitors are advised to bring their own.

Snorkeling. Snorkeling sites are located in coastal waters of Magdiwang, (Barangays Ambulong and Poblacion), and San Fernando (Barangays Agtiwa, Taclobo and Poblacion).

Entrance Fees

Sibuyanons are exempted from paying entrance fees to the park.

Entrance fee for individuals:

- P 50.00 per person for Romblon residents.
- P 100.00 per person for non-Romblon residents and foreigners.
- P 200.00 per person for local and foreign mountaineers.

Entrance fees for family or group packaged tours:

- P 200.00 for a family of 5 or less and P20.00 for every added person.
- P500.00 for an educational tour group of 50 and P10.00 for every added person.
- P 400.00 for a family of 5 or less and P40.00 for every added person.
- P 1,000.00 for an educational tour group of 50 and P20.00 for every person added.

Best Time to Visit

The ideal time for mountain climbing and diving is during the dry months of December to May.

Food and Accommodations

The Protected Area Office Complex provides bed spaces for P 200.00 per person per night. It can accommodate up to 40 persons. Couples can rent a room for P 500.00 per night. It is the only accommodation in the Island that provides 24 hours of electricity.

Vicky's Lodging House (5 rooms) and Park View Inn (4 rooms) are found in Poblacion Magdiwang, near the market and a few minutes walk from the beach. Room rates are P 100.00-P 150.00 per night. On top of providing clean and quiet rooms, Vicky can cook a wide range of local and foreign dishes upon request. Meals cost P 100.00 – P 150.00.

Frivas Lodge, locally known as the Marble House, is located in Cajidiocan Poblacion, close to the market. Rooms are rented for P150.00 per night. It has an in-house restaurant.

The Cantingas River Resort/Conference Center in Barangay Taclobo, San Fernando has a view of the clear and powerful waters of Cantingas River. Its natural pools offer swimming opportunities for visitors. Rooms cost P300.00 per night. It has an in-house restaurant. 