

Random sightings and musings...

- 5 lanes of roadway, each direction. No one pays attention to lane markings, they are suggestions at best. Traffic wildly erratic, lane changes the norm. Three children jumping out into the street, playing with the cars. It seems the game is to get as far in the street as possible. As I rode by, one got two lanes out, as taxis, cars, and buses whizzed by on both sides. His buddies laughing, he won that round. Traffic speed around 10-15 mph...I recall driving in Manhattan many years ago, when traffic like this was a challenge and fun. Now I worry about taxis with no seat belts. But they all have good "aircon"!
- Rocco caught a small mouse in the office this morning. Showed me the mousetrap. Marvelous low tech device, a tray of sticky goo, mouse walks on and gets stuck. Mouse is still squirming, probably pooped out. Into the trash...
- Electricity is in great demand, expensive, and short supply. The apartment building property manager apologizes for dimmed lights in the hallway. "It's part of what we do to help with the problem". On the way to work we pass a full fledged golf course, near the national park. One of the attractive features is that this golf course is fully lit, for night time golfing.
- Wonderful Japanese restaurant last night! And some excellent Johnny Walker scotch, something called Blue Label. Didn't know it existed until a month or so ago, when Liz told me about it. Very good! And oysters to die for, fresh and plump, somehow cooked so they melted in your mouth, lightly coated with a wasabi infused tempura coating.
- Trying to get travelers checks cashed. A great bit of theatre. Six banks later. I get two that cashed a couple checks, and one that helped me drain my ATM. Needed the money to pay for the apartment building. Pam's driver was wonderful, taking me all over the city area, circling for hours while I begged for foreign mercy. "The signatures are not matching sir, could you sign again?" "We will only cash them if you have an account here." In one establishment, you got a number and an invitation to read newspapers while you waited for a teller. In another, I waited 45 minutes while a customer service rep dialed a theft verification number. Constant busy signal. She finally complained to someone else, was provided a different number, and 30 seconds later the call went through. Success! It took three and a half hours across three successful and 4 unsuccessful transactions to get 750 dollars converted. And I was still 50 pesos (about a dollar) short. The apartment owner forgave the shortage.
- Chickens can be heard crowing all day through the windows of our office building. Kinda nice homey feeling. I've seen two people bathing themselves in the median of the highway so far. An incredible array of colorful jeepneys, bikes, and motor scooters. People protecting their faces from the polluted air, with cloths black from soot and smoke. I'll get some jeepney pictures if possible, someone is bringing me a camera.
- Raining hard, typhoon passing to the north (Sept 2, 2003). Stories of streets filling to knee deep, main roads in towns only 30 minutes from here. Downstairs on the way to the ATM at the office, outside there is a drain with water flowing up out of it. We walk right past the drain to the machine. We also walk past a pot hole with water flowing into it. Three minutes later we try to walk back past the drain to go back indoors. There's now 6 inches of water in a 15 foot circle around the drain, with water still coming up. I'm told there are people up to their

waist in water by this point in some parts of the city. I recall the people washing themselves in the road median, and sleeping along the roadside, 100 yards from the ocean.

- 3:00am in the morning, the apartment building smells like it's burning down. Just the routine smell of outdoors, and this is during a rain that should be cleaning the air.
- It occurs to me that I'm averaging about 800-1000 pesos for dinner, without drinks, on the nights that I eat out. This is one to two percent of the average Philippine yearly income. On one meal. Most days. But this area is abnormally high priced.