

# Sunsets in the Philippines

MAY 17 2014

BY JASONM | 0 COMMENTS

I went with my little cousins to the beach for a late swim. It's too hot here in the Philippines to swim in the middle of the day. At sunset though, it's wonderful. There is a black sand (another reason you can't go mid-day- the sand is like coals in a fire) beach near the Sulu Garden, where I'm staying in Miagao. Most of my attention was to the west, toward sunset where the mountains were cutting the sun light into rays of beams that end on the sea. But the mountains were too far away for my 24-70mm lens. So I was forced to enjoy the view only.

Suddenly, the beach behind me exploded in cheers. The otherwise perfectly calm water was being cut by flying fish skipping over the surface like one of Jojo's rocks. It was amazing to see, even from so far away.

Then I noticed the sky becoming more and more pink. And then more pink. By now I have my camera already and I'm walking into waste deep water with my tripod. As I captured the light I felt I needed a foreground to bring the audience into the experience. I called Jojo over and asked him to grab some skipping rocks. We had been skipping rocks for the last half hour and I have never met anyone better at skipping rocks than this guy.



You can see Jojo's rocks skipping at the right end of this shot. It really was this pink at sunset!

My first two days here in the Philippines have been great. Last night at sunset I captured hundreds of bats as they left their roosting tree into the night sky in search of fruit. More on that in a future post after I meet the bat conservationists. Then tonight I had the awesome sunset. The weather here in Miagao is just a tad short of brutal. It's hot and sweaty. The humidity is new to me and I find that I get tired by the end of the

day much sooner than usual. I'll share some images of the Sulu and the markets around this province soon.

Aloha from the Philippines!



# The Bats of Miagao

BY JASONM | PUBLISHED MAY 20 2014

There is a roosting tree for fruit bats 100m from Sulu Garden, Miagao. Every night at 6:30 the bats leave the tree in groups until the whole sky is filled with them.

They don't make a sound as they fly. They feed on the fruit in the surrounding jungle and can cover 40km in a single night. In doing so, they disperse seeds over a large area ensuring the survival of many plants in the region. Sometime in 2003 the bats began migrating to their new roosting tree. The tree is about 150' to 175' and sits right on top of a small barangay.



**How do people live with so many bats in their village?** For starters, the bats are endangered and protected by the municipality. Then there is the legends and folklore surround the tree they live in. The tree they roost in is considered mystical and over 200 years old. On misty nights Princess Ulayra's golden ship docks next to the tree. Many mysterious sightings of bright lights and white ladies are reported. Some say that they have seen Kapre smoking in the branches of the roosting tree. The Kapre are mythical giants that are half man, half beast. I was also told that people have seen mansions appear and disappear next to the roosting tree. The last bit of folklore about the tree is that is the resting place of American soldiers who died in the Philippines in WWII. *Needless to say, no one here will harm it.*

As such, the bats have become members of the community now. All 5,000 of them. Their nightly procession into the mountains takes about 20-30 minutes and happens precisely at 6:30PM. Back lit by sunset, the view from the Sulu is unique every time. The picture below was captured on a rainy day. I stood on top of a slippery roof as the sky broke and let the sun through. It was worth the shaky legs!

The following day I went with a guide to visit the tree. Walking though the barangay was an experience in alternate reality. Mere meters from where I sleep in an air-conditioned room with running water are people living in shoddy huts with the town's power cables running across the ground. Pigs for neighbors. Dirt floors. No running water.



A boy pumps water for his mother while other village children run to see what 'big lumbering American' is doing.

Of the children that took to following me around for the evening, Angelica was the least bashful. She never said two words to me but was happy be in my shadow while I stood at the base of the bubog tree.





Even though it was midday, the bats were very active and very loud!

An old man's hut sits directly beneath the tree. Before the bats moved in I'm sure it was quite a peaceful place to be. We shared a few words and stories through a translator. When I asked to take his photo, he sat up straight as an arrow; he had never had his photo taken.



I think his eyes are smiling in this pic.

On my first night at the Sulu Garden I stood on slippery roof top and saw the bats take flight. It has been a long time since I've seen something so new and outside my own experiences.

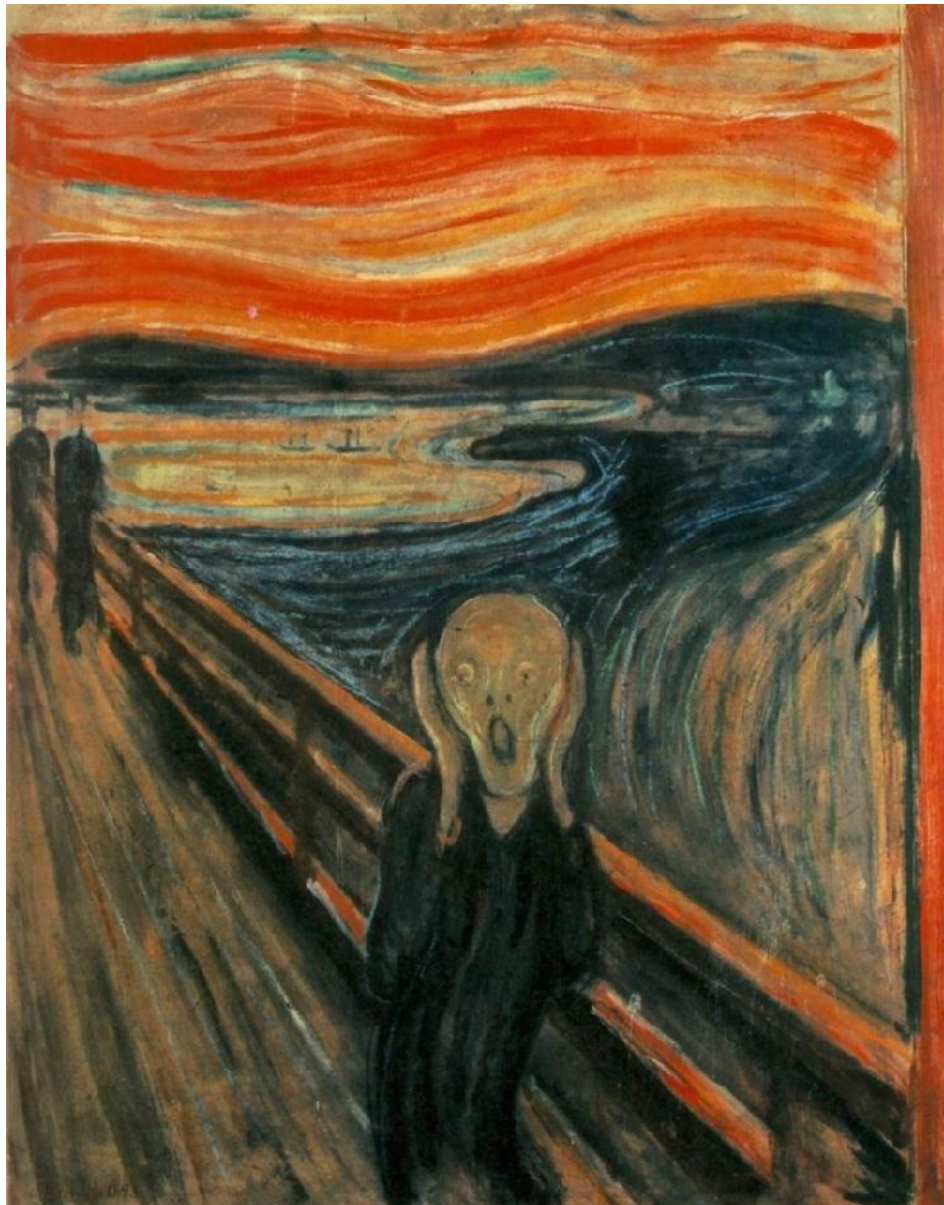




## The most amazing sunsets lasted for 20 years

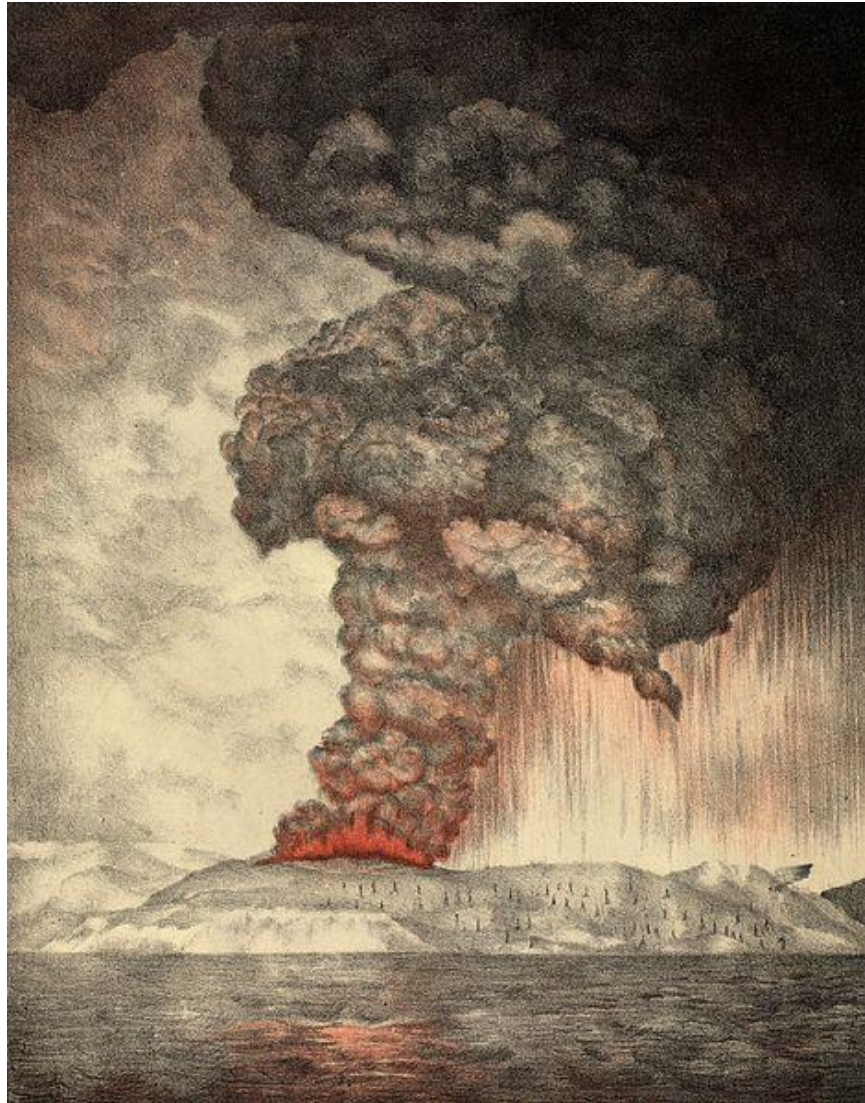
BY JASONM | PUBLISHED MAY 27 2014

It was as if a flaming sword of blood slashed open the vault of heaven. The atmosphere turned to blood - with glaring tongues of fire - the hills became deep blue - the sword shaded into cold blue - among the yellow and red colors - the garish blood-red - on the road - and the railing - my companions' faces became yellow-white - I felt something like a great scream - and truly I heard a great scream". Edvard Munch



Edvard Munch's famous painting, "The Scream" painted in 1893

Edvard Munch and many other artists around the world painted and wrote about spectacular sunsets from 1883 to long after 1915. For a time, art historians believed the ultra-colorful paintings and pastels were a fad or trend that caught on with visual artists the world over. Not until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century did art and science come together to explain the pictures and prose.



A lithograph of the eruption of the Krakatoa super caldera

In 1883 the world's most massive volcanic eruption occurred. The final explosion radiated out from the Krakatoa at 675mph. It was so loud that it was reportedly heard 5,000 km away, rupturing the eardrums of sailors in Sudan Strait. When Edvard Munch says he heard a scream, he was recalling the loudest sound ever recorded.





One of

paintings of William Ascroft in 1883/1884

hundred



One of hundred paintings of William Ascroft in 1883/1884

Krakatoa launched so much particulate into the atmosphere that the world temperature decreased by 1.2C and produced sunsets so red and fierce that fire trucks in New England were called out to fight fires that did not exist.

Had the fierce ashes of some fiery peak Been hurl'd so high they ranged about the globe? For day by day, thro' many a blood-red eve... The wrathful sunset glared . . . ("St. Telemachus", pub. 1892) -

**If the most amazing sunsets in the history of man were a side effect of super caldera Krakatoa, what is the cause of the most colorful sunsets I have ever seen here in the Philippines?**

We're not likely to see such blazing skies in our time. At least, we ought to hope not considering the cost with which they come. In all my travels I have found that the most amazing and colorful sunsets happen in the Philippines. Why? In a word: air pollution, or lack thereof.

The consensus among many and my original beliefs, is that the amount of pollution in the skies from Manila and China were the cause of the colorful sunsets. The level of total suspended particulates in Manila reached 118 micrograms per cubic meter when the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 placed the health limit for air pollution at 90 micrograms. It is said that air pollution creates colorful hues in the twilight skies but the type of pollution or smog being referred to indiscriminately scatters light, creating bland light and haze, ever not be able to see the sun because the sky was so bright? That is from pollution. It is also low-altitude pollution whereas Krakatoa's particulates extended 35,000' into the atmosphere.

With that myth debunked, what makes the sunsets here so beautiful is the actually the clarity of the skies and the altitude of the clouds. When sunlight is coming from directly above it travels through  $\frac{1}{38}$  the air mass that it would if it is coming from the horizon. Fewer particles are scattered here and the light remains blue. When light is coming from the horizon a red shift occurs as it is scattered by more particles i.e., by water (clouds), air, and other airborne particulates high in the atmosphere. If the red light is scattered at a greater distance (from the horizon) it gives a higher chance of reaching the observer.

Anyway, I find myself on a tangent. I would have loved to be alive capturing images in the years following Krakatoa. The sunsets are so pink and vibrant here it's difficult to imagine one as red as "The Scream." The sunset images below were all captured the same night and inspired this post. Aloha.

Photos are from Barangay Guibongan, Miagao, Iloilo

Prints are available.

Jason

Captured in Barangay Guibongan, Miagao, Iloilo on the island of Panay.





Directing boatmen via hand signals (since we don't speak the same language) was fun and challenging. I kept asking



them cruise by and they kept navigating away from where my camera

The thunder cloud on the horizon had stretched too high. Like Icarus who flew too near the sun. Only instead of the sun melting his wings the wind stream clipped the head of the column and spread the cloud like butter across a warming sky.



# Bioluminescence

BY JASONM | PUBLISHED MAY 28 2014

The ocean was a different sort of black. The sky on the horizon was black. The stars were shrouded by featureless clouds. Where the horizon and the sea met was indiscernible. It was so eerie that I almost didn't want to get in the water. Nothing, however, substitutes for ocean therapy and without thinking too much more about it I waded into the perfectly calm, black water. Then the most amazing thing happened; I started glowing! Well, not exactly, but kinda.

The ocean here is wonderfully clear but it is easy to forget that here in Miagao because the beaches are all black sand. The water looks dark all day long. But when you walk through the water and your every movement is celebrated by a chorus of bioluminescent algae you are quickly reminded of how clear the water is. And how wonderful nature is!

One day I'll figure out how to capture this sight with the equipment that I own. For now, you'll have to take my word for it- looking down into the ocean, the floor so black that you cannot see it at all, and all the bioluminescent life swirling around beneath me, was akin to looking up at the stars on a clear night. If all the stars swirled about, illuminating and re-illuminating as they traveled in erratic curves around the lines you draw with your fingers in the darkness.

Yup, it was that cool.

My favorite part about the night snorkel was when we swam down to the ocean floor and touched it. Like a shock wave light spread across the floor as far as a meter in every direction. In some ways it resembled a snowflake. It happens fast and is so fragile its delicate like a snow flake, too.

I know: no picture, no proof. I have one month to figure out how to capture this for you with what I've got. It has also inspired me to do some work with models to try capture of swimming in the stars. I hope I can pull it off for you before I leave the Philippines.

Aloha

Jason

# Kian the King

BY JASONM | PUBLISHED JUN 07 2014

When I was setting up to shoot the Hobbit Door at Sulu Gardens I had the owner hang some more accent and outdoor lighting to create a little bit of the magic that the Hobbit door implies. Within everyone is their inner child. As my vision for the door began to take shape for the Sulu's owner his inner creative pushed it's way to the surface. We began to get side tracked planning another shot with a character in the door instead of sticking to the plan for the next door in my door series. An idea for a figure emerging from the nether through the hobbit door began to take shape. But this was already shoot day and there was no time to call designers and models and get fancy lighting for shoot. Sulu's manager lives nearby and her son, Kian, eventually came to mind as the new volunteered subject of our shot. We scoured his closet and found an old vest from a Halloween costume. I grabbed a table decoration and turned it into a bandana. The builders had an on old gasoline lamp and the gardeners a brand new machete. We gave them all to this tiny third grader and charmed him into an unlikely middle-eastern hero. (Read: Aladdin) Lastly, I added smoke by burning saw dust and leaves in a grill. A fan gave us the motion and atmosphere and some simple desk lamps with extension cords provided the lighting.



Kian (pronounced: key•in) who's nick name is King emerges from the nether through the magic Hobbit Door.



# Sand Bar Island. Concepcion, Philippines

BY JASONM | PUBLISHED AUG 22 2014

I arrived on the bus late in the afternoon and struggled for nearly an hour to find boat that would take me to the islets. After some some asking around at the dock I found a gentleman named Dante who would transport me for 500 pesos each way. I arrived with my camera bag, a tent, a few pieces of chicken and some rice for dinner, and some sweet bread for the morning. I said a secret prayer to myself as I waved the boatman off hoping I'd be picked up in the morning.

The water is more than beautiful in the Philippines, as you know. This night there were bioluminescent 'live lights' in the shore line. I spent a few hours trying to collect the life lights to take a photo of them illuminating my hand to no avail. Time well spent in amazement. You'll have to experience this for yourself. Maybe on my next trip I'll figure out how to capture this.



It was no problem waking up at first light, I slept in the sand under the stars. A boat had arrived in the very early hours of the morning and made for a picturesque middle ground on this sandbar. This sand bar, by the way, disappears at high tide leaving only the small island resort above sea level. Where I'm standing now submerges about waist deep in crystal clear water.



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I believe this will make a master print. A two frame panoramic captured at 1st light with Canon 5DII and 24-70mm lens. Exposure edited in Camera RAW and assembled in Photoshop. It is a 2:1 landscape; 20×40, 30×60, etc. Edition of 100.

Later that morning my boatman did arrive, thankfully. He was on Filipino-Time. Filipino time is a lot like Hawaiian time but much, much slower. For a few hours, I was sitting on the edge of my seat. ....more like the edge of the sand. Not a bad place to be, honestly.



After some very beautiful island hopping I settled for a very picturesque vantage of all the islets of Concepcion. This island only had a few huts on it, mostly caretakers', before hurricane Yolanda blew through. Now, it is a completely empty piece of paradise surrounded by beautiful shallows and spritzed with just the right amount of palm trees. My next photo workshop will have an overnight stay on this island. And jet skis.



J A S O N   M A T I A S   P H O T O G R A P H Y

It is rare that I get two images I regard so highly in the same 12 hours. Or even same month. The above image is a 9 photo panoramic. I was gifted with the most perfect mid-morning sky. I asked Dante to bring the pump boat around the island to complete the foreground. Edition of 100.

I love Concepcion. To make this experience better I would charter a boat for a few days. Bring more supplies and some great company. Sandbar Island is beautiful but if you want to be more remote, the second island is really the place to be. A bon fire and midnight swims under the stars. A hammock and shade beneath the sun and a lazy wind. Island to island exploration. Repeat. Paradise.

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Private photoshop lessons and instruction available year round via Skype and Google Chat at \$45/hr.

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