Day 1

Manila City tour

May 7, 2025

Day One: From Ruins to Reverence — How Manila’s Painful Past Became a Proud Landmark

Our first day on the city tour was a perfect blend of culture, history, and modern-day fun. We began our adventure in **Intramuros**, the famous “Walled City” of Manila. Walking along the cobbled streets surrounded by Spanish-era buildings made us feel like we stepped back in time. The atmosphere was peaceful, and every corner had a story to tell.

Our next stop was **Fort Santiago**, a key historical site within Intramuros. Standing inside this fortress where heroes once walked, especially Dr. José Rizal, gave us chills. We explored the dungeons, admired the thick stone walls, and took photos with the iconic gate. It was a strong reminder of the country’s fight for freedom.

Afterward, we passed by the **San Agustin Church**, the oldest stone church in the Philippines. Though we didn’t go inside, its majestic exterior and intricate carvings were enough to leave an impression. It stood like a silent guardian of the past amid the busy streets of Manila.

Next, we visited **Rizal Park,** also known as Luneta. This open park is dedicated to our national hero, and seeing the Rizal Monument up close was both humbling and inspiring. The park was lively, with families relaxing and kids playing—truly a place for everyone.

To cap off the day, we headed to **SM Mall of Asia** for a dose of modern Manila. The sunset view by the bay was breathtaking. We enjoyed some food, did a bit of shopping, and just relaxed by the promenade. It was the perfect way to end our first day—blending the past with the present.

Day 2

Subic, Olongapo

May 8, 2025

Day Two: From Hubs to Harbors — Uncovering Subic’s Strategic Power

Our second day took us on a journey to **Subic, Olongapo**—a place that has evolved from a former U.S. naval base into a vital center of trade, logistics, and national development. The visit gave us a glimpse into how Subic now operates as a well-organized and forward-looking zone that balances security, commerce, and infrastructure.

We started our day at the **Subic Bay Exhibition and Convention Center (SBECC),** a key facility within the Freeport Zone known for hosting high-level conferences, trade expos, and official gatherings. The SBECC represents Subic’s transformation into a commercial hub, attracting investors and stakeholders from across the country and beyond.

Our next stop was the **Law Enforcement Department (LED)** of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority. The LED is tasked with upholding law and order within the Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ). Their role goes beyond basic patrol duties—they conduct 24/7 law enforcement operations, implement physical security, enforce national and local laws, manage traffic, conduct forest and harbor patrols, and control access points at various gates. They also handle investigative functions, including the apprehension and processing of suspects. Seeing their structured and mission-driven operations gave us a clearer picture of how public safety is prioritized in a bustling economic zone.

While touring the area, we also passed by the Subic Bay **International Airport**, which features a long runway originally used during the American era as part of Naval Air Station Cubi Point. This aviation facility, with its expansive landing strip, is a legacy of Subic’s military past and a testament to its readiness for both logistical and emergency operations today.

We concluded our tour at the **SBMA Port Administration Office,** where we were introduced to the processes involved in maritime trade. From customs clearance to port security and cargo logistics, the visit highlighted how Subic functions as a key maritime gateway for the Philippines. It was fascinating to see how every part of this port works in sync to support national and international commerce.

Day Two gave us a deeper understanding of Subic’s transformation—from a former military base to a secure, structured, and economically strategic zone. With its blend of infrastructure, safety systems, and trade operations, Subic stands as a model for development rooted in both history and innovation.

Day 3

Museo ni Manuel Quezon and National Museum of National History

May 9, 2025

Day Three: Echoes of Leadership and Nature — A Cultural Deep Dive into the Filipino Identity

Our third day was a reflective and enlightening journey into the soul of the nation. We began with a visit to the **Museo ni Manuel Quezon**, located within the grand halls of the Quezon Memorial Circle in Quezon City. The museum is a solemn tribute to the life, leadership, and legacy of **President Manuel L. Quezon**, the first president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines.

The museum is housed beneath the iconic **Quezon Memorial Shrine,** a towering mausoleum that stands as both a landmark and a monument of national pride. Inside, we were surrounded by artifacts, photographs, and documents that traced Quezon’s path from a principled public servant to a visionary leader. The most striking feature was his preserved presidential car and personal belongings, which gave a human dimension to a historical figure we often read about in books. His advocacy for the national language, social justice, and independence echoed powerfully throughout the exhibits.

Afterward, we proceeded to the **National Museum of Natural History**, situated in Rizal Park, Manila. Architecturally stunning and intellectually rich, the museum presents the story of the Philippines through its biodiversity, ecosystems, and geological history.

Upon entering the atrium, we were greeted by the “**Tree of Life**,” a central architectural piece that symbolizes the interconnectedness of all living things. Each floor of the museum offered a well-curated look at the country’s vast and unique natural heritage—from the rainforests of Luzon to the coral reefs of Mindanao. We explored halls dedicated to Philippine wildlife, endangered species, fossils, and ecological systems. One of the highlights was seeing the replica of **Lolong**, the world’s largest crocodile in captivity, whose presence is both awe-inspiring and a reminder of conservation efforts.

Day 4

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and Hytec Power Inc.

May 10, 2025

Day Four: Innovation and Industry — Understanding the Value of Currency and Technology

Day Four of our tour immersed us in two critical pillars of national development—monetary production and technological advancement. Our visits to the **Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP)** and **Hytec Power Inc**. Offered a deeper appreciation for the complexity and precision behind both currency management and industrial innovation in the Philippines.

Our first stop was the **Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas**, the country’s central monetary authority. While commonly associated with financial regulation, our visit focused on the **Security Plant Complex**, the facility responsible for the production of Philippine banknotes and coins. It was a rare and privileged opportunity to witness how the nation’s currency is created and safeguarded.

We learned that only **denominations of ₱50 to ₱1,000** are currently produced in banknote form using **Abacá Fiber**, chosen for its strength and local significance. Production of the **₱20 bill ceased in 2023**, as it was transitioned into coin form for durability and cost-effectiveness. Likewise, the **₱200 denomination** has been minimized due to low circulation and utility.

A noteworthy detail was the introduction of **Polymer Banknotes** in the Philippine currency system. These are not produced locally; instead, they are outsourced to international providers who won the bidding process based on cost-efficiency and material quality. The polymer notes offer greater durability and security, reflecting the BSP’s commitment to innovation and anti-counterfeiting measures.

In addition to currency, the facility also processes **Gold**. We observed the controlled procedures for transforming gold from crushed ore into refined **Gold Bars**. The process includes smelting, molding, cooling, and stamping—each step conducted under strict regulation and security to ensure purity and integrity. It was a fascinating demonstration of how the country’s reserves are physically shaped and preserved.

From currency, we shifted to technology and automation as we visited **Hytec Power Inc**., a company dedicated to **industrial innovation and workforce development.** Hytec Power is not just a robotics and automation provider—it is a solutions-driven partner for both industry and education sectors.

During the tour, we saw a range of **robotic applications** and **automated systems** designed to solve real-world industrial challenges. These included machines for repetitive assembly-line tasks, safety-enhancing mechanisms for hazardous environments, and programmable learning tools for technical education. Their commitment to addressing **skills mismatch** in the country was evident, as they not only supply high-tech equipment but also provide continuous training and support for clients, ensuring that both schools and companies can operate with the latest technologies.

Day Four reminded us that behind the things we often take for granted—money and machines—are institutions rooted in discipline, foresight, and national progress. Whether through the secure printing of currency or the building of intelligent machines, both BSP and Hytec Power are shaping the future with precision and purpose. Though cameras were not allowed inside BSP, seeing everything firsthand made me appreciate the true value behind every peso.

Day 5

Traffic Engineering Center and Light Rail Transit Authority

May 11, 2025

Day Five: Systems in Motion — Navigating Urban Solutions for a Growing Metropolis

On the fifth day of our tour, we explored the infrastructure and systems that keep Metro Manila moving—literally. With congestion being one of the most persistent challenges in the National Capital Region, our visits to the **Traffic Engineering Center of the MMDA** and the **Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA)** shed light on how urban mobility is studied, managed, and continuously improved.

Our morning began at the **Traffic Engineering Center of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA)**. This facility serves as the nerve center for traffic management across the metro. We were introduced to the science behind road systems, traffic flow analysis, and signal timing—all vital components in easing congestion and improving commuter experience.

The center uses advanced technologies for **traffic simulation, signal design, and road safety planning**. Among its key functions are the implementation of traffic signalization, maintenance of intersection controls, and evaluation of road accident data. We gained insight into how geometric design, signage placement, and road capacity studies contribute to more efficient urban movement. It was eye-opening to see how engineering, data, and policy work hand-in-hand to manage the dynamic and often unpredictable behavior of urban traffic.

In the afternoon, we visited the **Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA)**, the government agency that oversees the operation, maintenance, and development of Metro Manila’s light rail systems. The LRTA plays a crucial role in the capital’s public transportation network, particularly in managing **LRT Line 2**, and ensuring that expansion and modernization projects are executed with commuter safety and service efficiency in mind.

At the LRTA headquarters, we were briefed on the structure of train operations, from **scheduling and dispatching to maintenance protocols** and **railway safety**. The agency’s ongoing efforts in rail line extension projects, infrastructure modernization, and digital ticketing systems highlight their commitment to sustainable and accessible urban transit.

Day 6

Baguio City

May 12, 2025

Day Six: Culture, Scenery, and Cold Escape — A Day in the Heart of Baguio

Our sixth day brought a refreshing shift in scenery as we ascended to the cool climate and cultural charm of **Baguio City.** Known as the “**Summer Capital of the Philippines**,” Baguio offered not only a break from the heat but also a vibrant blend of agriculture, heritage, and local craftsmanship. Every stop throughout the day reflected a unique facet of what makes this city an enduring favorite among locals and tourists alike.

We began our morning at the **La Trinidad Strawberry Farm**, just outside the city proper. Surrounded by rows of ripe red fruit, the experience was both hands-on and heartwarming. We walked through the plots and watched local farmers carefully tend to their crops. Some of us even got the chance to pick fresh strawberries—a simple but memorable moment that gave us a taste of the region’s agricultural pride.

Our next stop was the **Bell Church**, a peaceful and intricately designed Taoist temple nestled among pine trees and floral gardens. The temple grounds were filled with symbols of Chinese spirituality—dragons, lotus ponds, and prayer halls—all blending harmoniously with the natural landscape. It offered a moment of quiet reflection amid the vibrant city surroundings.

From spiritual peace, we moved on to historical grandeur at **The Mansion**, the official summer residence of the President of the Philippines. Standing before its iron gates and colonial-style architecture, we felt a sense of history echoing through its walls. Though access inside was limited, the site provided a picturesque view and a deeper appreciation of the city’s political and historical significance.

A few minutes away, we explored Mines View Park, a scenic overlook that offered a sweeping view of the mountains and valleys of Benguet. The cool breeze and the sight of native crafts and snacks created an atmosphere of relaxation. The observation deck reminded us of how naturally beautiful—and photogenic—Baguio remains even amidst its modernization.

We ended the day with a visit to G**ood Shepherd Convent,** famous for its locally made products like ube jam, strawberry preserves, and peanut brittle. More than just a souvenir stop, it represents a mission-driven enterprise where proceeds support educational scholarships for Cordilleran youth. Every purchase here felt meaningful—handcrafted with care and purpose.

Day Six showed us that Baguio is more than just pine trees and cold weather—it is a city rich in culture, rooted in community, and generous in its offerings. Whether through strawberries, temples, or mountain views, Baguio gave us a day filled with freshness, learning, and heartfelt experiences.

Day 7

Baguio City Freedom Gala

May 13, 2025

Day Seven: A Gentle Goodbye — Souvenirs, Scenery, and Sweet Farewells

Our final day in Baguio was reserved for a “**freedom gala**”—a time to simply slow down, soak in the cool mountain air, and enjoy the last few hours before heading home. After days filled with structured learning and exploration, this morning was about **personal moments and simple joys**.

We spent the early hours visiting **local souvenir shops**, selecting thoughtful gifts for our families and friends—**handwoven items**, **wooden crafts**, **local delicacies,** and **iconic Baguio treats** like ube jam and peanut brittle. Each item we picked carried a memory, a story, or a taste of the city we had come to appreciate deeply.

Wandering through familiar streets, we took in the scent of **pine trees,** the warmth of local smiles, and the crispness of Baguio’s morning breeze. Some of us sipped hot chocolate or coffee from nearby stalls, while others simply sat back, reflecting on the week that had passed—grateful, recharged, and inspired.

By noon, it was time to return to **Quezon City**. The ride back was quiet, not just from fatigue, but from the feeling that we were leaving behind something special. Baguio had given us not just sights and souvenirs, but shared experiences and lasting impressions.