

Sunday Drives: Philippines

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02/04/2023 Entrepreneur and Porsche collector Jay Aldeguer escapes the hustle and bustle of his native Cebu for an island drive around nearby Bohol.

Where:

Bohol, Philippines

Length:

Approx. 275 km

Type:

Long straights and wooded mountain roads with breath-taking views towards crystal clear waters and of 'chocolate hills'.

Some 500 kilometres southeast of Manila lies Cebu, the second city of the Philippines and lifelong home to Jay Aldeguer, entrepreneur and serial Porsche collector. A small island in the Western Pacific might seem like a strange place to amass a garage of coveted classic sports cars, but as Aldeguer reveals, with a little imagination and the help of a local ferry, you can unearth some of finest driving roads in Asia.

Aldeguer was born and raised in Cebu, a small but cosmopolitan community between white sand beaches to the south and lush, tree-covered mountains to the north. After studying at University in Manila, he returned to Cebu city and set up a business at the age of just 22 selling souvenir t-shirts to tourists. Thirty years later, Aldeguer's business has grown into a modest empire, his 'Islands Group' now incorporating numerous retail chains, budget hotels and tour companies. Such success has allowed the hard-working father to indulge a passion that arrived relatively late in life.

"Growing up, I never really liked cars," Aldeguer admits. "I was more fond of planes and boats. My first foray into cars was in 1997 when I saw a Miata Roadster in a showroom here in the Philippines. I was working hard and had a young family, so felt I had no business acquiring a toy at that point. But after a test drive I bit the bullet and bought my first sports car."

It didn't take long for that newfound interest to lead Aldeguer to Porsche. "Things escalated so fast," he laughs. "Later that same year I visited a friend who had a warehouse full of high-end cars, and somewhere in the corner was a 1974 911 S Targa. It was partially covered and really dusty but I was immediately drawn to it. I still remember opening the door and sitting on the old leather seat and that alone captivated me. The car wasn't for sale but I had literally fallen in love with it."

Aldeguer was still only 27 years old, but classic cars were relatively inexpensive in the Philippines in the late 1990s. Just before Christmas that same year, he made the owner an offer which was, to his surprise and excitement, accepted. Although a little rusty and neglected, Aldeguer now owned his first 911, an example he has kept to this day and is currently preparing for his son to use as a wedding car in June. After 30 years of devotion to the brand, there are now more than a dozen classic 911s in his collection and giving them all an adequate share of seat time has become an enviable if time-consuming challenge.

Despite the beauty of Cebu, one of Aldeguer's preferred drives today takes him over the water to a neighbouring island. "When I first got into Porsches I would drive in the mountains north of the city quite regularly," he says. "But since the pandemic the roads up there have become quite congested, so what I often do now is take a ferry to Bohol. The Philippines is an archipelago of about 7,000 islands, so getting from one to another is usually seamless. And some of these islands are pretty vast and can be

very quiet."

Bohol is about an hour's boat ride from Cebu, and Aldeguer will often spend two or more days exploring the island's shoreline and interior. "The roads of Bohol are beautiful to drive and there are numerous routes you can take," he says, "and because the island is relatively small, it can be circumnavigated in a day. There are nice, long stretches of open road and windy sections in the mountains. There are also areas with little or no civilisation beyond small plantations, and that's part of what makes the place so exciting."

The landscape of Bohol is extraordinary, with low mountain ranges ringing a large plateau. At its heart, near the town of Carmen, the Chocolate Hills are a series of 1,200 uniform conical limestone peaks, the grasses on which turn a rich brown in summer. Between May and July, temperatures and humidity peak ahead of the southwest monsoon season between August and October when heavy rains can last for days. For many visitors, the ideal time to travel is therefore between November and April, when the northwest monsoon season brings predominantly far drier and milder weather.

Aldeguer's preferred route sees him heading north from the ferry port at Tubigon. "We take the coast road past quiet little towns like Clarin and Talibon, all the way to Loay, where we make a detour towards the Loboc river and the manmade forest in Bilar. This is where we usually take a break under a nice canopy of trees. And once in a while," Aldeguer continues, "when we have more time, we head inland towards Carmen to see the world-famous Chocolate Hills. Before dark we then head back to the islet of Panglao and spend the night in one of the beach resorts there."

For Aldeguer and his family, food is a big part of any road trip. "In the Philippines, you can't do anything without food," he says. "Every day is a picnic. Anthony Bourdais actually declared Cebu's roasted pork or 'lechon' the best in the word, and you can be driving up a mountain and people are roasting it by the side of the road. You can just park up and enjoy some, always with rice wrapped in banana leaves. Or you pass by a fruit stand and they'll open up a nice coconut for you to drink straight from the shell. And this isn't just a novelty for tourists," Aldeguer adds. "This is what the locals do. Food is a really big part of a good Sunday drive here."

Aldeguer's collection of vintage 911s now includes an extremely rare 1968 911 'Soft Window' Targa and a very early 1966 model sitting alongside the last of the G-Series cars built more than thirty years later. He tries to drive them all, but often the decision isn't his. "I like driving alone on big trips," he says, "but for a Sunday drive I'm always with the kids. We often go out at night – one of my daughters will ask to go for a drive and she gets to choose which car and which coffee shop we're stopping at for ice cream. But I'm so happy my kids are into it. We do Sunday drives together all the time."

Sunday Drives

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globe.

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