MAN AND MOUNTAIN: AN ENDURING LOVE STORY

For centuries, Ifugao communities survived on the harvests from the terraces, and the terraces gave bountiful sustenance in exchange for the loving care and maintenance of the Ifugao people. This legacy of agriculture and rituals, inextricably intertwined, is tangible in the daily lives of the people who live in the terraced slopes of the Cordilleras.

However, the robust resilience of the Ifugao lifestyle has been challenged by the many changes caused by modernization and climate change. The tourism industry, while providing new income streams, also carries with it a different kind of strain on traditional outlooks.

The rising cost of living and changes in the agricultural cycle have made some farmers convert to lowland rice and second crops. Younger generations, instead of hunting and fishing, are attracted to other more modern means of livelihood. Weak financial climate, families willing to do the farm work, terraces cannot be maintained and are used to be. Despite these challenges the people still push forward.

With characteristic resilience, communities have joined local government units and partner organizations that have initiatives that are focused on preserving Ifugao culture and the rice terraces.

TWO THOUSAND YEAR-OLD LIVING SCULPTURE

Among the structures that have withstood the test of time, the rice terraces are remarkable for their fertility and age. The terraces are farming plots built on the Cordillera mountain ranges by the Ifugao people. The intricacies of the terrace structure — its natural irrigation, stone and mud walls, and unique landscape — helped the Ifugao develop a system of farming that was both sustainable and profitable, as well as a lifestyle that highly influenced by the community-centric culture of the Ifugao and their native beliefs. It is because of this that the beauty of the terraces has flourished for so long.

LIFE-SUSTAINING LANDSCAPE

The rice terraces are valued, first and foremost, as agricultural land, where Ifugao families grow their food. The terraces were born from the desire to become a self-sustaining, independent community. Hence, every aspect of the rice terraces was designed to work harmoniously with the environment.

The forested area is called the padi, it is well protected, and serves as the watershed and the source of natural irrigation for the terrace plots.

At the head of the terraces are the muayong (family-owned) and communal forested areas that provide necessities like medicines, fuel materials for building houses, as well as for wood carving and basket weaving.

The third section are the rice terraces, whose walls were built with nothing more than native tools and the hard work of the Ifugao people. The walls that support each terrace are still made and repaired with stone and mud, and were designed to follow the natural contours of the mountain. Along the terrace walls is also an intricate web of canals that help the water flow freely from the watershed through to the various terraces, as the flow of the terraces is the dolyo, a herbaceous and fruit forest that serves as a barrier between the villages and the rice terraces. All these ensure that the communities are able to maximize their terrace plots by yielding abundant and quality crops.

BOUNTY FROM THE GODS

Their primary crops include “Heritage Rice,” the most prominent of which are the native varieties that can be harvested annually, called tinowan (literally once a year). The Ifugao believe that this grain was a gift given to them from the gods and the stories are contained in traditional Ifugao myths. Tinowan is considered especially nutritious. Organically grown, it is heavier than lowland rice, even if the yields are not as plentiful. Respect and gratitude for the sacred rice are expressed in the agricultural cycle of preparation, planting, and harvesting — an intricate blend of labor and rituals that are led by the Mambabatok (village priests).

Although central to Ifugao culture, tinowan rice is not the only item in the Ifugao diet. Other common crops found in the terraces are tari, corn, cassava, garlic, onions, tomatoes, squash, beans and various legumes.

Tinowan Stalks

OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordillera is an outstanding example of an evolved, living cultural landscape that can be traced as far back as two millennia ago in the pre-colonial Philippines. The terraces are located in the remote areas of the Philippine Cordillera mountain range on the northern island of Luzon, Philippine archipelago. While the historic terraces cover an extensive area, the inscribed property consists of the clusters of the most intact and impressive terraces, located in four municipalities. They are all the product of the Ifugao ethnic group, a minority community that has occupied this mountainous region for thousands of years.

The five inscribed clusters are: (i) the Nagacadan terrace cluster in the municipality of Kalinga, rice terrace cluster manifested in two distinct sectioning rows of terraces connected by a river; (ii) the Lupon terrace cluster that uniquely emerges into a spider web; (iii) the central Mayoyao terrace cluster which is characterized by terraces interspersed with traditional farmers’ bamboo (house) and stone (granaries); (iv) the Benguet terrace cluster in the municipality of Banaue that backdrops a typical Ifugao traditional villages; and (v) the Batad terrace cluster of the municipality of Banaue that is nested in amphitheatre-like semi-circular terraces with a village at its base.

The Ifugao Rice Terraces epitomize the absolute blending of the physical, socio-cultural, economic, religious, and political environment. Indeed, it is a living cultural landscape of unparalleled beauty. The Ifugao Rice Terraces are the priceless contribution of Philippine ancestors to humanity. Built 2000 years ago and passed on from generation to generation, the Ifugao Rice Terraces represent an enduring illustration of an ancient civilization that surpassed various challenges and setbacks to humanity.

Reaching a higher altitude and being built on steeper slopes than many other terraces, the Ifugao complex of stone or mud walls and the careful carving of the natural contours of hills and mountains to make terraced pond fields, coupled with the development of intricate irrigation systems, harvesting water from the forests of the mountain tops, and an elaborate farming system, reflect a mastery of engineering that is appreciated to the present. The terraces illustrate a persistence of cultural traditions and remarkable continuity and endurance, since archaeological evidence reveals that this technique has been in use in the region for 2000 years virtually unchanged. They offer many lessons for application in similar environments elsewhere. The maintenance of the living rice terraces reflects a primarily cooperative approach of the whole community which is based on detailed knowledge of the rich diversity of biological resources existing in the Ifugao agro-ecosystem, a finely tuned annual cycle respecting lunar cycles, sowing and planting, extensive soil conservation, mastery of a most complex pest control regime based on the processing of a variety of herbs, accompanied by religious rituals.

Criteria under which the site is inscribed into the World Heritage List: Criterion (i): The rice terraces are a dramatic testimony to a community’s sustainable and primary communal system of rice production, based on harvesting water from the forested mountain terraces and ponds, a system that has survived for two millennia.

Criterion (iv): The rice terraces are a memorial to the history and labour of more than a thousand generations of small-scale farmers who, working together as a community, have created a landscape based on a delicate and sustainable use of natural resources.

Criterion (v): The rice terraces are an outstanding example of land-use that resulted from a harmonious interaction between people and their environment that has produced a steep terraced landscape of great aesthetic beauty, now vulnerable to social and economic changes.
The wonders of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras cater to many tourist interests. There are numerous waterfalls and beautiful trekking routes for the thrill-seeking adventure tourists, restaurants and souvenir wood-work shops for leisure tourists and a plethora of museums and some experiential tours for those interested in more academic excursions. There are also many convenient inns and home-stays across the five municipalities that are quite accessible and reasonably priced. To make the most of the trip, it’s important for tourists to register and get guides from the respective municipal tourism offices. With proper guidance you are assured of both your safety and an adventure with no opportunities left unexplored! Paying the fees is also an important way for tourists to help support the Ifugao communities and their rice terraces.

**How to Respect the Culture of the Ifugao?**

- Avoid wearing overly revealing clothing.
- Ask permission before taking pictures, especially of community elders.
- When using native attire and tools/instruments, ask for guidance, as one risks offending if they are not used for their intended purpose.
- Be aware of certain holidays, which Ifugao communities seek to observe quietly among themselves.
- Respect the strict privacy of family rituals and rituals of healing.
- For your safety and the preservation of the terraces, do register at the respective municipal tourism offices.
- Pay the environmental fees.
- Trekking through terraces is best conducted with recommended guides; always stick to the pathways and follow them.
- You may wish to rent walking sticks; some tracks have steep inclines and can be challenging.
- No smoking in public areas (some municipalities have local ordinances).
- No littering.
- Refrain from excessive drinking, and try to tone down group conversations in the evenings, especially when staying near communities.

**A Guide for Tourists:**

- **TO BAGUIO**
  - 3.5 hour drive via Mt. Province

- **TO MANILA**
  - 3.5 hour via San Jose City

- **TO BANAUE**
  - 1.5 hour via Banaue Town Proper

- **TO TAPPINGAH FALLS**
  - 1.5 hour via Mt. Province

Visit the extensive terraces of Hungduan, famous for its resemblance to a spider web when seen from the air. Spend the night in home-stays located in the midst of the terraces next to the Upanan River. Explore the nearby Banaue Hot Springs. 2.5 km from Banaue (approx. 1-hour drive) 4 km from Banaue (approx. 1-hour drive)

- **TO BATAD**
  - 1 hour drive via Banaue Trade Center

- **CENTRAL MAIDAYAN TERRACE CLUSTER**
  - 1.5 hour drive via Banaue (approx. 2.5-hour drive)

- **TO BANAUE RICE TERRACES**
  - 4 km from Banaue (approx. 1-hour drive)

- **BANAAE MUSEUM**
  - Kiangan

- **BANAAE TRADE CENTER**
  - Municipal Hall

- **NAGACADAN TERRACE CLUSTER**
  - 35 km from Banaue (approx. 1 hr and 50 minutes drive)

- **BATAAD TERRACE CLUSTER**
  - 4 km from Banaue (approx. 1-hour drive)

- **BANAAE RICE TERRACES**
  - 4 km from Banaue (approx. 1-hour drive)

This map shows the cultural sites of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras. This map was drawn by the author collaborating with the student from Visual Arts at the University of the Philippines Baguio. The map was created to allow the public to understand the layout and its cultural significance. It was drawn with the help of local experts and stakeholders who have been involved in the management and conservation of the terraces. The map is a valuable resource for tourists and researchers interested in the history and culture of the Ifugao people and their rice terraces. For more information about the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, visit [this website](http://www.rice-terraces.org/en/).