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Reflection on My Trip to Palawan: The Thrilling Exploration of the Hundred Caves



*Figure 1. Surroundings of the
Hundred Caves*



*Figure 2. In Hundred Caves,
with Liu Sir*

One of the highlights of my trip to Palawan was the exhilarating exploration of the Hundred Caves. This adventure was both challenging and thrilling, leaving me with memories that will last a lifetime. Before embarking on this journey, we were asked to watch some documentaries about what the China Exploration & Research Society (CERS) has done to help the locals in Palawan. One of the videos focused on how CERS assisted in the development of the caves, which has been beneficial to the local community by generating income through entrance fees and tourist guide services.

Initially, I had no high expectations for the Hundred Caves. Having previously visited well-known natural caves like Huanglong Cave in Zhangjiajie and Cave Okinawa in Japan, I assumed the Hundred Caves would be on a smaller scale and less impressive. However, my experience turned out to be quite the opposite.

Unlike other caves with wide entrances and easy access, reaching the Hundred Caves required a 15-minute climb through the jungle. This alone set it apart from my previous cave

explorations. Upon arrival, we were given helmets with torches, and I was immediately struck by the pitch darkness inside the cave. It was a stark contrast to the well-lit caves I had visited before.



Figure 3 (Left). Climbing up to the entrance of the Hundred Caves

Figure 4 (Right). Interior of the Hundred Caves

As we ventured deeper into the cave, the sound of bats flapping their wings became a common occurrence. Despite my previous cave experiences, this was my first time encountering bats up close, adding to the sense of adventure.

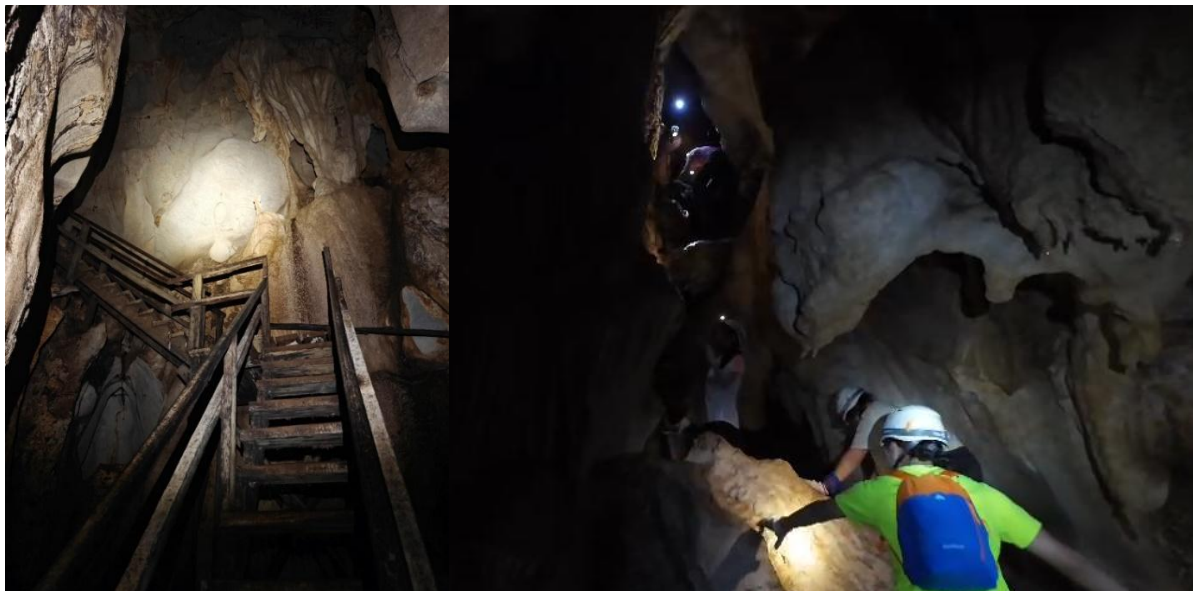


Figure 5 (Left). Stairs in the Hundred Caves

Figure 6 (Right). Climbing up the Cave

The further we went, the more challenging the journey became. Initially, there were stairs and ropes to assist us, but as we delved deeper, the path became more difficult. At one point, we

had to navigate a narrow gap. I watched Dr. Liu, the strongest (fat) member of our group, struggled to pass through. As a thinner person, I thought it would be easy for me. However, I quickly realized that it was more challenging than I had anticipated. My first attempt saw me getting stuck, with my head wedged in the gap. After a minute of struggling, the guide advised me to retry. This time, I led with my head and right foot first and successfully made it through.



Figure 7. Squeezing through the cave

The cave floor was often covered in water and mud, which presented another challenge. I had bought new waterproof sports shoes for the trip, confident that my feet would stay dry. However, the conditions inside the cave were more extreme than I had imagined. While I could sometimes avoid or jump over shallow pools, there were instances where the entire path was submerged in water and mud. Determined to keep my feet dry, I employed a "spider walk" (|大|) technique, using the friction between my hands and shoes to stay above the water. This worked for a while, but eventually, I encountered a wide pool with no dry path. Feeling defeated, I hesitated at the edge of the pool. The tourist guide, noticing my struggle, kindly offered to carry me across. Although I was grateful, he became tired near the end and accidentally dropped me, causing one of my legs to plunge into the water. Despite this minor setback, the caving experience was thrilling and exciting. Unlike the well-developed caves with stairs, ropes, and even escalators that make the exploration feel more like a visit to an underground shopping mall, the Hundred Caves offered a raw and authentic adventure. Besides the different kinds of stones, I saw wildlife, like bats and worms, which are absent in the more commercialized caves.



Figure 8-10. Creatures in the cave

After our exploration, our leader mentioned that fewer than 30 people visit the Hundred Caves each month. I found this to be a pity, as more people should experience this incredible adventure, and the locals could benefit from increased tourism. However, given the difficulty of navigating the Hundred Caves, it is not suitable for everyone, and its lack of fame means it remains relatively unknown.

While I am not a famous YouTuber with many followers, I still wanted to do my part in promoting the Hundred Caves. I posted my recommendation on Google Maps, hoping that others might stumble upon my review and be inspired to visit. I believe that even small efforts can contribute to raising awareness about this hidden gem and, in turn, help the local community.

Reflecting on my adventure in the Hundred Caves, I realize how much it deviated from my initial expectations. The journey was not just about seeing impressive rock formations or navigating through tight spaces; it was about immersing myself in an environment that felt untouched and wild. The thrill of exploration, the sense of accomplishment after overcoming each challenge, and the close encounters with nature made this experience unique and unforgettable.

Moreover, the trip made me appreciate the efforts of organizations like CERS, which work towards sustainable tourism and support local communities. By developing the caves and creating opportunities for locals to earn an income, they help preserve the natural beauty of the area while ensuring that the benefits are shared with the people who call it home.

In conclusion, my trip to Palawan and the exploration of the Hundred Caves was a profound and exhilarating experience. It reminded me of the joys of adventure, the beauty of unspoiled nature, and the importance of supporting local communities. I hope that more people will have the chance to experience the Hundred Caves and that my small contribution will help in some way to bring more visitors to this incredible place.