

# Volcano Country

By Marc Obrowski



Drifter Landing

## A Flying Holiday in the Philippines

**A** flying club in the Philippines has become a secret ultralight Mecca for pilots around the globe.

All hell breaks loose behind my head as Max Guevarra starts the roaring Rotax. He jumps in next to me. This thing will never fly. Two garden chairs with some wire attached to a wing. More go-cart than aeroplane. What am I doing here? Max pushes the throttle forward and the small ultralight starts moving.

The taxiing seems endless. There is no suspension; I feel every bump. We have reached the threshold. Max does some checks and then...

Full throttle.

Tachometer goes to 6400 rpm.

Wind in my face, in my T-shirt, in my shorts, static in my headset, hopping over grass, acceleration, airspeed needle jumps wildly.

Lift off. We soar into the air. Past a

deeply unimpressed water buffalo and his stoic wife. The sun flashes from a reflection in a rice field.

A moment later we are at 300 feet, throttled back to cruising speed and heading towards an old volcano. For someone who had never been in an ultralight (much less an open one) that was quite a thing.

Not for the farmer in a rice field below us. He goes on with his plough behind another indifferent buffalo beast without even looking up. This quiet Filipino country-side has long gotten used to those crazy people from all over the world, and their strange flying machines.

Meet the oddest flying club on the planet. The Angeles City Flying Club (ACFC) in the Philippines is a truly international hang out with over 150 members from all over the world. Most members don't live in the country. They hail from Europe, the Americas,

Australia and other Asian countries. They commute between the club and their home country whenever they want to fly.

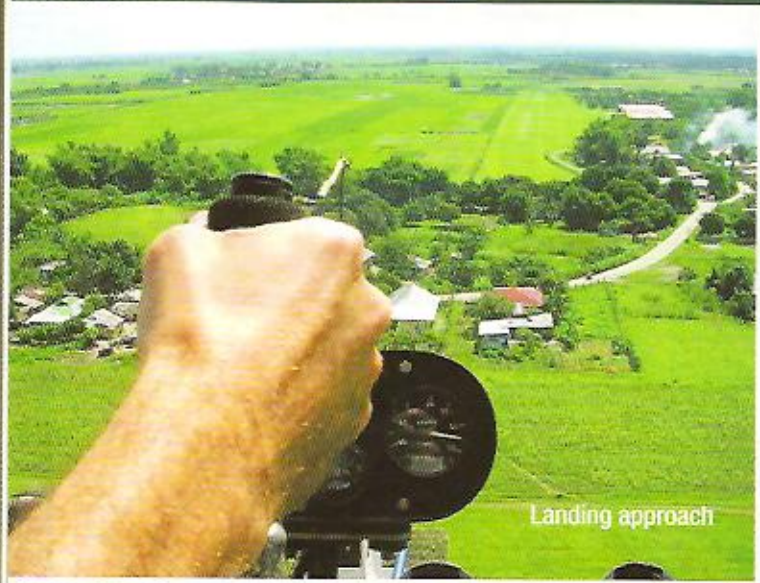
Like Douglas and his son Paul whose X-Air is parked in one of the three hangars. Douglas flies in from Canada, Paul boards a plane from Hong Kong. They meet in the Philippines, where they enjoy a few days in slow flight over the rice fields.

Chris from Australia learnt how to fly at the club and then decided to retire in the Philippines, right next to his Rans S12. Jay is another S12-owning Australian member who likes it so much here that he set up residence not far from the club.

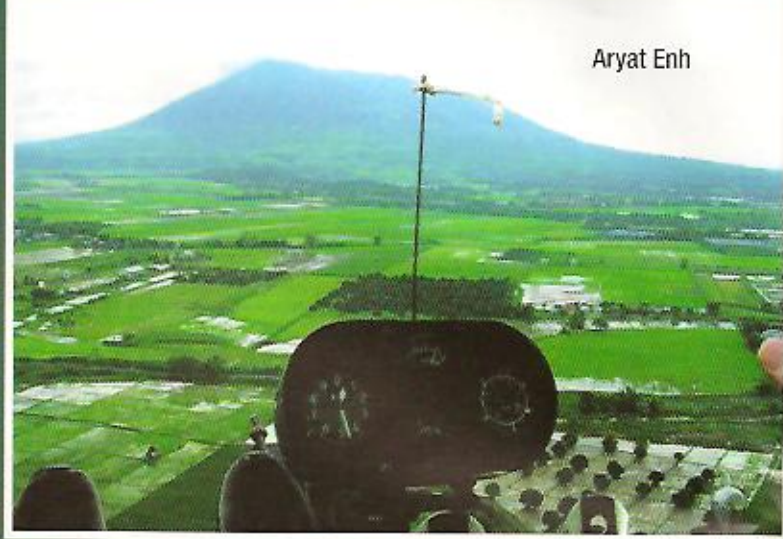
The ACFC seems like a black hole, drawing pilots to it and never letting them go.

Indeed it is beautiful. Bamboo huts surround a crystal-clear pool, the grass runway is perfectly maintained and the

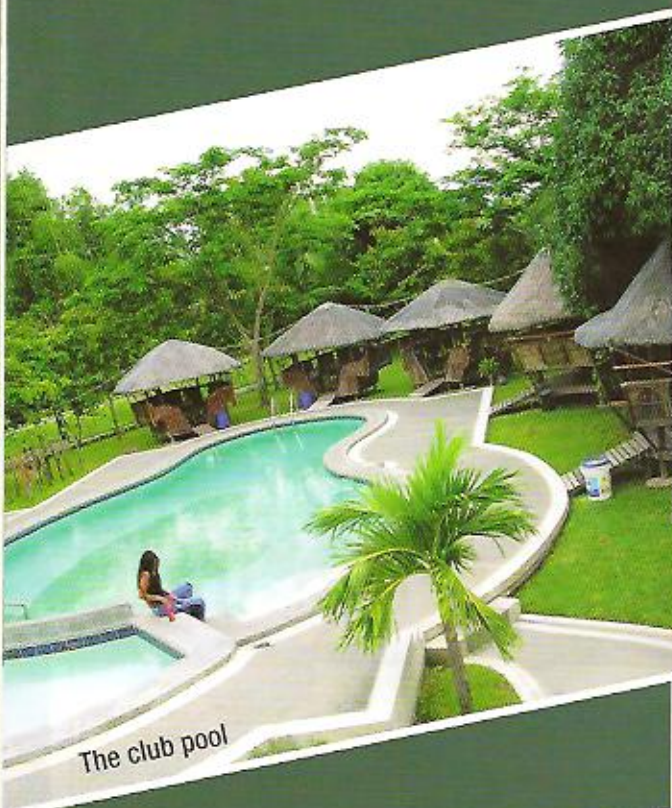




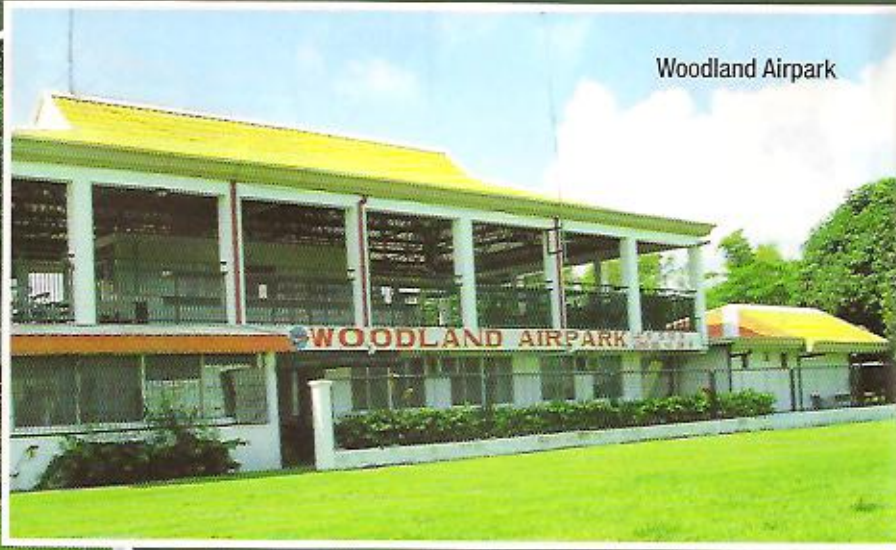
Landing approach



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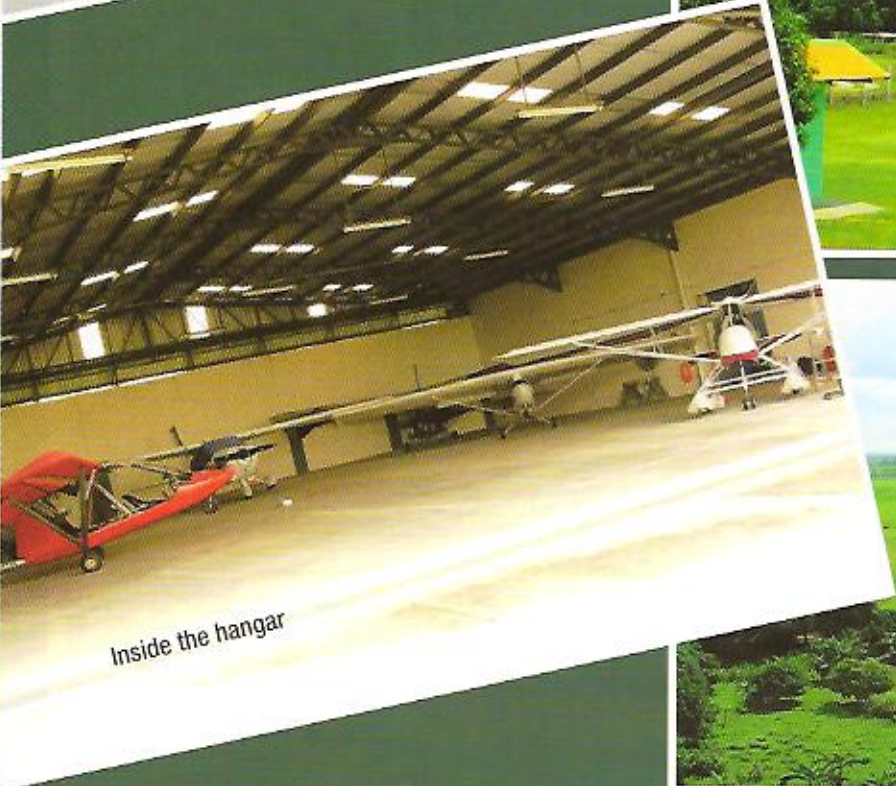
The club pool



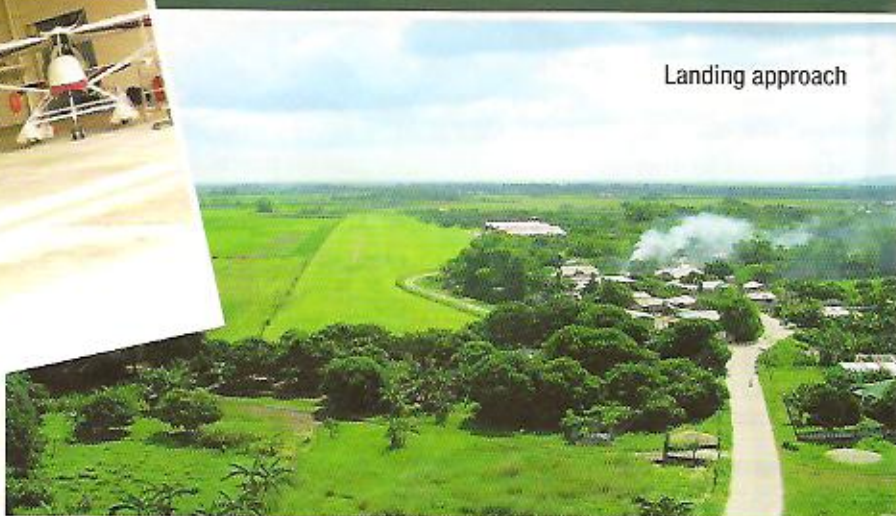
Woodland Airpark



Red QS landing

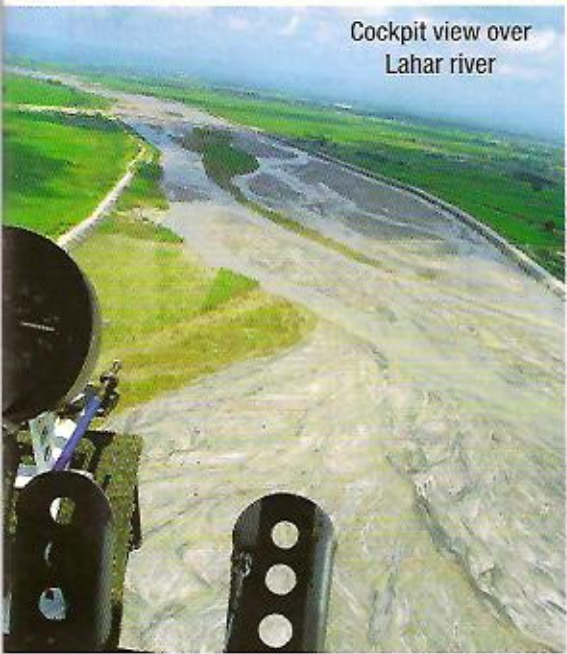


Inside the hangar

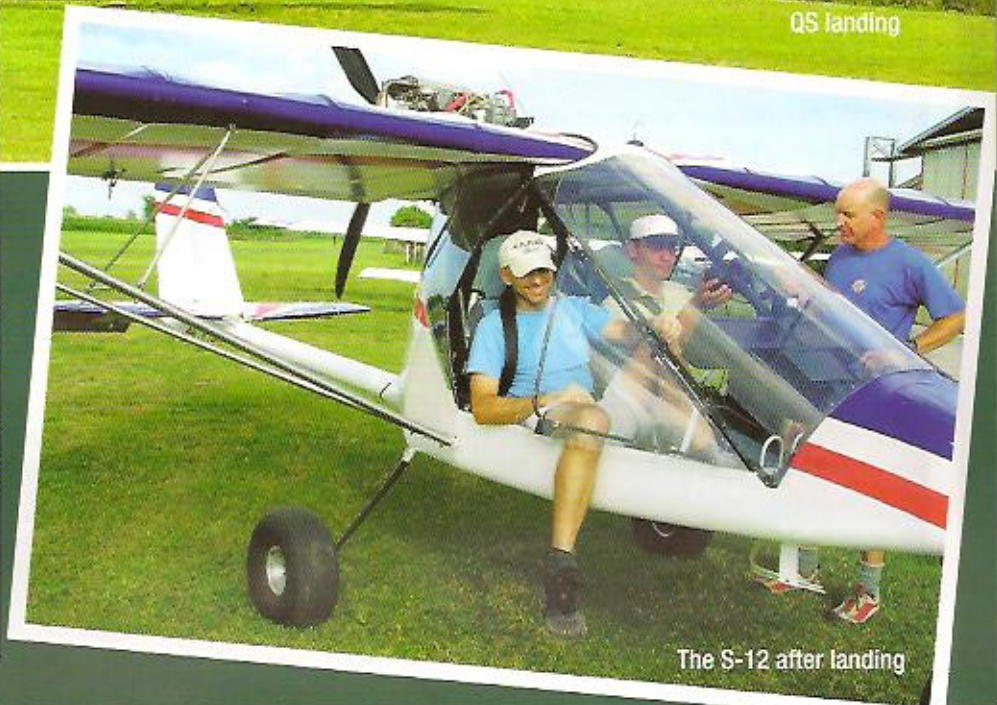


Landing approach





Cockpit view over Lahar river



QS landing

The S-12 after landing

club house cosy.

A team of aircraft mechanics look after the flying hardware, and make sure that the pilots are not bothered with any annoying chores. Welcome to the Philippines, let yourself be pampered. Unless you are in the air, that is. Max has no intention of chauffeuring me around. As we reach 500 feet the time for sightseeing is over and I have to take the controls.

I learnt my first lesson in local conditions: If you fly during the middle of the day be prepared for bumps and thermals. Like on a roller coaster we fly over the club and I notice some people in the pool. They are the ones who don't welcome turbulence as an element of added excitement. They hang out in balmy water until later when the air calms again.

But Max directs me in the other direction, to a lahar river. Lahar is a mixture of volcanic ash and mud.

It came from Mount Pinatubo, the catastrophic volcano that transformed the landscape some 15 years ago. The Lahar river is quite a spectacular view. And when seen from a low-flying plane, the view turns from spectacular to dramatic.

I quickly learnt a second lesson: Lahar heats up in the sun. Our Quicksilver abruptly soars 50 feet up without any of my input. But there was no free lunch today, and I lost part of that gift half a minute later as a sudden gust from behind puts the plane into a nose dive - down 50 feet.

"It's good that you experience turbulent air now. When you fly in calm air later, everything will seem really easy", explains Max, to whom all this seems to be very normal.

Turning the Quicksilver MXL II, like many slow planes, takes a lot of rudder input and almost no aileron. In fact when in a steep turn a lot of

opposite aileron is needed to keep it coordinated.

Flying in an all-open plane like the Quicksilver is quite unique. In principle it is flown exactly like a larger plane, but in reality it is much more exciting. Sitting there in the open with a vertigo view straight down, the wind tearing at you and the prop screaming right behind your head is not for the faint-hearted. Mix this with a true panoramic view over the beautiful tropical Filipino landscape and heaven seems near.

We land softly and before jumping into the pool I inspect the business end of the club. Three fully loaded hangars greet me with light planes of all varieties. The oldest is a 1941 Boeing Stearman biplane, owned by Mike, another pilot hooked on the club. He lives in Italy and in Hong Kong, but flying, he does only in the Philippines.

"Which other club has a roof top



café like this, overlooking the runway where members can relax over a San Miguel while passing judgement on the landings they witness?" he says.

The panoramic view from the café on the roof reveals also fish ponds and a mango grove on the large property. Some horses roam around.

It feels like a holiday resort centred on flying. Edmond from Manila has gathered a small crowd around him. He is flying a miniature remote-controlled helicopter in the hangar. Erwin is an RC flight champion and on quiet days he flies large plane models over the runway. Another member sails his remote-controlled sailing boat in the fish ponds, and some bring their bicycles and start tours from here. And when the wind grounds the planes, the kites come out.

What does it take to fly in the Philippines? Not much really as I learnt from Mel Troth, an American expatriate and the club's manager.

"You don't need a license to pilot an ultralight in the Philippines. But if you want to fly planes from our club you need to become a member and get a club-issued Sport Pilot Certificate. We recognise Australian licenses, you just need to have an induction and check rides."

The Philippines are an attractive pilot destination, flying rates are low and service is good. There are already

several internationally popular flying schools for general aviation, and the word is now slowly spreading among the ultralight community also.

Those who are not sure about learning to fly only risk \$51 for the introduction flight. If they find it's not their thing, they go to the beaches, the mountains or to any of the other attractions the country has to offer.

My decision however is clear and no beach can do anything about it. I signed up as a member.

### Facts on ultralight flying in the Philippines

English is an official language of the Philippines. Most people speak it well.

The only club for ultralight flying planes is the Angeles City Flying Club. It's two hours by car north of Manila. It is a non-profit organisation.

The weather is good all year around, with very few days not so good for flying. Not even the rainy and typhoon seasons (June to November) spoil the fun. The rains start normally only in the afternoon. It is never cold.

Thermals are less pronounced during the winter months. Strong winds are seldom in the area.

The club has accommodation on-site, but Angeles City, the town nearby, also offers plenty of accommodation.

Angeles City and the former US army base Clark next to it, are known for their holiday resorts, good restaurants and night life.

You can fly Quicksilver MXL II, GT-400, Rans S-12 or a Maxair Drifter. Beginners are welcome to take the course, most fly solo after 10 to 15 hours of dual instruction.

Certified pilots need to provide evidence of their experience and have an induction and check rides, this usually takes 2-5 hours of flying with one of the instructors.

An introduction flight costs P2200 (A\$51), a flying hour in a Quicksilver MXL with instructor costs P3700 (\$86), a flying hour solo costs P2850 (\$66). Other planes have slightly different prices. Student membership is P6000 (\$140) per year. The Philippines are an inexpensive holiday destination. Western-standard accommodation starts at about \$16 per night, a typical lunch costs between \$2 and \$5. *For more information contact the author on 0403 527717 or go to [www.angelesflying.com](http://www.angelesflying.com)*

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*Mt. Arayat, an inactive volcano rises from amid the rice fields into the clouds.*

