

# InLife

A U S T R A L I A

3 UNDERRATED GEMS  
IN THE PHILIPPINES

SEPTEMBER 2021



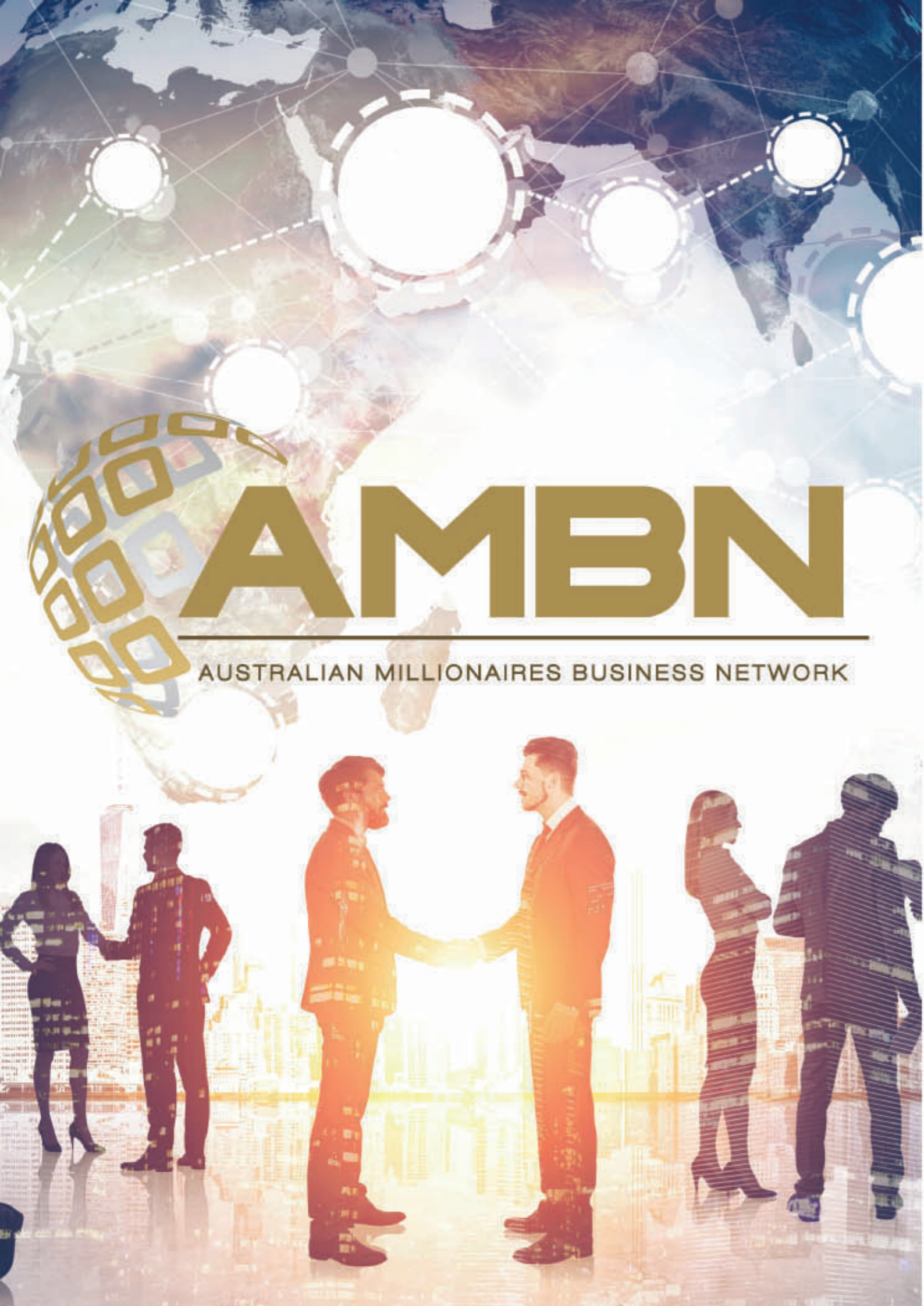
**BALIKBAYAN**

InLife Magazine's  
balikbayan travel  
tips to remember



MAKE WAY FOR

*Julie Anne*  
San Jose



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# InLife

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# InLife

A U S T R A L I A

## CONTENTS

- 6 **Travel:** The three best-kept secret vacation destinations in the Philippines
- 8 **Balikbayan Tips:** Check out InLife Magazine's top homecoming tips for Balikbayans
- 12 **Entrepreneur Spotlight:** Alexis Perkins
- 16 **Statement Maker:** Designer Yvonne Baker
- 20 **Cover Story:** Julie Anne San Jose embarks on an extraordinary journey in "LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy"
- 30 **Diet:** Five ways to get rid of excess winter weight
- 32 **Inside Celebrity Homes:** Inside America's most entertaining \$20 million mansion
- 36 **Feature:** How I found a second home in the Philippines

## EDITOR'S NOTES

A wise man once told me that New Year's resolutions are just wishes if they're not paired with a plan of action. It's no use saying 'I'll get healthier this year' without detailing exactly how you'll do it. Successful people, whether they're a performer or an entrepreneur, apply this little piece of wisdom every day. They put together timetables, action plans, take classes to hone their skills, take advantage of any marketing avenue to make themselves and/or their brand known to the public. And what will all this hard work result in? They get to see their dreams coming true. The poet, Henry David Thoreau said: "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them." So, don't let 2021 go by without you taking that chance to make your dreams a reality. Create a second column next to the New Year resolutions you made at the beginning of this year. Make sure it's entitled: "ACTION." God bless, everyone.

Sue Turner  
Editor-In-Chief



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# THREE BEST-KEPT SECRET VACATION Destinations

## IN THE PHILIPPINES

As a Balikbayan coming home to the Philippines for a short vacation, we always look for quality time that we can share with our family and friends. We also tend to make each of these special moments seem longer and is worth our time for coming home. As a substitute to this time passer activity, we attend fiestas, parties, and other occasions just to enjoy and savour the beauty and culture of our beloved Philippines. However, there are also other ways for us to enjoy our Balikbayan moments with some of the Philippines' noteworthy locations and tourist spots.

Below are some of the most majestic and noteworthy getaways for Balikbayans.

### • Bohol

The aesthetic beauty of Bohol always captivates any tourist's heart. This natural tourist-made wonder is located in the Central Visayas where the famous Chocolate Hills are found. Chocolate Hills are so-called "chocolate" because of its color and it looks like big piles or arranged kisses from the top view of Sagbayan Peak. In Bohol, we can also see the world's smallest primate and nocturnal creature called Tarsier.

Accommodations, the party life, and restaurants in Bohol are abundant due to the number of tourists who are visiting the island. Other historical places, monuments, and residents of the late Philippine hero Dr. Jose Rizal are also located in Bohol. This place also holds some of the oldest catholic churches that are definitely worth visiting.

### • Bacolod

Bacolod City is the capital city of Negros Occidental in Visayas. Widely known for its successful commerce and tourism, Bacolod is also a perfect place to enjoy the renowned Maskara festival that is held every end of the week of October. With lots of shopping centers and great nightlife, you would want to be in this city for a long time.

There are lots of resorts and tourist destinations that are located near the vicinity of the Bacolod area going north to south. You can also dine in local restaurants or eat one of Bacolod's specialties such as Piyaya and Talaba.

### • Dumaguete

Being a Balikbayan, we always tend to look for a place that is likely similar to the place where we have been or worked. Well, Dumaguete is something that gives us both the feel of being in a serene foreign environment but still cultivates the Filipino culture. This city is the capital city of Negros Oriental and is widely known as the motorcycle city in the Philippines. There are also dozens of hotels, bars, restaurants, and shopping centers that we can visit or stay with.

Dumaguete gives easy access to some of the best diving spots and resorts in the oriental province while offering sincere services and gratitude.

These given locations are just some of the best and most visited places here in the Philippines by Balikbayans like us who like to spend more quality time with our family and friends. Other locations that provide wonderful accommodations, breathtaking locations such as Palawan, Cebu, and the Ifugao Province are also worth visiting.

# TOP HOMECOMING TIPS FOR BALIKBAYANS

Nothing inspires us more than a trip back to the Philippines. We can spend months planning the trip, packing our things, and daydreaming about it. There's nothing quite like having both your feet planted on the soil of the country you grew up in, or being around the people you've been apart from for what feels like a lifetime.

Homecoming can either be thrilling, daunting, or a mixture of diverse emotions especially for those who had been so used to a foreign country's culture, people and climate. For those who had been in a different land for a very long time and are planning to go visit their hometown, what seemed to be so ingrained in their personalities years ago before they set foot on foreign land, now appears to be so detached that they feel a bit frightened and completely unacquainted of many things...even those that were before so close to them once.

Yet for those who frequently fly in and out of the country in search of a better opportunity, homecoming becomes a means of unwinding and finding time to once again be reunited with their loved ones.

In essence, for any of these specified conditions, homecoming is undeniably a time to look forward to whether it brings out a positive or a negative, or an amalgamation of different emotions. As inevitable as it is, so is the preparation that it entails making another homecoming an extraordinary one (and when I mean extraordinary...I mean beyond the usual...something you can go back several times over and still be happy or even laugh about it each time).

You would definitely want to spend more time with every person you had not seen for a long time, visit places that had given you unforgettable memories, and even taste foods that you haven't tasted for years. All these along with the thought that you would once again be in a place where you are not considered a foreigner...and later will again blend in and be one with the land that was and now will be where you will be...even for such a short time.



For this reason, these top homecoming tips for balikbayans would certainly serve either situation:

### 1. Dress for the season or the people

I believe one of the best ways you can be in touch right away with the people and be acclimatized readily, is for you to dress up as what the people in the location or the environment require. Being able to move freely and easily will allow you to be in contact with more people once you have set foot in your hometown.

### 2. Pack light and take note of baggage allowances

Although you ought to be bringing every "pasalubong" you could think of just to show people closest to your heart that they are always remembered, you also need to consider the baggage allowances set by air companies.

### 3. Make a list

Concerning tip number 3, your need to make a list of people and your itinerary while in the country that you are visiting. Remember that itemising everything you need for your short stay would give you extra time for people that matters more than the preparations that a homecoming requires.

### 4. The Balikbayan Program

Finally, if you are one of the many Filipino Overseas Workers who had populated most of the modern world, coming back home to the Philippines would be a thrilling time and you would want to make the most of your stay while in the country.

A thing to be grateful about is a presidential ruling as stated in Presidential Proclamation No. 181 which was signed back on June 3, 2011. This campaign reinforces Republic Act No. 6768, as modified, or the "Balikbayan Program." Under the Balikbayan Program, overseas Filipinos (OFs) are provided exceptional benefits in appreciation of their contribution to the progress of the Philippine economy in terms of foreign exchange in flow as well as remittances.

"This is a campaign that recognises three things: the invaluable contributions of Filipinos overseas, our urgent need to develop and promote Philippine tourism further, and how much can be achieved when government agencies work together," mentions DOT Secretary Ramon Jimenez. "We also have to tap into the market of second and third-generation Filipinos abroad and encourage them to discover their roots."

To reach a broader audience for the campaign [www.pinoyhomecoming.ph](http://www.pinoyhomecoming.ph) was launched. With this launch, Pinoys abroad can easily access Philippine news portals, tourism products as well as services, hands-on balikbayan tips, Philippine holidays, festival calendars, as well as a directory of industry partners and the contact details of DOT's international offices.

As much as possible, you would like homecoming to be convenient. Planning ahead and considering these top homecoming tips for balikbayans would definitely provide you the comfort you so desire to have once you have set foot on your native land.

## ENTREPRENEUR SPOTLIGHT: INTRODUCING ALEXIS PERKINS

Alexis Perkins is the founder and creative director of Chair One Fitness. She has always had a passion for fitness, television production, dancing, and public speaking. As a Magna Cum Laude graduate from Norfolk State University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mass Communication/Broadcast Journalism, she went on to work at CBS Affiliate WTKR News Channel 3 and became co-producer and lead instructor for the 30-minute television program Fuzion Fitness and Body By Alexis.

Alexis made a huge impact in the fitness world teaching Zumba Fitness internationally and coordinating the LOVE Fest; which became the largest dance fitness event in Hampton Roads Virginia attracting people from all over the United States. She is also an AFAA certified Group Exercise Instructor, AFAA Certified Personal Trainer and has competed in OCB Natural Bodybuilding Competition and placed 3rd in Bikini.

Inlife International recently caught up with Alexis to discuss her journey as an entrepreneur and here's what went down:

### **When did your entrepreneurial flair first reveal itself?**

I had just come off of a euro tour teaching fitness Master Classes. I was so pumped about the experience I dreaded going back to my 9-5 as a Project Manager at an advertising agency. I grabbed a notebook and wrote if I were to do fitness full time how I could make it work. I then put my notes away and returned to the ad agency. I would literally cry every day on my way there. Then days after returning to work I got fired. I drove home. Dropped to my knees and told God I trusted him. I then remembered my notes! I grabbed them, put them into action, and have been an entrepreneur ever since.

### **How did your life look like before being an entrepreneur?**

I hated it. I was a single mom working my 9-5. My son was in before and after school care and I really wanted more time with him.

### **As an entrepreneur, what is it that motivates and drives you?**

Freedom is what motivates me. The freedom to choose what I want to do. The freedom to take advantage of options to earn more than what most 9-5 jobs provide. The freedom to do what I want to do when I want to do it.

### **In one word, describe your life as an entrepreneur and explain why.**

Adventurous – I always have ideas and the desire to try new things. As a result, I am constantly learning, doing things I have never done, and never know truly what to expect.

### **What were your top three motivations for starting your business?**

1. I wanted to be a blessing in some way and I knew I could make a difference with Chair One Fitness.





2. To be an example to others. I never really had an example of how to work for yourself. My family was big on joining the military. When I chose a different path, I had no clue what to do. I feel like if I am successful, I can set the bar that anyone can become their own boss.

3. Motivated by the fear I was not living up to my full potential. Talent wasted is sad. I could not at least try to achieve something great.

**What would you say are the key elements for starting and running a successful business?**

Vision, Self-Discipline, and Tenacity.

**What are three of the biggest challenges you have actually faced growing your business and what did you do to overcome them?**

1. Having to juggle all the roles until you scale. When you start your own business, you are not just the boss but also the customer service department, legal team, tech support, you are everything and must learn them all. I overcame this by seeking out mentors and asking for help.

2. Not enough hours in the day – I became very proactive in time management. I read books on how to be more proficient.

3. Scaling – as soon I hit one milestone, I would have to figure out how to get to the next. I listen to audible, joined entrepreneur groups, and kept trying. If one thing didn't work I would fail fast and try something new.

**What form of marketing has worked well for your business throughout the years?**

Social Media marketing and word of mouth.

**As you grew the business, what have been some of the most important leadership lessons you have learned?**

I had to learn how to delegate a task. I had to learn that just because I am capable of handling something doesn't mean that I should. I learned to stay in my strengths zone and delegate a task that I knew someone else could do better.

**What is the best advice you have ever been given?**

What God has for you is for YOU! This removed the spirit of competition and comparison.

**What advice would you give to a newbie Entrepreneur setting up their first business?**

Start... stop overthinking and just START!



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## STATEMENT MAKER: FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YVONNE BAKER

Yvonne Baker is a fashion designer to watch out for in 2021. From an early age, Yvonne Baker had quite clear ideas, she was a very creative child. She dressed her barbies, and she drew and played with her imagination. Growing up, she went to Art School with a specialization in Fashion. After completing her studies, she enrolled and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Fashion Design.

InLife magazine recently caught up with Yvonne to discuss her journey in the fashion industry and here's what went down:

### **What do you like most about being a designer?**

The imagination. Because being a designer for me means imagining, seeing colors, patterns, places, nature, everything that surrounds us to bring us ideas and create every day.

### **Downside to being a fashion designer?**

I don't think I have or feel any disadvantages about my profession. Surely every day I learn something to add to my wealth of experience.

### **What has been the most memorable experience of being in the fashion industry so far?**

Wow, in about five years of work/activity I can say I've had plenty of memorable experiences. I dressed a couple of people from show business, as well as athletes and TV stars here in Italy and it feels great to see my clothes worn by such prominent people.

### **Who have been the most interesting people you've met so far?**

I've met many people, but none that particularly impressed me. Otherwise, I would remember.

### **What has been the most valuable lesson you've learned while in the fashion industry. This can be about the industry or about yourself.**

In high school, my fashion teacher Lucia explained how to finish garments well and how to build them in a tailored way. These are valuable lessons that I will always carry with me. Often he was amazed at me because in a short time I was able to create great works.

### **If you could go back in a time machine to the time when you were just getting started, what would you do differently?**

Nothing. Because if I'm here today and the reason I got here is because of my sacrifices. I started my work by exhibiting in a gallery where every weekend there was a market. I sold what I created with a small sewing machine and a few fabrics. In the meantime, I was studying to give my degree thesis. Little by little I understood the mechanism of this work. I started getting serious. My first workshop was at home. When I started getting serious I moved and took a small workshop, the fabrics had become 20-meter rolls and the orders were starting to increase. In a year I needed to find a second laboratory even bigger and more spacious (where I am now). My business is online, I ship everywhere so that my tailored and super-comfortable garments reach everyone. That's why I wouldn't change anything about my path. I am happy and grateful.

### **What are your future plans? Inside your career or out of it**

My future plans in my career and my life are all centered around my work. That's why I dedicate myself with a lot of constancy and determination in what I do. I want to carry an important message everywhere, that of wearing handcrafted garments created and designed to dress all the physicalities and use them for every occasion. My line dresses all sizes, especially future mothers too. I play a lot with soft fits and tailored cuts. But above all, I pack my garments with high-quality Italian fabrics, because if we offer high quality made in Italy fabrics such as silk, linen, cotton, and wool we also reduce the waste of buying in quantity. I plan to bring ethical, elegant fashion that suits every woman.



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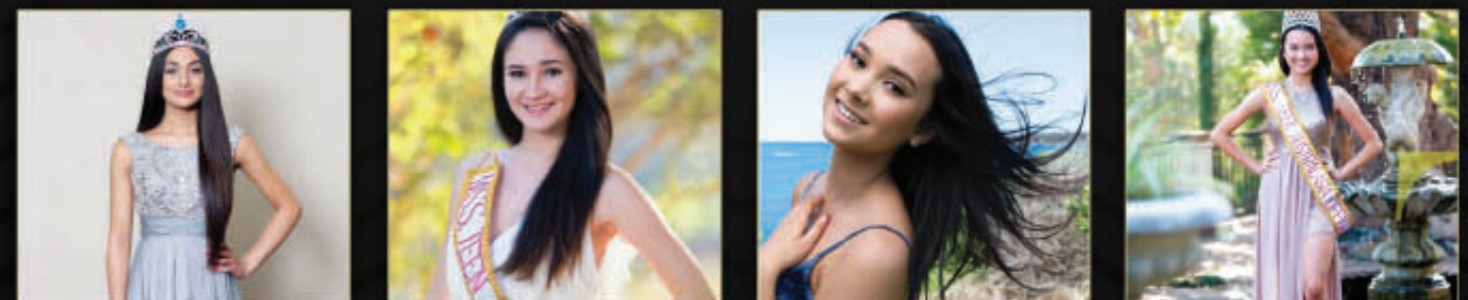
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Salubre Entertainment Network is an entertainment company that empowers young people to bring awareness to the less fortunate. Salubre Entertainment Network not only celebrates the beauty of each of its beauty queens, but it also empowers them to help others in need. Established by Maryrose Salubre of Salubre Models International, our projects and publications aim to raise funds for a variety of worthy causes, chief of which is to help Bunga National High School (BNH) in Leyte, the Philippines rebuild.



# Julie Anne

## SAN JOSE

Embarks on an extraordinary journey in "LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy"



Asia's Limitless Star Julie Anne San Jose unleashes her musical prowess in the extraordinary musical journey "LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy" with the first part premiering on September 17.

"LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy" is set to unveil the different facets of Julie as a singer, songwriter, dancer, actress, and multi-instrumentalist as she travels to the three island groups of the Philippines where she discovers new inspiration in unexpected locations in Mindanao, Visayas, and Luzon.

Witness how Julie shows a new side of her that she has never shown before. Here she shares what she can do as a performer and what she has to go through to become limitless.

"Any artist would be very excited to be part of this unique project," shared Julie. "And for me to be able to share my talent and my experience to my fans here and abroad is something I am truly excited for. I am grateful to GMA Network and GMA Synergy for trusting me with this one-of-a-kind endeavor."

This journey of discovery is something everyone can relate to, especially now that we have to stay home again for our safety.

Julie also collaborates with GMA Network's homegrown talents and local artists from all over the country.

For the September 17 leg, Julie will be joined by Asia's Romantic Balladeer Christian Bautista and The Clash alumnus Jong Madaliday, who is actually from Mindanao himself. Julie will work with Myke Salomon, the musical director behind the hit musicals "Huling El Bimbo" and "Rak of Aegis." JC Gellidon is the director of photography.

A versatile artist, Julie is one of the hosts of GMA's top-rating program 'All-Out Sundays.' She is also set to return with Rayver Cruz as Clash Masters in the all-original musical competition 'The Clash.' She bannered the GMA rom-com series 'Hearful Café' opposite David Licauco and will soon be starring on an online video streaming platform's musical series "Still" alongside Christian Bautista.

Julie was recently featured on a digital billboard at the iconic Times Square in New York City. The said billboard was for Spotify's EQUAL campaign, which encourages users to listen to amazing women all around the world.

"We have been a witness to Julie's powerful stage performance during GMA Synergy's highly-successful 'Kapuso Concerts' series 'The Sweetheart and the Balladeer' as well as '3 Stars, 1 Heart,'" said GMA Regional TV and Synergy First Vice President and Head Oliver Victor Amoroso. "LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy is set to unleash Julie's musical prowess that we have never seen before and we cannot wait for her fans here and abroad to be part of this new musical experience which begins on September 17," he added.

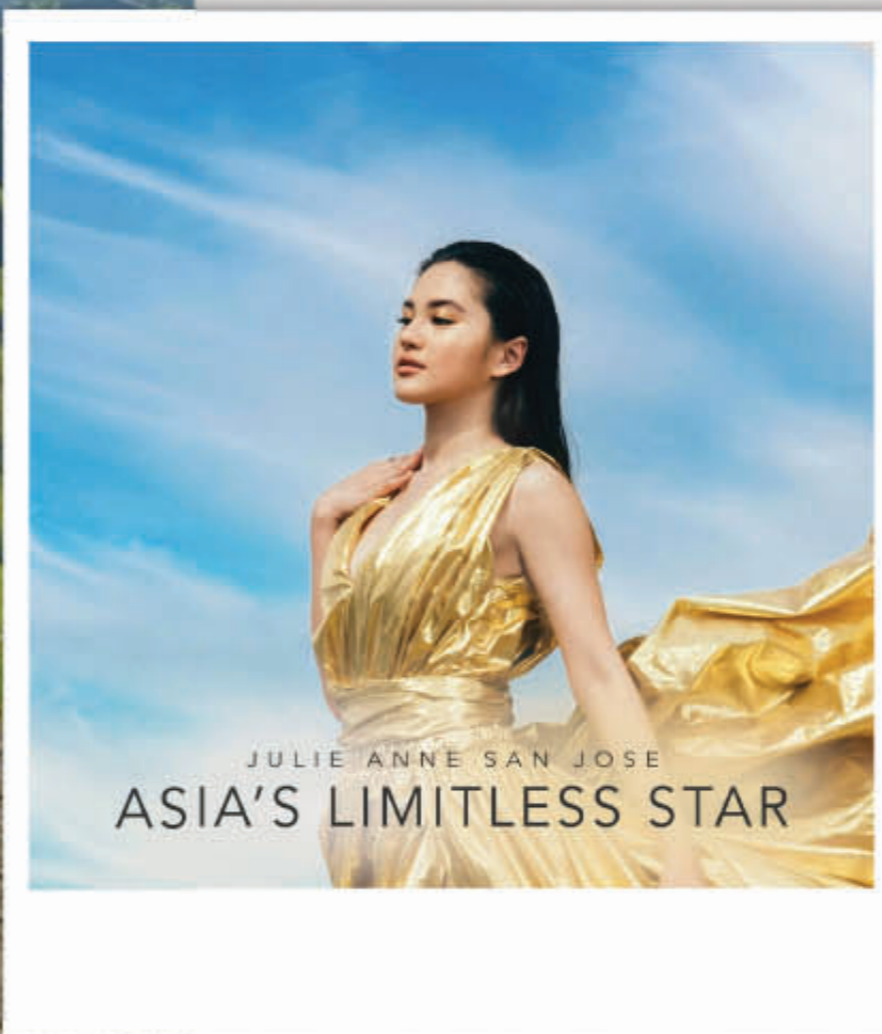
"As one of GMA's finest homegrown talents, Julie has flourished to become one of the best performers in our country and is now beginning to be recognized abroad as well. This is why we are excited to present to Julie's fans this musical trilogy, 'LIMITLESS' because we know that Julie's talent will take her fans to limitless heights when they join her in this musical journey," shared First Vice President for Business Development Department III Darling De Jesus-Bodegon.

InLife Australia recently had a quick chat with Julie about her creative process and how she's coping with the pandemic and here's what went down:

#### As an artist, what was the effect of the pandemic in your life?

Honestly, there was a point in my life when I really felt demotivated. I didn't know what to do or where to go... maybe it was the effect of the pandemic and the lockdown. I guess this is something we all went through - there were so many changes in our daily lives and so many people lost a lot. The pandemic didn't just affect the physical aspect of our lives, it also affected our thinking - our mental and emotional health. Nowadays, I have a lot more reflections and self-discoveries especially now that I was able to travel. Travelling has enabled me to breathe a little better and I was inspired to live our lives to the fullest - there's definitely more to life than this pandemic.

“Any artist would be very excited to be part of this unique project... And for me to be able to share my talent and my experience to my fans here and abroad is something I am truly excited for.”



#### How did you get through the pandemic?

It's really up to you to find a way to get through these difficult times or figure out how you'll be able to rise again. Support from your family is very important. Because worse comes to worst, your family will be the only ones who will be able to help you pull through. I'm very grateful that my family has always been there for me. With this pandemic, I can honestly say that my relationship with my family has gotten a lot stronger because I found the time to go bonding with them. Before the pandemic when I was working a lot, I had to wake up really early so I never got the chance to see my family. Then when I get home, everyone would already be asleep! Nowadays, I can spend more quality time with them.

#### What inspires you to be creative? Is there anything special that you do to get into a creative mindset?

Whenever I write songs, I need to usually be in the right mood or I need to have an inspiration - I always look for inspiration on whatever available resources I have. For example, let's say I have a friend who told me about his/her experience - this friend shared an experience with me because we haven't seen each other in a long time. From that interaction, I can actually come up with lyrics to a song. Sometimes it just hits me and sometimes I even dream about the lyrics (laughs). Unfortunately, I would feel bad the next day because I won't be able to remember what I dreamt about! Typically my inspiration comes from self-realizations about my family or myself - different moods can produce different inspirations.

Filipinos abroad can watch Julie Anne San Jose unleash her mesmerising musical prowess by purchasing tickets to "LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy" via [www.GMANetwork.com/synergy](http://www.GMANetwork.com/synergy). Steps on how to score your ticket of choice are available on the website.

"LIMITLESS, A Musical Trilogy" is under the creative direction of Paolo Valenciano. This one-of-a-kind event is produced by GMA Synergy — the same team behind the Philippines' first-ever virtual reality concert, "Alden's Reality: The Virtual Reality Concert," held last December. The concert's TV airing, "Alden's Reality: The Virtual Reality Concert TV Special," is a finalist at the New York Festivals Awards.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white wide-brimmed hat, a white short-sleeved dress with ruffles, and brown boots, is sitting on a sand dune. She is holding a brown crossbody bag and sunglasses. The background shows a beach with waves and a blue sky with light clouds. Two wooden posts are visible in the sand.

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## FIVE EFFECTIVE DIET TIPS TO GET RID OF THE EXCESS WINTER WEIGHT

Even the most stressed of people let their hair down and hang ten during winter. So, in the most celebrated and comfortable time of the year, you find yourself relaxing and devouring three times the calories per day you usually consume. And, unknowingly, you make it to three sizes up in just two weeks.

Now, you no longer fit into your favorite jeans, and you are forced to wear sweatpants even if it's Wednesday. Suddenly, wearing a bikini is not an option and the holidays don't seem so appealing anymore.

Well, stop moping around about eating that bowl of chocolate fudge ice cream and the three slices of blueberry cheesecake your sister made you. There's no point in crying over spilled milk, or in your case, empty bottles of milk.

Get you're A-game on and take back your body! Here are five easy and effective diet plans to shave off excess weight:

### 1. Don't skip your breakfast

Just because you've eaten too much for the last few weeks, doesn't mean you have to stop eating anything to lose a few pounds. Skipping meals, especially breakfast, will only leave you starving and then wanting to eat more. This will then lead to gaining more weight, which is something that you don't want.

Eat breakfast so you have the energy to do your tasks for the day. And, you won't have the urge to eat a few sugary treats every now and then.

### 2. Drink more water

Feeling constantly hungry is sometimes your body's way of telling you that you're thirsty. Next time you have an impulse to eat a donut, try drowning that impulse with a glass of water.

Moreover, your body is mostly composed of water so making sure that you're hydrated ensures that all your body parts get the necessary amount of water they need to function properly.

### 3. Eat your greens

Fiber is your friend. You want to inject more fibrous fodder into your meals because it helps you digest the food better. Leafy green vegetables are rich in fiber and you have tons of selections from your local grocery and Farmer's Market to choose from.

Aside from fiber, you are dosing up your body with much-needed nutrients, which you can only get from fresh veggies. Taking care of your body doesn't mean just being thin enough for a bikini but also having the body and the energy to do the things you want to do.

### 4. Say goodbye to your bag of chips

Losing weight is already hard enough. There is no need to make it more difficult for yourself. So, throw away your bags and bags of junk food, and anything that isn't necessary for your health.

Make an inventory of what is inside your fridge and kitchen cabinets and take out those that don't fit into your healthy diet.

### 5. Commit!

Yes, make a commitment. It is easy to choose the food that we eat but being consistent about it can be very challenging. An effective diet plan mostly depends on how unswerving and dedicated you are to following it.

Keep sight of your goal and don't let a few donuts take you off the right track. A few bites of pizza once in a while won't hurt. And, of course, don't forget to stay active and exercise. Your dream body is within your reach as long as you stay disciplined and you always put your health first.







AMERICA'S MOST ENTERTAINING  
**\$20 MILLION MANSION**

From the same town that brought America its first ice cream cones and where 7-Up was invented, home of the largest beer producing plant in the nation, first American city to host the Olympics, has an urban park bigger than New York's Central Park, where MLB pitchers-brothers Dizzy and Daffy Dean were big stars, a world-famous zoo and botanical gardens, host to the famous 1904 World's Fair, the NFL's Greatest Show on Turf football team, and a town that welcomes visitors by boat on the Mississippi River or car on I-44 with its 630-foot-tall Gateway Arch, a mansion is for sale that fits right in with the fun things from St. Louis, Missouri. An estate that rivals most resorts and some amusement parks.

Built in 2001 on over 20 acres and located just outside of St. Louis in Wentzville, the humongous 15,638-square-foot home might be the most entertaining house in the country; It is also one of the country's best equestrian properties. Stunning from both air and ground with a lake and miles of white equestrian fencing, the home has almost everything one could ever want to do - including a children's Ferris wheel - to stay entertained in even the longest lockdown. There are seven bedrooms, 13 baths, formal living and dining rooms as well as the informal version of each, a two-story library, two gyms, laundry rooms on two floors, boardroom, conference room, large kitchen with two islands and clerestory windows, inviting family room off the kitchen with fireplace and an impressive theater room with a bar. An elevator covers the second-floor bedroom level to the lower entertainment floor.

A never-ending array of things to do begins on the lower level with colorful bowling lanes, well supplied game rooms and an indoor basketball court. The outdoor resort-style pool has a lazy river, swim-up bar, two slides, a grotto and waterfall and a two-story pergola overlooking it all. There is a children's playground, horse stables, and a professional-style gym. Equestrian facilities include a riding ring, paddocks and plenty of land to ride horses (up to 130 acres are available). Games on the lawn include the Ferris wheel, and there is a four-car garage with oodles of parking available for guests.

With fall just around the corner and TV news about an uptick in Covid cases making people wonder if another lockdown is imminent, an elegant house which will keep everyone entertained at home might be just the ticket for anyone with an extra \$20 million on hand.

The property is listed by the VIP Group, Coldwell Banker, Lake St. Louis, Missouri.

**Photo credit:** Richard Taverna for Sotheby's International Realty  
**Source:** TopTenRealEstateDeals.com



# HOW I FOUND A SECOND HOME IN THE PHILIPPINES

By: Kristine Aquino

Philippines. Amongst all of the places I have travelled to around the world, it is one of my favourite countries to visit. It's a time to go shopping, eat lots of Jollibee, go shopping, book into luxurious day spas (at a fraction of the price I fork out in Sydney), go shopping, work on my tan by the five-star hotel pool, and did I mention go shopping? It's always a fantastic holiday experience.

And this is what it's like for a lot of young Filipinos living outside of the Philippines who travel back to the 'home-land'. Yes, it is also a time to visit extended family. But in a lot of ways, the Philippines is a 'holiday destination' to many young second-generation Filipino migrants who live outside of the Philippines.

Homeland, Holiday destination. Two contradictory terms signifying quite different experiences. The latter denotes travels to the exotic and the foreign where you are for the most part a tourist. The former alludes to a sacred return to your roots and origins where you are essentially a native. I believe that for many second-generation Filipino migrants, a visit back to the Philippines treads a fine line between these two notions. For myself, I had always felt that the line wasn't so fine at all. It's difficult to feel an emotional attachment to a place as some kind of 'home' when it exists only in the nostalgic stories told by my parents, barely surviving in my own fragmented memory, and is only half-heartedly summoned in the occasional visits that I make. I had always talked about the Philippines as a 'holiday' first and a kind of abstract 'motherland' second.

On my last visit to the Philippines before the pandemic, I returned with my family and expected us to check into the Shangrila Hotel in Makati like we usually do. However, this time around, my mother advised me that the house her family had built was now complete and that this was where we were to stay. I didn't really like the idea but I went with it.

The house is built on the original land on Aragon Street in Frisco where my mother's family lived. I remember the place because I spent a few years of my childhood there. But upon arriving I realised straight away that it had changed – the neighbours, the streetscape, and the landmarks that I fondly remembered were gone. So far not so good – everything in my memory about this place that could have given me any semblance of belonging had vanished. More tragically, we were a good twenty minutes outside of Makati (an hour when there is traffic and there is always traffic) and seemingly so far away from the splendours of Shangrila.





I debated with my mother quite lengthily insisting that this was not the holiday I was expecting. But despite my steely determination, she won the battle. And so I unpacked my bags and tried to make myself feel comfortable. It's not that the house isn't nice. My mother and her family built it to cater to the westernised needs of their 'Australianised' offspring. But it just wasn't Shangri-la – that 'home away from home' experience that tourist hotels cleverly fabricate. I was in a house that looked like a home but it wasn't my home.

But after a few days at Aragon Street, I started to feel differently.

The house has three levels. The ground floor is rented out to my father's sister and her family. And so, instead of my cousins making the trek out to the city to visit their balikbayan relatives, we could easily see each other every day. At first, I longed for the anonymity that came with staying in a hotel where nobody could disturb you unless invited. But I slowly began to look forward to the daily disturbances of my tita coming in through our door to share the latest family gossip about second and third cousins whom I had never even met yet whose scandalous lives I became thoroughly interested in. My Lola also lived with my tita and so my mornings consisted of walking downstairs to their unit and sitting with my Lola to watch a few Filipino dramas. Aside from the hearing impairments that my Lola has, she can't speak English and I can't really speak Tagalog (and we were both too embarrassed to try), and so watching the images on the screen together was the only way we could really bond. By noon everyone was awake, and along with my cousins, my siblings and I would gather by the bench outside the house and plan our day. We'd smoke too many cigarettes and watch tricycles zoom past, and despite the extreme heat, we would often spend more time on this bench talking and joking around than actually carrying out our plans for the day. Sometimes my brothers would join in on a game of street basketball with some canto boys who would only let them play in tsinelas. Life is slow in the Philippines. Despite how much you might want to get out and about - it has a way of forcing you to abide by its pace. Surprisingly, I began not to mind at all that I wasn't always in the surrounds of a busy mall spending money that I didn't really have.

My stay at Aragon Street altered my usually detached tourist experience of the Philippines. I became implicated in the given social and cultural setting. I was finally able to construct a sense of belonging to the Philippines and formed an understanding of what a 'homeland' might be. The idea of homeland was suddenly transformed from abstract notions of roots and origins to a concrete lived experience of family togetherness and kinship ties, a reconnection with language, and an embodied experience of culture.

There is nothing like the rupture of migration to displace senses of home and belonging. But through the house on Aragon Street, my siblings and I acquired a real sense of place in the Philippines – the experience of a 'visit' was replaced by a deeper experience of 'return'.





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