

# The Campaign Bus for the President of the Philippines



by Larry Plachno  
Photos courtesy of NBT

This Yutong bus served as the campaign bus for Presidential Candidate Rodrigo Duterte in April of 2016 just prior to the Philippine election. Starting from Davao City on the island of Mindanao, the campaign caravan covered cities in northern Mindanao as well as on the islands of Cebu, Leyte and Samar. Pictured in front of the bus are Driver Jonathan Ricarte, Nancy and Larry Plachno from NATIONAL BUS TRADER, and Elmer Verano of the bus staff.

**W**e were delighted when members of our extended family were able to make arrangements for us to inspect and photograph the campaign bus of the new President of the Philippines. It certainly qualifies as being an interesting bus in an interesting place.

Located in Southeast Asia, the Philippines are north of Indonesia, west of Guam, directly south of Taiwan, southwest of Japan and southeast of China. The country is comprised of more than 7,000 islands, many of which are small and uninhabited. With a land area of only about 116,000 square miles, the Philippines are only 1/33

the size of the United States, but the population is somewhat less than one-third of the United States.

Jeepeys, converted and extended World War II jeeps or their modern replacements, provide much of the local transportation in major cities. Buses are used in suburban and intercity services, some of which use ferry boats to cross from island to island. Recreational vehicles, campgrounds and converted buses are virtually unknown.

Ferdinand Magellan arrived in the area in 1521 and started an era of Spanish influence that lasted until 1898 when the United States became involved. The Philippines played an important part in World War II, particularly with the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island near Manila. In 1944, General Douglas MacArthur fulfilled his promise to return and landed on the island of Leyte where a monument commemorates that event. The Philippines were given full independence on July 4, 1946. While the national language is Tagalog, American-style English is the normal language of business and education. It is a great place for a vacation.

Davao City is the third-largest city of the Philippines. It is located on the large island of Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines. Rodrigo Duterte became involved in politics in the late 1980s and became the mayor of Davao City. Because of his hard stand against crime and drugs as well as his work to improve the city, the residents re-elected him over and over until he served seven terms and 22 years as mayor.

Duterte was almost never seen in formal clothing, which helped him to watch over his beloved city. Instead of attending parties, he frequently spent part of the night patrolling his city as a taxi driver. He lives in a house at the end of a residential street in a subdivision on the west side of Davao.

In Davao, Duterte instituted one of the first 911 emergency services outside of the United States and Canada. As crime was reduced, Davao became known as one of the 10 safest cities in the world. Tourists and companies came to Davao in the form of business and modern shopping malls. Just past the new Abreeza mall and condo complex on the west side, another new mall just opened in the Lanang area and another new mall is under construction in the Buhangin area, not far from the modern new international airport. Cebu Pacific Airlines just opened a high rise modern hotel in the Lanang area.

A road building program is underway just north of the new airport in what has become several new, gated subdivisions to handle the increasing population of Davao including many foreigners coming to live





Looking towards the front, this photo shows the compartment at the rear of the bus with two couches that could be used for additional seating or storage.



Regular seating has been retained back to the rear door and adjacent restroom. There is a sideways seat on the driver's side opposite the rear door.

and retire. Recently started was a new Mindanao Railway Project that will connect Davao City with Digos, Tagum and other major cities on Mindanao.

The previous Philippine President, Benigno "Noy Noy" Aquino III, served from 2010 to 2016. His father is considered by many to be a martyr for Philippine freedom and his sister, Kris, is a top TV and movie personality. His mother, Maria Corazon (Cory) Aquino, was the beloved president of the Philippines from 1986 to 1992, making Noy Noy probably the first son to follow his mother as the president of a country.

Unlike the United States with only two major parties, the Philippines may have as many as seven or eight candidates for Pres-

ident who may or may not be affiliated with political groups. Vice Presidents are elected separately and may therefore come from a different group or be independent. There was a push to get Rodrigo Duterte drafted to run for President in 2016 because of what he had accomplished in Davao. He initially declined saying that he preferred to stay in Davao and he had no money to finance a campaign. Just prior to the deadline, he gave in and offered to run.

It ended up being a grass roots campaign as a peoples' candidate. His supporters produced signs with many being hand-made. Printers offered to print campaign shirts if you brought the shirt to them. Local groups organized all over the Philippines (and elsewhere) to support him. Duterte won the elec-

tion in May of 2016 with a plurality of votes that some said was the highest ever for a presidential candidate in the Philippines. He was the first candidate from Mindanao to win election as president. It is interesting that immediately after the election, hundreds of drug dealers turned in their drugs and themselves rather than face the wrath of the new President.

The campaign bus is a Yutong model ZK6107HA built by Yutong in Zhengzhou China. It is 34.4 feet long, the standard European 98.425 inches wide and about 12 feet high. It is powered by a six-cylinder C245 20 diesel engine and equipped with a six-speed manual transmission. The bus has typical European configuration with two doors and a lower level restroom adjacent to the center door. Yutong's brochures indicate that this model has about 300 cubic feet of underfloor storage and can carry as many as 45 passengers plus a driver and a tour escort.

I might mention that we were able to visit the Yutong factory in China a few years ago. There are actually two facilities that are very modern and huge. Each is the size of a small city and has its own support services including a fire department as well as some housing for staff. Chassis production is highly automated. While many of the buses are smaller or less sophisticated than our coaches, the annual output is impressive.

Information we received indicated that the bus was one of an order originally delivered to Holiday Tours in Davao City. As such, it probably served on suburban routes and charters until being selected for the honor of being the campaign bus. Modifications for the campaign caravan included a new exterior in Philippine red, white and blue along with lettering and a drawing of the candidate's face. The front of the bus has a drawing of a clenched fist, a symbol for the campaign.

Built in Zhengzhou, China, the bus is a Yutong model ZK6107HA. It is approximately 34.4 feet long, 98.45 inches wide and about 12 feet high. It has a six-speed manual transmission, has the typical European configuration with two doors and a lower level restroom, and reportedly could seat as many as 45 passengers with the original interior.



Internally, the bus was not really converted but did receive some modifications. The rear of the bus was closed off in a special compartment with opposing couches that could be used for additional seating or storage. The front of the coach retained its standard coach seating although the seat opposite the rear door was turned sideways.

The campaign trip became known as "Byaheng DU30" with "byaheng" coming from a local dialect that translates as trip or caravan. Leading the caravan was Elizabeth Zimmerman, the ex-wife of Duterte. She was undergoing radiation treatment for stage three cancer but suspended treatment while on the campaign trail. She commented: "I am doing this for the country's future. We are doing this for change, real change." Also on board was Sara Duterte-Carpio, the daughter of Elizabeth and Rodrigo who replaced her father as the Mayor of Davao, and her three children. They were joined by as many as 25 others on the campaign trail.

The bus and caravan hit the road on April 5, 2016. In addition to covering several cities on the large island of Mindanao, the caravan wandered north into the Visayas – the islands north of Mindanao but south of Manila on the island of Luzon. Included in the tour were stops on the islands of Cebu, Leyte and Samar, as well as northern Mindanao.

To say that the campaign bus was well received would be an understatement. Newspapers reported that it took hours for the bus and caravan to enter the city of



This photo was taken from the aisle and looks towards the back of the coach. Regular seating and overhead parcel racks have been retained in this area. The door at the back of the aisle opens into the rear compartment.

Cagayan de Oro because huge crowds lining the roadways and bridges caused traffic to back up. Factory workers from Del Monte flooded the streets as the caravan entered the city. From there the bus used a ferry boat to reach the island of Cebu and continued east to Leyte and Samar.

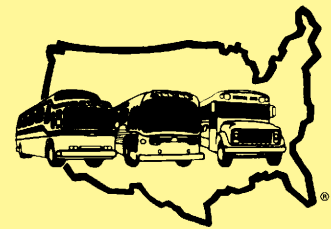
While the election is over, much of the excitement remains. The bus was brought out of the garage for us and parked near

Davao's City Hall so we could photograph it. While we were taking photos, crowds gathered on the sidewalks to view the bus. Clearly, the bus and campaign will be long remembered by many Filipinos. □

Immediately noteworthy in the driver's cockpit area is the six-speed manual transmission. Automatic transmissions are fairly rare in the Philippines. In this climate, air conditioning becomes more important than any heat while tire chains for snow are unknown. Buses like this are very typical on suburban services originating in Davao City.



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