

Oliveras plans trip to coastal Portugal

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT
AGENCY



Maria-Christina Oliveras says her best vacation memory is taking her mom to the Vatican. **STEPHANIE DIANI**

In the Broadway production of “The Balusters,” Maria-Christina Oliveras plays Luz Baccay, a Filipina housekeeper who has served a wealthy community for 30 years.

“Her power lies in observation and deep listening (and) in knowing what to say and what not to say,” the actor said from her New York City home.

“She is an expert at navigating spaces that are not her own, which mirrors much of my lived experience. As a proud first-generation Filipina-Puerto Rican artist from a working-class background in the Bronx, it was vitally important to me to honor her with dignity and grace. She has a fierce sense of humor and ultimately serves as the truth-teller, and the light of the play.”

This interview with Oliveras has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Growing up, did you think that this life could be yours?

A: It’s complicated. Growing up and even through college, I didn’t really feel limited by my identity. I had a lot of support, and I just loved acting. I worked hard, eked out every opportunity I could and even in predominantly white spaces like Yale, I got to play incredible roles. Theater was like a great equalizer. So at the time, it felt like this life was possible. The bigger pressure early on came from being the child of immigrants, where stability and security are emphasized. Though my parents were

tremendously supportive, acting was seen more as a hobby and a passion than a profession. It wasn’t until I entered the industry that I really started to become aware of the limitations and the lack of role models. I had to learn pretty quickly how to navigate it and advocate for myself.

Q: Have you had the opportunity to visit Puerto Rico and the Philippines?

A: Yes! I’ve been to Puerto Rico a number of times. It was much more accessible and affordable than the Philippines. My dad is one of 12 children, so we have tons of family there. I was just in Guayanilla, my father’s hometown, in July 2025 celebrating his 80th birthday. Unfortunately, I’ve only been to the Philippines once, in 1985. My mother migrated here in 1971 and rarely made it back, but she wanted my two sisters and me to meet my grandparents. I was only 6 years old at the time. My mom is from Buguias up north in the mountains. It was cool, but so weird for a city kid. We added Tang to our drinking water because it tasted so different, bathed in the river and carried a kettle of boiling water to pour into a tin tub outside to wash up. I also distinctly remember my cousins being obsessed with American music. We had endless guitar singalongs of “Hello” by Lionel Richie. ... I can’t wait to go back and visit as an adult.

Q: Where did you film

“Vivien & The Florist”?

A: We filmed in Philadelphia, which I’d never been to before. I loved it. We stayed right on Rittenhouse Square. It’s such a walkable city, full of culture and history. The Philadelphia Museum of Art is beautifully curated. While I’m not a huge meat eater, I had a cheesesteak, and it did not disappoint.

Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned?

A: Yes! I’ve booked a trip to Lisbon after “The Balusters” closes. I’d also love to hit up Santa Fe and maybe make a quick stop in Denver, where I went to grad school.

Q: What is your best vacation memory?

A: Bringing my mom to the Vatican. My mom is devoutly Catholic and has never asked me for anything. So when she finally got her citizenship in 2019, she said, “Maria, I want to meet the pope.” She had never been to Europe, so last October, off to Rome we went. She’s about to turn 80 and is still incredibly vibrant and energetic. She tired me out! It was such a special mother-daughter moment, and I’m so grateful we got to do it. And the day we went to the Vatican, seven people were being canonized. So not only did she meet the pope, she witnessed the new saints being welcomed into the Church.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.



\$5.75 | SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2026 | CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Chicago Tribune

WINNER OF 29 PULITZER PRIZES FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM