

FUGA ISLAND

# Like an unwrapped present from Heaven

"(It) was like an unwrapped present from God. It's typhoon country, and the Pacific and China Sea currents converge there, but the scouring and intermingling of water creates great clarity and a teeming undersea big-game preserve. We kept finding all the elements necessary for the perfect new Underwater Explorers Paradise: shallow virgin wrecks, coral reefs marching from the shore out to drop off ledges, giant turtles, lobster villages, mystery caves, millions of exotic fish — and no dynamiting, no sharks."

This passage did not come from a book on an imaginary island-paradise. It was part of a recollection by Prof. Albert A. Tullman, considered one of the world's leading authorities on scuba diving, after a visit to Fuga Island — the biggest of a three-island group in northern Philippines, 22 nautical miles off the Luzon mainland.

The waters surrounding Fuga and its two satellite islands — Barit and Mabag — are indeed a diver's and an angler's paradise. The area may well be the "last frontier" in underwater wilderness, for fish of all shapes and colors abound in the clear waters. The beaches around the islands are carpeted with white sand, in turn sprinkled with multi-colored crushed corals and seashells.

Fuga's underwater lure is such that it is drawing sports enthusiasts from as far down south as Manila, nearly 700 kilometers away. The island has an area of 92 square kilometers and has a port called Murur, three fathoms deep, where vessels can seek refuge during inclement weather. It also has



The ruined church in Fuga: a blending of the past & present.

an airport, two and a half hours away from Manila.

Unknown even to many Filipinos, the three islands occupy a place in Philippine religious history. In Fuga can be found the ruins of the "Church of the 11,000 Virgins," once the center of Catholic missionary work that extended to as far as China and Japan. It was built during the Spanish regime by Fr. Jeronimo Morer, first vicar of the Catholic mission in Cagayan province. The island was named



The white beaches of Fuga: nature's gift to fabled island.

"Fuga" after the Spanish word "to flee." Legend has it that its inhabitants deserted the island when pirates swooped down, destroying the villages and the church. Only a few hardy souls ventured to live again on the island. Eventually, its ownership passed from one family to another. The present owner is a Filipino businessman, Alfonso Lim, who maintains a cottage there, equipped with all the conveniences of modern living.

The owner himself makes a visit only now and then. The few people who actually stay there are mostly tenants tending rice and other crops. It is an idyllic place; life is almost sedentary and perks up only when there are visitors from the mainland.

But Fuga's appeal is starting to be noticed even outside the Philippines. A Japanese firm is studying the possibility of developing it into a tourist center. Fuga was visited recently by a delegation from the Kokusai Kogyo, a Japanese firm engaged in developing tourist resorts and hotel construction.

Plans call for the construction of a 500-bed hotel with a complex of

shopping and other facilities. Also proposed to be set up are deep-sea fishing facilities, an oceanarium, a golf course, and a sports center for pelota and tennis.

To make it more accessible from Manila, the island's airport will be expanded to accommodate modern aircraft.

While in Manila, the Japanese delegation, led by Kenji Osano, went to Malacanang for a courtesy call on President Marcos. They were accompanied by Ambassador Roberto Benedicto, Philippine envoy to Japan. The President told the delegation that foreign investors were always welcome to do business in the Philippines.

Aside from the Japanese group, some European investors are also interested in developing Fuga into a tourist attraction.

If plans do not miscarry, Fuga, which now lies serene amidst the waters of the Pacific and the China Sea, may soon be "invaded" by both foreign and local tourists. But the "invasion" will be so planned that the conservationists' loss will be minimal and tourism's gain, considerable.

## PEOPLE

She visited Manila in January and had lengthy interviews with President and Mrs. Marcos. She also saw at close range the rapid and profound changes that had taken place in the Philippines since September 1972. Last week, word reaching Manila was that journalist Beth Day had signed a contract with M. Evans Company, an American publishing firm, to write a book on the new Philippines. Miss Day has written 23 other books and contributed to most major publications in the US. She plans to return to Manila to gather additional materials for her latest work, which she will write in collaboration with Secretary of Foreign Affairs Carlos P. Romulo. In the meantime, her interview with the President will be the subject of a cover story for the April 14 issue of World magazine. Her interview with the First Lady is also scheduled as a cover story for Ladies Home Journal in its May 21 issue.

"I apologize to the Filipino people for the behavior of my son." Thus said 86-year-old Tanejiro Onoda on his arrival from Tokyo on April 8, eve of Bataan Day. The

words came appropriately at a time when the wounds of war were fast healing and two former enemy nations had entered an era of peace and friendship. Unfortunately, the message was yet to reach his son, Lt. Hiroo Onoda, who is still holed up on Lubang Island, Mindoro Occidental, 28 years after the end of World War II. From Manila, the elder Onoda flew to Lubang to join a combined team of Japanese Army and Philippine Air Force personnel who have been scouring the island for the straggler since early March.

One of them, at 35, is the first Filipino to become Provincial of the Dominican Order in the Philippines. He has also introduced the non-graded school system which promises to revolutionize elementary education in the country. Another is deeply involved in youth leadership training, particularly in the southern province of Cotabato. Another has written a tome on local contemporary art, considered "the first and only comprehensive survey of the subject" ever published in the Philippines. Still another, at 27, is the youngest under-secretary in the government. They are among the 10 Filipinos chosen to receive this year's TOYM (The

Outstanding Young Men) awards, sponsored annually by the Philippine Jaycees. Since 1959, 118 other young men have been so honored for "exceptional contribution to the welfare and well-being of the country, their respective communities and their fellowmen." This year's crop: Fr. Rogelio B. Alarcon, education; Carlos A. Arellano, business; Alberto L. Ayupan, youth leadership development; Inocencio C. Bolo, agricultural extension; Manuel D. Duldulao, art; Joseph E. Estrada, public administration; Jose Pardo, education; Vioquelin C. Pascual, veterinary medicine; Bernardo M. Villegas, economics; and Ronaldo B. Zamora, law and public office. They were chosen by a panel of judges headed by Secretary of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile.

Most of them had been away for as long as 20 or 50 years, and like many others abroad, they probably had heard the worst about their country during all those years away from home. Last April 3, some 65 Filipino expatriates came for a visit and found out many changes had taken place since they left — and definitely for the better. "Martial law brought us back," said Oscar

Casasola, one of the leaders of the tour group. He said what probably makes Filipinos abroad these days decide to visit their homeland is the realization that "it is now safe back home." The group will be staying here for a month before returning to various points in Canada and the United States.

"I am very happy in Rochdale," said 23-year-old Priscilla Amio, smiling from behind an enormous bouquet of flowers presented to her when she won over 19 British girls to become this year's beauty queen of the Alderglen Manufacturing Company in Rochdale, England. Rochdale was the scene of a recent controversy over the working conditions of 100 or so textile workers from the Philippines. The controversy obviously has been resolved to everyone's satisfaction — except for three who decided to come home. Miss Amio scored her triumph at the annual dance of the garment factory where she had been working as a machinist for three months. She received a silver trophy and a kiss from Cyril Smith, the Liberal lawmaker representing the industrial towns of northwestern England in the British Parliament.