

## POLILLO: *Sleepy Isle*

**A**CTUALLY, Polillo is not as small as its names denotes. It has two towns—Burdeos on the east and Polillo on the west—and it would take a small motorboat the better part of a day to circumnavigate. By walking, which is the most common means of land travel, it takes about 15 hours to walk from Polillo to Burdeos. It has two points of contact with the mainland, Mauban and Infanta, both of Quezon province.

Motor launches ply everyday between the island and the mainland carrying copra and bananas which are the main products of the island. During a stormy month the strait becomes unpassable and the island truly becomes remote.

The patron saint of the island is the carpenter St. Joseph. Because he was poor, the people of Polillo believe that nobody on the island would become rich. There seems to be some truth to this because nobody is really rich on the island although nobody is actually very poor.



Polillo has to buy its rice from the mainland and sometimes even its fish. Consequently, the little money that its people earn from copra and bananas is used to purchase the staples and there is little, if any, savings.

Nothing noteworthy or spectacular has happened on Polillo since the Spaniard Salcedo founded its first town in 1572. A Catholic church was constructed in 1800 and around the same year a Moro watchtower was erected because it was sacked by Moro pirates.

During the Revolution, Polillo remained aloof. All that it did was shelter a few fugitives from the Spaniards. Even the Japanese during the War ignored Polillo. Hence the way of life of the people, their homes and culture have remained practically unchanged.

In such a town, a baptism, a fiesta or a wedding is a much-awaited event. People from the different barrios would congregate in the house of the celebrant and drink and dance for two days. As an Irish priest had observed, "The people could hardly afford to send their children to high school, but they spent ₱400 for fireworks and ₱500 for a band, all of which were gone in a moment." Probably, the most exciting thing

that has happened to Polillo recently was the national election. There was much campaigning, betting, speculating and tempers ran high and wild.

**D**URING the rest of the year the people would occupy themselves in fishing, cleaning the coconut groves, planting and harvesting bananas. In the evenings they would congregate in the stores, drink lambanog and exchange harmless gossip.

It is probably because talking is the principal entertainment that the people are lively talkers. Most of them are highly opinionated and they would sound off, in an earthly way, on subjects as diverse as the best way of cutting a baby's navel and the strategy and tactics of nuclear warfare. Conversation in Polillo is flavored by homey witticisms and a kind of indirect moralising.

During the stormy months the people grow fat because of inactivity. This is also the time when the people run into debt. The Chinese and the buyers of copra and bananas are therefore able to buy the products months before the harvest.

Polillo is hardly a vacation spot but it certainly can offer the wary city-slicker a week or two of complete peace and relaxation.

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