

Cavite revisited

There is more to Cavite than meets the cynic's eye.

In terms of tourist attractions, Cavite offers everything from historical sites to beach resorts. The visitor with an eye for history can drive to Bacoor, which was Fr. Mariano Gomez's parish for 48 years. Past Bacoor is Kawit, where you can see Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo's abode all intact — the baroque balcony, the Gothic roof and the now eerie living room where the General's heroic exploits first saw the light of day.

Other towns have their own distinguishing traits.

Rosario has the cleanest school building in the province; Tanza has a neat concentration of hardware stores; Trece Martires, a newly created city and now capital of the province, is really a sleepy village: few tricycles, not a single theatre and on Saturdays and Sundays, a place devoid of people except those napping in 20 or so residential houses.

If you go for the breeze, you can bask in the high bright sun of Novleta where a row of beach resorts (Josephine, Lido, Villamar, etc.) proliferates. You can savor Cavite's typical countryside lure in Indang where the verdant surroundings remind you of lush Hawaiian forests. Tagaytay City, Cavite's answer to Benguet's Baguio City, remains a must in both the local and foreign tourist's itinerary.

Cavite boasts of cultural and social activities the whole year round. Cavite City, the former capital of the province, has its Artists Guild that turns out a yearly supply of participants in stage plays and choir concerts. It conducts an annual search for the "Mutya ng Cavite," an undertaking sponsored by local civic organizations. Once or twice a year, a boat race, complete with fidgety beauty queens, unfolds in Lido Beach Resort. Called the "Regatta de los Pescadores" (literally, regatta of the fishermen), this boat show can compare with fashionable boat races abroad.

If most of the nice things about Cavite had eluded the tourist's eye, lay the blame on politics and crime which were the main items newspapers in the old society normally bought.

Cavite City (population: 79,146) has shed its hugely ominous airs, one finds out the second time one gets to see the place.

It has acquired Manila's disciplined look. The city traffic, though not as complicated as Manila's, now follows a systematic pattern. Pedestrians cross on well-marked lanes; no one may cross a street (no matter how narrow or secluded) without the appropriate signs. Jeepneys no longer zigzag like children chasing an errant ball; yellow dots have divided the streets into two-way thoroughfares.

Policemen have stopped acting like part-time bullies; off Burgos street, one bumps into the once leering face of a policeman who gave one directions, with all too apparent distaste, the first time one visited the place. One misses his grunts and snarls.

The sidewalks sport a less critical look. Julian Felipe Boulevard (named for the composer of the national anthem) is now devoid of characters who, in the past, did not look too kindly on the stares of strangers.

Over at the local PC camp, Provincial Commander Manuel Gil notes the remarkable decline of criminality in the province. Once stubborn politicians have learned to show up in conferences — sans their private armies.

Mayor Eduardo de Guzman has just returned from a speaking engagement when I catch up with him in his office at the city hall. He wears a Banlon shirt, looking approachable like many town executives I know. His office is devoid of cushion chairs. Instead, we sit on wooden chairs with rattan trimmings. Outside, the shrill cries of school children are heard. The present city hall, the mayor tells me, is ac-

tually a school building. They are holding office in the campus.

Sporting a heavy brown tan only a man of the sea could have acquired, the mayor talks about post-martial law Cavite with relief.

"Martial law has brought about changes here which were simply impossible when we first thought of them," Mayor de Guzman begins the conversation. "Now, Cavite is perhaps one of the most peaceful provinces in the country."

The mayor cites the firearms ban, which was never successfully implemented before Proclamation 1081. He had spearheaded a drive against loose firearms, but its effects were hardly felt. "We were able to confiscate firearms but we knew there were more on the loose. With Proclamation 1081, the drive against loose firearms is now a success."

A year ago, in Pagoda Kitchen Restaurant, a man who reportedly owned a gambling joint in Cavite City, aimed a .38 caliber gun on De Guzman, then the city vice-mayor. De-Guzman was, like most of the local officials of that time, helpless.

Actually, he was luckier than some — like his predecessor, then Mayor Manuel Rojas, who died in an ambush also last year. Things are different today. Officials and citizens alike feel much safer in the streets or in their homes. Mrs. Placida Villanueva Rojas, the mayor's widow, herself seems to have recovered from the tragedy that befell her family. Although the hearing on her husband's slaying is still going on, she is relieved to find that some of the men believed "morally" responsible for the crime had been immobilized with the proclamation of martial law. "I like the atmosphere in Cavite City," she says. No more guns and all that. The local police are now efficient. I hope it goes on that way for long.

The incumbent mayor continues: "Sanitation also has greatly improved. We used to see residents throwing their garbage anywhere they liked. It was disgusting. You won't see them do that anymore. Same with the local Green Revolution movement. In my office, I required all my employes

to plant even on pots. Here in the city hall, we cleared the front lawn of weeds and planted it to vegetables. We don't have problems with vegetables now. Our problem is how to find a market for them.

"Dynamite fishing used to be another problem before martial law. The practice has abruptly stopped and so has gambling."

The crackdown on "notoriously undesirable" officials and employes initiated by President Marcos has seeped down to the local government. The mayor gives this rundown:

"By the end of 1972, 11 policemen and one sergeant had been dismissed. Six policemen had been forced to resign. One lieutenant had to leave the service for taking a prisoner out of the city jail without the proper permission. This, in spite of the fact that he had 25 years of service behind him. I recently dismissed a market inspector for not issuing a receipt for a 20-centavo market collection. A district engineer, who had served for 18 years, I also dismissed for surreptitiously selling used iron bars."

How were the local citizen assemblies carried out?

"At the very start, I really had the problem of organizing them. For one, we don't have barrios here in Cavite City. What I did was to divide the city into four districts. I appointed one leader in each.

"The positive response was overwhelming. We reached out even those who could not attend the assemblies because of the nature of their occupations. To solve this handicap, we arranged for a house-to-house voting. We distributed questionnaires to those who couldn't attend the assemblies and let them vote in writing.

"All those weeks, from one engagement to another, I lost my voice. Some local officials, however, are still reluctant to cooperate with the New Order. Right now, I have headaches on some members of the city council. Take the appropriation for the health centers operated by the city government. Hanggan ngayon, wala ni isang pera para sa mga centers. And we have eight centers to take care of. They are still playing politics."

Despite the odds, and considering the gains made thus far, Mayor de Guzman looks forward to a brighter future for the city.

In peace and order, the mayor says, the record speaks for itself. From August to November of last year, the police blotter listed only 28 cases. There was a decrease of about 100 cases compared to the previous record.

The gradual rise in the city income is another factor. For the year 1972, market stall collections, ticket receipts and checkpoint collections accounted for an increase of no less than P20,473. The mayor attributes this to the strict enforcement of the market code. On another aspect, the city assessor, in a report submitted last January 4, noted that in spite of the withdrawal of the US naval station from Sangley Point, the city had improved its realty assessment position. From P43,809,875 in 1971, assessed valuation increased to P45,865,985 in 1972, with an increase of P2,056,110. This gave the city an additional income of P20,561.10.

For these positive trends and many more, the mayor has reason to be optimistic.

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Municipal building of Indang: a symbol of local autonomy in Cavite.