

The Province of Biliran

PROFILE

According to folklore, Biliran derived its name from the native grass - Borobiliran - which was abundant on the plains during the Pre-Spanish period. Long before this era, seafarers passing through the narrow straits of Biliran, separating mainland of Leyte and the island of Biliran, had noticed the fertile plains and the lush green hills of the island.

In the early 18th century, a group of settlers, led by Fr. Gaspar settled in Albacia (now a sitio of Barangay Hugpa in the municipality of Biliran). Years later, this same group of settlers now led by Fr. Lorenzo Rivera transferred to Magsanoc. Unfortunately, Magsanoc, (now sitio Nasunugan) was burned to the ground. These settlers finally settled on the plains of Biliran. This settlement developed and grew that by 1878, it was formally declared a municipality of Leyte by the Spanish authorities - the first town in the island of Biliran. This significant event led virtually to the naming of the whole island as Biliran

Biliran became a regular province on May 11, 1992 after a plebiscite was conducted in accordance with R.A. 7160. The island province, which was formerly a sub-province of Leyte, belongs to the Eastern Visayas region (Region 8). It is bounded on the north by the Visayas Sea, on the south by the Carigara Bay, on the east by the Samar Sea, and on the west by the Strait of Biliran.

The province of Biliran consists of 8 municipalities and 132 barangays. It is a lone congressional district. The seat of government is in Naval, the capital town.

The main island has slightly flat to rolling and rough terrain. It has narrow coastal areas or lowlands with mountainous interiors except for the municipalities of Naval and Caibiran that have wider plains and rolling terrain extending about 7 km from the coast. Mountain ranges occupy the major portion of the island municipality of Maripipi.

Biliran has a combination of warm and cool climatic zones, thus the prevailing climate is ideal for the cultivation of a wide range of agricultural crops. There is no distinct dry season but the heavy wet season generally occurs in December.

Demography

In 2000 Census, Biliran had a total population of 140,274 of which 71,259 were males and 69,015 were females. Population density was 252 persons per square kilometer. Annual population growth rate was 1.28 %. Dialects spoken are the Waray-waray, which is spoken by 43.3% of the total population, and the Cebuano dialect, which accounts for 55.9%. [up]

Land Area

Based on the Bureau of Soils and Water Management's report, the province has a total land area of 555.42 square kilometers (55,542 hectares) of which 12,879 hectares are forestlands and 42,663 ha. are A & D lands. The alienable and disposable lands are utilized as follows: agricultural lands 30,628 ha., fishpond/mangrove and inland water area 598 hectare, built-up area 1,855 hectare, and open and grasslands 9,582 hectare. [up]

Agriculture

Biliran's economy is predominantly agricultural. The total agricultural production area is 30,628 ha. or roughly 55% of the total land area of the province. In 1998, approximately 100 mt. of various agricultural products were produced.

Palay is planted to 13,581.75 ha. by 9,042 farmers. Total palay production is 61,117.87 mt. per year for two cropping seasons. Average production per cropping is 102 cavans or 4.5 mt. per hectare. Available post harvest facilities include 74 rice mills, 44 warehouses and 3 mechanical dryers. Production in 1995 of locally grown vegetables (e.g. eggplant, carrots, cabbage, pechay) totaled 1,002 mt.

Coconut is also widely planted in the province. This crop is grown in about 21,100 ha. by 12,783 farmers. Total copra production in 1998 was estimated at 15,242 mt. There are around 91 registered copra buyers. Coconut lumber as by-product is an alternative source of lumber for the province; there are 53 registered coco lumber processors and 21 coco lumber dealers.

For rootcrops such as camote, cassava and gabi, the annual production is estimated to be 3,692 mt. These crops are cultivated in 568 has. Additionally, some 260 ha. are planted to various fruit trees (e.g. mango, jackfruit, guava); the average production is 5 mt. per hectare. Banana is another major fruit grown in the province. Production areas for bananas cover almost 3,109.54 ha.

Fishery. Municipal fishing accounted for 4,730 mt. of fish produced in 1998. There are 105 ha. available for brackishwater fishponds but only 50 ha. are developed. Total fishpond production was 87.6 mt. of prawns, shrimps and milkfish. Some 55 commercial and 2,712 municipal fishing boats operate in the territorial waters of the island province. About 30 hectares may be used for seaweed farming and 10 hectares for fish-cage culture. [up]

Trade and Commerce

There are major areas where trade and commerce is active in the province. There is the municipality of Biliran where a bridge connects the province to Leyte. It is the gateway to Ormoc City, Tacloban City and other parts of the country that are accessible by land transport. Also, ferryboats regularly ply the Naval-Cebu City route. In the Naval commercial port, major inflows and outflows of goods are observed. On the other side of the main island, marine products from Cabucgayan, Caibiran, Culaba and Kawayan are sold directly to the cities of Ormoc and Tacloban in Leyte, and Calbayog City and Catbalogan in the province of Samar.

Principal goods shipped out of the province are copra, rice, bananas and dried fish. The major markets are Cebu, Tacloban, Samar and Manila. Goods that come from Cebu, Tacloban and Ormoc include

canned goods, garments, construction materials, metal products, pharmaceuticals, electronic appliances, school and office supplies, petrochemicals, plastic wares and consumer items.

During the year 2000, 243 establishments were registered, which generated employment to 501 persons and had a declared total capitalization of 26 million pesos. [up]

Employment

The labor force numbers 77,714 of which 73,595 persons or 94.7 % are employed and 4,119 (5.3 %) are unemployed. Labor force participation rate is 69.3%. Employment is distributed as follows: agriculture, hunting and forestry - 49.5%; fishing - 12.7%; manufacturing - 3.1%; construction - 4.6%; trade - 8%; services - 21.7%; and others - 0.4%. [up]

Health

Among children the malnutrition status is 1.71% severe and 25.84% moderate. The crude birth rate is 24.68 per thousand people, crude death rate is 5.23 ptp, infant mortality rate stands at 13.85 ptp, and the maternal mortality rate is 1.13 ptp. Average life expectancy is 64 and 68 years for men and women, respectively. Biliran lacks supply in the following food items: dairy, meat and fruits. [up]

Utilities

Power. The Tongonan Geothermal Power Plant through the Biliran Electric Cooperative supplies electricity in the main island; a power generation set is operated by BILECO in the island municipality of Maripipi. Almost all of the barangays are already energized. Average rate per kilowatt-hour is P5.22, maybe the highest power rate in Eastern Visayas.

Water. Presently, 10% of the households are being served by Level 1 systems (wells, rain collectors, springs), 39% by Level 2 systems (communal faucets), and 44% by Level 3 systems (individual household connections). Other water supply sources account for 7%. The Naval Water District provides potable water in the provincial capital.

Communications. Biliran has 8 postal offices located in each municipality, 1 FM radio station and 3 cable television firms. Globe and Smart operate cellular sites in the area; the former also operates a local phone exchange. The Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) and the Radio Communications of the Philippines, Inc. (RCPI/BayanTel) have public calling offices in Naval. [up]

Financial Institutions

Three financial institutions operate in the province: the Land Bank of the Philippines, the Philippine National Bank, and the Rural Bank of Naval. In addition, three lending investors and five credit cooperatives extend financial services. [up]

Education

In providing good quality education, the province has one state college (Naval Institute of Technology), one agricultural college (BNAC), and 2 vocational schools (CNSAT and MNVS). The most popular college courses are engineering, agriculture and education. Total elementary enrollment is 26,170 while secondary enrollment is 7,289. Graduation rate is 97.55% and the dropout rate is 5.56%. Teacher to pupil ratio is 1:29. Total number of classrooms is 833 for the elementary and 97 for the secondary. [up]

Peace and Order

Biliran is generally a peaceful province and there is no known incidence of insurgency in recent times. Crime rate is 15.56% and crime solution efficiency is 94.72%. There are a total of 192 policemen and 25 firemen. The provincial command center is stationed in Naval. [up]

Infrastructure

The province is 123 km. from Tacloban City. Land access into the province is via Tacloban City and Ormoc City. Road quality from these two cities to Naval is concrete-paved throughout. The total length of roads is 444.006 km. (167 km. national highways, 56.656 km. provincial roads, 25.71 km. municipal roads and 194.64 km. barangay roads). Road density is 0.775 km/sq. km.

Sea Transportation. The major seaport is the Naval Port. Ships calling into the port include small- and medium-sized vessels from Cebu. Other municipal ports are located in Kawayan, Caibiran, Culaba, Biliran and Maripipi. [up]

Tourism

Biliran Province is endowed with natural tourist attractions that lure both local and foreign tourists: coral reef gardens, scenic waterways, white sand beaches, natural hot and cold water springs.

White Sand Beaches. The island takes pride in its white sand beaches: the Agta Beach resort in Almeria, the Banderahan Beach in Naval, the exotic island of Dalutan with its sculptured rock formations, the Sambawan Island with its rich marine life and coral gardens, the Higatangan Island, famous for its moving white sand bar, the Cogon Beach in Kawayan which is ideal for edible shellfish hunting, and the Genuruan Island in Kawayan which is ideal for water skiing and deep sea diving. There is also the Tingkasan Island, famous for its mysterious bat caves and edible shellfishes. The panoramic island of Maripipi has a beautiful marine seascape.

Waterfalls. The clear and sweet tasting water that flows from the Tomalistis falls is believed to be one of the best in the world. Other falls include the Kasabangan Falls and Casiawan Falls in Cabucgayan, the Kinaraha and Pundol Falls in Almeria, and the newly discovered falls in Pulang Yuta in Caibiran which resembles the Pagsangjan Falls.

Water Springs. The Libtong Hotspring is located in Naval while the Mainit Hotspring can be found in the municipality of Caibiran.

The more popular swimming pools are the Masagongsong Swimming Pool in Kawayan and the San Bernardino Swimming Pool in Caibiran. These pools never run dry nor require chlorination because

their waters flow freely from their cool underground natural spring source. Both have amenities like kiosks, conference halls, dressing rooms and rest houses. [up]

Development Plans

As a new province, Biliran is strengthening its organizational development program to build up its capabilities for local governance both at the provincial and municipal levels. Biliran has also set in place necessary mechanisms for a more participative constituency, promoting its own culture and identity and evolving a model for local administration. Moreover, the province is moving to expand its traditional role in the Eastern Visayas. From being the rice granary, the province is aiming to become the food basket of the region.

The island province aims, as part of its overall vision, to propagate high market value crops; establish seed nurseries and demonstration farms to showcase new technologies; encourage aquaculture production; intensify its reforestation and environmental protection programs; accelerate its integrated livestock and poultry programs; develop its ports, roads, power, communications and waterworks systems, irrigation network and post-harvest facilities; enhance its people development programs; promote eco-tourism development; and improve its service delivery. [up]

Private Investment Opportunities

1. Eco-tourism
2. Mineral/spring water packaging
3. Industrial tree plantation
4. Integrated coco processing
5. Livestock production and processing
6. Post harvest facilities
7. Sea weed processing
8. Ceramics and terra-cotta manufacturing
9. Communications

Incentives to Investors

1. Skilled and literate labor force
2. Favorable peace and order condition
3. Rich fishing grounds
4. Favorable climate
5. Tourist attractions
6. A development oriented, strong-willed and committed Provincial Government leadership.