



# THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS AND THEIR STAMPS

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The Archipelago of the Philippine Islands is situated in S.E. Asia, between Taiwan and the Celebes Sea. It extends from the Luzon Strait to Tinaca Point, the southern tip of the island of Mindanao, and it consists of 7,000 islands and islets, of which 2,773 have names. But only sixteen of these islands are large: these being Luzon, Mindanao, Samao, Negros, Palawan, Panay, Mindoro, Leyte, Cebu, Bohol, Masbute, Subu, Tawi-tawi, Romblon, Marinduque and Siquijor. The total area is 115,601 square miles, and the total population some forty two millions. Of these, some sixteen million people speak English, and one million Spanish. The capital is Manila, in the island of Luzon, and other large cities include Cebu, Davao, Iloilo, Zamboamga and Bauolod. The Philippines are chiefly agricultural, and the chief products are rice, coconuts, maize, sugar-cane, tobacco and timber. But the manufacturing industries are expanding with the active encouragement of the Government. The air-services are important, for both internal and external purposes. There are regular flights to Hong Kong, Taipei, Sydney, Singapore and Tokyo, as well as a four-weekly flight to San Francisco. The University of the Philippines was founded as long ago as 1908, and it presently has some 40,000 students.

The Philippine Islands have been aptly described as a 'melting pot of peoples and cultures' (by Richard E. Kennewick, in the *Fodor Guide to South-East Asia*, edition of 1978, page 434). Their inhabitants are traditionally very friendly and hospitable; and the group attracts many American businessmen and visitors, largely on account of the legacy of about half a century of American rule. The Philippines support over 1,400 newspapers and magazines (800 published in Manila), and their periodical press has been plausibly described as one of the freest in Asia. Manila alone has six English language newspapers, with circulations ranging from 16,000 to 120,000. The Congress Building in Manila, the seat of the National Parliament, is a magnificent edifice.

Perhaps the appeal of the stamps of the Philippine Islands has been obscured by their long and close association with the U.S.A. But these stamps deserve also to be considered in their own right, and they have a current appeal, which is remarkably large and varied. At any rate, the Philippine Islands effectively demonstrate in their available stamps the features of their eventful history, as well as those of their colourful and vivid geography. The first European to reach the group came in 1521, with Magellan, who was killed there. In 1542, the islands received their name, after Philip II of Spain. In 1571, Manila was founded by Miguel Lopez de Legaspi and—although the British briefly held Manila in 1762-64—the Spanish ascendancy there continued into the nineteenth century and it was not a progressive one. But the first of the stamps of the Philippine Islands were those of the Spanish rule, beginning on 1 February, 1854. These early stamps, bearing a portrait of Queen Isabella II of Spain, offer a profusion of philatelic varieties, of colour, perforation and paper. So also do the ensuing sets, of 1859, 1863, 1864 and 1868. Stamps for King Amadeo of Spain came out in 1871 and 1872, for the first Spanish Republic in 1874, and for Alfonso XII of Spain after 1875. These last, especially, contain a very large diversity of interesting philatelic varieties. His successor, Alfonso XIII of Spain, had his portrait on the stamps of the Philippine Islands between 1890 and 1898. But Spanish rule there began to be challenged as early as 1873, and after 1889 the nationalist struggle was in earnest, led by the physician, novelist and poet, José Rizal. His works had to be smuggled into the Philippines, but in 1892 he returned to the Archipelago and set up the 'Philippine League', to campaign for independence. However, he did not join the actual uprising of 1896, which resulted in the establishment of the short-lived Philippine Revolutionary Government of 1898-99, for which some interesting stamps were issued.



The United States administration of the Philippine Islands began as a result of the American victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898-99. By the Treaty of Paris, the U.S.A. agreed to purchase the Philippine Islands for twenty million dollars. President McKinley then announced that their policy would be to 'civilise and Christianise' the Philippine people, as a preliminary to their independence. Thus, as from 30 June, 1899, stamps of the U.S.A. were overprinted 'Philippines' for use there; and these offer a lot of varieties of overprint, colour and watermark. The first definitive stamps for the United States administration of the Philippine Islands, were those of 8 September 1906, and these also provide a useful array of absorbing philatelic varieties. Air stamps for the Philippines came out on 13 May 1926, for the initial flight between Madrid and Manila; and on 20 December 1926, a design—infested with perforation varieties—was issued for the inauguration of the Legislative Palace at Manila. Air stamps for the flight from London came out on 9 September 1928; and on 3 May 1932, the Philippines were provided with their first, full pictorial set; including glimpses of the General Post Office at Manila, Mayon Volcano, rice plantations and terraces, and Manila Bay. An even larger set of pictorials for the Philippines came out on 15 February 1935, showing such features as José Rizal (the patriot), pearl fishing, Magellan landing, and Montalban Gorge.

On 15 November 1935, the Commonwealth of the Philippines was established, with a President and a National Assembly. The first President was Manuel Quezon. But defence and foreign relations remained under the United States control and these matters became increasingly important, after the Japanese attack on China in 1937. Stamps continued for the Philippines with the set of 1936-1937, showing Manuel Quezon, and that of 1939-40, for the fourth anniversary of the Commonwealth status. Despite all the American efforts, the Japanese occupied the Philippine Islands in 1941-1942. The Japanese issued, for the territory, a collection of assorted stamps, including the interesting pictorial set of 1943-44. They declared the Philippines to be a Republic, within the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', on 14 October 1943. But after the Japanese naval defeat in the Battle of Leyte Gulf (October 1944), the Americans landed in the Philippines and the Japanese finally surrendered there, on 2 September 1945. 'Victory' stamps, under the American auspices, were issued in 1944-45 and these included some useful philatelic varieties.

The Republic of the Philippines, with the American blessing, came into existence on 4 July 1946 and a special commemorative design was issued for that occasion. Its first President was Manuel

Roxas, who had remained in Manila under the Japanese. But American aid was necessary, especially during the first five years of independence. Corruption and inflation became rife. Fortunately such economic realities did not overshadow the continuing appeal of the stamps of the Philippines. As they became increasingly self-confident in their national independence they issued an abundance of attractive and significant stamps, all of which must continue to deserve the appreciative attention of collectors. Moreover, these stamps need no longer be linked with the U.S.A., as the products of a political appendage and their appeal is to all sorts of Anglo-Saxon collectors; from postal historians and philatelic students to the ordinary 'design' collectors. The stamps of the Philippine Islands offer their growing numbers, for the efforts of a wide range of intelligent and observant collectors.

Today, the Philippine Islands provide an attractive and lively atmosphere of Spanish, American, and Filipino elements. Manila, the capital, has plenty of modern buildings, including hotels, churches and universities. Once a gem of the far-flung Spanish Empire, it is still one of the most romantic ports in the world. It has been influenced largely, in turn, by Indian, Spanish, Chinese, American, and Japanese elements; and its total population, of three million, is crowded into less than 15 square miles. It is also the centre of a postal system, which includes 1,578 post offices, and depends on world-wide air-mail services. The Philippine Islands have an added significance, in our own times, as an outpost of the American influence and ascendancy, close to Indonesia, Taiwan, and—across the South China Sea—the mainland of Asia. They are the utmost limit of American influence, beyond Guam and Okinawa. Significantly, too, the Mindanao Trench, along their eastern coasts, forms one of the deepest and the most impressive descents of the Pacific Ocean.

The Philippine Islands and their stamps cannot properly be understood, without some study of the available 'background' reading. This is fairly abundant and accessible. Richard E. Kennewick's article on the Philippines—*Sunshine, Charm and Colour*—is in the *Fodor Guide to South-East Asia* (edition of 1978, pp.433-451). Leonard Casper, of Boston College, also writes well on the Philippines, in the *Encyclopaedia Americana* (edition of 1977, Vol. 21, pp.748-759). Relevant books include K. Lightfoot's *The Philippines* (London, 1973), J. R. Hayden's *The Philippines: a Study in National Development* (New York, 1942), and Leon Wolff's *Little Brown Brother* (New York, 1960). Such literature supplements the varied evidence of the numerous stamps, in all their aspects, philatelic or pictorial.

