



Biri: an island with magnificent rock formations

Biri Island is one of the most fascinating towns of Northern Samar. It is known for its awe-inspiring rock formations carved thru time due to big waves of the San Bernardino Strait that lap up the eastern portion of its shore.

Its rocky landscape leaves vast potential for exploration. There are hundreds of sites and thousands of routes waiting for the intrepid climber.



The island town has been a favorite place for photography enthusiasts and picnickers, especially during summer when the weather is good and the sea is calm. Visitors spend the day relishing the site and taking a dip in the cool turquoise blue water. It has also attracted surfers during the months of October to January, with its perfect surging waves.

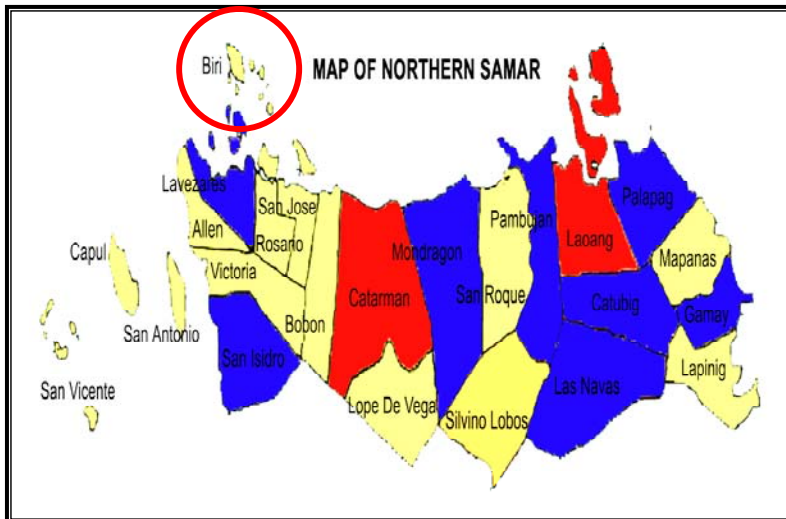
History Biri was originally an island barangay under the jurisdiction of Bobon, Northern Samar until its conversion into a new and independent municipality under Republic Act No. 5500 on June 21, 1969. Biri became the 21st municipality of Northern Samar.

The island used to be Tingiao, as referred to in the navigational maps of the Spanish Galleons, and was the entry point to Luzon and Visayas.

As navigational landmark, the name "Biri" was derived from the Spanish word to "barrer", meaning to sweep. Every time the Spanish captain of the Galleon would sight the San Bernardino Isle and Biri of Tingiao, the captain would order his men "barrer" or clean the galleon deck in preparation of their berthing to the Capul Island for their trip to Manila. On some occasions, the Spanish Galleon would anchor at Biri Bay before proceeding their navigation to Manila.

While in the Island, inhabitants would hear the Spaniards naming the Island "verey". From then on, the word "verey" was popularly known as "Biri".

During World War II, Biri was the site of the Japanese Garrison Signal Corps due to its strategic location from the Pacific Ocean. Many Biri-anons became witnesses to the passing of the American submarine and other warships during the liberation of Leyte. A bomb-made lagoon still exists inside the Biri Central Elementary School.



Geography Biri is situated in the northernmost tip of Northern Samar, facing the Pacific Ocean to the East and the famous San Bernardino Strait to the west.

It has a total land area of 24.6 square kilometers and is composed of 8 barangays namely, Pio del Pilar, Poblacion, MacArthur, Kauswagan, Progress, San Antonio, San Pedro and Santo Niño.

Demography The island registered a total population of 10,649 in the 2007 Census of Population. Its population density of 433 persons per square kilometer is the third highest among the 24 municipalities of Northern Samar.

Biri inhabitants are a blend of Waray and Bicolano culture. The inner inhabitants speak Waray dialect while the outer island people speak Bicol-Waray dialect.

Financial Resources The island town is considered as fifth class municipality. Its average annual income from 1996-1999 reached Php 7.6 million. The Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of the municipality amounted to Php 16.1 million in 2006. This translates to an IRA per capita of Php 1,493, the sixth biggest among the municipalities.

Education The municipality has a total of 11 government elementary schools and 2 government secondary schools. In SY 2006-2007, both teacher to pupil/student ratio in elementary and secondary schools stood at 1:38.

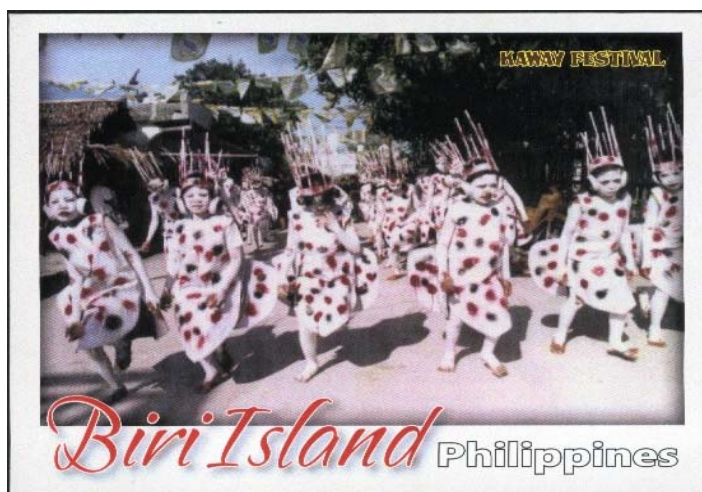
Socio-Economic Activities The natural resources of the municipality consist mainly of fish and other marine products. Fishing apparently is the primary livelihood in the community. During the months of March to September, the Biri-anons are engaged in catching fish and squids like kulambutan, tabugok, tustos, muko-buko, kugita, tagbulakaw, tamala, and many others. The populace are also engaged in rice, root crop and coconut farming.

Scenic Spots Biri takes pride in its natural scenic spots, foremost of which are the magnificent rock formations of Magasang and Bel-at. Two huge, beautifully carved rocks, each about the size of a three-story building, stand separately on a wide flat rock on one of the islets called Magasang. A big rock formation with a bat cave underneath can be found in Bel-at.

These spots have been attracting both foreign and domestic tourists. It became so popular when one of the scenes of the



romantic movie entitled "Iisa Pa Lamang" starred by Richard Gomez, Dawn Zulueta and Maricel Laxa was shot in their place. It also became a setting of an adventure-horror-drama film called "Spirit Warriors II" starred by Danilo Barrios, Vhong Navarro and Chris Cruz. Likewise, these spots were featured in the 2001 Calendar poster of the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) as one of the Geological Wonders of the Philippines.



Kaway Festival Apart from the natural rock formations, Biri is teeming with squid. The squid's tentacles otherwise known as "kaway" lead to a Kaway Festival which is the Biri-anon's expression of thanksgiving for the abundance of sea products. This is being celebrated every 23rd and 24th of June.

Various agencies and barangays participate in the merry-making and breath-taking dance exhibitions.

Through the Kaway Festival, Biri will nurture a culture of peace in harmony with nature, and will probably become the gateway to the arts and culture of Northern Samar.

Getting There Biri Island can be reached in 14 hours by bus or private vehicle from Manila or approximately 1 hour and fifteen minutes flight from Manila to Catarman, the capital town of Northern Samar. The island can also be reached in 30 minutes by sea from the town of Lavezares through motorboats.

Motorboats are used for inter-island transport while motorcycles are available in the town proper.

References:

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2007 Annual Report of Biri, Northern Samar, MPDO Biri
The Countryside in Figures: Northern Samar, First Edition: 2007, NSCB
2007 Census of Population, NSO
DOT Website: <http://www.tourism.gov.ph>
Photos courtesy of Department of Tourism, Region VIII and
Municipal Tourism Office - Biri

Biri: an island of magnificent rock formations
A Municipal Profile

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