



Limasawa Island: Site of the First Mass in the Philippines and in Asia

Limasawa, an island municipality in Southern Leyte, is a small yet flourishing town being the site of the **First Christian Mass** in the country and in Asia. The **First Cross** and the **First Mass Shrine**, are some of the frequently visited spots that give tourists a rare experience of retracing the historic footsteps of the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 who paved the way for the beginning of Christianity in the country.



First Cross in Brgy. Magallanes, Limasawa

History. “**Mazaua**” is the original name of this municipality. According to historians, there are two assumptions how the municipality got its name.

One assumption is that before the Spanish men arrived to the island, the natives don't really have a name of their place. Upon the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan and his men, one of the natives was asked for the name of their place. The native, unable to understand what it meant, mistakenly interpreted the question to mean as to “how many wives their Rajah has”. So he answered immediately “*Lima’y Asawd*”, meaning that their Rajah has five wives. The Spanish too, thinking that was the answer to his question, return to tell his companions that the island is named “*Lima’y Asawa*”. And from then on, the place came to be called as “Limasawa”.

Another assumption is that when the Spanish men arrived to the island, they named it “*Mazaud*” for the beauty of the place. As it is their custom to add the prefix “*Le*” to mean a particular name, it became the tongue of everyone in the place to call it as “*Le Mazaua*”. It was the local people themselves who later changed the spelling and joined the two words into “Limasawa”.

Today the island is popularly known as “Limasawa” although some elderly citizens prefer to call it “**Mazaua**”.

Limasawa was created into an independent municipality on June 11, 1978 by virtue of Presidential Decree No. 1549. But this was not implemented due to some problems. Limasawa officially became a municipality on August 27, 1989 after the conduct of a plebiscite among the populace to ratify its independence.



Geography. Limasawa Island is situated at the southern tip of the Province of Southern Leyte. It is bounded on the north by the municipality of Padre Burgos, on the east by Panaon Island, on the south by Camiguin Island (Mindanao Sea), and on the west by Province of Bohol (Canigao Channel).

It has a total land area of 7 square kilometers and is composed of six barangays namely: Cabulihan, Triana, Magallanes, Lugsongan, San Bernardo and San Agustin.

Climate. The municipality has no distinct dry or wet season but with pronounced rainfall from the months of June to January. The rainy season occurs between the months of June to January while the dry season occurs between the months of December and January and driest months between March and April.

Demography. Based on the 2007 Census, the municipality recorded a total population of 5,831 with an average annual growth rate of 1.71%. Its population density was estimated at 835 persons per square kilometer, making it the most densely populated municipality in the province. Majority of the people speak Cebuano or Visayan language. The municipality recorded the highest literacy rate of 97.8% in the province.

Governance. Limasawa is considered as sixth class municipality. In 2008, total financial resources (TFR) of the municipality was estimated at 18.3 million pesos. Its internal revenue allotment (IRA) for 2008 amounted to 16.2 million pesos. This translates to an IRA per capita of 2,738 pesos.

Socio-Economic Activities. Land area of the municipality is classified as follows: agricultural 64.4%, residential 18.5%, forest 6.3%, industrial 3.0%, and others 7.7%.

The main sources of income of the people in the municipality are fishing and farming. The major crops include coconut, banana, cassava, fruits and vegetables. They also engaged in fish and squid drying.

The municipality is also known among its neighboring fishing towns for making lighter and durable pump boats with sleek designs.



Tourism Potential. The municipality of Limasawa is one of the areas in the country with high tourism potential being the site of the first Christian mass in the country. On July 25, 1994, Limasawa was declared as a tourist zone with the issuance of Republic Act 7822. With this declaration, the tourism master plan of the municipality was prepared. Today, with the support of the Provincial Government of Southern Leyte, Department of Tourism and other government agencies, various tourism enhancement projects have already been implemented in the area. The island is envisioned to become the next "Boracay Island" tourism site in the Visayas.



Scenic Spots. Aside from its religious and historic landmarks, Limasawa is endowed with scenic and refreshing vistas of white sand beaches and fish sanctuaries perfect for hiking, camping, snorkeling and scuba diving. The long white beaches (Dakdak and Gamot Beaches) are located at Brgy. Lugsongan and Cabulihan. Caves can also be found in Brgy. San Agustin and Magallanes.

Its fish sanctuaries with pristine coral reefs are located in Brgy. San Agustin and Brgy. Lugsongan. Relics of giant oyster/clam shell can be also found in Brgy. San Agustin.

Getting There. Maasin City is the nearest gateway to Limasawa island. From Maasin City, the island can be reached through a 30-minute ride to the municipality of Padre Burgos and another 40 minutes banca/boat ride to the island. Maasin City is 2-3 hours van/bus ride from Ormoc City and Tacloban City.

References and Data Sources:

Profile of Limasawa prepared by LGU-Limasawa
Province of Southern Leyte Website (<http://www.southernleyte.ph/>)
Southern Leyte Provincial Tourism Office Brochure
Department of Budget and Management, Region VIII
The Countryside in Figures Southern Leyte, National Statistical Coordination Board
Photo courtesy of LGU-Limasawa and Department of Tourism Regional Office No. 8

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