

Culion - A Paradise Lost - A Paradise Regained

• Geographical Location

Culion is an island situated at the northernmost part of Palawan some 200 nautical miles southwest of Manila. It belongs to the Calamianes Group of Islands.

Culion lies within the parallels of 11036' N and 12003' N and the meridians of 1190 47' E and 1200 15' E. It has a total land area of 415 square kilometers which includes the 41 surrounding islands and measures 1,191.39 square kilometers including its territorial water. It is bounded on the north by Busuanga Island, on the east by the Coron Reef, on the south by Linapacan Island, and on the west by the South China Sea.

• HOW TO GET TO CULION:

From Manila, you can take one-hour flight to Busuanga Airport (YKR) via SEAIR & ASIAN SPIRIT or a 12-hour cruise to Coron via SUPERFERRY & NEGROS NAVIGATION. From Busuanga Airport, an hour jeepney ride to Coron pier followed by a scenic one-hour small boat ride.

• ANCESTRY & HERITAGE

The People

The original people of Culion are the Tagbanuas, a cultural minority group that lives by fishing and food gathering. While preserving their native customs and traditions, the Tagbanuas are greatly influenced by Muslim culture and social

organization.

Early trading activities attracted people from other parts of Palawan, like Calamianen and Cuyonon, who came and stayed in Culion as their new home.

Today, however, the Tagbanuas no longer practice many of their cultural traditions and many of them have been converted to Christianity. They are largely marginalized, making up only about 8% of Culion's total population. Barangay Carabao, under Republic Act 9032, was established for these indigenous people. They were also granted Certificates of Ancestral Domain under Republic Act 8371, also known as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997.

The establishment of the leper colony in 1906, hansenites and hospital staff were brought to Culion from different parts of the Philippines bringing their customs, habits, dialects, and regional characteristics, and the influx of migrants in the last three decades have understandably made Culion an heterogeneous population.

In spite of the regional idiosyncrasies and biases, the people have adapted themselves easily, setting aside regional differences to form a homogenous population

bonded by common disease – leprosy, and common destiny – Culion, sharing same dreams and vision, working for a common mission of finding cure and new identity.

Climate, Local Conditions & Natural Riches

Culion has two distinct seasons: seven months of well- pronounced dry season from November to May and five months of wet season, from June to October. The temperature of Culion is uniformly hot and humid. Generally, the warmest months are March, April and May; the coolest is December.

Being a pocket archipelago of small islands, Culion is vulnerable to changes in sea level and excessive precipitation. The rise in sea level can cause some of Culion's low lying areas to be inundated, reducing the total land area.

Culion has a hilly to low mountainous terrain

with generally acidic, sandy, and porous soil. The soils were formed as a result of soil erosion, so most soils in Culion are poor, with very low fertility.

There is a unique geographical charm and physical features of Palawan that differ from Luzon and the rest of the country, with a very high degree of endemism of plant and animal species due to Palawan's geologic and tectonic evolution millions of years ago. Palawan resulted from the collision of the Indian plate and Eurasian plate while the rest of the country was formed from the subduction of the rotating Philippine Sea plate. The most prominent geographic fact of Culion is that it consists of islands and rocks.

The Culion sea is teeming with a total of 201 fish species including commercially

important fish like Lapu-lapu (Groupers), Kanuping (Sweetlip Emperor), Maya-Maya (Snapper), Tanguige (Spanish Mackerel), Dalagang Bukid (Blue and Gold Fusiliers) and Bisugo (Breems). Squid, cuttlefish, shrimps, crabs, shellfish and sea cucumber or trepang are plentiful.

Three ecosystems sustain the rich marine life of Culion: mangroves, seagrass, and corals. 17 mangrove species cover the coastline of Culion. 9 seagrass species and 47 coral genera representing 60% of the total genera found in the Philippines are found in Culion.

Culion used to have high density forests with hardwood or “iron trees”

like narra, mahogany, molave, kayataw, wasi and ipil. Unfortunately, large areas of what used to be densely forested areas have been ruthlessly cleared by illegal logging and kaingin (slash-and-burn agriculture). All these activities of humans have endangered Culion's forests and it has contributed to the rapid decrease of wildlife habitat and the consequent depletion of wildlife species. It has also seriously affected the availability of fresh water supply. Furthermore, man's heightened activities and careless actions like oil spillage and dumping of waste and pollutants, over-harvesting of the mangroves for firewood and charcoal,

and coral reef destruction caused by cyanide and dynamite fishing, are threatening our vital ecosystems and marine life.

The reckless denudation of Culion's forests and rampant exploitation of marine resources and exporting of fauna species is posing a threat to our seemingly boundless natural wealth. While it is easy to destroy Culion's ecosystems, it is difficult to rehabilitate or to restore it. A forest ecosystem may never recover their original type within the next 500 years. Culion thus faces an environmental problem that requires an immediate response.

From Culion.net