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Davao: 'biggest' city yet

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Part V

DAVAO CITY, March 30 — Plane arrivals in this city, 90 minutes and P233 away from Manila, are greeted on the road to town by a gayly painted statue in tribal attire, holding up a durian fruit with both hands. Davaoños say the figure is that of a Manobo native who is the true aborigine of Davao.

The statue looks more like Pinocchio, with his long nose and wide grin, punctuated by red, plump cheeks but anyone who has never seen a genuine Manobo will simply have to let it go at

that.

There are no true Davaoños, except the Manobos, and they constitute a very small minority in Davao. Eight out of every 10 persons you meet are migrants, mostly from Cebu and other Visayan islands, as well as Luzon.

Davao city is the biggest city in the world, in area at least. It measures 244,005 hectares of sprawling land, consisting of plantations, forests, and even unexplored mountain ranges. It is probably called the city of promise, because of the large areas still open for development.

Davao is relatively young compared to other cities in the country. It is barely 33 years old, and the foundation day celebration, characterized by a week of festivity, culminates on March 16.

There are 20 hotels available to tourists in the city, with the plushiest accommodations provided by the famous Insular Hotel at P45 to P60 a room. The Apo View, Davao Bay, Imperial and Meng Seng hotel offer air conditioned rooms at P14 to P26. Other hotels rent out non-airconditioned rooms for as low as 8 a day.

Pete Laviña, coordinator of the Department of Tourism, calls Davao "instant Philippines" because of a conglomeration of different ethnic groups in the province, with the native descendants of pioneer families, mixing with the aboriginal tribes and the Muslim groups.

Mount Apo is Davao's principal attraction, towering majestically at 9,600 feet above sea level. It is the highest mountain peak in the whole country. The Bagobo natives believe the mountain is the sacred abode of the god Apo, and the dwelling place of Mandaragan, the God who demands human sacrifice, by

causing landslides.

A hike up to Mount Apo will include an overnight camp at the mountainside but there would be many attractions along the way, like hot springs, interspersed with cool and limpid streams that cut across the trail. Giant tabon eggs buried in virgin forests, and sweet blueberries growing abundantly between the cracks of rocks, offer prospects for an exciting hunt.

The historic Talomo beach within the city is a two-kilometer strip of coconut collonaded grey sandy water's edge. In 1942, the Japanese invasion forces landed on this beach that led to the occupation of Davao. Early in 1945, Talomo beach was again stormed by the US liberation forces, under Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

In February of 1963, more than 10,000 Filipinos troops made a beachhead in Talomo to stage "Operations Bawi," the biggest war maneuver ever held in southern Philippines.

A tour of Davao will not be complete without a visit to the Aguinaldo Pearl farm in Samal island. A one hour ride aboard a motorized outrigger canoe across the blue waters of Davao gulf will take you to this haven of cultured pearls.

At the Caroland resort, a visitor can relax under the cool shade of verdant foliage and marvel at the widest of variety of fruit trees and exotic flowers. A man-made lagoon in the farm teems with multi-colored giant carps so friendly you can feed them with your hands. Or you can rent a boat at P1 per hour and catch your own fish. The fish you catch will cost you at P3 or P4 per kilo, but you may have it cooked for free. Or, if you wish, you may cook it yourself in a conveniently provided stove and grill beside every rest hut.