

The Northern Mariana Islands

Saipan, CNMI | Photo by Sung Shim, Unsplash.

A strategically Located Tropical Paradise Full with Untapped Potential

Often described as “America’s best kept secret”, the CNMI is so much more than the U.S. backdoor to Asia. Combining a strategic location, unequal natural beauty and a rich storied history, it can become the region’s preferred touristic destination and a key post for both military and civil business endeavors.

Being at the crossroads of Asia and America, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, CNMI, has been on the front line of geopolitics for over a century, and looking into the future, it certainly has plenty of potential as one of the most strategic locations in the United States of America. In its long, disputed history, the 14-island archipelago has gone from being colonized by Spain, sold to Germany, ruled by Japan for over three decades and then liberated by the USA during World War II, when its Tinian military airport was one of the busiest in the world. Later, in 1978, it became a commonwealth U.S. territory, with its residents being granted U.S. citizenship almost a decade later. Today, like in the past, the CNMI stands at yet another pivotal moment as it redirects its economic and military potential towards new horizons. Following the economic crisis brought by the loss of its garment industry, which ran from the 1980’s until the early 2000s, hence leaving mass unemployment and migration, their situation was later aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, visa restrictions (particularly to Chinese citizens, who had visa-free access and made up their second largest tourism market) and the devastation brought by Typhoon Mawar in 2023.

However, and indicative of their longstanding historical resilience, they have managed to surpass those crisis and now look forward to new opportunities that will guarantee a safer and more sustainable future. For instance, last year the U.S. military announced it will spend some \$5 billion in military and civilian infrastructure development on the island of Tinian, which is expected to become U.S.’ next strategic base in the Pacific, and which will bring a vital economic boost to the island, particularly after the closure of its Chinese-owned casino following U.S. restrictions. And while key improvement works at the Tinian harbor have already begun, there are talks of future repairs to increase the capability of the dual-use port, which is the key supply gateway for Tinian residents and supports the region’s military operations. Other crucial developments include two new subsea cables, Proa and Taihei, which are part of Google’s \$1 billion investment to expand the Pacific Connect initiative and will connect Guam, CNMI and Japan. Furthermore, by creating new fiber-optic routes between the continen-

«We need sustainable partners like Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and India. We need to put together a policy of 40-50 year stable investment and relationships with friends of the United States.»

tal U.S. and Japan, these cables will improve the reliability and resilience of digital connectivity between the two countries and within the Pacific Island countries and territories, a key condition for boosting existing businesses and establishing new ones around technology and innovation, like additive manufacturing.

On the other hand, the CNMI has great potential for developing further its main economic driver, the tourism industry, thanks to its unique blend of pristine beaches, spectacular caves and tropical lands perfect for all types of leisure activities and sports; well-preserved indigenous traditions dating back to 4000 years, like their open-sea celestial navigation in “proas”; and history-rich sites from their diverse colonization periods, from prehistoric stone structures or “latte” stones to World War



Saipan, CNMI | Photo by Vincent Camacho, Unsplash.

II shipwrecks and airfields —one of which is the site from where the atomic bomb carrier Enola Gay was launched—, all existing in a friendly and safe environment ruled by U.S. laws. Although the tourism industry was hit hard by the pandemic, in the last couple of years it has started to recover, with visitors doubling in January 2024 compared

to the same period last year. However, since numbers are still low in relation to pre-pandemic indicators, with a total of 215,543 tourists visiting the CNMI in 2023 compared to 487,008 in 2019, the government is trying to build more ties with longstanding partners like Korea and Japan, their first tourist markets, and more recent ones like India. As CNMI governor Arnold Palacios recently said, “We need sustainable partners like Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and India. We need to put together a policy of 40-50 year stable investment and relationships with friends of the United States.” Simultaneously, at the local level, institutions like the Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Saipan Chamber of Commerce launched a plan for economic survival known as “Operation 500k”, that seeks to attract 500,000 tourists annually by recovering old markets such as the Chinese, which made up around 40% of the visitors before the pandemic and would likely come back if current visa restrictions are lifted, or promoting new ones like Taiwan and other Asian destinations.

Furthermore, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is actively engaged on educating its young population and attracting more U.S. workers into jobs held by foreigners, in order to face one of its most important challenges (which is also shared by all Pacific island states and territories): the lack of skilled labor and mass migration. Currently, there is a high demand for healthcare personnel and skilled construction workers; that is why, since fiscal year 2021, the CNMI government has spent between \$1.8 and \$2.4 million annually on vocational education, apprenticeship, and other training programs for U.S. workers, focusing on fields such as nursing, construction, business, hospitality, and tourism.

Being in a part of the world whose strategic location and remoteness has set its own particular challenges as well as opportunities, we are sure the people of the CNMI will continue doing what has defined them for thousands of years: showing incredible resilience to adapt and thrive. ■

A US Strategic Location in the North Pacific Ocean

With maritime borders with Japan and just a few hours away by plane from most Asian capitals, the 14-island archipelago is perfectly placed to connect mainland U.S. with all the main Asian markets.



MAIN DATA

Inhabited islands: Saipan, Tinian and Rota.
Capital: Saipan.
Area: 464 sq km.
Forest area: 53% of total land area.
Population: 55,650.
Approximately 90% lives on the island of Saipan.
Languages: English, Chamorro, Carolinian.



• **GDP:** US\$ 858 million (2020 Worldbank).
• **Access to electricity:** 100% of population.

• **Mobile and Internet penetration:** 75.9% and 41.9% of the total population respectively.

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Economy



CEDA has worked to promote CNMI as an investment destination since 1985.



CNMI has control over its tax regime and is exempt from the Jones Act.



CEDA offers development loans to prospective entrepreneurs and businesses looking to expand, at competitive rates and customizable conditions.

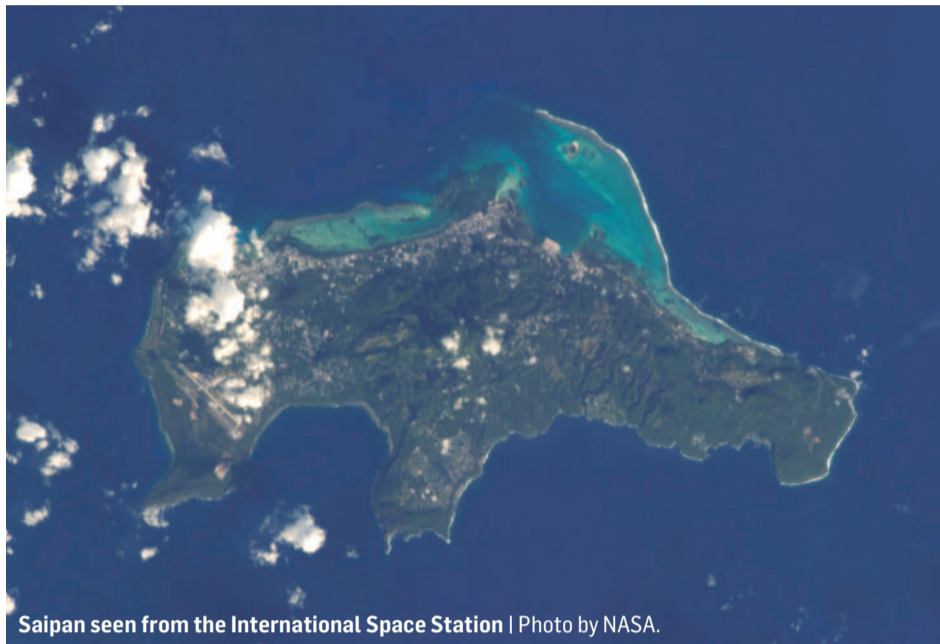
The One-Stop-Shop for Investors Eyeing the Northern Mariana Islands



MANUEL SABLAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CEDA

CEDA offers local insight to investors, guiding them to opportunities and facilitating economic activity that translates into jobs and businesses for the people of the Marianas.

Founded 36 years ago as a semi-autonomous agency of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, CNMI, the Commonwealth Economic Development Authority, CEDA, is the body in charge of providing financial and technical assistance for the creation or expansion of public and private enterprises in the islands, for the benefit of their economic welfare and long-term sustainability. “We aim to set up an economic system that reflects the reality of life in CNMI and to help investors tap into the potential of this natural paradise in the middle of the Pacific and yet on US soil,” says Manuel Sablan, Executive Director of CEDA and an expert in the macroeconomics of the Marianas, a leader who was involved in the drafting of the Commonwealth’s 1976 covenant with the Federal Government.



Saipan seen from the International Space Station | Photo by NASA.

“Being exempt from the Jones Act means investors can expect a high level of commitment from the government, and if you have the expertise, we are ready to partner with you and transform the Mariana Islands together.”

MANUEL SABLAN

Accordingly, the efforts of CEDA go well beyond promotion, with a Corporation Division dedicated to private sector development and offering direct financing through pilot loan programs. Conversely, a Banking Division deals with government and public sector activities, coordinating public borrowing from agencies, municipalities, and public corporations through bond and bank financing. The Qualifying Certificate Program (QC) and the Opportunity Zone (OZ), offer tax incentives in exchange for investments in the CNMI that are proving vital in attracting investments to the Marianas.

Beyond having access to federal funding and the ability to control its tax regime, the CNMI also enjoys a Jones Act exemption, which has historically cost similar economies such as Hawaii over 1.2 billion dollars. “Our independence in this sense means investors can expect a high level of commitment from the government, and if you have the expertise, we are ready to partner with you and transform the Mariana Islands together,” concludes Executive Director Manuel Sablan. ■

Proactive in pursuing industries and investments that can strengthen the economy, CEDA promotes the CNMI brand in global events such as the Select USA Investment Summit, spreading the word on what the Northern Mariana Islands are about: a fourteen island archipelago of possibility. With unique access to the burgeoning markets of the East and protected by U.S. regulation and standards of excellence, the Marianas are a land of potential. “Our main asset is our natural and cultural wealth, but we are seeing growing interest in sectors other than tourism and are eager to hear new ideas,” adds Sablan.

With investment from the U.S. military in Tinian’s developing Air Force infrastructure and

road upgrades occurring in Saipan, infrastructure investors are weighing CNMI as an alternative to Guam’s saturated market. Meanwhile, telecommunications companies are looking to the Marianas as a solid base for IT and data center development especially with the recent announcement by Google to run a direct fiberoptic cable into the CNMI. Additionally, new investment in aquaculture will see the construction of a dome for farm fishing, as well as a potential project for growing edible seaweed aimed at the demanding Japanese market. “The possibilities are endless,” adds Sablan, “and we are doing our best to make all great ideas into realities that bring real returns to investors and long-lasting benefits to our community.”



VISIT US



CEDA

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Construction



Reflecting their commitment to their workforce and community, RNV construction finances college education for loyal workers that have been with the company for more than 5 years.



While its growth strategy is focused on larger federal projects, RNV continues to build single family housing, as it did in its inception. For RNV, "There are no small or big projects".

RNV Construction: Building on a Human Scale

The story of Ruel Villacrusis and his company RNV Construction is about the rewards of hard work and entrepreneurship, and above all, the importance of working with a committed team.



RUEL VILLACRUSIS
OWNER/
GENERAL
MANAGER
OF RNV

At 37 years of age, after a life dedicated to construction in Saipan, civil engineer and Filipino construction worker, Ruel Villacrusis realized it was time to open his own construction company. And so he did: RNV was incorporated in May, 1999, and 25 years later, the company is the leading full-service construction company from the CNMI and one of the archipelago's biggest success stories. "There is no elevator to success, and so I did it step by step, making sure I got it right," says Villacrusis.

At first, establishing his vision required frugality and sacrifices. Still, the time was right for an experienced constructor able to navigate the particular difficulties of the sector in the CNMI. Challenges such as securing reliable suppliers and transporting them to Saipan, procuring finishing materials only produced in the U.S. mainland, and solving the problem of scarcity in the workforce. "It was a logistical challenge, but the secret was focusing on the human resources," adds Villacrusis, whose company provides various employee benefits. "I have been fortunate with people, and because I care for them, they care for me."

Starting with individual jobs primarily focused on renovation and house construction, RNV began distinguishing itself among competitors for its quality and know-how. It soon found access to construction bonds, which opened a wide door for business: the ability to bid on projects with federal funding requiring significant borrowing. Today, RNV is a competitive construction company with the human resources to build any horizontal and vertical structure and a proven track record in all project phases,



Route 36 (Windward Chalan Kalabera) Road Improvements Phase II.

«Every construction project is a challenge, just like in life; every day is a different challenge, and you just have to face it squarely and with seriousness.»

RUEL VILLACRUSIS

from conceiving and defining to planning, implementing, completing, and evaluating. Despite its success, RNV still handles its projects,

following the principle that every client is never too small and engages in every new project as if it were the first one. "Every construction project is a challenge, just like in life; every day is a different challenge, and you just have to face it squarely and with seriousness," Villacrusis adds.

This work ethic secured RNV contracts with Tinian and Saipan international airports for renovations and improvements, as well as fit-outs with high-end boutiques such as T-Galleria, the ARC Building in Garapan, and the Duty-Free Shops. They feel fortunate for having a contract with FEMA and completing various residential houses

«On a small island, your work is your reputation, and our reputation is one for quality and affordability, transparency, and professionalism.»

RUEL VILLACRUSIS

all over Saipan. In addition, they have also finished one of their biggest road projects, the Route 36 (Windward/Chalan Kalabera) Road Improvements Phase II. "We do little advertising because we have found that the best networking is example and word-of-mouth," says Villacrusis, adding that "on a small island, your work is your reputation, and our reputation is one for quality and affordability, transparency, and professionalism."

Soon after gaining ground with RNV, and particularly after the experience of the pandemic, Villacrusis began to diversify into other promising businesses in the archipelago so that the different branches could protect each other in cases of low tourism, changing U.S. law or other unforeseen moves in the market. Today, Villacrusis runs a remittance company (RNV Forex), pawnshops (Villaroyal Pawnshop) with four locations in Saipan, insurance (Ecosure Insurance), wholesale & general merchandise company (Best Deal General Merchandise) and various apartment rentals (Homesmart Residences). "My father was not rich, but he understood money, and he always told me not to put too much money in the bank but to keep reinvesting. Otherwise, you will become lazy and you will not work as hard," Villacrusis remembers with a smile. ■





QUALITY & AFFORDABILITY

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VISIT US

Route 36 project.



CHCC drive-thru pharmacy.



Fitouts of High-End Boutiques.

Tourism



Tourism is the largest sector of the economy. Having suffered greatly during the Covid-19 pandemic, it has recovered to 50% of its pre-pandemic level.



A Fourteen island Commonwealth, with three major islands that have tourism infrastructure.



The Micronesian Islands are the last places where the ancient art of celestial navigation is preserved.



CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MVA

All Eyes on The Marianas

The Marianas Visitors Authority works to position the Pacific Islands of the CNMI as a favorite destination for vacationing families in the region.

Crystal-clear waters, spotless sandy beaches, and year-round summer weather make the Marianas archipelago an idyllic travel destination. The Marianas Visitors Authority is in charge of telling the world about this irreplicable tourist experience. Hit strongly by the pandemic, the sector is already at over 50% recovery thanks to the MVA's tailored online and social media campaigns, aimed towards the islands' most populous neighbors, Japan, Korea, and China, and designed to convey a simple message: that 3 hours from Tokyo, 4 hours from Seoul, and 5 hours from Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong, exists paradise. "We're a favorite among Asian countries because of our proximity and because when the sun leaves them in winter, they can come to find it in the Marianas," says the Authority's Managing Director, Christopher A. Concepcion. "We welcome visitors from the whole world and are eager to tell them about our little corner of perfection."



Swimming Hole, Rota.

«We welcome visitors from the whole world and are eager to tell them about our little corner of perfection.»

CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION

In The Marianas, tourist infrastructure caters to high-end experiences for visitors interested in quality leisure time and exceptional service. The islands offer a wide range of accommodation options focused on quality. Visitors can expect The Marianas' famously attentive service, superior care, and friendly attitude. "We all know each other here. We treat each other like family," adds Christopher, "and we want visitors to experience the true meaning of Micronesian hospitality."



The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, CNMI, are a volcanic archipelago; some islands, like Anatahan, Pagan, and Agrihan, still have active volcanoes. CNMI provides visitors with fascinating natural landscapes and views that are impossible to find elsewhere. Saipan is the commercial heart of The Marianas, their capital, and the epicenter of the populated islands' cultural, sporting, and leisure activities. With a history that goes back over 4,000 years and traditions still maintained by the

Chamorro and Carolinian indigenous people through festivals, crafts, and gastronomy, Saipan is the crossroads of ancient and modern, where visitors can switch from traditional festivities to the downtown Garapan district, with its excellent restaurants, bars, and shopping facilities. "In Saipan, you can scuba dive in a turquoise lagoon with wrecks from the Pacific War, and right after be sipping a cocktail on the beach, it has it all," adds Christopher.

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CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION

«The ruins of Taga House, a thousand-year-old, 12-stone house of the Latte Period of our history, is a breathtaking spectacle because it tells the story of who we are.»

CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION

A hop away from Saipan is Tinian Island, surrounded by exceptional coral reefs favored by snorkelers and scuba divers, covered in jungle, cliffs, and limestone caves which are home to exotic flora and fauna, including the rare Tinian monarch, one of the island's endemic birds. Inside the jungle, abandoned ruins, Shinto shrines, World War II relics, and even the airplane runways that launched the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki make Tinian Island a natural paradise and a place charged with history and meaning. "The ruins of Taga House, a thousand-year-old, 12-stone house of the Latte Period of our history, is a breathtaking spectacle because it tells the story of who we are", says Mr. Concepcion. Tinian is also home of the annual Pika Festival, founded and hosted by the MVA, which brings together indigenous crafts, local cuisine, live entertainment, sports games, and the legendary hot pepper competition, in which the bravest attempt to eat the local Donni Sali pepper, the reason why Tinian is known as the hottest island in the world.

Yet if Tinian is the hottest, neighboring Rota Island is known as "the world's friendliest island" due to its inviting nature and the smiley and charming hospitality of its people, who to this day wave hello between passing cars. "You land in Rota, and



Grotto, Saipan.

«In Saipan, you can scuba dive in a turquoise lagoon with wrecks from the Pacific War, and right after be sipping a cocktail on the beach, it has it all.»

CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION

a sense of family overtakes you instantly," says Christopher, "which is why it is a favorite for family retreats, weddings, and celebrations." Indeed, equipped with state-of-the-art resorts and a golf course, Rota Island is a place for self-care, nourishment, and relaxation. Among its most sought-after treasures is its local cuisine, which includes delicacies such as its feel-good sweet potatoes and maddening coconut crabs. "And it has its own story to tell, with its German-era chapel, Chugai pictographs, a Japanese cannon, and an NKK sugar mill and train, not to mention the As Nieves Latte Stone Quarry, where the stones seem to come alive." For those seeking pure natural wonders, the island holds a variety of diving sites with underwater wrecks and coral formations, a Bird sanctuary, and hills with breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean.

The Mariana Islands lure practitioners of all water sports and are home to the unique and millenary art of Proa sailing. The ancient Micronesian art of navigation, practiced on handcrafted sailboats, is kept alive by the Indigenous Affairs Office, Carolinian Affairs Office, and the 500 Sails organization,

which are focused on restoring Chamorro and Carolinian maritime traditions for all in The Marianas. "We work closely with them, providing resources and preparing promotional activities. Chamorro and Carolinian navigation is remarkable and of cultural value: navigating the seas in a proa, with the technology that existed before European contact, is fascinating and forms part of our identity," adds Christopher.

The success of the MVA in bringing the Mariana Islands to the forefront of global tourism is not only explained by their crucial marketing strategies but also by their willingness to work hand in hand with the community, assisting and collaborating with those projects, efforts, and ideas that bring out the best in its people and culture, and that make The Marianas a place like no other in the world. "This is why so many people are also interested in investing here, partnering with these projects, or even setting up shop in our islands. You enjoy U.S. laws, security, and rights, but you're in a place like no other." ■

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Songsong Village Lookout, Rota.



Jones Beach, Tinian.

The Marianas

| Saipan | Tinian | Rota |

Explore the untouched beauty of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
The Marianas are the closest United States territory to Asia.
Come visit our tropical paradise in the Pacific.

Saipan



Tinian



Rota



Transport



Emerald Pacific exists since 1987 and serves Guam, CNMI, Palau and Cebu Island.



Enterprise is the only rent-a-car brand with a location in both the Navy and Anderson Airforce bases.



Enterprise Rent-A-Car is in partnership with the United Service Organization, it participates in monthly activities that cater to the US Armed forces and their families.

The Happiest Cars on the Island

With a vision to serve the community, Emerald Pacific has grown into a triple-franchise car rental provider with a growing presence in the Micronesian islands.

After setting up shop in Guam in 1987 with a fleet of seven vehicles, Emerald Pacific celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2022 as a franchise operator of three global rental companies: Alamo, National, and Enterprise. It now has a fleet of hundreds of cars within Guam alone. The company also has locations in the CNMI, Palau, and Cebu Island. The three globally recognized brands cater to all types of customers: Alamo for its leisure business aimed at tourism; National Car Rental for its corporate and federal government clients; and Enterprise Rent-A-Car, which caters to a wide range of customers, from local families and businesses to the US Military; that is why they are the only rental car company currently located within both the Navy and the Anderson Airforce base



PACITA A. TOMADA
PRESIDENT &
CEO OF EMERALD
PACIFIC

“When you operate on a small island, you can’t just mind your side of things and forget the rest; you have to work together even with competitors, engage all sectors, and establish shared goals so that we may all grow together.”

PACITA A. TOMADA

and establish shared goals so that we may all grow together,” says Pacita A. Tomada, president and CEO of Emerald Pacific.

As a company, Emerald Pacific’s goal is to nurture its employees and provide them with the support they need for their career development as well as recognizing their contributions to the business. In servicing the customers, the company strives to provide world class customer service by listening to customer feedback, addressing concerns promptly, and striving for customer satisfaction and loyalty. Community involvement is something that the company is also proud of as they service their community by providing training for unskilled workers, emergency housing and support, as well as feeding the hungry and homeless, and supporting families in need.

With Enterprise head offices keeping track of customer satisfaction through customer feedback to ensure global standards, the company has the support and tools it needs to keep its customers and partners satisfied. Additionally, technical standards always ensure that a top-of-the-line fleet is available. “We like to say we have the happiest cars on the island,” says Cita. “This

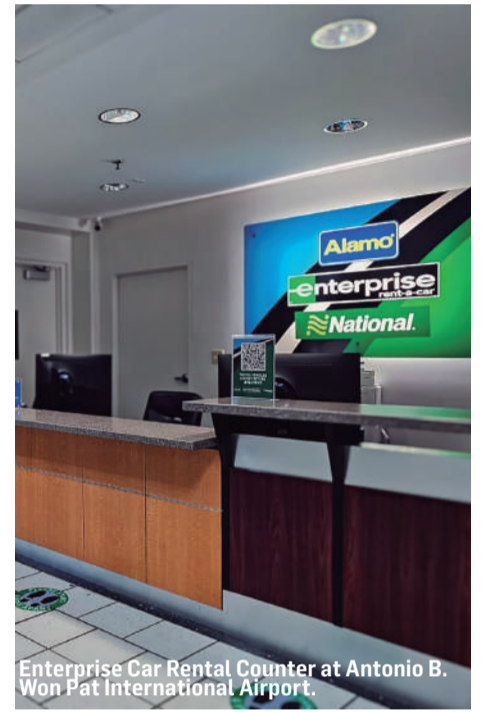
is what sets us apart.”



Enterprise, Leaders of the Company.



Enterprise Airport Parking Lot.



Enterprise Car Rental Counter at Antonio B. Won Pat International Airport.

“Enterprise and the USO are aligned with a shared mission of serving those who serve our country.”

PACITA A. TOMADA

Enterprise Rent-A-Car is also in partnership with the United Service Organization, where they participate and volunteer in monthly activities that cater to the US Armed forces and their families here in Guam.

“Enterprise and the USO are aligned with a shared mission of serving those who serve our country,” concludes Ms. Tomada. ■



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Culture & Heritage



The native Chamorro people did not have a tradition of written language before the arrival of Europeans.



Tracing their origins to what is now Taiwan, it is estimated that the Chamorro have resided in the Marianas for 4500 years.

Kensington Hotel: Where All-Inclusive Meets Premium Services

With a wide variety of stylish rooms, gourmet restaurants and exclusive facilities, the five-star resort's unique Premium All-Inclusive concept allows all type of travelers to customize their luxurious stay and create a truly unforgettable experience.

Inspired by the majestic profile of a luxury cruise liner, Kensington Hotel Saipan stands out as the island's only all-inclusive luxury accommodation, where every single detail has been carefully chosen to fulfill the highest standards and accommodate their guests specific needs.

Overlooking the pristine beaches of Saipan's northern coast, the resort offers 313 luxury guest rooms perfectly suited to both leisure and business travelers, from Royal Zesty rooms and family-friendly Kensington Kids rooms, to four types of specially-curated rooms: Premier Deluxe, Executive Premier (complemented by access to an exclusive Executive Lounge), and spacious luxury suites, the Prestige Suites and the unique Kensington Suite. Whether they are for families or for executive travelers, all rooms combine breathtaking ocean views, private balconies, custom-made luxury linens and a diverse selection of Molton Brown or Hermes amenities, promising undisturbed comfort and relaxation.

On the other hand, Kensington Hotel Saipan is also known for its first-class culinary options. Their four restaurants and two bars follow the concept of a luxury cruise, with master chefs guiding guests through exquisite gourmet journeys. At Loria, guests can enjoy an international buffet selection, ranging from Korean, Japanese and Chinese-inspired Asian cuisine to authentic Italian dining and desserts crafted by master patissiers; East Moon offers the island's only Modern Chinese dining experience, from hand-made dim sum and freshly pulled noodles to artfully curated set menus and a diverse buffet selection; Meisho's diners will enjoy immaculately crafted, authentic Japanese food; and those partial to sunset BBQs will not only relish on spectacular views but also on flame-grilled local ingredients and surf & turf



Kensington Hotel Saipan.

sets, all presented in buffet style at Ocean Grill. In addition, guests can enjoy two open-air, poolside bars, the Splash Bar and the Infinity Pool bar, as well as two interior spaces, Oha's Café and Bar lounge, and the exclusive Executive Bar.

Furthermore, being a five-star accommodation, Kensington Hotel Saipan offers exclusive facilities. At their private beach, guests can choose to either relax or enjoy water sports such as kayaking, paddle boarding, and their signature activity sail boat, where leisure experts will take them to the ocean for a stroll in the sea breeze, and to see turtles if they are lucky. The resort also has diverse collection of pools promising fun and relaxation for swimmers of all ages: a family pool, a kids' pool, two water slides, two kids' slides, a splash pool, and an infinity pool for guests staying in Premier Deluxe rooms and above. A wide variety of indoor activities is also available. At Kenny Play Deck, young and adult guests can enjoy games such as trampo-

Kensington Hotel Saipan offers exclusive facilities. At their private beach, guests can choose to either relax or enjoy water sports such as kayaking, paddle boarding, and their signature activity sail boat, where leisure experts will take them to the ocean for a stroll in the sea breeze, and to see turtles if they are lucky.

line, indoor climbing, pool, darts, table tennis, table football, and air hockey; or they can access the fully equipped Fitness Center, which also includes a relaxing yoga room. Similarly, children have a special-



GLORIA CAVANAGH
VICE PRESIDENT
OF KENSINGTON
HOTEL SAIPAN

ly dedicated Kid's Camp, a fun and safe space with a varied program of activities ranging from Coco-mong dancing to art school and marine school, all led by professional children's instructors.

Moreover, for those exceptional occasions such as corporate meetings, themed banquets, weddings and cocktail parties, Kensington Hotel offers two event halls: the Kensington Hall, a luxurious grand ballroom with crystal chandeliers, thoughtfully curated interiors and a capacity of up to 500 guests; and Queens Hall, an event space ideal for small-scale VIP meetings and conferences, private gatherings and cocktail receptions with a capacity of 250 guests. The hotel also counts with its own small chapel, perfectly suited for moving second wedding ceremonies or simple vow renewals.

Given the full range of options that Kensington Hotel Saipan offers its guests, and the unparalleled quality and care with which it does so, it is no wonder that this five-star resort remains the number one reference in the region for unforgettable all-inclusive luxury accommodations. ■



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Culture & Heritage



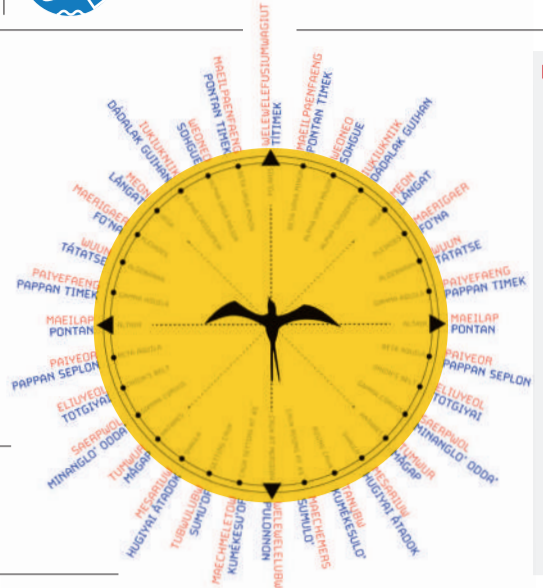
The Northern Mariana Islands is one of the fewest places in the world where the ancient art of astral navigation is still taught and practiced.



The beach canoes project aims to make canoes and navigational storytelling accessible at major beaches on Saipan. It boasts 20 canoes on the western beaches across five locations.

500 Sails: Rekindling the Region's Ancestral Navigation Techniques

The organization leads a proa craftsmanship project resuscitating native engineering prowess that was lost and banned during colonial occupation.



This image combines the Carolinian star compass names from the Weriyang school of traditional celestial navigation (red above), the Chamorro names (blue below), and the English speaker's version of stars (black inside circle).

500sails.org

Nestled in the western reaches of the Pacific Ocean lies the commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Known for its staggering natural beauty, this collection of islands boasts a fascinating cultural heritage despite its modest size and remote location. The rich tapestry of traditions, languages, and customs that make up its modern culture reflects centuries of dynamic interactions between indigenous peoples, colonial powers, and immigrant communities.

Remarkably, the indigenous cultures of the Chamorro and Carolinian people have been meticulously conserved, a rarity in territories that experienced European colonization. Their unique customs, languages, and traditions stand as a testament to their resilience and distinctiveness. But the preservation of these culturally defining seafaring practices is not a matter of chance, nor is the culture specifically immune to the erosion that has affected so many others. It's the result of comprehensive efforts to preserve, recover, and spread ancient knowledge among the current residents of the islands, undertaken by passionate individuals in the public sector and civil society. 500 Sails is a nonprofit based in the CNMI, which has worked to preserve and continue these ancient traditions by providing locals the knowledge and tools they need to connect to their roots. The Cultural Maritime Training Center (CMTC) they have established in Saipan provides training in canoe building, sailing, and traditional astral navigation, but can also certify students in CPR and first aid, and even help them obtain their captain's license, serving the dual purpose



500 Sails Canoes.

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of cultural preservation and providing career opportunities to the local population.

The geographical makeup of the Northern Mariana Islands, characterized by a scattering of volcanic peaks rising from the azure waters of the Pacific, profoundly shaped the lives of its indigenous Chamorro inhabitants. With the islands' rug-

ged terrain and relative isolation, the Chamorros developed a deep connection to the sea, mastering the art of canoe building and navigation to traverse the vast expanse of ocean surrounding their homeland. Canoes were not merely vessels for transportation but essential tools for fishing, inter-island trade, and exploration. Crafted from sturdy hardwoods such as "Ifil" and "Taug," Chamorro canoes, known as "proas," featured distinctive outriggers that provided stability in the open sea. These seafaring traditions were passed down through generations, preserving a vital link between the Chamorros and the ocean that sustained their way of life.

On the other hand, the native Chamorro did not have a written language tradition before European settlers arrived. The complex cultural practices that they developed to survive and thrive in their unique environment were passed

The Mariana Islands retain practices and traditions that have been practiced for thousands of years and remain profoundly influential and relevant in the lives of its modern-day inhabitants.

down to the newer generations through elaborate techniques of oral instruction. While this had led to a substantial part of their pre-colonial culture being lost to time, many of these essential practices have been maintained and preserved to this day. The Northern Mariana Islands is the only place in the world where the ancient art of astral navigation is still taught and practiced. Knowing your way around the sea, with only the cosmos as your guide, became an essential survival when living around the islands. Among descendants of the Chamorro and the Carolinians, stories abound of local individuals, stranded on islands, making their own canoes and navigating home with nothing to guide them but their understanding of the night sky. These are not legends told about ancient figures of folklore but proud locals telling stories about their own families or even themselves.

Despite being the site of centuries of interactions between a myriad of cultures, the Mariana Islands retain practices and traditions that have been practiced for thousands of years and remain profoundly influential and relevant in the lives of its modern-day inhabitants. ■

Humanities Council: Tasked with the Preservation and Empowerment of Island Heritage

By preserving and disseminating knowledge and culture, the council acts as a generational bridge for CNMI's community.

Despite a history marked by external influences, the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands has remarkably preserved its unique customs and practices, which are the very essence of its ancient culture.

This culture, a blend of Catholic heritage, modern American influence, and the customs of Pacific immigrants, still echoes the traditions of the ancient Chamorro and Carolinian people, connecting them directly to their present-day descendants.

This is one of the few places in the world where the ancient art of celestial navigation is preserved, taught, and practiced by local residents and descendants of the Chamorro and Carolinian people.

These preserved and restored practices have interwoven with catholic beliefs and practices inherited from Spanish colonizers, leading to a fascinating cultural blend that is unique in the world. Indigenous customs have merged with Catholic tradition in a way that defines resi-

dents' family and societal structure, and even ancient rituals have been tucked into prayer.

The Humanities Council has undertaken significant endeavors to preserve the ancient cultures of the Chamorro and Carolinian people. Their work involves unearthing new discoveries that deepen the community's connection to its roots and highlighting the unique qualities that the Marianas' exceptional history has bestowed upon its local culture.

The Council has developed initiatives to interview and record Chamorro and Carolinian elders, safeguarding knowledge that otherwise would have depended on oral transmission to be preserved. They make this information available to present and future generations through books, events, podcasts, and documentaries.

The Council has emphasized documenting the experiences of military personnel and first responders in the community. These stories are not only crucial to understanding the values of service, sacrifice, and resilience in the CNMI today, but they also form an integral part of the



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Marianas' history. The Council features other local narratives in projects such as "Crafting the Covenant", a documentary that chronicles the development of the Covenant with the United States to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Council has joined forces with the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities and counterparts in Hawai'i, American Samoa, and Guam to form the Pacific Islands Humanities Network. Together, they not only articulate efforts to preserve and uplift the cultures of the Pacific islands but also work to tackle political and social issues that affect them disproportionately, such as climate change.

Preserving and strengthening the cultural vitality of the Marianas is a complicated and challenging endeavor. Still, the Humanities Council counts on the support of local and U.S. institutions, as well as the profound connection and passion that the people of this island have for their unique culture. ■



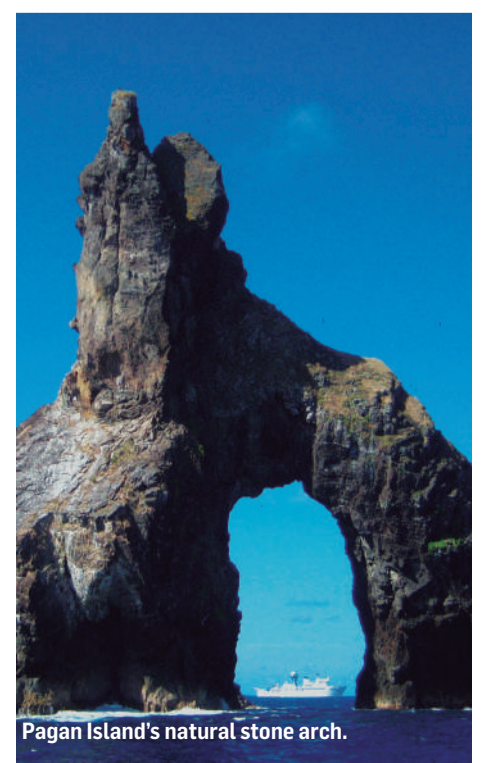
Kutturam Chamoru Performers.
| Photo by Richard Prins



Rota's natural seawater swimming hole.
| Photo by menmal12



Mariana Fruit Dove.
| Photo by Dick Daniels



Pagan Island's natural stone arch.