

THE MANOBO



Nestled in the heart of Surigao del Sur, in the town of Lanuza, is Baranggay Pakuan—site of the original settlement of the Manobos in the province. It is believed that in the early 18th century, Datu Apo Oja, with his family and hundreds of his men, fled from the *baganis* (warriors)

of the warlike Manobos of Agusan and settled in Pakuan.

Datu Oja and his people liked Pakuan. Because of its lush vegetation of edible ferns, vast timberlands (a source of materials for their houses), crystal-clear springs that served as their water supply, and rivers teeming with fish, Pakuan was the ideal place to settle. In fact, the area's waterfalls were natural sites for the tribe's worship rituals to the *diwata* (spirit) and for tribal weddings and baptisms.

Today, the Manobo are spread out all over Surigao del Sur and have an estimated population of 129,000 people. They are concentrated mostly in the towns of San Miguel and in the baranggays of Lobo and Cabangahan in Cantilan as well as Pakuan, Agsam and Mante in Lanuza. They also live in Pansukan and Panikiam of Carascal, in Bayugo of Madrid, and in Himpuyan and San Vicente of Carmen.

Unlike the Mamanua, the Manobo have light brown skin, straighter hair and bolder personalities. They decorate their bodies with tattoos and wear bright colorful attire with ethnic designs. They adorn their necks and arms with multi-colored strings, made of indigenous materials skillfully and attractively created. Nowadays, only senior members of the tribe regularly wear the full costume, while younger members have already adopted the mainstream population's mode of dressing.

Unlike the Mamanua, the Manobo are not nomadic. They plant crops for their daily consumption and sell or barter their surplus harvests once a week at *tabos* (farmer's markets).

They have their own political structure, which is autonomous from the main population. At the head of their political system is the *datu* (leader) whose position is gained by traditional succession. A council of elders advises him. If the community determines that he is not suited to the position, he is then removed from office and a special election is then called. Peace keeping is entrusted to the *baganis* (warriors).

The Manobo still practice some of their old customs and traditions. Like the Mamanua they transmit laws orally from generation to generation. Declaring land ownership by word of mouth and planting bamboos to mark land boundaries are actively practiced customs.

Like the Mamanua, the Manobo are gentle people. However, they will not avoid conflicts, especially when their domain is threatened. Proud of their heritage, they hold on to their ancestral lands – ready to fight and die for them. Their land is their life. Although unschooled in Philippine laws governing land ownership, and with no titles of ownership of their domain, the Manobo nevertheless strongly resisted capitalists' attempt to take over the ancestral lands in the early 1960s. They raised their voice in unified protest and the government listened. In a historic breakthrough, the government – through the Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claims program of the National Commission on Indigenous People – have started to award to some Manobo communities certificates of titles to their ancestral lands. Today the Manobo have become a political force.

Struggling to survive amidst strong waves of change, the younger Manobo dream of a better life and a brighter future for their children. They have come to realize that such betterment start with education. The USAA, through its scholarship program, is committed to helping this strong and independent people fulfill their achievable dream.



THE USAA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



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THE USAA & ITS MISSION

The United Surigueños Association of America (USAA) – Eastern Seaboard was founded in 1980 to promote fellowship among Suriguenos living in the East Coast of the United States of America. Compassionate and generous in spirit, the Association has undertaken many social projects for the less fortunate children of Surigao del Norte and del Sur. These include the Books for the Libraries, Medical Relief and Togbongon Orphanage projects.

The latest and most ambitious initiative of the Association is the USAA Scholarship Program. Its mission is to provide educational and leadership development opportunities to the children of the Mamanua and Manobo.

The Surigao provinces are blessed to have these gentle people, whose indigenous cultures form an integral part of the Philippine tapestry. With this scholarship program, the USAA hopes to help the Mamanua and Manobo preserve their cultural treasures, acquire modern knowledge, gain political strength, and consequently overcome poverty.

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THE MAMANUA



The Mamanua, the only Negrito race of Mindanao, are indigenous to the province of Surigao del Norte. They live in the foothills of Anao-aon, Malimono, Mat-I; in the hinterlands of Bacuag, Claver, Gigaquit; and in the mountains surrounding Lake Mainit. They believe that these ancestral lands are sacred - a source of life and a gift from their *magbabaya* (God).

The Mamanua are short, small-framed people. They have dark skin, kinky hair and shy personalities. Their names are derived from nature - from mountains, bodies of water, trees, stones, wildlife. Basically, nomadic, the older men of the tribe still roam the forests of Surigao Norte to hunt for food, returning only to their territories to deliver their catch, which are shared by everyone. In recent times, the younger ones have begun to look for work at mining and logging companies, to earn money to support the needs of their young families.

The Mamanua are gentle and peace-loving people. They prefer to settle disputes amicably and pay the *manggad* (fine) for minor infractions and *oyagaan* (heavy fine) for serious ones rather than prolong conflicts. In fact, they only use their spears for hunting and as ornaments on ceremonial occasions.

The oldest tribe on record is the Cantogas of the Lake Mainit area. As with the other *lumad* (tribal) communities, they have occupied their ancestral domain since before the arrival of the Spaniards. To this day, they still practice some of their ancestral customs and traditions.

The Mamanua have their own indigenous political structure, which is distinct and autonomous for each tribe. Each community has its own laws transmitted orally from generation to generation and through actual practice. At the head of their political

system is the *dakula* (leader), whose position used to be inherited. However, nowadays he is chosen for his ability to settle disputes within his tribe. He is advised by the *malaas* (elders). At the bottom of the hierarchy of power is the *bagani* (warrior), who is responsible for maintaining peace and order in the community.

For a long time, the Mamanua have resisted the “outside” world, living only in the dignity of their own culture. At present, due partly to the patient efforts of the government and some NGOs, they are slowly adapting to the changing world. They are starting to send the younger tribe members to school. They now allow the government to assist them with livelihood projects. They now welcome medical missions to inoculate their children and to work with their *baylan* (tribal doctor) in treating their sick with modern medicine. Lastly, they have found their political voice as a people, petitioning the government to grant them the legal rights to their ancestral domain.

Slowly but increasingly convinced of the benefits of better health and education, the Mamanua are struggling to catch up, although centuries late. In this endeavor, they need help to survive and save their unique culture from extinction. Providing educational grants to their children is both invaluable and essential. A college education would enable Mamanua children to help their people escape poverty and develop their full potential.

