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# BIOTA FILIPINA

June - July 2005

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## Conservation and Tourism: a Symbiotic Relationship

South of Palawan and beneath the vast Sulu Sea lies reef after reef of pristine beauty and natural order. The Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is renowned for providing nourishment, sanctuary, and diversity.

For the past 6 years each visitor to Tubbataha has paid a P2500 conservation fee which supports this world-class ecotourism site. Filipinos have enjoyed a 50% discount but next year the conservation fee will be raised to P3000 for all visitors.

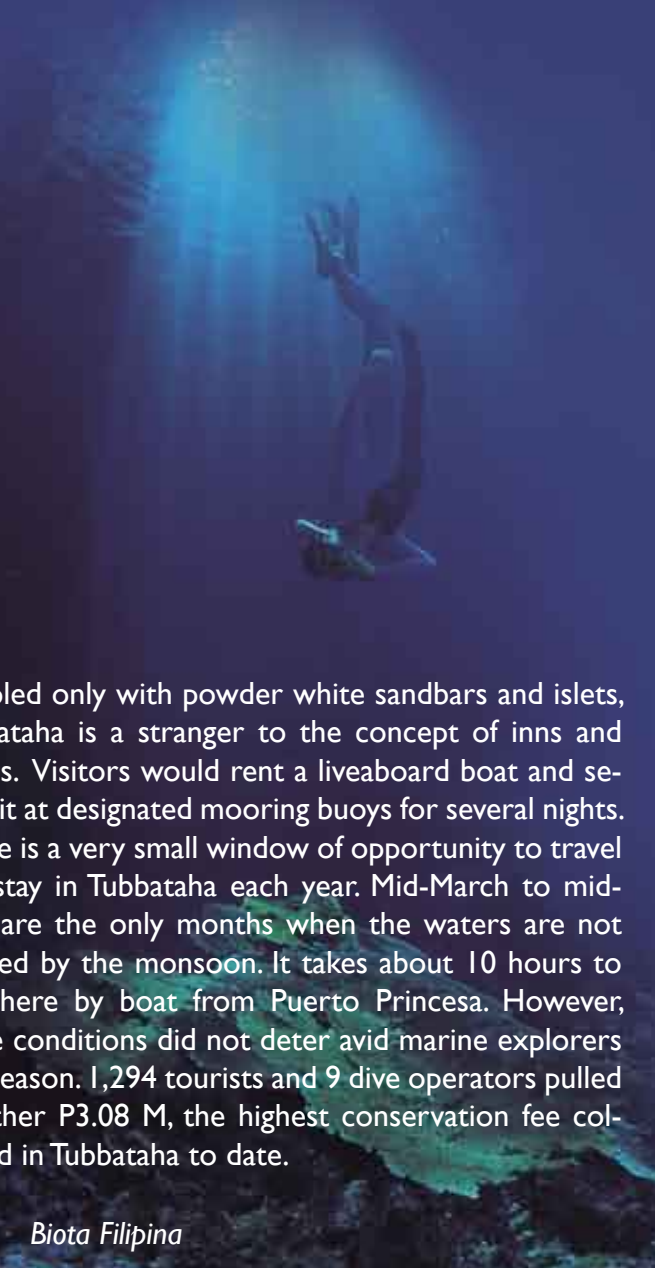
The conservation fee constitutes the bulk of the Tubbataha trust fund. This year, 50% of the P6.2 M annual budget allocated to protect Tubbataha is from the trust fund, 41% came from the Philippine Navy and Coast Guard and 9% from WWF-Philippines.

“The management of a protected area distant from the shore is expensive,” Marivel Dygico, WWF Project Manager in Tubbataha.

“At current prices, the base cost to protect this 33,200-hectare marine park requires a minimum P6 M a year – to keep the park staff of five people, to support the composite team of six to seven marine park rangers, to do patrols, to maintain the ranger station and equipment,” she explained.

According to Dygico, program activities like research, information campaign and capacity building are not included in the cost and would require an additional P4 M.

These activities are funded by grants and donations from international and local partners like Packard Foundation, Global Environment Facility- United Nations Development Programme, Homeland Foundation, World Heritage Center, WWF-US, WWF-Philippines, Conservation International, Rotary Club, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Provincial Government of Palawan.



Dappled only with powder white sandbars and islets, Tubbataha is a stranger to the concept of inns and hotels. Visitors would rent a liveaboard boat and secure it at designated mooring buoys for several nights. There is a very small window of opportunity to travel and stay in Tubbataha each year. Mid-March to mid-June are the only months when the waters are not toused by the monsoon. It takes about 10 hours to get there by boat from Puerto Princesa. However, these conditions did not deter avid marine explorers this season. 1,294 tourists and 9 dive operators pulled together P3.08 M, the highest conservation fee collected in Tubbataha to date.

*Every ripple made in Cagayancillo also affects Tubbataha*

With a population of 6,000 and located 80 miles away from the cosseted reefs, Cagayancillo was the first to feel the pinch when Tubbataha achieved its protected seascape status in 1988. Because many fisherfolks lost access to this prime fishing ground, the surrounding reefs were desperately exploited with dynamite and cyanide fishing. It was only in 2002 that the municipality actively managed and protected their municipal reefs.

Cagayancillo is now also allotted 7% of the Tubbataha trust fund that is spent developing alternative and eco-friendly jobs for the community. These funds along with help from the local government will also be used for coastal resource management that will complement the conservation efforts in Tubbataha.

“Under the municipal government of Cagayancillo, this program makes the municipality an effective buffer against illegal fishing in Tubbataha and not a jump-off point of transient illegal fishing operators, as it used to be,” according to Dygico.

*Looking into the future, what do we see?*

Studies show that biodiversity and productivity of the reefs in Tubbataha and Cagayancillo are in the up-trend:

- 10 % annual increase in live coral cover
- fish biomass is four-folds better than the average healthy reef in the country
- resident reef fishes are growing bigger to spawning size

- more top of the line marine animals are seen in the area, and
- seabirds are crowding the islets and sandbars

There is enough reason to believe that those who paid for the conservation of Tubbataha made a good investment. But the need to raise investment and to encourage more investors continues.

Dygico added, “Tubbataha is just a speck in the Sulu Sea. When surrounding marine areas are left unprotected and marine resources are depleted, Tubbataha becomes a coveted piece of jewel. The price to pay to safeguard it is higher.” •

*Left photo: Skin diver above coral reef.*

*Bottom photo: Corallimorpharia (Amplexidiscus fenestrafer)*



## The mermaid vigil

As sparse as they are, the elusive mermaids are still around.

Every month, the Dugong Research and Conservation Project (DRCP) of WWF-Philippines conducts a monitoring survey in one of the last places in the country where dugongs are found. The study aims to determine the abundance and distribution of this herbivorous marine mammal, particularly in Roxas, Palawan.

Confirmed dugong sightings were recently made along seagrass meadows frequented by the sea cows. Surveys will push through till December and the team is hopeful to see more of this vulnerable species.

“We monitor the presence of dugongs seven days a month, one day for each of the seven seagrass protected areas,” according to Pong Cayaan, WWF-Philippines research assistant.

“For a whole day, we stay in our boat near their favorite feeding areas and just wait. We are rarely rewarded for our patience so the briefest sighting of a dugong is savored like the last drop of water in the middle of the desert,” Cayaan enthused.

Two large dugongs were sighted from a distance near the seagrass beds of Caramay in March and one more was seen last month outside the seagrass beds of Tinian.

“The tide was out so it probably could not go to the seagrass area anymore. The dugong surfaced and dove several times for an hour. We even documented the incident,” Cayaan said about the last dugong sighting.

The team also relies on volunteer fisherfolks to gather information on dugong presence and activities. The fisherfolks are given data sheets to fill in whenever they see a dugong.

“They are out in the sea more often than we are so their chances of seeing dugongs are greater than ours,” Sheila Albasin, the DRCP project manager.

One major output of the partnership with fisherfolks was the Indicative Map of Dugong Sightings. The fisherfolks were asked to point on the map where they frequently saw or encountered a dugong.

“We superimposed the dugong sightings map on a seagrass map. True enough, the areas the fisherfolks pointed out also fell on sites where there are rich seagrass beds,” Albasin said.

Dugong experts observed that as long as healthy seagrass beds are abundant, dugong populations may continue to thrive. Seagrass is the dugong’s only known diet. *Halophila ovalis*, *Halophila minor*, *Halophila spinulosa*, *Halodule uninervis*, *Halodule uninervis* and *Cymodocea serrulata* are their preferred food types.

There are 7 seagrass protected areas in Roxas. High seagrass cover and species richness, extensive bed width, and presence of dugong feeding trails qualify them for protected area status. •

## A caravan goes island hopping in El Nido

It's harder to get through to people these days the importance of saving the environment. But the El Nido team of WWF-Philippines had it all figured out.

Armed with colorful buntings and streamers, an award winning film, a UN endorsed cartoon, games for children, lively discussions and giveaways, WWF turned environmental education into a fun carnival.

The 'Caravan Para Sa Kalikasan' (Caravan for Nature) has been making the rounds in several island barangays (villages) in El Nido, Palawan since May. Through entertainment and discourse, the caravan aims to encourage the community to live harmoniously with nature.

"We just have to make people realize how their every action affects the environment," said RJ de la Calzada, project manager in El Nido, Palawan. "This caravan does just that in an entertaining and interactive way so that the facts will be easier to digest and hopefully, the impact will be lasting."

The caravan is made up of several presentations. Engaging films and videos with environmental themes are shown. After which, discussions are encouraged

and the concerns of the community may be raised. Games regarding the films and videos are held and simple prizes are given away for the younger audiences. Then a brief but important lecture on environmental law enforcement is made.

"One of the major challenges in El Nido is stabilizing conservation efforts. This means that while laws and policies are already in place, ensuring that El Nido's natural resources will be protected for generations relies on the continuous observance of these laws and policies," said de la Calzada.

WWF also took the chance to acquaint the locals of its biodiversity monitoring study on El Nido's fisheries. This study aims to monitor the productivity of the municipality's fisheries prior and during enforcement. That way the study can show to the community that proper enforcement nurtures marine habitats and yields bigger fish harvests for them.

The ongoing environmental caravan will be a twice a year joint activity by the El Nido Foundation, LGU, ENTMP-Protected Area Office, Department of Education and WWF to foster biodiversity conservation within the municipality of El Nido. •



## The Irrawaddy dolphin takes to the streets

A gigantic Irrawaddy dolphin made of crab carapace won the grand prize in last month's Environmental Float Parade in Palawan.

The colorful street parade coincided with the Baragatan (convergence) Festival of Palawan—a much-anticipated event that gathers scores of locals from all over the province to celebrate the founding of Palawan's civil government.

The Baragatan Festival showcases different cultures, lifestyles, and crafts of Palawenos. It is also a good venue to popularize the province's environmental concerns through the streets. For instance, these parades have helped promote awareness for the alarming plight of the Palawan Irrawaddy dolphin.

Data on the Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*)

are so deficient that cetacean experts cannot tell if they are already endangered or still thriving fairly good. However, recent studies and surveys lead all to conclude that their population is greatly imperiled.

Malampaya Sound in northern Palawan is home to the only known population of Irrawaddy dolphins in the Philippines. Highly prone to getting trapped and then drowning in fish corrals and gillnets, WWF-Philippines helped develop and promote modified fishing gears to lessen the impact of human activities to Irrawaddies and other dolphins.

The Irrawaddy is slowly becoming the unofficial mascot of the beautiful province of Palawan. Massive information and education is crucial in ensuring that Irrawaddies will continue to play their important role in keeping balance in our marine ecosystem. •



## Species of the Month

Common Name: Edible-nest swiftlet

Scientific Name: *Collocalia fuciphaga*

Family: Apodidae

Ever wondered where nido soup came from?

Edible-nest Swiftlets make nido, which is Spanish for nest. They regurgitate their saliva, which has a gelatinous consistency, and shape it like a cupped hand. It is about 3 to 5 inches in diameter and its nest-cement constitutes the raw material for the translucent-white nido soup.

Locally called balinsasayaw, the birds dwell in towering limestone cliffs of El Nido, Palawan. The municipality of Bacuit changed its name to El Nido in 1945 because of the abundance of edible nests in the area.

There are many species of swiftlets but not all of them produce edible nests. Only five species of swiftlets from the Apodidae family produce edible nests: White-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia fuciphaga*), Black-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia maxima*), Grass-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia esculenta*), Mossy-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia vanikorensis*), and Himalayan Swiftlet (*Collocalia brevirostris*).

Most swiftlets in the Philippines are found in coastal areas and forested mountains. The most common is the White-nest swiftlet, measuring about 12 cm in length and weighs 15 to 18 grams. It has a band of brownish gray feathers across the rump with dark brown eyes, black beak and feet. Their long, narrow and pointed wings make them fast fliers, spending most of their time flying and searching for tiny aerial insects to eat. They breed on July to November but no record of their population is available.

Palaweños traditionally collect these nests for food. But when its value in Chinese cuisine reached from US\$3,000 to \$4,000 per kilo, nest gathering became unsustainable. The nest is taken before the bird lays its eggs, consequently threatening the bird's population. Another controversy linked to harvesting bird's nest is the method itself. Nest collectors practice shabby safety guidelines while climbing steep cliffs where the nests are hidden in deep crevices. Lives have been unnecessarily lost to satisfy the appetite for bird's nest.

In the early 1990's, the local government enforced an open and close season for nest harvesting. From December to June, the nests can be collected since the birds often leave these tenuous homes to decay.

Although there are many claims of the health benefits from eating the white-nest, there is no scientific explanation to support this.

Nido soup, anyone?

References: Philippine Red Data Book by Wildlife Conservation Society of the Philippines; Birds of the Philippines by Tim Fisher and Nigel Hicks; Websites in the internet



Edible-Nest Swiftlet  
(*Collocalia fuciphaga*)

## The DARE

No it is not another reality TV show looking to raise ratings. 'The DARE' is a bouldering competition series held to raise funds and awareness for the environment.

Bouldering, similar to rock climbing, stretches ones physical and mental abilities to the limit. Climbers traverse incredibly demanding natural and man-made obstacles. At its essence bouldering is an outdoor pursuit that draws us into the natural environment. Enjoying the beauty of nature is a privilege. And steps must be in place to preserve this privilege.

'The DARE' is organized by former Philippine National Climbing Team representatives Dennis Diaz and Erwin Gozum. Their goal is to tie-in a climber's passion for bouldering with environment stewardship.

"It has become apparent to us that when we go climbing we get so much back from nature. We must be able to somehow give something in return," said Dennis. "Having WWF as our primary charity seemed like the obvious choice."

The event featured a format that allows climbers of different calibers to climb together, sharing "beta", a term used to describe the solution to a climb. Redpointing is a format which allows climbers to watch each other climb in succession, so there is an opportunity to learn new techniques.

Climbing in the elite categories are top climbers Miel Pahati, Lissa Lesaca and Ina Flores all fresh from the Asian X-Games. There's an open category along with a beginner's category to help those just getting

started. The competition will continue on August 20th, October 22nd, December 17th, and in February and April 2006.

The first meet of the series was held on June 18 at the VX-Boulder Climbing Gym. Jun Vidal and Kristine Robles finished first in the Elite Category. Miki Sarmiento, Aga Francisco, Jen Rosete and Allen Enriquez finished in double ties in the men's and women's open category. Clara Lagman and Ardelon Pareja took out the beginner's category.

This project is supported by The North Face, Rock and Ice Magazine, Adventure Rush Magazine, Red Bull, Astroholds, Nalgene, Sunbolt, Footworx Fitness Center and, WWF-Philippines.

A good boulderer knows how to work with what nature has provided. At the heart of the sport is pushing one's limit, yet leaving nature unblemished for the next chance to challenge it again. •



Dennis Diaz (left) with the winners of "The DARE".

## My Nature Trip: Pick of the Month



Text and photo by Emerson Camaya, *WWF-Philippines member*

Sometime in November last year, I went with my fiancée to Talim Island in Binangonan to help her out with a project. It was then that I saw Laguna de Bay's true state.

I was disheartened to see how the locals took care of the second largest lake in Southeast Asia. I thought they treated it like it was one big trashcan, throwing rubbish into it without concern for whatever consequence. The lake, which is naturally surrounded by land and has only the Pasig River as its drainage, is not an infinite well. What comes in stays in virtually forever.

But I have also seen some pockets of efforts that hopefully can make a difference. There are church volunteers who organize lake clean-ups and hold lectures to promote environmental responsiveness. Hopefully these concrete projects can help them change their way of life and alter their attitude towards the lake. After all, the people who live there will be the first ones affected by any positive change.

Having seen this, I want to share the feelings I had that day. The sun setting on the serene lake was melancholic but there was still beauty. We know that the sun sets today to give way for a better tomorrow. •

Join the "My Nature Trip" contest by submitting photos of places you have been to, recent or not so recent, and email them to Vicson Chua at [vc\\_hua@wwf.org.ph](mailto:vc_hua@wwf.org.ph). All photos should be in high resolution (at least 3.5 x 5 inches with 300 dpi saved in jpeg format). Include a title, the place where the shot was taken, and a short description of your memorable experience (not exceeding 150 words). Join now and win prizes from our Conservation Circle Partners!



## Conservation Circle Partners

### New Conservation Circle Partners!

#### **Hearts on Hands**

10% discount on Arts and Crafts workshops  
Contact Person: Fay Gaddi or Mary Grace Ramos  
Contact Details: 9229137 / 9219693  
Email: [fay.gaddi@mayniladwater.com.ph](mailto:fay.gaddi@mayniladwater.com.ph)

#### **L' Fisher Hotel**

30% discount on room rates for Cash  
20% discount on room rates for Credit Card  
Contact Person: Kristine Villaruz  
Contact Details: Email: [lfisher@globelines.com.ph](mailto:lfisher@globelines.com.ph)  
Branch: Bacolod City, Negros Occidental

#### **Papemelroti**

5% discount on originally priced items (min. CASH purchase of Php100)  
10% discount on Roces branch only  
Branches: SM North EDSA, SM Fairview, Ali Mall, Cubao, SM Centerpoint, SM Southmall, Alabang, Glorietta 2 (Makati), Roces Ave. (Q.C.), Robinson's Place Manila, Sta. Lucia East Grand Mall.

#### **Travel Agencies**

*Acropolis Travel Agency*  
Discount on selected local and international packages  
Contact Person: Weng  
Contact Numbers: 9297039 or 9203903

#### *Dumaguete Outdoors Tours and Services*

10% discount on unbound and outbound tours  
Contact Person: Michelle Villanueva  
Contact Details: 2256079,  
e-mail: [dumagueteoutdoors@eudoramail.com](mailto:dumagueteoutdoors@eudoramail.com) or

Branch: 3-A Noblefranca St., Dunaguete City

#### **Restaurants**

*Bizu Patisserie*  
Get a free WWF "Rainforest" cake for a minimum order of 2 entrees  
Branches: Alabang Town Center, Glorietta 4 and Greenbelt 2

#### *Kitchen*

Complimentary Sticky Situation or Monkey Business  
Branches: Greenbelt 3 and Robinson's Galleria

#### *Segrafredo Espresso Bar*

5% discount on food  
Branch: Greenbelt 2, Liberty Plaza and HV Dela Costa and Salcedo Village

#### *Seattle's Best*

10% discount on all drinks  
Branches: All outlets

#### *Taters*

5% discount on all items (Cash payment only)  
Branch: all outlets

#### *Tavern on the Square*

5% discount on all items (Cash payment only)  
Branch: Greenbelt 3

#### **Shops**

#### *Alfredulla Corporation*

10% discount on decorative animal figures  
Contact Person: Jeffrey Bosales  
Contact Details: 2459999, HYPERLINK "<http://www.alfredulla.com>" [www.alfredulla.com](http://www.alfredulla.com)

## Conservation Circle Partners

### *The Maya Kitchen Culinary Art Center*

5% discount on one day/half day courses

Contact Person: Rory Subida

Contact Details: (02) 8921185, HYPERLINK "mailto:mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph" mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph

Branch: Makati City

### *Ocean Colors*

15% discount on regular items

10% discount on specialty courses

5% discount on major dive trips

10-15% discount on Open Water and Medic First Aid courses for atleast 3-5 people

Free Discover Scuba Diving

Contact Person: Chester Lee

Contact Numbers: 8901785 or 8904142

### *Play Underground*

15% discount on Membership Fees and Party Rental Rates

Free Gear Rental for Rock Climbing

Branch: Powerplant Mall

### *Scuba Ventures Dumaguete*

15% discount on diving equipments and courses

Contact Person: Andre Montenegro

Contact Details: (035) 2257716,

e-mail: scuba\_inc@yahoo.com

Branch: Ponce de Leon Compound, Tubod, Dumaguete City

### *Softspot Inc. / the B Shop*

20% discount on all items (except items on SALE)

Special discount on made-to-order stuffed toys and other giveaways

Contact Person: Eric Jugueta

Contact Number: 5325189

Branch: Robinson's Galleria

### *Southbay Badminton Center*

Waived player's fee

Contact Person: Marivic Campillo

Contact Number: 8079576

Branch: Villongco St., West Service Road, Sucat, Paranaque

### *VX Boulder Climbing Gym and Training Center*

Discount on regular climbing day passes

Contact Person: Dennis Diaz

Contact Details: 9342774

e-mail: vx\_boulder@yahoo.com

### *A Different Bookstore*

5% discount for regular priced books.

Branches: Eastwood City, Glorietta and Podium (Ink and Stone)

## **Hotels/Resorts**

### *Atlantis Beach Resorts Philippines*

20% discount on accommodation and diving

Contact details: (035) 4252327

e-mail: dumaguete@atlantishotel.com

Branches: Dumaguete and Puerto Galera

### *Aqua One*

15-20% discount on Scuba Equipment

5% discount on Scuba Courses and Dive Tours

Free Intro Dive

Contact Numbers: 8992831 to 32



## Conservation Circle Partners

### *Astoria Plaza*

Php 3,000 NET for 1 bedroom Suite  
Php 4,500 NET for 2 bedroom Suite  
10% discount on Café Astoria (bar and restaurant)  
10% discount on weekend social banquet functions  
10% discount on Streetscape Spa Center  
Contact Person: Vivian Ng  
Contact Details: (02) 6871111  
Branch: J. Escrive St. (former Amber Ave.) Ortigas  
Business district, 1600 Pasig City

### *Diamond Head Hotel and Convention Center*

30% discount on rooms based on published rates  
10% discount on water sports (once available)  
Contact Person: Roger Begre  
Branch: Baloy Beach, Bo. Barretto, Olangapo City

### *Discovery Suites*

10% discount on Local Residents package  
Contact Details: 6852222,  
e-mail: rsvn@discovery.com.ph  
Branch: Ortigas

### *The Marikina Hotel*

10% discount on accommodations  
10% discount on Food and Beverages except on promo items  
Contact Person: Ed Endaya  
Contact Numbers: 9988290 / 9988342 to 45  
Branch: Pio Del Pilar St. cor. Tangerine St. Brgy. Concepcion II, Marikina City

### *Oceana*

10% discount on accommodations during weekends  
30% discount on accommodations during weekdays  
Contact Person: Tere

Contact Number: 6426215

Branch: Puerto Galera

### *Pandan Island Beach Resort Corporation*

15% discount on accommodations and buffet meals  
Contact Person: Dominique Carlut  
Contact Number: 0919 3057821  
Branch: Pandan Island, Sablayan 5106, Occidental Mindoro

### *The Pearl Manila Hotel*

Php 1,900 NET for Superior  
Php 2,450 NET for Junior Suite  
Php 3,350 NET for 1 bedroom Suite  
Php 4,250 NET for 2 bedroom Suite  
Php 7,000 NET for Splendour Penthouse Suite  
Php 8,500 NET for Oriental Penthouse Suite  
Php 8,500 NET for Palazzo Suite  
Php 10,000 NET for Enchantment  
10% discount on Streetscape or massage services  
10% discount on Food only  
Contact Person: Mary Ann Valenz  
Contact Details: 4000088,  
e-mail: fo@pearlmanila.com.ph  
Branch: Gen. Luna St. corner Taft and UN avenue, Ermita, Manila

### *Puerto Del Sol Beach Resort and Hotel Club*

10% discount on Local Rates for all room types (Mansion Villas, Casitas, BAhay Kubo) of non-peak season  
5% discount on Local Rates during peak season  
Contact Person: Rene Isidro  
Contact Details: 6378963,  
e-mail: csr@puertodelsol.com.ph  
Branch: Bolinao, Pangasinan



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