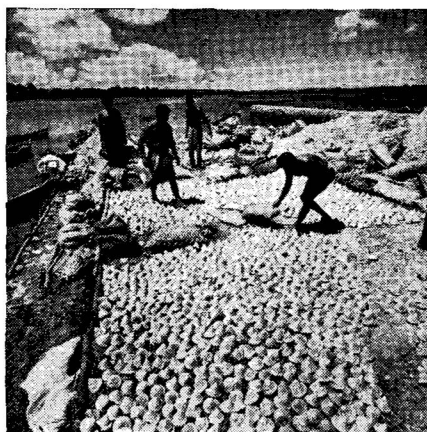




Sailing the lagoon.



Playing the shell game.



Taking the A-frame.

—R. Wenkam photos.

## AMERICA AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY

# THE SMALL ISLANDS

By E. J. KAHN, Jr.

SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, a man from Yap happened to be in New York City, and, hoping to find someone who would recognize his homeland, he stopped at the United Nations building. On approaching the U.N. information desk, the Yapese was a mite saddened, though not terribly surprised, to learn that no one there had ever heard of Yap, or, when it came to that, of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

The Territory, also often called Micronesia, is under U.N. jurisdiction. A three-million-square-mile expanse of the northwest Pacific, Micronesia has, for the past twenty years, been overseen on behalf of the international organization by the United States. The 90,000 native inhabitants of the Territory's six small and widely dispersed districts, of which Yap, with a population of 6,000, is the tiniest, are resigned to the unawareness of most of the rest of the world of their existence. When they travel abroad, Micronesians often carry maps—but these are maps of their own area, so they can explain to outsiders where they hail from. (The Territory's only Catholic bishop once was obliged to devote a good deal of the only audience he ever had with a Pope to a description of the boundaries of his obscure vicariate.)

The very remoteness of Micronesia has of late, however, inspired in many

Micronesians new hopes for attention. The islands that make up the Territory—the Marshalls, the Carolines, and, except for Guam, which has been a U.S. territorial possession since the turn of the century, the Marianas—have been in a shaky economic position ever since the end of World War II, much of which was waged on and around them. The native Micronesians and the 350 or so Americans who have been entrusted with showing them the way toward self-sufficiency visualize the region as a potential haven for cash-crammed tourists who are bored with the globe's familiar stopping-off places and want to strike out into more or less unexplored territory.

Micronesia has certain enviable natural assets. Though its climate is humid, the temperature stays in a tolerable range—between 75 and 85 degrees. The region is exotic, with a few high-rising volcanic islands, lush with tropical foliage, and, beyond them, dozens of coral atolls encircling broad, palm-fringed lagoons. Micronesia has sea-going crocodiles, and clams whose shells reach four feet in diameter. It has eye-opening and little-seen creations of man—the huge stone money discs of Yap, for example, and the fabled ruins of Nan Madol, an enclave of a sovereign of 1200 A.D. in the Ponape district of the East Carolines. And it has genial, hospitable natives who, by most tourists' standards,

would have to be considered authentically primitive.

Those Micronesians who frequent the district centers, though, are rapidly becoming more and more sophisticated. When the office of the resident American High Commissioner, whose headquarters are on Saipan, issued a tourist brochure that, among other illustrations, featured a line of bare-breasted, grass-skirted girls in a ceremonial dance, not all Micronesians were pleased. They grumbled that here they were trying to become civilized and Westernized, and there ought to be some better way of graphically depicting the big, bold, evolutionary steps they were taking than by a garden-variety parade of nubile nudity. Those few Micronesians who have visited bars featuring waitresses in topless outfits in San Francisco can hardly suppress their yawns.

TRUST Territory officials expect that their main influx of tourists will come from two relatively nearby sources: Japan and Australia. Japan ruled Micronesia between World Wars, and many Japanese have a built-in affinity for the region. Australians, it is thought, would relish a chance to visit a place that isn't as far away from home as are most run-of-the-mill vacation spots. Guam offers further promise; it houses thousands of American servicemen who, feeling cooped up on that tropical island, might

relish the notion of visiting some other tropical islands.

A few Americans in Micronesia believe that Pagan, one of the northernmost of the Marianas, might make a fine tourist mecca. Pagan has hot springs and a volcano that now and then still spits lava. "Most people on Guam have never seen an active volcano!" a Trust Territory official exclaimed not long ago. "They'd flood the place!" Unfortunately, a few months after his pronouncement, an active typhoon flooded Pagan and destroyed 80 per cent of its buildings.

So far, hardly any tourists have descended upon Micronesia. To get into the Trust Territory at all, one needs authorization from the High Commissioner. This is easily obtainable, but even so, there has been no avalanche of applications. One traveler got there pretty much by mistake. He was an Istanbul man whose hobby was setting foot on out-of-the-way shores. He had collected something like 200 countries, but the Turk had never been to Truk, the hub of the East Carolines. Pan American Airways has been operating the Trust Territory's own inter-island airline, and at a Pan Am office at home, the Turk's ac-

quisitive eye lit on a printed schedule of Micronesian flights. He bought a ticket that promised him passage throughout the islands, and shortly afterward presented it to a liaison officer the Trust Territory maintains at Guam. Having gone to all that trouble, the Turk was allowed to go to Truk.

Then there was a retired carpet manufacturer from the suburbs of New York who, with his wife, spent three weeks in Micronesia. They had shared a taxi in Honolulu with a geodeticist who, when they complained that Fiji and some of the other South Pacific islands they had been to no longer seemed natural and unspoiled, replied that they should see where *he* had just come from. The New Yorkers headed straight for Micronesia, where they had a reasonably good time, though they were taken aback to learn that the only drive-yourself vehicle then available for rental on Yap was an ancient and decrepit pick-up truck. I myself once rented the only available vehicle on Saipan, which is the most posh settlement within the Territory. I did get a car, but it was not one that even Avis would wish on Hertz, having no mirrors, no muffler, no directional signals, no speedometer, no radio, no gas gauge, no spare tire, and no brakes.

What is likely, more than anything else, to inhibit any widespread outbreak of tourism in Micronesia is the vast distances that separate its inhabited islands. Its airline, which almost exclusively serves the district centers (five of the six of them get only one scheduled flight a week), has its drawbacks. Not only is it the most expensive scheduled passenger service on earth, with a 12-cents-a-mile rate of fare, but space on its flights is so limited and so coveted that mere tourists, who would presumably not enjoy the highest priority, would be in danger of being bumped off at the last minute. The air-travel situation may soon improve. Hawaiian Airlines, operating out of Honolulu, has made a comprehensive exploratory trip through the Trust Territories, and has filed for the rights to open service from Hawaii. Kwajalein is only only a couple of thousand miles away from Hawaii and thus, as distances go in the Pacific, practically next door.

A new hotel is being built at Majuro. Additional accommodations for transients have recently been put up at Yap and on Saipan. Each of the district centers now has at least one hotel, but all of them fall considerably short of providing the amenities that might be held essential by American tourists and by Japanese and Australians, too. There is no hotel room anywhere in Micronesia with a private bath. Such Spartan digs might disappoint elderly voyagers, who are apt to be the principal ones who

have both the time and the means to range so far afield. (It is doubtful that many tourists, however spry, would soon venture much beyond the district centers; most of the outlying Micronesian islands can be reached only by boat, and most of the ships that ply the waters between them make infrequent calls—perhaps one every two or three months.) Until two years ago, the Trust Territory administration ran the hotels. Then, in line with its overall policy of helping the natives to help themselves, it began encouraging indigenes to take over. Their managerial practices are doubtless going to improve with experience, but so far they have been both unimaginative and unpredictable.

Micronesia abounds with native foods that most tourists rarely sample and would find beguiling, at least as novelties—taro cooked with charcoal and coconut milk, fruit-bat broth, tasty fruits of all varieties, including mangosteens and star apples—but the hotels, by and large, offer an unvarying fare of canned stuff. The Royal Palauan Hotel, the festive center of Koror, the capital of Palau district, makes a point of instructing its guests that the breakfast hour starts at 6:30 a.m., but those wayfarers who betake themselves to the dining room at that challenging hour may well be frustrated, inasmuch as the chef shows up whenever he feels like it and may not unlock his kitchen until 7:15.

**B**EGINNING this fall and scheduled to continue for at least two years, there will be a new, important attraction in Micronesia: the Peace Corps. For the last three months, several hundred Peace Corps volunteers have been in training, in Florida and Hawaii, for a massive invasion of the Trust Territory. The majority of the volunteers are slated to participate in an area-wide educational program designed to give all the natives—who speak a bewildering assortment of languages—an opportunity to achieve fluency in English and thus be in a position to communicate among themselves.

During their indoctrination period, the Peace Corps trainees kept asking their instructors what the immediate prospects were for a surge of tourism within Micronesia. Whether the volunteers were curious because they had a genuine concern about the future of the Territory's halting economy, or whether they hoped visitors would show up in droves to keep them brief company in what might otherwise prove to be a conspicuously lonely assignment, was hard to ascertain. The likelihood is that for quite some time to come Micronesia will harbor far more resident emissaries of the Peace Corps than transient outsiders who have come to glimpse their distant island posts.



—R. Wenkam.

Yap—"by most tourists' standards authentically primitive."