

THE CLIMATE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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THE climate of our Islands, which is predominantly maritime, with a mean annual temperature of 27° C. (81° F.) is almost entirely governed by the play and interplay of the three main air currents—the trade wind, the northeast monsoon, and the southwest monsoon.

THE TRADE WIND—FEBRUARY TO MAY

The trade wind, the most important factor of all, originates in the great tropical high pressure area of the eastern North Pacific Ocean; and, after traversing practically the whole of the Pacific in a westerly direction, reaches the Philippines from a northeast, east or southeast direction, depending upon the pressure distribution. While it may be a frequent visitor at almost any time of the year, it is the most predominant wind during the months of March, April and often February and May. At the ground, though by no means dry, it is usually the least moist of the three air streams; but aloft, i.e., above the two kilometer level, it is generally surprisingly dry. The trade is quite brisk and fresh near its source; but by the time it arrives at our Islands, it has become very moderate in force. We can see, therefore, that in the main stream of the trade, there is a marked tendency for pleasant skies, dotted with fair weather cumuli. Nevertheless, since the trade reigns during the time the sun marches high in the heavens, thunderstorms will be frequent on land during the afternoon and early evening owing to convection upward from the heated earth surface, and over the sea at night when the water is warmer than the air.

But it must be noted in passing that not all our thunderstorms are of the convection type. During October and November, when the northeast monsoon is gradually gaining prominence, and in June and July when the southwest monsoon meets the trade in the vicinity of our Islands, many "frontal" thunderstorms occur, due to the interaction of the two different air streams. With the sun in our latitudes almost at zenith and the skies comparatively clear during the reign of the trade, it is natural that the highest temperatures of the year for most of our stations should then be recorded. However, ocean breezes prevent the excessive heat that could otherwise be expected and, except in those places which are more or less enclosed, temperatures as high as 100° F. (38° C.) are quite rare.