

## Chapter Twenty

# Ecotourism in the Philippines

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### Introduction

The Philippines offers diverse tourism activities and destinations for tourists with various inclinations. The competitive advantages of the country are its ambiance and natural attractions that are excellent for rest and recreation. Its tropical climate is perfect for outdoor recreational activities. Being an archipelago, the coastline of the country is spiced up with thousands of natural coves and beaches that offer tourists great satisfaction and relaxation. For cosmopolitan pleasures, the major cities of the country offer giant malls, cinemas, shopping arcades, restaurants, hotels, gaming establishments, fashion boutiques and golf courses. The country's various government agencies are conducting continuous product development activities to promote tourist destinations.

### Tourism Growth

As the destinations and activities become more multifaceted, the Philippine tourism industry is seen to increasingly play a significant role in the country's economic development. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) noted that in the Philippines, tourism contributed 8.7% of the country's GDP in 1997, and is anticipated to grow to 10.9% by 2007.

Tourism employment generated 2.3 billion jobs in 1997. By the year 2007, an additional 1.4 million jobs are projected to be generated by the sector. Capital investment in tourism accounted for some 10.5% of all Philippine investments in 1997. It grew dramatically from 1995 to 1997 at an annual rate of 20%. The trade surplus from tourism was estimated at P22.13 billion in 1997. This 1997 surplus is 29% of total tourism exports for the seven year period between 1988 and 1994. Tourism's economic benefits are absorbed into the economy as a whole, particularly in such sectors as manufacturing, construction and agriculture.

The country's recorded tourist arrivals in 1999 increased by 0.98% to 2 170 514, from 1998 arrivals of 2 149 357. A downturn was experienced for

the first semester in 2000. Americans comprised 24% of total tourist arrivals, followed by Japanese tourists (18.5%), and Koreans (7.7%). The latter, however, registered the highest growth over the same period at 45.2%.

The slowdown brought by the Mindanao crisis has not dampened the Department of Tourism's (DOT) objective to increase foreign visitor arrivals by 20% and domestic travel by 15% in 2000. To achieve this, the DOT has launched its Tourism Marketing Plan 2000, dubbed as the first plan that actively involves the private sector. The plan pinpoints various countries in North America, South-East Asia, Europe and the Middle East, as target markets.

Despite stiff regional competition for the North American market, the Philippines remains the American and Canadian market's fourth "most favoured" destination next to Hong Kong, Japan and China. In fact, the country hosted 18.2% of total 1998 North American visitor arrivals to the Asia-Pacific region. The DOT has set average annual growth targets for the North American market over 2000-2004 at 18.4% or 1.335 million visitor arrivals. Promotional campaigns will be geared towards special interest tours (veterans groups, students, adventure travellers, etc.) leisure visitors (cruise and holiday markets), corporate travellers and the balikbayans (visiting Filipino family and friends).

### Institutional Framework for Tourism Management

The DOT was created to encourage, promote and develop tourism as a major socio-economic activity which will generate foreign currency and employment. It is also mandated to spread the benefits of tourism to a wider segment of the population with the support, assistance and cooperation of both the private and public sectors. It also seeks to assure the safe, convenient, enjoyable stay and travel of foreign and local tourists within the country. Under its wings is the Philippine Convention and Visitors Corporation (PCVC), a government-owned and controlled corporation that is tasked, as the lead agency, to plan and implement the country's tourism marketing efforts. The PCVC aims to position the Philippines as a major tourist and convention destination in Asia. The Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) was created on 11 May, 1973 as the implementation arm of the DOT. It manages policies and programs of the department pertaining to the development, promotion, and supervision of tourism projects in the Philippines.

The National Parks Development Committee (NPDC) was established primarily for the purpose of developing and maintaining assigned parks, specifically the Rizal or Luneta Park (NPDC's flagship), Paco Park, the Pook ni Maria Makiling and Burnham Park. It assures the provision of well-maintained grounds where people can enjoy outdoor healthful play and relaxation. It also promotes and implements cultural and educational programs, particularly those in support of national heritage and identity.

The Intramuros Administration is mandated to restore and develop Intramuros (Walled City). The agency works under the DOT. After having restored 95% of the walls, the agency's thrust is to maintain the premises of this top tourist destination in the Philippines.

Several taskforces and authorities have been created to undertake development programs for priority tourist destinations. For example, the Aklan Provincial Tourism Special Development Project Task Force was created by virtue of Executive Order No. 6 signed by previous President Joseph E. Estrada on 7 August 1998. It was established to promote balanced development and maximise the potential of the province. It serves as an advisory body to the President on all matters pertaining to the tourism development of Aklan, as well as major tourist destinations in the province. It is mandated to set in motion the mechanisms for the preparation of the Aklan Province Tourism Master Plan and the updating of the Boracay Island Master Development Plan.

## Ecotourism in the Philippines

The first serious effort to come up with a definition of ecotourism in the Philippine context was on December 1994 when the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD), the DOT and the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) jointly sponsored an tourism symposium workshop, solely for this purpose. It defined ecotourism as 'an environmentally sound tourism activity, sustainably implemented in a given ecosystem yielding socio-economic benefits and enhancing natural and cultural diversity conservation.'

This definition was enhanced by a government circular entitled "Guide Laws for Ecotourism Development" in the Philippines and signed in June 1998. It changed the 1994 definition to "a low-impact, environmentally-sound and community-participatory tourism activity in a given natural environment that enhances the conservation of biophysical understanding and education and yields socio-economic benefits to the concerned community."

In 1998, the University of the Philippines, Asian Institute of Tourism Professor, Carlos M. Libosada, Jr. published the book "Ecotourism in the Philippines" which can be considered the most comprehensive study on the subject. In the book, the professor explored the beginnings of ecotourism in the Philippines, factors that need to be considered in its development, the target market, as well as the list of potential and existing ecotourism areas in the Philippines.

To provide the legislative backbone, a Senate Bill was filed to provide for a national ecotourism policy, establishing a framework for its institutionalisation and its implementation. However, in June 1997, to fast track the process of evolving a national policy, President Estrada provided a

significant boost to the country's ecotourism program with the issuance of Executive Order No. 111. This Order established the guidelines for ecotourism development in the Philippines, the highlights of which are listed in Box 1.

### Box 1: Guidelines for Ecotourism

1. **Establishment of the National Ecotourism Development Council.** This council serves as the policy-making body for ecotourism and is chaired by DOT and co-chaired by the DENR.
2. **Establishment of the National Ecotourism Steering Committee (NESC) and Regional Ecotourism Committees (REC).** The REC will assist the NESC in effectively implementing the programs and activities approved by the Council.
3. **Identification of the Functions and Responsibilities of Ecotourism Committees.** Among these are the formulation of policies, guidelines and programs relevant to the development and promotion of ecotourism; and devising an accreditation and incentives mechanism for ecotourism projects.
4. **Formulation of a National Ecotourism Strategy.** This is an integrated management plan to provide a comprehensive direction for ecotourism in the country, recognising issues and problems for sustainable development and to recommend feasible approaches in addressing these issues.
5. **Development of National Ecotourism Programs.** These involve: development, management and protection of identified ecotourism sites; product enhancement and development; environmental education and information campaigns; and support programs for community stewardship and livelihood development.

In support of this order, in November 1999, the DOT held the 1st National Ecotourism Congress in Tagbilaran, Bohol. At this meeting, various stakeholders agreed to develop a national policy on ecotourism, as well as a strategy to bring more foreign tourists in the country. The meeting called for: (i) dissemination of information on the concepts, strategies, principles, trends and practices with regard to ecotourism; (ii) enhancing awareness on ecotourism planning and development, promotions and marketing, as well as, financing and investment; (iii) promoting partnerships in ecotourism between the public and private sectors, local government units and the community; and (iv) recognising models and best practices in community-based ecotourism.

The national tourism policy adopted by the Congress stressed that 'the State shall pursue, promote, manage and develop ecotourism anchored on sustainable development through environmental management and education, community empowerment, cultural enrichment and entrepreneurship to improve the quality of life for present and future generations.' Strategies

adopted for full development of ecotourism in the country include: (i) establishment of a database for marketing, and product and destination development; (ii) conduct of human resources development programs for tour guides and others requiring specialised skills; (iii) implementation of advocacy, information, education and communication programs; (iv) development of incentives and an accreditation system; (v) formation of multi-sectoral working groups committed to spearhead the planning and monitoring of various initiatives; and (vi) standardisation of systems and procedures.

At the November 1999 meeting, the DOT committed to formulate a national ecotourism plan, supported by necessary legislation, both at the local and national levels, to achieve: (i) concrete action towards developing a system that will facilitate active involvement of major stakeholders; (ii) growth of small and medium scale enterprises; (iii) voluntary initiatives; (iv) poverty alleviation; and (v) self-regulation against abusive and exploitative forms of tourism.

The Philippines is cognizant of the profound impact of human activities on all components of the natural environment, particularly the effect of increasing population, resource exploitation and industrial advancement. It also recognises the critical importance of protecting and maintaining the natural, biological and physical diversity of the environment, notably in areas with biologically unique features, to sustain human life and development, as well as plant and animal life. The government seeks to secure, for the present and future Filipino generations, the perpetual existence of all native plants and animals through the establishment of a comprehensive system of integrated protected areas, within the classification of a National Park, as provided for in the Philippine Constitution.

The government established a National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) to encompass outstandingly remarkable areas and biologically important public lands that are habitats of rare and endangered species of plants and animals, biogeographic zones and related ecosystems, whether terrestrial, wetland or marine. The Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, an Agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, formulates policies, rules and regulations relative to the establishment and administration of the NIPAS, and the management of other biologically important components of the environment such as ecosystems, species and genetic resources. In addition, the Bureau monitors and coordinates the planning and implementation of the country's various programs and projects on biodiversity, as well as provides technical assistance to its regional offices.

*Under Republic Act No. 7586* which established the NIPAS, a protected area refers to "the identified portions of land and water set aside by reason of their unique physical and biological significance, managed to enhance biological diversity and protected against destructive human exploitation." The law also identifies the categories of protected areas as listed in Box 2.

## Box 2: Protected Areas

**Strict Nature Reserve.** This is an area possessing some outstanding ecosystem, features and/or species of flora and fauna of national scientific importance. This area is maintained to protect nature in an undisturbed state in order to have ecologically representative examples of the natural environment available for scientific study, environmental monitoring, education, and for the maintenance of genetic resources in a dynamic and evolutionary state.

**Natural Park.** Refers to a forest reservation, essentially of natural wilderness character, that has been withdrawn from settlement, occupancy or any form of exploitation, except in conformity with an approved management plan, and set aside as such, exclusively to conserve the area or preserve the scenery, the natural and historic objects, wild animals and plants therein, and to provide enjoyment of these features.

**Natural Monument.** A relatively small area focused on protection of its features, to protect or preserve nationally significant natural features on account of their special interest or unique characteristics.

**Wildlife Sanctuary.** Comprises an area that assures the natural conditions necessary to protect nationally significant species, groups of species, biotic communities or physical features of the environment where these may require specific human manipulation for their perpetuation.

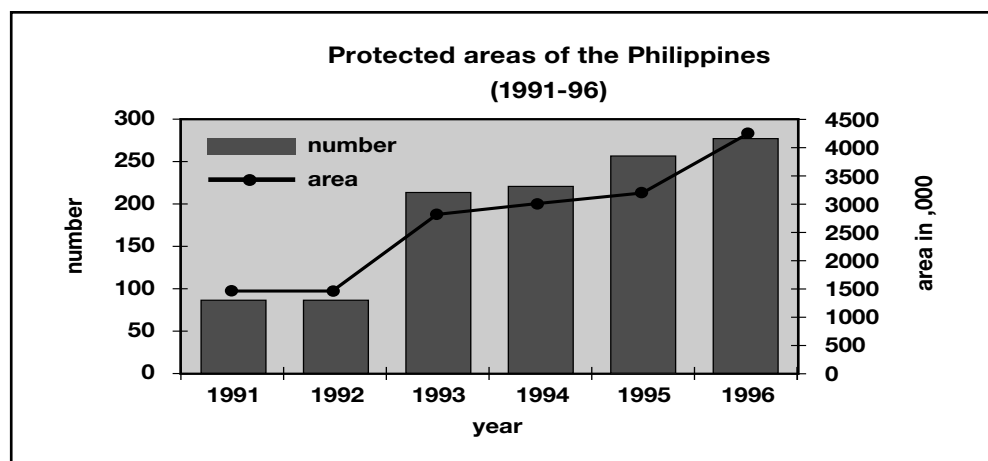
**Protected Landscapes and Seascapes.** These are areas of national significance which are characterised by the harmonious interaction of humans and land while providing opportunities for public enjoyment through recreation and tourism, within the normal lifestyle and economic activity in these areas.

**Resource Reserve.** An extensive and relatively isolated and uninhabited area normally with difficult access, designated as such to protect natural resources of the area for future use and prevent or contain development activities that could affect the resource, pending the establishment of objectives which are based upon appropriate knowledge and planning.

**Natural Biotic Areas.** A natural biotic area is an area set aside to allow the way of life of societies, living in harmony with the environment, to adapt to modern technology, at their pace.

**Other Categories:** Established by law, conventions or international agreements where the Philippine Government is a signatory.

**Figure 1: Protected Areas**



Within the six-year period 1991–96, declared protected areas in the Philippines increased at an average of 24% or 344 889 hectares every year. From only 84 protected areas covering 1.5 million hectares in 1991, the number grew three-fold to 268 or 4.2 million hectares of protected areas in 1996 (see Figure 1).

A number of foreign-assisted projects are underway to conserve and expand the country’s protected areas. These are listed in Box 3.

**Box 3: Foreign-assisted Projects**

**Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CCPAP).** The CPPAP aims to implement the provisions of the NIPAS Act by focusing on the 10 priority sites as identified in the Integrated Protected Areas System I Project. The NGO for IPAS, Inc. (NIPA) is the direct recipient of the World Bank – Global Environment Facility grant covering technical and livelihood components of the project. The implementing agencies of the project are DENR through the NIPAS Policy and Program Steering Committee and the IPAF Governing Board, both of which are inter-agency bodies.

**EU-National Integrated Protected Areas Program.** The primary objective of the project is to help protect, conserve and manage tropical forest biodiversity areas with endangered endemic species in eight of the country’s protected areas. The project is funded by an EU grant for the establishment of the eight protected areas, community-based resource uses, resources management and protection, information and education and, lastly, the administration of the areas.

**Philippine Biodiversity Country Study.** This project aims to review and assess the status of the country’s biodiversity and to formulate the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. This is a project funded by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

Apart from these, there are also a number of locally assisted, special projects aimed to complement the foreign-assisted programs (see Box 4).

**Box 4: Local Projects**

**Philippine Raptors Conservation Program.** Formerly known as the Philippine Eagle Project, this aims to propagate the Philippine Eagle and other endangered Philippine avifaunal species in captivity at the Centre for Philippine Raptors, Makiling Botanical Garden, University of the Philippines, in Laguna; to conduct scientific research; to restore known habitats; to monitor and protect wild populations of raptors in partnership with the local people; to provide extensive education and information campaigns for the protection of eagles and other avifaunal species; and to develop local expertise in raptor conservation and management.

**Tamaraw Conservation Program.** This project serves the conservation and protection of the Tamaraw (*Bubalus mindorensis*). Activities include resource and habitat protection, maintenance of the gene pool at San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, population studies and habitat surveys, restoration of denuded habitats, information and education campaigns and community development.

**Crocodile Farming Institute.** The Crocodile Farming Institute project aims to conserve the two species of crocodiles found in the country, the freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus mindorensis*) and the saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*); to generate breeding technologies for the propagation of these species in captivity; and to transfer these technologies to local communities.

**Calauit Game Preserve and Bird Sanctuary Project.** This project aims to maintain Calauit Island Game Preserve and Wildlife Sanctuary as a centre for nature conservation, propagation and conduct of studies on the biology and ecology of Philippine endemic species and translocated African wildlife species. Since 1995, the project is being implemented by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development under a Memorandum of Agreement with the DENR.

**Pawikan Conservation Program.** This project aims to propagate and conserve economically important marine turtles. It is also concerned with the development and implementation of conservation and protection policies, management and propagation schemes, and a massive information and education program to ensure the survival and growth of marine turtles.

**Caves Management and Conservation Program.** The project aims to conserve the cave resources of the country as part of the National Integrated Protected Areas System.

**Dalaw Turo Outreach Program.** This aims to explore and pursue a conservation education scheme through a non-traditional teaching approach on the conservation and protection of biodiversity.

**A Case Study**

The Aklan Tourism Task Force is proposing an eco-farm tourism project in Aklan Province. The proposed site is within a forest reserve, located halfway between Kalibo and Caticlan, the jump-off point to Boracay Island,

## Chapter Twenty-one

# Ecotourism in Palawan: A Case Study

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### Introduction

The province of Palawan is blessed with rich resources (as described below) and with its historical and cultural attractions offers ample opportunities for varied activities. The pristine environment setting is excellent for sightseeing, beach holidays, marine sports, adventures etc. The province has a number of world-class spots, such as the underground river in St Paul National Park, karst terrain and lakes in Coron, Tabon Caves, Quezon, Ursula Island, Bataraza, Tubattacha Reef, Cagayancillo, Calauit Island, Busuanga Island, Honda Bay, Puerto Princesa City, beaches, islands lagoons and dive sites in El Nido, Taytay and Fin Bay, and Cuyo Island.

### The Resources

Palawan, the largest province in the Philippines, is composed of 1769 islands and islets. It has a total land area of 1 489 655 hectares and occupies 5% of the national territory. Stretching 650 km from tip to tip, it reclines between Mindora Island and North Borneo and is approximately 240 km southwest of Manila. Palawan is bounded by the South China Sea to the northwest and by the Sulu Seas to the east. Its provincial limits commence with Busuanga Island in the north, the Cuyo Group of islands in the northeast, Cagayancillo in the east and Spratley Islands in the west. It ends with Balabac farthest south. The southernmost tip of Balabac (Mangsee Island) is 48.8 nautical miles from Sabah (North Borneo).

Located west of the main Philippine chain of islands, Palawan is the country's southwest frontier with Malaysia. It forms a link between the Philippines and the East Indies. It lies between 7°47' and 12°22' north latitude and 117°00' and 119°51' east longitude.

The province is subdivided into 23 municipalities, one city and 431 barangays. Eleven municipalities are located on the mainland. The other 12

with a panoramic view of Jawili Beach and the Sibuyan Sea. It is a stone's throw away from the seven basin Jawili Falls. The project is envisioned to serve as a mini-research facility where small farmer-producers can observe and consult on the latest information on piña cloth production techniques. A display and retail centre for finished piña cloth and other local handcrafted products will be constructed. Implementation will be in partnership with local NGOs who will provide the project's supervision.

This project is within the overall objective of transforming the whole province of Aklan into a destination of its own, anchored on agri- and ecotourism. This is contained in the Aklan Tourism Master Plan that the Task Force drafted and printed in March 2000. Titled "Hala Bira! A Reawakening, Tourism Strategic Development Plan," it offers three planning horizons: the short-term agenda (1-5 years); the medium-term agenda (10 years); and the long-term agenda (15 years). The short-term agenda recommends seven key programs aimed primarily towards the renewal, rehabilitation and redevelopment of Boracay Island. The plan considers Boracay Island as the anchor product that will serve as a platform for mainland Aklan's economic diversification. The medium-term agenda focuses on the development directions for mainland Aklan by prescribing cultural, agri- and ecotourism as key product categories. The concepts of agri- and ecotourism are directed towards countryside development, fuelled by an agricultural economy, in support of the tourism industry. The long-term agenda seeks to recreate the entire province into a destination in itself in the reshaping of its urban panorama in a way that is distinctly its own. The success of the medium and long-term agenda is anchored on the sustainable development of Boracay Island and its magnetic attraction as a tourist destination.

### Conclusion

Although ecotourism may be considered the most sustainable form of tourism, it exposes natural ecosystems to risks due to human intrusion. The following are just some of the negative impacts of ecotourism activities: (i) mountaineering or trekking causes trail erosion and garbage accumulation, and spelunking can damage limestone cave formations; (ii) wildlife in its natural habitat is disturbed and plants can be damaged during ecotourism activities (for example, human feeding of fish tends to encourage dependence on visitors, to the point that the animals no longer hunt on their own, and reckless scuba diving can disturb marine life and destroy corals); (iii) frequent contact of mountaineers and trekkers with natives can cause culture-shock and changes in the indigenous culture of the area; and (iv) local communities are deprived of rightful economic benefits when food, beverages, and souvenir items and products are produced elsewhere but sold in their area, and when outside investors repatriate their revenue back to their home bases.

If these downsides are successfully addressed in the planning of ecotourism, it can be an extremely useful tool to make progress towards sustainable development.