

Cultural Tourism: Its Causes And Effects

The Philippine Experience

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In 1994, the Philippines welcomed a record number of visitors, generating some US\$2.12 billion for the country. Although statistics do not show particular figures for the number of tourists travelling to experience the country's cultural heritage/attractions, surveys reveal that tourists enjoy the warm hospitality and kindness of the Filipinos, beautiful rural sceneries, good food, and local handicrafts/shellcrafts, among others. All these reasons constitute the elements of cultural tourism which the country's Department of Tourism (DOT) has been promoting in recent years.

Islands of the Philippines: An Ideal Cultural Tourism Destination

The Philippines is an archipelago blessed with a wealth of natural resources, a rich history and unique cultures that make it an ideal destination for cultural tourism. The country's attractions are as many as they are diverse, with each island offering something different. History and culture buffs, for instance, may learn more about the Philippines and its people when visiting the museums, centuries-old structures,

monuments and churches spread across the country, and a tour of the farms in the provinces for a taste of rural Philippine life.

The Filipino is basically of Malay stock with a sprinkling of Chinese, American, Spanish and Arab blood. From a long history of Western colonial rule, interspersed with the visits of merchants and traders, evolved a people of unique blend of east and west, both in appearance and culture.

The character of the Filipino is actually a little bit of all the cultures put together. The bayanihan or spirit of kinship and camaraderie that Filipinos are famous for is said to be taken from Malay forefathers; close family relations are said to have been inherited from the Chinese, and piousness came from the Spaniards who introduced Christianity in the 16th century.

Filipinos are divided geographically and culturally into regions, and each regional group is recognizable by distinct traits and dialects. Tribal communities can be found scattered across the archipelago.

The country offers the visitor a wealth of cultural diversions and attractions. Within the city limits of Manila is located the medieval walled city of



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Intramuros, Spain's stronghold in Asia during the era of its empire here. The Cultural Center of the Philippines Museum showcases archaeological and ethnological finds, as well as contemporary artworks; while the Metropolitan Museum of Manila exhibits works of classical and modern masters. There are also other private galleries and specialized museums.

The Banaue Rice Terraces, dubbed the eighth wonder of the world is located in Luzon, while in Southern Palawan, the Tabon Caves are acknowledged as the "Cradle of Civilization" of the Philippines. Nestled in the mountainous cape of Lipuun Point, the 29-cave complex is a treasure trove of archaeological artifacts and fossilized bones of the Tabon Man. The skull is carbon dated to be 22,000 years

old. In Cebu, the past blends with the present in the province's many historic and scenic attractions, handicrafts, etc. In Aklan, tourists may dab soot on their bodies and stomp their feet to the rhythm of the traditional Ati-Atihan festival.

Ecotourism & Cultural Tourism: Strategies in the TMP

The 20-year Philippine Tourism Master Plan (TMP), which guides the development of tourism in the country, has recommended the promotion of cultural tourism. Related to this, the main goals of tourism development as spelled out in the TMP include the enhancement and contribution of tourism to social cohesion and cultural preservation at local levels as well as the development of tourism on environmentally sustainable basis.

In order to achieve these goals, the TMP has provided the framework for the promotion/advocacy of ecotourism which is aimed towards the sustainable development of Philippine tourism.

Ecotourism, as one travel association defined it, is travelling with particular attention to nature's wonders and leaving them as you found them. It is basically tourism that contributes to the conservation of the world's natural resources and cultural heritage through minimum environmental stress and sustainable development. In its purest state, ecotourism denotes tourism that is environmentally, and socially aware, which is responsible and sustainable.

On this basis, cultural tourism becomes a component

of ecotourism as it involves the culture and cultural attractions of a place as well as the physical environment of these resources. Hence, the efforts being made by the DOT towards ecotourism would naturally contribute to the development of cultural tourism.

Ecotourism, or sustainable tourism development, aims to guide the further development of tourism, including cultural tourism, in the Philippines in such manner that:

- would not negatively affect the local population economically and culturally;
- ensures active participation of the local people in the development process;
- creates economic and cultural benefits for the local communities; and
- would not negatively affect the local environmental conditions.

Ecotourism/Cultural Tourism Programs/Activities of the Department of Tourism

The DOT is involved in programmes or activities that have either direct or indirect effects to the development and/or promotion of ecotourism/cultural tourism in the country. In its efforts to attract a higher number of tourists to the country, DOT has embarked on an ambitious program called 'Bring Home A Friend' which aims to encourage Filipino citizens to promote the Philippines as a tourist destination by highlighting the music of the islands. 'Bring Home a Friend'

has won wide support from Filipinos who have invited many of their friends and business associates to visit the Philippines and discover the sights and sounds of the islands, "where music seems to be interwoven with every event and where life itself can be expressed in a series of song". The program was launched in October 1993 and will end in December 1996. Another example is the 'Annual Regional Food Festival'. Already in its seventh year, the regional food festival aims to preserve and promote the country's regional cuisine. The festival features gastronomic delights from different regions of the country, and attracts both local and foreign tourists, particularly those who may not have the opportunity to travel all over the country to savor authentic Filipino cuisine.

Establishment of Cultural Villages

In support of the Tourism Master Plan, DOT has embarked on the preparation of preliminary/conceptual plans for the establishment of cultural villages in selected tribal territories. The cultural village aims to showcase the rich cultural heritage and creativity of the cultural minorities and help preserve their various rituals and art forms. Likewise, it will attempt to protect the tribal communities' lifestyles and discourage their exploitation by tourists and other interest groups. The Department recognizes that such projects should emanate from the local people, hence it has encouraged the participation of the different cultural organizations and tribal leaders of the area in all aspects

of the project preparation.

In the implementation of these projects, DOT, together with the National Commission on Culture and Arts, will closely monitor the developments while the local City Tourism Office and Office of Southern/Northern Cultural Communities will take the lead.

The Preparation of a Detailed Tourism

Development Plan for Tabon Caves, Tabon Caves is a significant archaeological site where the oldest human remains in the country, dating 22,000 years ago, were found. Situated in an area identified in the TMP as a potential ecotourism destination because of its unique natural history and resources, Tabon Caves is to be developed as a major tourism and archaeological destination, both of the province and of the country, for domestic and foreign tourists, in consultation and cooperation with the host community, and based on optimizing economic benefits and preserving/conserving the archaeological and pre-historic site and its environmental resources.

Tourism Training and Appreciation Program (TTAP)

The Department has also initiated a series of tour programs that focus on the country's history, culture, and natural heritage. One of the programs is the Tourism Summer Camp which exposes the youth to the creative nature of the Philippine society and culture through travel. The Student Travel Club Tours seek to promote special interest tours for the niche market

at student prices. The ultimate goal is to create a core group of all tourism-related travel clubs, tap them as catalysts for developing student's awareness on tourism, and to prepare them for their future jobs in the tourism industry.

Impacts of Cultural Tourism

The Philippines has experienced the disruptive effects of unplanned tourism on its socio-cultural fabric, when moral degradation, cultural displacement, and politico-economic impoverishment for affected communities occurred. On the other hand, with a realistic appraisal of the domestic and international markets, planned tourism can increase the country's competitive edge by cueing each sectoral and environmental resource to a high-yielding, but distributive economic system.

Following are some of the positive and negative impacts of cultural tourism programs/activities on Philippine society through the direct and/or indirect interaction between local and foreign visitors and the host community.

A. Positive Impacts

- As a result of the interaction between the local people and foreign visitors is awareness and appreciation of each other's culture.
- As an outcome of the establishment of ethnic arts and crafts centers in small towns and villages around the country, there is a revival of traditional arts and crafts, such

as the silver craft and ethnic woodcarving of local Baguio folk.

- Restoration and preservation of sites, monuments, cultural relics and architecture are undertaken as part of Tourism product development and enhancement projects on historically/culturally significant sites such as the ongoing restoration of the 16th century Baclayon Church and Museum in Bohol province.
- The establishment of cultural villages in tribal communities are expected to protect and rich cultural heritage and creativity of the cultural minorities.

The visitors' appreciation of the people and the attractions brings about pride and self-respect among the locals for their own communities. From exposure to and interaction with foreign visitors generate in the people a widening of interest in world affairs and better understanding among peoples and cultures.

The proliferation of tourism-related establishments provide employment to the local people, e.g. tour guides, hotel/resort workers, etc.

B. Negative Impacts

- Opportunities for business from the tourists, and the commercialization of relationships cause changes in values, morals, and obligations of the community.
- Thieves and illegal trading of

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artifacts and historical mementos

- The mass production of various local products cause proliferation of fake items and products of lower standards.
- Commercialization of ceremonies and rituals, and loss of traditional meanings
- With the influx of foreign tourists, and the inevitable adoption of foreign words into local languages or dialects, linguistic competency of the locals may deteriorate.
- As a consequence of unplanned and hasty tourism development projects in communities such as the establishment of cultural villages, minority groups/tribes may be displaced, deprived of their means of livelihood, source of food and way of life.
- Tourism has also affected the most vulnerable sector of society, the women and

children. Prostitution of women and children, primarily due to economic reasons, has galvanised the DOT to include stiffer penalties for child prostitution and other abuses, stricter issuance of business permits to tourism-related establishments, and strengthening of the tourism police to protect tourists, prevent sex tours and pedophilia.

Cultural Tourism: Focus of Recent Developments in Philippine Tourism

The Philippine tourism industry has agreed to focus on the unique history, rich culture, hospitality of its people and the beauty of

natural environmental attractions as the central theme of the industry's domestic and international promotion and marketing campaigns. It was stressed that the country should outgrow its image as a mere "rest and recreation" destination and highlight instead its historical treasures, heritage and unique cultures that blend the best of the east and the west.

This was the agreement made during the recently-concluded first tourism industry strategic workshop initiated by the DOT, in which representatives of the government and the private sector participated.

As pointed out earlier, the Philippine Tourism Master Plan includes social cohesion and cultural preservation among its goals and objectives in being able to attract desirable tourists. In this regard, the tourism industry recognizes its role in integrating history and culture into every tourism activity and program as a way to contribute towards a strong cohesive society.