



## TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE COASTAL ISLAND OF GUIMARAS PHILIPPINES

By: Suzanna Ratih Sari

Department of Architecture, Diponegoro University

### ABSTRACT

*Tourism is a multi-disciplinary activity that touches almost every aspect of human endeavor. In view of its international character and its role in the development of the national economy, an attempt has been made to study the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impact of tourism on regional development in developing countries such as the Philippines.*

*Tourism development is an economic and industrial activity involving many individuals, firms, corporations, organizations and associations. It is economically important as it provides a source of income and employment, brings in infra-structural improvements and helps in regional development. (Negi, 1990)*

*For a province such as Guimaras Island, tourism development is a powerful tool needed in solving some of the provincial problems. Furthermore, in some cases, it contributes to the national economy by developing and revitalizing the economic condition more quickly than other industries. Many sectors of the community benefit from the injection of additional wealth that tourism brings*

**Keywords:** Tourism development, Guimaras Island, Philippines

### I. INTRODUCTION

The promotion of tourism will bring a greater contribution, in terms of economic development. It will, for example increase foreign expenditures, generate business activities, provide more capital and employment, induce more production, and improve per capita income. It goes without saying that the dollar contribution of this industry will greatly hasten the development of a region.

Remembering the important role of tourism in development, the study will attempt to analyze this phenomenon in Guimaras Island, a province of the Republic of the Philippines. Guimaras offers a unique environmental setting as well as enormous tourism potentials such as abundant marine resources, aquaculture, plantations (mangoes, cashew, guayavano,

pineapple, and others), coastal resorts, and yacht and boat building. Furthermore, Guimaras has a variety of terrain ranging from plains, hills, and mountains.

Despite these potentials, Guimaras is one of the youngest, smallest, and poorest provinces of the six component provinces in the Western Visayas Region (Region VI). The tourism industry in Guimaras is not quite developed. Presently, the government faces some problems which hinder the development of tourism in the country. First is limited capital, Guimaras being one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines. Second is the absence of infrastructure, particularly the lack of good roads leading to potential tourist destinations. Third is limited assistance in terms of financial and technical aspects from the government, etc. Because of these factors, the provincial

government can hardly benefit from the utilization of potential tourist sites in the area. Moreover, the provincial government is confronted with problems regarding the limited multiplier effects of tourism activities in the province. Many people are still poor as the industry offers limited job opportunities. As for the environment, there is a tendency for tourist activities to bring about negative impacts such as the destruction of the environment. This can be seen especially in the areas along the seashore. The pollution of the marine ecosystem may be traced to fuel discharged from pump boats, collection of corals for souvenir purposes, inadequate garbage facilities, and many others.

Regarding the above matters, the study analyzes these problems and identifies appropriate strategies that may be adopted to promote the tourism industry in Guimaras. The analysis used in this study is an analysis of potentials and problems which could serve as a basis for recommending strategies to re-focus tourism activities towards regional development. These strategies will hopefully evolve into policies that will develop the area into a "World Class Tourist Destination." Should this come to pass, the area can provide a greater contribution to the development of the region as a whole.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Guimaras Island is the youngest and smallest among six component provinces of the Western Visayas Region (Region VI) Philippines. The compact shape of the island province of Guimaras lies southeast of Panay Island and northwest of Negros Island.

This island is selected as a study area because Guimaras has not yet reached the pinnacle of tourism development. Even though the provincial government has tried

to promote and advertise its tourist potentials, the number of tourist arrivals is still low compared to other provinces in the region. Moreover, the provincial government is confronted with problems regarding the limited multiplier effects of tourism activities in the province. It is therefore, the provincial government should take all of these conditions into consideration in order to develop and promote the area to become one of the major tourist destinations in the Philippines.

Regarding to the above matter, this study intends to serve as an analytical tool whereby tourism development can be used as an instrument for promoting regional development by strengthening the forward and backward linkages of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental sectors. Analysis of data was done by using the following methodologies:

- Analysis of positive and negative impacts of tourism is used to determine the potentials and problems of the industry in Guimaras. The analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of tourism in Guimaras could served as a basis for recommending strategies for re-focus tourism activities towards regional development.
- The multiplier effect takes into perspective particularly to analyze the relationship between tourists' activities and employment, tourist expenditures, income, and business tax. This can also demonstrates whether or not the development of the tourism industry helps in the actual development of the locality and/or the region. Furthermore, the multiplier effect could serve in recommending strategies for increasing tourists' expenditures or for minimizing outside spending.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Philippines, foreign visitors spent an average of US \$ 150.35 per day in 1995. This expenditure was slightly higher by 9.81% compared to the average daily expenditure of US \$ 136.92 recorded in 1994. A total of 47,914 employees were employed in 1,287 tourist establishments in this year. The visitor receipts from January to December 1995 reached about US \$ 2,238.98 million. In region VI alone, in 1993, foreign tourists spent an average of 2,226 pesos daily, higher compared to the 1,940.00 pesos spent by domestic travelers. The estimates for foreign and domestic visitor expenditure increased by 94.9% and 100.2% respectively. The respondent establishments reported that a total of 1,894 employees were employed in all tourist establishments and regional accommodation facilities. Several people claim that Guimaras would have remained a remote and unknown province if not for the development of tourism in the area. Many other areas in Guimaras of tourist interest where industrial development is out of the question because of their distance from potential markets, lack of raw materials and transportation facilities, scarcity of power, and water can greatly benefit from tourism if this sector is developed properly. These areas can provide prosperity to the province and generate more jobs for a large number of unskilled workers.

#### 3.1. The Potentials of Guimaras Island related to Tourism Development

Guimaras has a potential in terms of tourist arrivals. The data given (Study on Regional Travel in the Philippines, 1993) reveals that the total number of tourist arrivals from 1993 to 1996 is increasing. The peak month for foreigners visiting Guimaras is January, while the months of August, September, and October are the peak months for local tourists. A

significant number of tourists from Iloilo come during the school holidays. The only departure from this on-season and off-season cycle is the large inflow of local visitors who come to see and participate in the religious festival (Pagtatal Sa Guimaras). The local people in Guimaras have become leisure conscious now preferring to spend their leisure time visiting recreational places in the area for swimming or sight-seeing activities rather than staying at home. Raymen Beach and Shann are among the popular areas frequented by local residents. The present situation can serve as a positive sign for hotel/cottage owners to keep their businesses open.

The areas around Guimaras are presently pulsating with life. The place has provided employment to local people in hotels/cottages, restaurant, small-scale industries, construction projects, and transportation. Based on the Socio-Economic Profile of the province in 1990, the total number of persons in the labor force belonging to the working age population (15-64 years) was 38,189. This number represents about one third of the total population of Guimaras. Less than 6,000 persons were unemployed reflecting an unemployment rate of 15.4 percent. This rate is higher than the 11.7 percent average unemployment rate for Region VI as well as the 8.5 percent national average unemployment rate. From this data, it can be seen that Guimaras province has a potentially large labor force than can be tapped when a need arises. These people can be trained for different job opportunities offered by the tourism industry. As a result, they may have additional income which may be used for acquiring other basic needs. Records obtained from the Department of Trade and Industry show that local small-scale industries engaged in the production of delicacies and handicrafts employ a number of local residents in Guimaras. The more popular of these tourist related

industries are: 1) Miniature Boat Making, 2) Bags and Baskets, 3) Bariw gift items. Among the product-lines of this group are household accessories, and 4) Guimaras is also a famous source of fresh fruits such as mango, calamansi, jackfruit, banana and atis. Additional income may result in increased tax collections which in turn would raise the Gross Domestic Product of the province.

Tourism development in Guimaras will also encourage more investors to come in. The unique environmental features of the island province plus its enormous tourism potential such as abundant marine resources, aquaculture, plantations, and coastal resorts offer a variety of business opportunities to potential investors. Joint ventures may be undertaken by both government and the private sector.

In terms of opportunities for cross-cultural contact, several such opportunities exist in Guimaras. For example, the mango festival, sailboat and mountain bike competitions, lenten presentation such as the "Ang Pagtaltal Sa Guimaras" which is a religious ceremony), and so on. These attractions have become major events, attracting a considerable number of tourists to Guimaras. Most of the tourists come from Iloilo, Bacolod, Manila as well as from other countries. Until now people in Guimaras still preserve the original cultural and historical essence of these attractions. These festivals are presented to local and foreign visitors as they were many decades ago. Hopefully, through such interactions and/or exchanges, more and more tourists will be encouraged to come.

Besides, exchanges with cultural minorities may attract more tourists to visit Guimaras, thus opening up more opportunities for these groups to sell their products directly to tourists. In other words, a larger market in the form of more tourists may encourage more groups to start small businesses which in the long run would provide local people with additional income.

Furthermore, in Guimaras, there are a number of projects aimed at protecting and conserving the province's natural resources. Among these are: projects on the protection of forest and mangrove areas and reforestation of forest and mangrove areas. These activities can be a good start for Guimaras in the drive to protect and conserve its natural resources against environmental destruction. The slogan of keeping Guimaras clean and green can also be adopted in order to encourage people to be more aware of the necessity of preserving and conserving their environment. The promotion of such a slogan would not only instill a consciousness among local residents of the benefits which may be derived from the proper care of the environment but to local and foreign visitors and tourists as well.

### **3.2. The Problems of The Island which Hinder Tourism Development**

There are almost as many skilled workers as there are semi-skilled ones. In Aklan, almost 50% of the reported manpower are semi-skilled personnel while in Iloilo (include Guimaras) and Negros Occidental which have several hotel establishments, skilled personnel comprise 55% and 45% of the total labor force respectively. From this data, it can be seen that most of the employees who work in establishments are either skilled and semi-skilled labor while the number of employed unskilled is low. Despite these figures, there is still a need for government to assist in upgrading the capabilities of workers to improve their chances of acquiring decent jobs.

Recognizing the need for more infrastructure, facilities, and services, the problem of financial support comes to fore. As mentioned, among the six component provinces of Region VI, Guimaras is the poorest. Based on a survey conducted by the Provincial Planning and Development Office, the median household income in



Guimaras is about 10,000.00 pesos per year. This figure is way below the poverty threshold indicated for Region VI which is 36,000.00 pesos (annual per capita of 6,454 pesos multiplied by the average family size of 5.5 persons). Therefore, Guimaras still needs financial assistance, particularly for the development of infrastructure. Additional funding from either the national or regional government may be utilized in undertaking development activities including the provision of infrastructure, facilities, and services throughout the province.

In Guimaras, just like in many parts of the country, the traditional beliefs and practices are slowly being eroded because of and replaced by the more modern ways of doing things. For instance, people easily adopt the culture of tourists arriving in the province. The sense of modernity is observed in the daily lives of the people. Perhaps, this may be attributed to the so called "colonial mentality" in the Philippine culture. The people of Guimaras tend to pattern their ways and practices after the tourists. "Modernity" or the use of non-traditional customs is regarded as a status symbol among the people thus, the more these people practice them, the higher their social standing. In effect, such a practice is not only an added burden to the expenditure pattern of the people (people tend to buy non-essential items) but eventually, this will lead to the deterioration of the attraction of the area. As it is, Guimaras is widely known for preserving its traditional practices such as the Pagtaltal and traditional products such as handicrafts made of wood and bamboo. Hence, if these practices are not preserved, the potential of Guimaras as a haven of tourism will diminish. Also, in the long run, the younger generations will become ignorant of their traditional culture and beliefs.

In terms of environmental preservation, destruction of the environment is

rampant in many places in Guimaras Island. Concerns have been raised particularly in relation to fishing and tourism activities. The extent of exploitation of coral reefs for instance has depleted much of the coral reefs in the area. Many fishermen still use dynamite in catching. Moreover, they also tend to over-fish. The gasoline or oil used in pump boats add to the pollution of the marine environment. Another form of destruction is the activities of many people who collect corals and use these as souvenirs. Presently, there are still no policies aimed at protecting or conserving these natural resources. The government should establish and enforce such policies which can protect, conserve and preserve the natural resources from further destruction.

There are many tourist destinations where adequate garbage disposal systems are not available. Garbage collection points in these areas have not been designated. There are establishments dump their garbage into the sea. It has been observed that not only beaches but also the environment surrounding the establishments are littered with garbage to the extent that these places appear dirty and ill-managed. Such conditions discourage tourist from visiting these places. Given such conditions, tourists would tend to cut their visits for the reason that they can no longer enjoy the charm of these places. As a result, fewer and fewer tourists will visit these places which would then cause lower returns of investment to owners of resorts and other businesses catering to tourists.

#### **IV. PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GUIMARAS ISLAND**

Tourism as a source of income provides a number of economic benefits. Its activities contribute to tax revenues both directly through sales taxes and

indirectly through property, profit, and income taxes. Moreover, tourism provides employment and brings about new developments or improvements to existing infrastructure. All these new undertakings contribute to the overall growth of the province and the region. The potentials and problems of tourism development in Guimaras were explored against the backdrop of these impacts. Given the totality of this scenario, the proposed strategies are aimed at strengthening the potentials of tourism in Guimaras and overcoming its problems. These strategies are as follows:

- The provision and improvement of infrastructure is very crucial. Not all tourist attractions in Guimaras are provided with good roads. This hinders the movement of tourists. It is important for the provincial government to give priority to the development and upgrading of roads. Resorts, activity centers, tourism facilities, handicraft production centers, tourism destinations, markets, etc. must all be connected with good roads making it easier for tourists to reach these places. The improvement of the road network will not only benefit the tourism industry but will serve the needs of other sectors as well. Since Guimaras still relies on Iloilo City as a direct link to international tourists, the feeder airport, which is presently under construction, should be completed as soon as possible so it can be utilized in part to serve the tourism industry. This is important because once the construction of the feeder airport is completed, the dependency of Guimaras on other cities like Iloilo and Bacolod will be reduced. Furthermore, the provision of more attractive ferryboats and pump boats should be promoted. Even after the proposed bridge connecting Iloilo, Guimaras and Negros Occidental is

completed, it will be worthwhile not only to maintain the utilization of pump boats but upgrade this industry to tourist standards. This can serve as a unique experience to tourists who have never experienced a pump boat ride before.

- In order to overcome the problem of many unskilled workers as well as strengthen the potential of a large labor force in tourism-related industries, technical and management capability training for the local residents is needed to improve their management and entrepreneurial skills, particularly for those engaged in industries. This can be accomplished by encouraging government to design management and technical training programs especially for those who are engaged in tourism.
- In order to maintain the cultural and historical value of the attraction in Guimaras, the local people can be invited on special occasions to perform Guimaras' cultural activities such as traditional dancing, customs or religious ceremonies in their area of establishment (hotels). By doing these, people and tourists will be encouraged to appreciate the cultural value of the province. To know more about the culture of Guimaras, another alternative is for the tourist to stay together with the people. Such a project, which is now undertaken by the Guimaras Department of Tourism, is so called "Barangay Tourism". The project will expose guests to the heritage of Guimaras through traditional barangay life and promote interaction between visitors and local residents. As a result, tourists will have a better understanding of Guimaras culture.
- Establish policy especially for protecting natural environment and maintaining the cleanliness of tourist spots. This strategy can be used for overcoming the problem on lack of





effective garbage disposal. The provision of proper garbage disposal, such as dumping area, has to be established in a selective area which far from residential area. This facility is needed especially to accommodate and treat the garbage from the whole province. Before, disposing garbage to dumping area, it would be better if government can provide garbage disposal facilities and separate the garbage into solid and liquid waste. Furthermore, to keep the environment clean and green, government should increase also the awareness of people towards their environment. By the provision of collective garbage point in all public areas, recreational places, and tourist spots. If Guimaras could keep the environment clean, green and attractive, consequently, many tourists would like to come and visit Guimaras.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism as one of the components of development provides a viable contribution to the development objectives of both province and region. Therefore, it has been consciously used as one of the important tools for regional development. This sector can be a big factor in alleviating poverty. Recognizing the great contribution of tourism in regional development, Guimaras has to develop and promote its tourism industry. Developing tourism will lead ultimately to the development of other sectors and areas. The benefit of development will spread in the province and region for the Guimarasnons. In other words, trickle-down effects of development from this sector will be visible throughout the province whereby the quality of life and personality of individuals and groups will also improve. The development and

promotion of tourism industry can be utilized to attract more tourists to come to Guimaras which will increase the amount of tourist expenditures. Therefore, there is a need for Guimaras to capture market share in the highly competitive tourism market in the region. This will require a unique and high quality product with a coordinated approach for marketing and an understanding of consumer preferences. In addition, to have better access to larger market within and outside Guimaras, the promotion and marketing training are really important. Some institution such as Department of Trade and Industry shall be tapped to assist the enterprises to explore the market opportunities. Since Guimaras still relies on Iloilo City as a direct link for international tourists arriving in the area, the infrastructure, tourist facilities and services need considerable improvement. In the environmental sector, there is a need for the government to preserve and conserve the natural environment to attract tourists and for the benefit of the local people. Taking a more active role in the local development the provincial government can assist with new tourism opportunities which can directly benefit those at the grass root level. However, it is important that tourism development should encourage local people to participate in and support the tourism industry.

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