Astronomical Tourism (Astro-Tourism) in Cebu, Philippines: Essential Features In Selected Destinations and Its Complementing Visitor Attractions

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Abstract— Nowadays tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and one of the fastest growing economic sectors. One of the branches of tourism that this study can be based on is ecotourism. Ecotourism can be defined as nature-based tourism. The main aim of the study is to investigate on a new aspect of the tourism management that researcher calls it “Astro-Tourism” (Astronomical Tourism). Astronomical views such as rainbows, beautiful sunsets, sunrises, and astronomical phenomenon such as solar and lunar eclipses can attract many tourists all around the world. To achieve the goal of the study, the researcher conducted six interviews with professional tourist guides to select the potential destinations of Astro-Tourism in Cebu, Philippines. This study focused on six destination and their essential features to attract astro-tourists. The results of the study were six destinations that have the potential to attract astro-tourists in Cebu, Philippines. This study opens a new door in tourism industry and leads to more related researchers.

Keywords— Astro-Tourism, Destination Development, Eco-Tourism, Natural Tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, in many countries, tourism plays a key role in regional development because of setting new economic activities [1]. One of the branches of tourism that the study can be based on is ecotourism. “Ecotourism can be defined as nature-based tourism. More specifically, ecotourism is potentially synonymous with wilderness tourism, adventure tourism, green tourism, alternative tourism, scientific tourism, cultural tourism, agro tourism and/or rural tourism, to name a few.”

The Philippine Tourism Act of 2009 states tourism as an engine of investment, employment growth, and national development. Cebu has been identified as the center of tourism in the Philippines because of its natural environment and entrepreneurial growth with all the modern conveniences of technology [2].

The main aim of this study is to investigate on a new aspect of the tourism management called “Astro-Tourism Management,” since the researcher thinks it can enter new market segments in the tourism industry especially in the Philippines due to its feature that is near the equator.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Gray's Travel Motivation Theory, as noted by Mansfield (1992), gives us two motives about why people go to natural settings. The first motive is the desire to go from a known to an unknown place, called in Gray's theory “wanderlust.” Secondly, a place “which can provide the traveler with specific facilities that do not exist in his or her own place of residence,” referred in Gray's theory as “sun lust” [3]. Some of the motives which determine their travel choices are recreation, pleasure, new experiences, cultural interest, shopping.

Plog’s [4] typology can be used to examine tourist motivations as well as attitudes to particular destinations and modes of travel. In terms of the latter, a tourist typology developed for the American Express [5] has categorized travelers as: adventurers, worriers, dreamers, economisers and indulgers- all of whom viewed their travel experiences in different ways.

Factors that motivate tourists for leisure travel are classified into two types, i.e. “push” and “pull” factors [6, 7, 8, 9 and 10]. An analysis on tourist motivation and activities is important for destinations to understand leisure tourist destination choice [11]; it can also enhance destination image [12 and 13] and its interplay with tourist satisfaction and loyalty [14]. The analysis of tourist motivation can focus on one destination [15]; or it can be conducted by a comparative study by nationality and destination [16].

Different criteria can be applied for analyzing destinations with their market segments, for example, a geographic criterion that can identify a destination as an urban or a rural/peripheral area. Destination attributes, such as cultural/historical heritage versus natural/beach is another criterion that “pulls” tourists into the local areas. Destination development becomes an important issue in tourism studies. Understanding tourism motivation and activities will help destinations improve their products and services. Not only enhance the quality of products, more importantly is to be aware of the exact needs of target tourists and where the main tourist markets are.

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Destinations can be developed based on the different needs of amateur astronomers. If a destination has a potential to be a place for sky photographers, it must be developed. Even private agencies can plan to search for the proper places that have unique views and provide a separate schedule for the sky gazers or even the people who like these views and certainly, if an agency introduces its program, most of the people will be encouraged to visit these views at least for the first time. Therefore, astronomical services can be among the top and unique services that a destination can provide them. Nature tourism, called by Newsome & et al. [17] "natural area tourism", is in short "tourism in natural settings". The proposed classification of Newsome, Moore and Dowling [17] and their conception of nature tourism is confirmed by Ceballos-Lascuráin [18] when he defines it as "all tourism directly dependent on the use of natural resources in a relatively undeveloped state, including scenery, topography, water features, vegetation and wildlife."

Newsome, Moore & Dowling [17] include under nature tourism: adventure, nature-based, wildlife, and ecotourism. McKerchner [19] expands the scope of nature tourism including: adventure tourism, ecotourism, alternative tourism, educational tourism, anti-tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism and many other forms of outdoor-oriented, non-mass tourism. These two views of what nature tourism includes and overlaps, agree, but also contradict themselves. To better understand, and conclude, what nature tourism is we must understand the three relations that can occur between the natural setting and the visitor which are: in, about and for the environment [17]. So any tourism based in a natural setting and experienced in, about or for the environment will be considered 'nature tourism'.

By this precise explanation, Asto-Tourism can be categorized in nature tourism. It can be classified in adventure tourism, educational tourism and sustainable tourism. One of the good and valuable aspects of this kind of tourism is that sky never needs to fix and develop. It is always available and has its unique features. The more the people become educated, the more they enjoy the beauties of the sky. So, sky whether in night or in day can be considered among the sustainable tourism.

III. METHODS

The methodology used in this study was descriptive research. Descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer questions concerning the current status of the subjects of the study. It determines and reports the way things are.

The respondents of this study were five licensed tour guides who were listed in the DOT Cebu Directory of Filipino Tour Guides as well as one of the meditators who was in touch with lots of tourists and was very interested in night sky and introduced by the President of the Philippine Federation of Professional Tour Guide.

The Department of Tourism is the primary government agency with the responsibility to encourage, promote, and develop tourism as a major socio-economic activity. Different segments in this department delve into developing tourists' destinations and doing research in marketing area. It is in this function that DOT Cebu through its directory is deemed to be the right agency to have the complete listings of licensed and experienced tour guides.

This study employed semi-structural interview as the main research instrument. The questions were asked based on the interview guide made by the researcher. The respondents were asked about their experience about astro-tourism interests among tourists and the final discussion were about the potential of astronomical tourism in Cebu and the destinations they thought can be enhanced and promoted for astro-tourism.

By joining Cebu Amateur Astronomers Association, the researcher tried to gather reliable astronomical pictures of the potential destinations. This association introduced her natural photographers who were interested to take astronomical pictures and astrophotographers as well.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews and pictures, the following destinations are classified as potential destinations for astro-tourism:

1. Mactan Island

Mactan island is located at 350 metres from Cebu mainland in the Philippines. The island is part of Cebu Province and it is divided into Lapu-Lapu City and the Municipality of Cordova. The island is separated from Cebu by the Mactan Channel which is crossed by two bridges: the Marcelo Fernan Bridge and the Mactan-Mandaue Bridge.

Mactan Island is one of the favorite tourist destinations in the country not only because it is accessible through the Mactan-Cebu International Airport, the second busiest airport in the country, but also for its beautiful beaches and dive sites. Dubbed as the "Diving Mecca of the South," Mactan Island has more than a dozen beach resorts with complete diving facilities.

The sky is enormous and filled with mysterious and interesting things. Everyone can observe the various wonders of the sky with the aid of telescopes or with the unaided eye. Stargazing allows people to become well acquainted with the positions and sights of the night sky. We view the sky from the Earth, a moving platform that is always changing our specific view. The motion of the Earth around the Sun brings a changing night sky with the passing of the seasons. There are always many interesting features one can observe with the unaided eye.

Sun, moon and stars always make unique sceneries that attract people. These sceneries are created with other surrounding. The most beautiful scenes are those sunrises and sunsets that can be watched near sea or on top of the mountains. Sunrises and sunsets near the seas have their most reflection in the water and they make outstanding features of colors that can attract many natural photographers and tourists.

Sky gazing, literally is gazing at the sky for pleasure or with an astronomical interest. Amateur astronomy observations are generally accomplished with the naked eye.
or with basic optical aids. Simple naked-eye observations of the sky can reveal a great deal about the basics of astronomy and give a better understanding of the cosmos, while instruments, such as telescopes, are used to study deep space. Many different celestial objects can be viewed through sky gazing during both the night and day.

Based on the gathered data, Mactan Island beach resorts have this opportunity to offer astro-tourism events even in small scale. Even without providing professional instruments like telescopes or binoculars, they can announce their tourist to enjoy watching outstanding features of the sky. Star parties were very common in western countries and promoting these events can be outstanding even for ordinary people.

Fig. 2. Sunrise Scene in Mactan Island taken by Rebecca Obidos

2. Malapascua Island

Malapascua Island is a Filipino island situated in the Visayan Sea, located across a shallow strait from the northernmost tip of Cebu Island. Administratively, it is part of the insular barangay of Logon, Daambantayan Municipality, Cebu Province, the Philippines. Malapascua is a tiny island, only about 2.5 kilometers (1.6 mi) long and 1 kilometer (0.62 mi) wide, and has eight hamlets.

Nowadays the problem of light pollution has risen up. Light pollution was killing not only the night sky, but also one of the most beautiful scenes from our planet. Travelling to the islands like Malapascua can be one of the most attractive places for the tourists to experience the beauties of the sky and unique calm moments that they can find under sky and near sea.

Robert Go, regional governor of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and industry said; “Cebu still has plenty of areas which can be tourist magnets, if properly developed and if hotels were put up there. These could be found on Malapascua Island as well as the towns of Daambantayan, Boljoon and Badian.” (Valino, 2006). These ideas showed the potential of Malapascua Island in attracting tourists and the need for more investment in this area.

Fig. 1. Sunset in Malapascua Island taken by Daniel LeLievre

3. Camotes Island

Camotes Group of Islands is located off the coast of Danao City in mainland Cebu and is known as the “Lost Horizon in the South” because of its unspoiled beauty.

The island group is located east of Cebu Island, southwest of Leyte Island, and north of Bohol Island.

Camotes Island is a very unique destination for natural seeking tourists. Enhancing this area can be beneficial for local tourism and development of the place.

One of the spectacular scenes in this area make with sky. According to the interviews with tourist guides, this destination has clear night sky, beautiful sunset and sunrise as well as visible constellations. Because of the natural setting of the place, there is little light pollution and people can enjoy stargazing or relaxing during sunrises and sunsets. It has a unique environment for natural photographers who seek to integrate different aspects of natural setting together and create extraordinary pictures.

Fig. 3. Sunrise in Camotes Island taken by Sealdi Calo

4. Olango Wildlife Sanctuary

The Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary is a sanctuary for migratory birds and other marine species in the Olango Island Group located about five kilometers east of Mactan Island, Cebu. The group of islands consists of Olango Island and six other islets namely Sulpia, Gilutongan, Nalusuan, Caohagan, Pangan-an, and Camungi.

The OIWS receives visitors through two entrances. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources operated visitor center collected about US$ 1,000 in 1999 from about 2000 visitors. In addition, the OIWS is receiving visitors who tour the area through a locally organized and community-based ecotourism group called the Olango Birds and Seascape Tour. In 1999, 357 tourists visited the Wildlife Sanctuary through this means and paid US$ 8,500 to the Suba, Olango Ecotourism Cooperative. Of this amount, about US$ 2,760 stayed in the community for salaries and wages and US$ 1,480 accrued to Mactan Island based boats or tour organizers.

Other opportunities for tourism on Olango Island exist that focusing on them can promote the area and its revenue. Among these opportunities, astrotourism can be mentioned. According to this fact, this area is attractive for ecotourists.
and astrotourism can be classified in this group occupying some astronomical tours can be promote this area as well.

Fig. 4. Startrail in Olango Wildlife Sanctuary taken by Eman Yakis

5. Moalboal

The Municipality of Moalboal is located approximately 89.3 kilometers south of Cebu City and is bounded by the municipality of Alcantara in north, the Municipality of Badian in the south, the Municipality of Argao in the east and by the Tanon Strait in the west.

One of the characteristics of Moalboal that has mentioned in the official website of this city is its beautiful sunset. It mentioned; “Its beautiful sunset with its grandeur and magnificence is an attraction to many people.” This sentence shows the importance of these views to attract tourists. Based on the interviews, Moalboal has clear night sky, beautiful sunset and visible constellations.

Promoting astro-tourism can be beneficial to rural tourism. Staying in contact with natural environment makes a tourist to go for rural tourism (Burns, &Novelli, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand various types of tourists who have different motivations to participate in related activities.

First class accommodations accompanying the natural setting of the region will increase number of tourists. Enhancing and promoting the ways of advertising and investing as well as contacting the amateur and professional astronomers to provide essential information or conducting special events can add more quality to the tourism offering in the region.

Fig. 5. Sunset in Moalboal taken by Alex Ramil Aguel

6. Tops, Cebu City

Cebu City is located on the central eastern part of Cebu Province, an island at the center of the Visayas in Southern Philippines. As defined by the Bureau of Land Location Monument (BLLM) No. 1, Cebu Cadastral Survey, it is 10 degrees 17 minutes North Latitude and 123 degrees 54 minutes East Longitude. It is bounded by Mandaue City in the North and the City of Talisay in the South. On the East is Mactan Channel and on its West are the Municipality of Balamban and the City of Toledo.

Cebu City drew 403,326 international visitors in 2005, making the "Queen City of the South" the top provincial destination of foreign travelers. Data from the Department of Tourism (DOT) also showed that Cebu City attracted 1,813 overseas Filipinos and 712,938 domestic travelers last year. Being a big city and an important economic center and a tourism center as well, Cebu City has an extraordinary unique position.

Top of a mountain is an ideal place for stargazing, if there is less light pollution. Having a wide view can help astronomers to track the new moon or sunrise and sunset. In Cebu City, Tops is a tourist destination that tour guides recommend to the tourists. Stargazing is one of the most dazzling things to do on top of the mountain. Spending on top of the mountain has the other benefits also like enjoying the beautiful sight of the city, fresh air and nature.

Cebu City is a unique destination and has a potential to be promoted in all aspects of the tourism and developing new products and tour packages in this city. Not only it has a beauty of the nature but also it is going to become a modern city which attracts both natural seeking and mass tourists. Cebu City has the capacity to offer astro-tours as well because it has destinations like tops that is the first choice of tourists.

Fig. 6. Sky in Tops taken by the researcher

- Implication of the Study

Currently, tourism is very important. In 2005, tourism’s gross contribution to the Super Region’s economy was about US$ 1,420 million, representing almost 7.5% of output (GDRP). Based on the NSO Labor Force Survey of 2005, Department of Tourism estimates that 191,000 are employed in the Hotel and Restaurant sector in the Central Philippines. Making allowance for those employed in tourism services, facilities and attractions have been estimated to total tourism employment in the Super Region is about 350,000 jobs.

Tourism has the potential to make a significantly greater contribution to the economy by capitalizing on Region’s wealth of ecological and cultural attractions which include pristine and white sandy beaches, diverse marine life, volcanoes, forests, UNESCO heritage sites and astro-tourism.

. Program Title: Developing Astro-Tourism Product in Cebu, Philippines

. Program Description: Astro-Tourism Market in Cebu program includes the province of Cebu.
Cebu tourism has a wealth of ecological and cultural attractions, but there are some gaps and potentials that can be considered in tourism planning and destination development.

The purpose of the program is to establish the Cebu Province as a significant destination offering international access, seamless interconnectivity and world-class tourist facilities and products. This will be achieved through an investment program which addresses the current deficiencies in marketing, product development, environmental protection and enhancement and human resource development. One of the offering programs by this study is astro-tourism program.

The researcher will submit the results of the study to the Department of Tourism. The proposal and the recommendation on the rest of components will also be submitted to the following sections of DOT for further consideration and planning:

- Business and Investment for pursuing the investment of government and private sectors
- Tourism Strategy for product development
- Tourism Marketing for promoting this product and market in their campaigns

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that Cebu has the potential to be enhanced as a destination for astronomical observation and tours mission. Cebu is one of the popular destinations of the Philippines that annually attract many tourists for its natural environment. Offering astro-tourism products can increase number of tourists in this area and promote it more.

REFERENCES


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