

Farm Tourism: Unleashing Iloilo's Potential through Sustainable Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Farm tourism in the Philippines is a subsector of the tourism sector of the Philippines needing development. With the tourism sector of the Philippines consistently growing in decades, generating employment and income, farm tourism is a potential tourist destination for consideration. This study unearthed readiness of potential farm tourism sites in the Iloilo Province, Philippines and their sustainable practices. Of the thirty-three (33) potential farms studied, four (4) farms have established their sustainable practices. Inefficient operation caused by scarcity of financial resources of which assistance from both the government and non-government sectors could significantly help farmers achieve optimal operations.

Keywords

farm tourism, tourist destination, tourism sector

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Introduction

The tourism sector of the Philippines has been observe as job generator sector of the economy and has grown into one of the world's fastest growing industries. In recent years, this sector generates employment and income with an estimated value of 5.3 million in 2017, higher by 09 percent compared to 5.2 million in the previous year (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2918). Furthermore, the country's Tourism Direct Gross Value Added (TDGVA) reached to a significant P1, 929.3 billion, with inbound tourism expenditure growing at 43.9 percent in 2017, amounting to P448.6 billion, from P311.7 billion in 2016. The sector's share to total country's total export was 9.2percent.

Receiving much attention recently is farm tourism or sometimes called agri- tourism, and considered an emerging 'sunshine' industry in the country. Tourists and visitors are given the opportunity to reside and sometimes participate in farms works and in ranches (Smith and Long, 2000). Such opportunity opens a new gateway to provide income generating activity for farmers and leisure-holiday events for tourists especially that the Philippines is an agricultural economy (Gabor, 2016). The country is designing a tourism development plan, where every town of the country establishes at least one farm tourism site. . The idea sounded very feasibly appealing especially that this alternative tourism activity provides equally attractive comforts, complementing the sand and beach activities. Western Visayas, groomed as the farm capital of

the south, is one of the regions of the country that advocates farm tourism. Farm tourism attracts visitors to farm areas, for educational and recreational purposes that encourage economic activity.

Farm-based tourism is no longer a new idea in Norway and in other Western countries. Most people from the cities consider trips to the countryside for recreation during holidays. There are approximately 10 percent of all working farms in Norway that are into in farm tourism (Forbord and Straete, 2008). According to Haugen and Vik (2008), while farm accommodation has a long tradition, the most recent activities are serving meals and providing adventure activities, reflecting a stronger focus on culture and experiences. Recio, et al (2014), in an article of Fernandez reiterated that the agri-tourism industry is taking shape in the Philippines. The state colleges and universities (SCUs) across the country are taking the lead in developing this new field. It refers to working farms, ranches, winery, or any agriculture operation opened to the public for their enjoyment and for outdoor recreation activities, education, shopping, dining, or even lodging. It also assists to mitigate emigration from remote areas and generate profit by diversifying economy.

Sustainable development in agri-farm tourism is essential because it is closely link with natural environment attraction and historic and cultural heritage. Environmental planning approaches and carrying capacity analysis are important techniques for preventing environmental and sociocultural problems resulting from tourism. In

order to plan for tourism development that meets present and future expectations and accomplishes sustainability of the tourism sector, local authorities may need to understand major tourism trends internationally. In this study, the researcher agrees that farm tourism and agritourism is use interchangeably. However, for purpose of consistency, farm tourism is use in order to assess the readiness of potential farms in Iloilo and to find out which farms are sustainable. In this paper, the term farm tourism is used to denote all kinds of farm-based activities offered to visitors. The study aims to describe the potential farm sites in Iloilo and assess the readiness of selected farms to sustainable tourism.

Methodology

Tsaur, et al (2016), employed an evaluation procedure by a collated series of indicators and conducted in-depth interviews with scholars and leisure farm managers. The modified Delphi technique was adopted to refine and identify the final indicators for the sustainable operation of leisure farms. In order to assess the level of domestic participation in farm-based tourism, and to identify the consumers and potential visitors to agritourism operations, Blekesaune, et al (2008), use data from ten national surveys Norsk Monitor, carried out by the Synovate Norway. The total sample surveys are weighted by population weights developed by Synovate Norway. Budiasa, et al (2014), collected the primary and secondary data by conducting in-depth interview with 11 key informants. The data are agro-tourism environment, history of agrotourism development, requirement of agro-tourism development, benefit, and barriers of agro-tourism development.

From March 2017 to November 2018, the author participated in an assessment of potential farms in Iloilo province. A random sample of potential farms are contacted and asked to accommodate the group during the assessment visit. Then, those who agree to participate receive the team for an ocular and interview. The total sample is thirty-three farm sites in the different districts of Iloilo.

Results

Iloilo is a diverse province steeped in history. It has been a melting pot of different cultures which have left their mark in the different towns. Stretching 4,663 square kilometer, Iloilo is composed of 42 municipalities and politically

subdivided into five (5) congressional districts. Topography varies from flat lands and rolling hills. Tourists visit farm sites in Iloilo for a variety of reason. In this study, it was found out that Damires Hills Tierra Verde rank highest (3.35%) with very good rating among the potential farms assessed. Located in Barangay Damires in the municipality of Janiuay, Damires Hills Tierra Verde is a paradise filled 45-hectare land area filled with great abundance of greens and breathtaking vegetation. Tourists can take photographs of the hillside view and celebrate important moments in a nature driven place. Known as the prime agri-tourism destination in Iloilo, its uniqueness, natural aesthetics, social and cultural value has a great tourists appeal.

The findings is in agreement with the Calgary Model of Competitiveness in Tourism by Ritchie and Crouch, which states that destination's appeal refers destination attractors and deterrents. The model identified attractors including eleven elements: natural features, climate, cultural and social characteristics, general infrastructure, basic services infrastructure, tourism superstructure, access and transportation facilities, attitudes towards tourists, cost/price levels, economic and social ties and uniqueness.

Transport selection, distance and travel time play an important role in tourist choice of a farm site. Orchard Valley Farm is located in Brgy. Tigum, Pavia. Operating since 1999 in a 22-hectare farm, it is the only certified organic farm in Iloilo, supplying vegetables, selected fruits, poultry and other organic products to the best restaurants and hotels in Iloilo. This study found out that among the potential farms in Iloilo, Orchard Valley was rated very good (3.80%) when it comes to accessibility. The organic farm, is 8.4 km via Iloilo east road from the City of Iloilo and can easily be reached by public or private transportation.

This conforms to a review paper by Sharin et al (2014) that transport plays an important role in tourists and provide a very meaningful travel experience for them. They further posited that the quality of the transportation experience is a key criterion in choosing destination. For long journey travel, tourist usually uses public transport such as planes, conventional, bus or private vehicles such as car. It was noted that the use of public transport

is convenient and provides satisfaction to the tourists.

Without attractions, there are no tourists visiting a destination. Tourism attractions exist because of tourists and the activities and products the site would offer. Garin farm is a unique and enchanting blend of leisure, spirituality, agriculture, and nature. It is a two-hour ride from the City of Iloilo to San Joaquin, which is the last town of the province of Iloilo. It offers tons of products and activities one can explore in the 14-hectare inland resort. A tourists can do water activities such as kayaking or boad padding, swimming, and zipline. If one wants serenity, climbing the 456 steps to the Divine Mercy cross is a challenge. On the top most part of the resort, one can view the beauty of nature and the different life size statues of the various biblical scenes. In this study, Garin Farm was rated excellent (4.0%) when it comes to the activities and products that attracts tourist visit.

Various authors asserted the importance of tourism products and activities in motivating tourist to visit them. Tourism destinations rely on their primary tourism products as mechanisms to pull and motivate tourists to visit them (Benur and Bramwell, 2015). In an assessment of the attractiveness of the destination tourists evaluate the perceived ability of the destination attributes to meet their needs (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981). It is generally believed that the attractiveness of a destination is enhanced the more attributes the destination has. In order to attract visitors, destination must develop facilities and services to enhance its attractiveness.

According to Lew (1987), attractions include all elements that draw tourists away from their homes and these include sightseeing, activities and experiences. Hu and Wall (2005) puts it, "tourist attractions are an essential ingredient for successful tourism destination development". Hu and Ritche (1993) believed that a tourism destination is a combination of destination attributes, mostly tourist facilities and services. The Agri-Aqua Research and Technology (ART) Center, a learning hub for farmers and fisherfolk pursuing agriculture and fisheries. Situated in a 12-hectare lot, the ART Center showcases best agri-aqua practices and technology that can help farmers and fisherman increase their production and profit. The findings of this study rated ART

Center excellent (4.0) when it comes to the variety of facilities and services they offer to tourists. They offer of varied services in terms of fisheries, production, livestock with demonstration and training.

Discussions and Conclusions

Like many other forms of development, the degrading effects of tourism have become a big concern that needs to be addressed quickly. The impact of tourism activities whatever is the motivation need to be sustainable. As emphasized by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), "The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment. This is achieved by balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination. Farm tourism has increased in popularity, there has been a steady increase of people visiting farm tourist enterprises. In 2007, nearly 7% of the representative sample of Norwegians above age 15 visited a farm tourist enterprise and this represents a doubling since 1991.

The Department of Tourism and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has forged a Memorandum of Agreement in order to make sure that ecotourism spots and threatened species living in the areas of interest in the region are well protected. This is supported by the statement of the Regional Director of the Department of Tourism-Region VI Atty. Helen C. Catalbas, "in order to make tourism more sustainable, we have to protect the environment".

The four (4) potential farms sustainable practices is also part of this investigation. Damires Hills Tierra Verde, is an inland resort offering nature-based activities such as canopy-walking, trekking, farm tour with fruit picking. Native food and local delicacies with vegetables fresh from the garden await tourists in their restaurant and bar. Orchard valley engages in vermicomposting, a process of producing organic compost from waste materials by utilizing different worm species. The organic compost produced is made as organic fertilizer for the different vegetable and fruit plants in the farm. All Orchard Valley vegetables and fruits products are guaranteed fresh and free from toxic pesticide and commercial fertilizer. The farm promotes pesticide-free farming to avoid contaminating

produce with chemical substances, and thereby ensuring freshness daily.

Garin Farm showcases Ilonggos creativity by making agriculture more productive in a sustainable way. A wide array of animals is raised in the farm such as ducks, rabbits, cows, pigs, doves, horses, sheep, and goats. The farm is practicing of zero waste management. A perfect example is their layered chicken farming where they harvest not only eggs, but also the manure which were used as fertilizer and as a fuel. The aim is to make the farm self-sustaining, having its own ecosystem, where nothing is wasted but properly utilized. Another interesting farm practice is their sample of backyard farming, done in limited space. In a structure a size of a garage, Garin Farm was able to demonstrate how one can grow their own vegetable garden while living in a highly-urbanized city. The plants were grown almost vertically, placed on materials you can find anywhere – used tires, wood, wires, and tin roof, etc.

The ART Center primarily promotes agri-aqua systems and organic farming techniques resilient to the effect of climate change. In terms of fisheries, the complex features an integrated freshwater aquaculture park and technology center where quality broodstock (tilapia, catfish, pangasius) and fingerlings are maintained and produced. It has a rice research demonstration farm showcasing different hybrid and inbred rice varieties. Palamayana, a model of diversified integrated rice-based farming system, can also be found inside the center. Such system employs practical, cost saving and yield enhancing management practices in growing rice and vegetables.

Limitations of the Study

This descriptive research provides some insights of the farm tourism industry of Iloilo City and the assessment as to its readiness to accept tourists in their farm site and their sustainable practices. Though the contextual information and some insights are valuable, obvious limitations of the study are evident.

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