

Good day to all of you present here at the Admiral Hotel, and good day also to all who are watching through various digital platforms. I am more than happy to be here right now, knowing how the tourism industry is a perfect fit for this forum on "Encompassing Sustainability, Future-Proofing the Economy." The two words "economy and "sustainability" are both closely tied to or associated with tourism, especially with Philippine tourism.



In terms of economy, the tourism industry has long proven its contributions to economic growth. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, in 2019, the Tourism industry has contributed 12.9% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Meanwhile, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the contribution of the tourism industry into our economy is pegged at 22.5%, calculating not just the direct impact of tourism, but also its indirect impact in various industries. These numbers emphasize the strategic importance of tourism.



No less than President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. recognizes the tourism industry to be a key pillar of economic recovery. And under the Marcos administration we have begun the work of ensuring that sustainable tourism lies at the very heart of the tourism transformation of the Philippines. As the lead coordinator for environment and climate change in the ASEAN national tourism organizations the Department of Tourism continues to ensure that sustainability is at the forefront of tourism development



By end of 2022, tourism showed to be a strong pillar in the economic recovery of the Philippines by posting an estimated of over 214 billion pesos or almost 4 Billion US dollars in terms of revenues for our country. Considering the revenues from domestic trips, the tourism industry have generated an estimated total of PHP 1.784 trillion in tourism receipts in 2022.

The amount was from the 2.65 million international recorded international arrivals which exceeded our target of 1.7 million for 2022, generating jobs an estimated 5.2 million jobs.



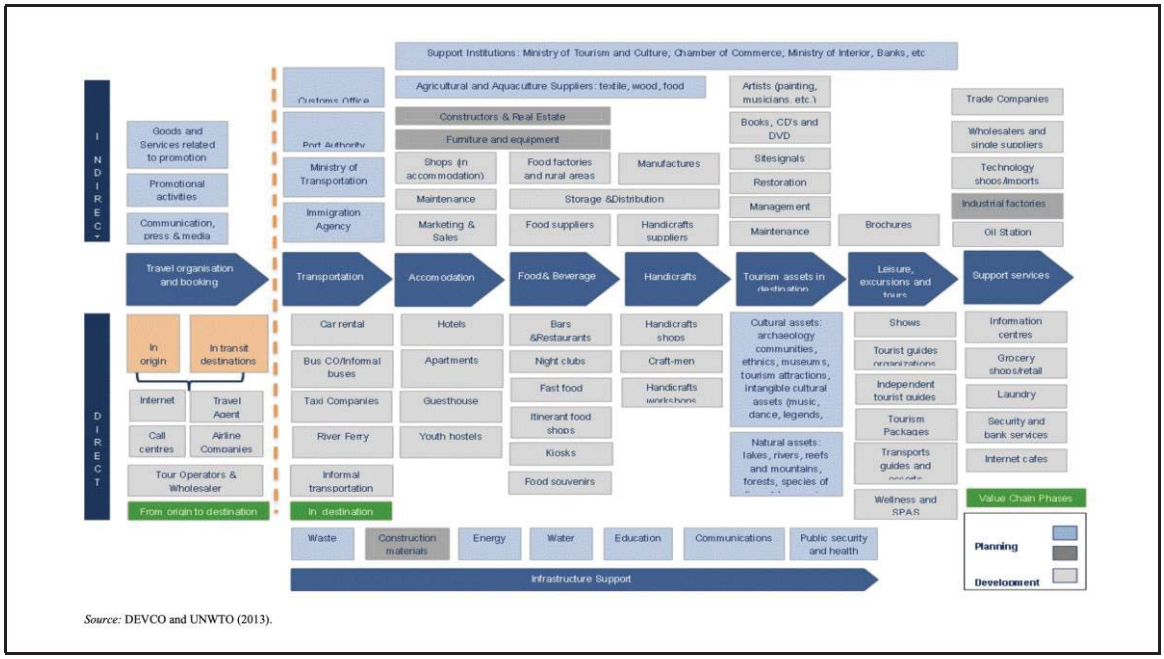
This early in 2023, we already recorded more than 2 million international arrivals. With 4.8 million international visitors as our target for 2023, which is nearly triple of our 2022 target, we can expect revenues to rise also.



From January to April 2023, we have already generated roughly 168.5 billion pesos in visitor receipts.



Such is the importance of the tourism value chain. The power of tourism to help the lives of the people is enormous. No other industry helps the people succeed as tourism. The tourism value chain affects many sectors in our economy. The power of tourism is such that it helps the lives not only of those that are in the tourism sector formally, but also those that indirectly benefit from tourism. All of those elements involved in the tourism value chain face the grave risk of economic loss and loss of life, should we not prioritize ensuring sustainable tourism.



Source: DEVCO and UNWTO (2013).

TOURISM VALUE CHAIN



The sector has tremendous social impact on local communities and the lives and livelihoods of people touched by Travel & Tourism. Through the revenues and jobs that it provides, Travel & Tourism helps reduce poverty and improve health, housing, education, and overall well-being. It supports diversity and inclusion, employing and offering opportunities to people from all walks of life, including minorities, youth, and women. Travel & Tourism has a unique ability to further protect and engage vulnerable groups and communities, while fostering innovation and preserving local heritage and culture.



While it's true that tourism statistics measures our contribution for the Philippine economy, we consider it important to pursue a perfect balance between pushing for economic opportunities and doing our social responsibility of taking good care of the resources bestowed on us. That is a unique mandate in tourism—to sell the destination and to preserve the destination.

Therefore, sustainability is on top of the DOT's vision. It is a priority: to ensure that the beauty of our country remains, even as people continue to enjoy a unique Philippine travel experience.



By proving its resiliency, the Philippine tourism industry has displayed it is valuable to the Philippine economy. As for the matter of "sustainability," this is a major core of the direction that the Department of Tourism is pushing towards.



President Marcos recently just approved our National Tourism Development Plan or NTDP 2023-2028 which is our blueprint for strategies to achieve the President's and DOT's goal of making the Philippines the next tourism powerhouse in Asia.

The National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2028 (NTDP) envisions a Philippine tourism industry that is anchored on Filipino culture, heritage, and identity, which aims to be sustainable, resilient, and competitive in order to transform the Philippines into a tourism powerhouse in Asia.

As the guidebook for Philippine Tourism and the window whereby we can see the future that the tourism industry is heading, the NTDP is the main manual on how the DOT intends to continue to grow the impact of tourism on our economy. We drafted the National Tourism Development Plan with foresight by placing

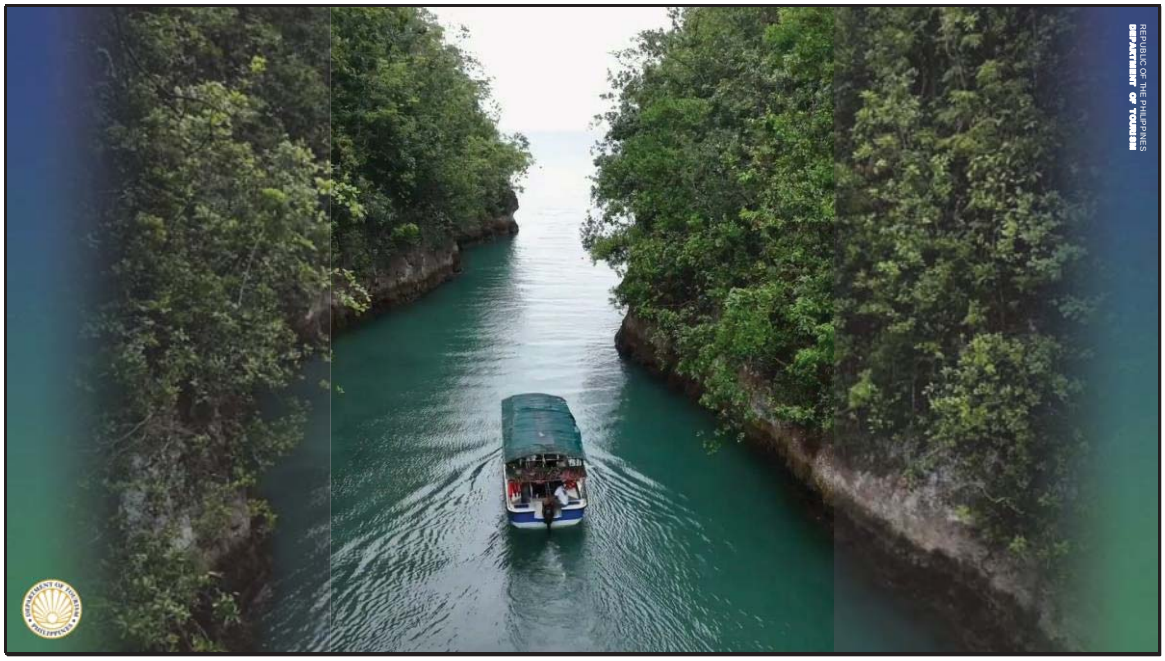
mechanisms of sustainability. Even as we recognize the important role that tourism has played and will continue to play in our drive to make the Philippine economy even stronger, we have to admit the possible downside to the environment if our tourism destinations are not managed well.



The DOT has been in the frontlines of economic recovery after the pandemic, and we will also be a cornerstone of environmental preservation.

Sustainability is in our 7-point agenda. In our objective to Enhance the Overall Tourist Experience for example, we see a future where our industry meets and exceeds international standards of service and leaves a lasting positive mark of the Philippine experience. In line with this goal the DOT will expand and strengthen the accreditation system and incentivize sustainability practices. Another part of our 7-point agenda is the Diversification of the Tourism Portfolio through Multidimensional Tourism. In this we see the Philippines as a destination for a variety of experiences that are defined as truly Filipino. This requires a commitment to manage our tourism sites sustainably, to promote local cultural identities, to build the needed facilities, and to encourage our visitors to

experience the diversity of our country. Under this, the DOT shall develop and improve products that deepen the Philippine cultural experience, developing frameworks involving indigenous peoples and cultural communities, and integrating experiences for built, tangible and intangible cultural heritage.



Sustainability in tourism is one way of, as this forum puts it, “future-proofing the economy,” as well as protecting the environment and livelihoods in the communities.

We have a success story in my own home province in the island of Cebu which we intend to replicate across the country wherever applicable. In the midwestern town of Aloguinsan, Cebu, the Bojo River Cruise is run by farmers and fisherfolks who successfully sustained their operation for over 13 years now. The Bojo River Cruise is a model for sustainability in tourism, and proof of how tourism can be both transformative and regenerative. This was founded in 2009 and is a partnership between the Municipal Government and a community-based organization, and has earned the award as one of the Best Tourism Villages from the 24th United Nations World Tourism Organization. Fishermen in the area are now tour guides effectively monitoring their carrying capacity, as

tourism has prodded them to preserve nature to sustain their tourism. With their sustainability and protection efforts, they showed that a good tourism governance can make a community self-sustaining because this succeeded in giving a continuous income. They stopped hunting wildlife, polluting the river, and cutting mangroves, and have adapted a way of life that is sustainable yet marketable to tourists.



As I always say, when sustainability is adopted as a way of life, it can lead to tourism that is transformative and regenerative.



As part of the Department's commitment to sustainability, we also partnered with the International School for Sustainable Tourism in hosting the first-ever International Ecotourism Travel Mart (IETM) 2023 last March which gathers hundreds of the world's national and regional ecotourism associations and networks, destinations, indigenous peoples, global operators, professionals, and academicians from over 20 countries with the purpose of providing advocacy, thought leadership, and encouraging innovation in ecotourism.



The DOT recognizes that ecotourism is one of the best tools for mainstreaming biodiversity conservation, the efforts for which are now more acceptable to local communities because it gives them a chance to benefit economically while conserving the environment.

This is why Ecotourism is an important component of our tourism industry, as it is a form of sustainable tourism that focuses on conserving the natural environment, preserving culture, and promoting sustainable community development. It helps in generating revenues for families by providing business and employment opportunities, and promotes environmental conservation. The National Tourism Development Plan recognizes the potential of ecotourism to contribute to the development of the tourism industry while preserving the country's natural resources.



The DOT is also leading the crafting of the National Sustainable Tourism Council, which it will chair along with the DENR and the DILG. The integrated council will be tasked to enhance the state's capacity to enforce and monitor the implementation of programs, activities, and projects in the tourism destinations.



We are also poised to formulate the National Ecotourism Strategic Action Plan (NESAP) for 2023-2028. The ecotourism action plan will be a six-year blueprint of sustainable ecotourism development, and will be a product of concerted efforts among stakeholders of ecotourism. The NESAP 2023-2028 vision is anchored on the development agenda of the DOT and DENR. This will harmonize the priorities contained in the Philippine Development Plan, the DOT 7-point agenda focusing on "Connectivity, Convenience, and (E)Quality" and the 10-point agenda of DENR prioritizing "Protection, Repair, and Conservation of Nature."



One of the steps we are doing in the Department as we acknowledge the importance of sustainable tourism and to ensure that what was started in Boracay will be implemented, we are strongly lobbying for the reconstitution of the Boracay inter-Agency Task Force.



Further, we will be launching the ANAHAW Philippine Sustainable Tourism Certification, which is a national green certification scheme primarily for accommodation establishments in the country. We are also launching this year the Philippine Tourism Awards, which aims to recognize tourism-related establishments and individuals whose commitment have creatively projected the Philippine culture and the Filipino brand.



There is so much more to expect and so many exciting prospects in the Philippines as far as sustainable ecotourism is concerned. As we work for the Philippines to become the next tourism powerhouse of Asia for the sake of our economy, we at the DOT will ensure that this will be in the context of being a sustainable tourism powerhouse.

For a wholistic perspective of "sustainability", please allow me also to point out that when we say sustainability, it does not just mean ecologically or avoiding the depletion or damage to our natural resources. It also means our ability to maintain our growth economically. This is why the DOT's goal is not only to go back to our pre-pandemic levels. We want to bounce back better by surpassing it. And so we have introduced several programs especially that in the battle for economic upliftment and sustainable economic growth, the DOT is in the frontlines.



NAIA T2

We also have programs and projects aimed to improve the Philippine experience of tourists from the time the arrive at the airport, at their accommodation establishments, the dining places, and until they go back to their home countries. We are improving the international airports.



TOURIST REST AREA

Our administration also focuses on the tiny details that are usually neglected in our tourism industry and topping out list is the lack of clean restrooms. We are addressing this through our Tourist Rest Areas, 10 of which we have broken grounds last year across the Philippines. Not only that, our TRAs will also include pasalubong centers and information booths for our travelers.



TOPCOPS

Safety is also a pillar in tourism so we have tapped the Department of National Defense and the Department of the Interior and Local Government to ensure that our destinations are safe for tourists, even as we implement our TopCops program to train policemen, barangay tanods and other force multipliers on safety issues. As of May 19, we have already trained 7, 133 TopCops across the country.



PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE

To sustain visitors' interest in our country, we are not just focusing on promotion but also on product development so we have the Tourism Circuits where lesser known places are grouped together with popular destinations so that no place will be left behind in our tourism bandwagon. We have also the Philippine Experience which is a caravan wherein we highlight other aspects of the Philippines like local festivals, heritage structures and places, gastronomic delights, and others. Next month, we will start launching the Philippine Experience in Region 11 in Davao.



TOURISM CHAMPIONS CHALLENGE

Still on inclusivity, we have the Tourism Champions Challenge whereby all local government units in the country have the equal chance to draft and present a proposal for tourism programs and projects which will be funded by the DOT, with about P180 million available funds for this.



The Department of Tourism has been re-introducing the Philippines to the world. Last March, I led the biggest-ever Philippine delegation to the biggest travel and trade fair, the ITB Berlin in Germany, together with the Tourism Promotions Board, we highlighted our key destinations, as well as the award-winning destinations of the Philippines, and also to include opportunities for our indigenous peoples and tribes to highlight their talents and their products. I'm very pleased to inform you that the result of that effort was an impressive estimated no less than 251 million worth of negotiated sales from more than 270 business meetings during the three-day networking event. The DOT and the TPB has been to a total of 23 trade fairs and events in just 10 months and from ***the 315 million pesos invested by the government on our participation in international travel and trade fairs, the tourism industry through the DOT, TPB and private sector partners have yielded 3.33 Billion pesos in estimated sales lead generated***



The DOT is thoroughly examining various perspectives and exploring all possible avenues for intervention, both locally and internationally, with the aim of enhancing sustainability in our country's tourism activities and establishing our prominence in the global tourism landscape. We are fueled by President Ferdinand Marcos' visionary outlook, as our aspiration is to become Asia's foremost sustainable tourism destination. Every endeavor we undertake is a deliberate stride in that direction. With unwavering determination, the guidance of President Marcos, the inspiring spirit of the Filipino people who deserve nothing short of excellence, and the dedicated efforts of our tourism workforce, we are steadily advancing towards this sustainable future.



Thank you and maraming salamat po.