

WOW PHILIPPINES

RP Booth Attracts Many at Travel and Adventure Show

By JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

LOS ANGELES—The Philippine booth was the center of attraction during the Los Angeles Times Travel and Adventure show Valentine day weekend.

The booth located in the center of the convention center displayed the Philippines high, had message therapists and a large wall size picture of the reef in Palawan, a place that is becoming one of the top diving spots in the world.

The Philippines booth was one of the more than 550 exhibitors set up at the convention center. Despite the economic malaise, more than 20,000 travel aficionados gathered to plan adventures, get expert advice and receive discounts on destinations around the globe.

And the Philippines booth showed off what it could offer to potential visitors.

"This booth focused on the adventure tours in the Philippines," said Manny Ilaga, deputy director of the Philippine Department

Philippines grew by 1.5 percent or nearly 3.2 million in 2008.

Ilaga said the Philippines are not affected by the global recession.

"We are not affected by the economic recession that's why I said tourism opportunities still exists during this time," said Ilaga. "This [recession] is a global thing [but] the country is not affected because we have a strong and robust economy and we're okay."

DOT Administrative Assistant Michelle Vy said that the Philippines low cost of living and island lifestyle is great for foreign travelers especially in this weak economy.

"That's another thing that many people don't realize," said Vy. "It's one of the cheapest places they can go because the currency is quite low. The ticket is probably the heaviest thing that you have to pay for but once you get there the living and other expenses are going to be really, really cheap so you'll have a good time without having to spend too much money."

Creating Awareness

During the weekend, Vy greeted potential tourists visiting the Philippine booth.

She noticed that the potential visitors always had one question for her—what is there to do in the Philippines?

"I have to tell them what's there," she said. "Most of the people (who visited the booth) don't know much about the Philippines so we have to create awareness. We have to tell them that we offer some of what the other

Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand all have. We have the nice beaches, surfing, wake boarding, and eco tourism."

But those who do know what the Philippines offer, say it's a gem of an island in the Pacific Ocean.

Professional scuba diver Szilvia Gogh just recently visited the Philippines on a diving trip last November. She said that the Philippines is "hot right now because the value of the money."

"The people there are so hospitable, so nice, and the food is amazing," said Gogh, who works as a scuba instructor at Aqua Adventures Unlimited in Burbank. "And the diving, you can't beat it."

"The water is amazing—clear, warm and you could dive without a wet suit," added Fil-Am Eo Ong, who accompanied Gogh at the diving trip



of Tourism in Los Angeles. "We have a big booth that although we are in this kind of economic environment in the US, we believe that tourism opportunities still exists. I think by having a big booth and good exposure we can get more tourists."

With the economy struggling, the multi-billion dollar tourism industry has dropped since many people especially Americans are holding on to their wallets and being more selective about where they vacation.

Popular tourist spots like Fiji, Singapore and Las Vegas have seen the number of visitors drop the past year.

But the Philippines has actually seen the number of international visitors traveling to the island increase.

According to the Philippine Department of Tourism, the international visitor arrivals to the



in the Philippines. "Seeing all the microorganisms and the fish was so amazing."

John Golicz, CEO of Unicomm, co-producer of the event and organizer of Adventures in Travel Expos across the country, has noticed that many Americans are now placing the Philippines as one of the tourist spots to visit.

He said that in another travel and adventure show in Chicago, the Philippine booth was

jammed pack with potential visitors, all wanting to know what the Philippines offered as a travel destination.

"I could hear excited people coming out of the booth saying, 'I'd never thought I would ever visit the Philippines,'" said Golicz. "But these people figure out, it's a great value, the nature part of the Philippines is incredible, and it's becoming an option." □

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