

# RP tourism explores new frontiers

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Inquirer.net



Ace Durano

NOT everything in the Philippines is adversely affected by the global financial crisis, which is strangling the economies of the United States and some countries in Europe and Asia.

In fact, some sectors in the Philippines are looking up, such as the business process outsourcing and tourism industries.

These vibrant sectors, coupled with remittances from Filipinos overseas, are expected to drive the growth in the country's gross domestic product this year by between 3.1 percent and 4.1 percent.

Realizing that a lot of the country's fortunes is riding on the tourism sector this year, the Department of Tourism under Secretary Joseph H. Durano is laying out grand plans to get the sector moving at full throttle.

In an e-mail interview with the *Inquirer*, Durano shares some of the ways by which the department plans to head off a slowdown in the sector, given that traditional sources of tourists like Korea and Japan are weighed down significantly by the crisis.

1. Given the economic turmoil affecting our traditional sources of visitors, what is the department doing to keep those tourist arrival numbers growing?

Our projection for 2009 is 3 to 3.1 million foreign tourists and 8 to 8.5 Filipino/Philippine resident tourists or a total of about 11 million tourist volume this year; a 9-percent increase compared to last year's figure. This is the primary reason why various destinations and tourism-related businesses in the country continue to expand to meet this growth despite the global economic downturn.

In terms of the department's international programs, we have maintained our pre-global economic crisis level of engagement in the United States, Japan, Korea, United Kingdom, Germany and some Asean markets.

Regarding international demand, the first two months of 2009 registered a 20-percent increase for the Middle East. Hong Kong recorded a 14-percent increase, Vietnam grew by 19 percent and France by 11 percent,

among others. Programs in these growth markets are being intensified.

2. What about the prospects for domestic travel?

Aside from growth opportunities in the global market, demand from the home market is also growing rapidly. In the past four years, we have been partnering with industry stakeholders and other private sector entities to encourage travel around the country by Filipinos and Philippine residents.

Together with our major travel industry association partners, we hold three major travel fairs in the country where a wide range of travel packages featuring various destinations in the country are promoted and sold. These are the Philippine Travel and Tour Expo in February, Philippine International Travel Fair in June and the Philippine Travel Mart in September.

Every summer, the Department with the Philippine Tour Operators Association, airlines and other transport groups and participating hotels and resorts introduce the Island Getaway Promo.

With a strong presence and robust performance in key global markets coupled with a vibrant domestic travel market, the continuous growth of the tourism sector is on very solid foundation.

3. What are the major constraints that need to be addressed to further increase those arrival numbers?

The constraints are physical tourism-related infrastructure, environmental consciousness and practices of host LGUs and communities. With growth in demand for our destinations, there is a need to expand physical infrastructure in and around these destinations to accommodate the demand and ensure the sustainability of these destinations.

The required physical infrastructure include upgraded airports and air services, road networks, hotels and resorts, and environmental protection and conservation infrastructure, like water treatment facilities, sewerage, drainage and water distribution systems.

The other constraint, however, is social in nature. Our challenge in more developed destinations, such as Boracay and Baguio, is to adjust the rate of growth to a sustainable level. These require engaging and equipping the LGUs, enabling them to formulate and enforce regulations that will place greater emphasis on environmental conservation, protection and restoration.

These more developed destinations can learn from the best practices of Bohol and Puerto Princesa, Palawan where the well-being of rural communities

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