

FOR 1ST QUARTER OF 2009

Cebu now RP's top tourist destination

by NESTOR P. BURGOS JR.
Inquirer.net



The Magellan's Cross
Photo from wikipilipinas.com

ILOILO CITY, Iloilo—Cebu has become the country's top tourist destination based on tourist arrivals, according to the Department of Tourism.

The province led 14 other key tourist destinations in the country, including the world-famous Boracay Island in tourist arrivals from January to March.

Data from the DOT on tourist arrivals for the first quarter showed that 422,239 tourists went to Cebu, nearly 3 percent higher than the 410,597 tourists who went to the province during the same period last year.

Boracay was second with 158,030 arrivals, followed by Davao City (156,468), Camarines Sur (140,220), Zambales (88,718), and Bohol (71,876).

The increase reflected the growth in over-all tourist arrivals in the country during the period, reaching 10.33 percent or a total of 1.3 million from last year's 1.1 million, the DOT said.

Cebu was also the most frequently visited destination by foreign tourists with 184,790 arrivals, or drawing nearly half of the 383,608 foreign tourists who visited the country. It was followed by Boracay (63,903), Zambales (25,252), Camarines Sur (24,976), and Bohol (24,350).

Overall, the volume of domestic tourists visiting key destinations grew faster at 13 percent while, foreign arrivals recorded a 4-percent increase in the first quarter.

Eduardo Jarque, tourism under-secretary for planning and promotions, credited the rise of tourist arrivals in the regions, especially Cebu, to more and more flights, and better infrastructure. ■

Tourism push 'all out' despite flu scare

DoT chief sees 11M tourists in '09

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA & VICENTE LABRO
Inquirer.net

MACTAN, CEBU—The Department of Tourism has no intention of going slow in encouraging foreign tourists—even from countries where the potentially deadly A(H1N1) flu virus has broken out—to come to the Philippines.

"It's still all-out," Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano told reporters, referring to the government's tourism campaign.

Durano said he was supporting the government's approach of vigilantly monitoring inbound passengers and providing stringent health management to those who might be suffering from the virus.

He said the department has been sending advisories to travel agencies around the world so they could inform their clients that the Philippines remained free from the A(H1N1) virus.

He said this fact—coupled with the country's "political stability" and strong private sector investment—was helping keep the tourism industry strong.

Durano said the government was expecting at least 11 million tourists this year. Of the number, at least three million were projected to be foreign, he said.

In a separate interview in Basey town, Samar province on Monday, Durano said he was confident that the tourism would continue to grow in 2009.

The DoT earlier reported that 1.3 million tourists came to the Philippines from January to March this year, which was 10.33 percent higher than the 1.1

million visitors who came to the country during the same period in 2008.

"If we started at 10 percent [growth], that would be the basis in forecasting that the entire year will be a very good one," he said.

Tourist arrivals start slow at the start of the year but picks up later in the year as cols weather sets in other countries, Durano said.

About 60 percent of the country's foreign tourists come from countries in north Asia such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, he said.

European tourists make up about 10 percent of arrivals and another 10 percent come from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. The rest are Americans and tourists from other countries.

He said that Chinese, Russian, and French tourists comprised the "fastest growing" sector among visitors to the country.

In an interview Monday, May 11, on a board a river boat making its maiden cruise on the Golden River of Basey, Durano told reporters that the DoT has been pushing for ecotourism, which helps attract more foreign tourists to visit the country.

He said the country's tourism industry had once lost the French, Hong Kong and Singapore markets, but with the promotion of ecotourism, tourists from these countries have started coming to the Philippines.

"It's because many of them, especially those in the younger generation, are looking for nature-based, adventure-type of travel," he said. ■

6 more storms to hit RP until July—PAGASA

by NIKKO DIZON
Inquirer.net

SIX more storms are expected to hit the country between now and July, an official of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration said last May 12, noting that the country has been experiencing "La Niña-like" weather conditions.

"We could have six more [storms] until July," Nathaniel Cruz, PAGASA assistant administrator, told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* by phone.

Cruz said that there have been "more than average" weather disturbances this year because of the La Niña-like condition, although there were four storms in May last year.

Since January, the country already has had five weather disturbances, with the last two—Dante and Emong—wreaking havoc in the Bicol region and Northern Luzon.

Cruz said that PAGASA might soon declare the termination of the dry season and officially announce the start of the rainy season.

He explained that typhoon Emong, which pummeled Pangasinan province, had "triggered and established" the entry of the southwest monsoon.

The prevailing windflow and the amount of rainfall are the two "ingredients" that mark the entry of the rainy season, according to Cruz.

The southwest monsoon brings in the rainy season.

Asked if the country has begun to experience shorter summers, Cruz replied in the affirmative, explaining that this was among the manifestations of the changes in the climate "that we should be prepared for."

"We've had years when the rainy season arrived early

so this would not be the first time. However, this year, as early as March we've already experienced strong rains in almost the entire country. This happened in March and April which are supposedly the driest months," Cruz said.

He added that in April, the rainfall was two to four times more than average.

In its 5pm weather bulletin last May 13, PAGASA said that the inter-tropical convergence zone would bring rains to the Visayas and Mindanao.

Visayas and Mindanao, as well as the Bicol region in Luzon, will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms.

"The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers or thunderstorms mostly in the afternoon or evening," PAGASA said. ■

Legarda: Climate change an imminent danger

CEBU CITY—The casualties and devastations caused by recent typhoons in Luzon showed that "climate change is an imminent and present danger," Sen. Loren Legarda said here last May 11.

"Climate change-induced disaster is not something that will happen in 50 years, but is a present and imminent danger now," Legarda said.

Speaking at the Climate Change Summit held at the Cebu International Convention Center in Mandaue City, Legarda pointed to the changes in climate trends.

"Ever wonder why summer ended so abruptly? April had not yet even been over when typhoons came to inflict havoc on several parts of the country, claim lives and destroy properties," she told

the summit participants. Legarda cited these as manifestations of climate change. "Now the average folk around the country already have an inkling that what used to be predictable weather patterns or cycles of crop cultivation and harvesting are changing very fast," she added.

Legarda also warned that the worst is yet to come since the country would be exposed not only to typhoons and tropical cyclones but also to many other climate-related hazards, especially floods, landslides, and droughts.

"Still, more impacts and challenges can likewise be expected in the area of agriculture and health," she added.

Legarda lauded the Visayas Regional Development organization for holding the summit as a way to enhance environmental

consciousness and awareness.

She cited the need for local governments to come up with a strategy to reverse climate change even as she recognized the proactive stance shown by the leaders from Eastern, Central, and Western Visayas to combat climate change and to cooperate in reducing and countering disaster risks arising from climate change.

"Although you are divided by waters within you, you are united by the cultural bond that you are all Visayans. I count that in times of distress, you can count on each other to give much-needed aid to the needy," she said during the welcome dinner tendered by Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia, Calbayog City Mayor Mel Senen Sarmiento and Antique Gov. Salvacion Perez. (Inquirer.net)

I Applaud...

...how I can stay updated with the latest 'chiamis' on my favorite Filipino stars on 'Showbiz News Ngayon.'

...the moment when someone wins on 'Pilipinas, Game KNB?.'

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