

Kayaking challenge at Hundred Islands

by AMADIS MA. GUERRERO
Inquirer.net

VIEWED again after two decades, there they were: The Hundred Islands, Pangasinan's top ecotourist attraction, an ecological wonder.



The rock formations ranged from minuscule to gigantic, with caves and beach coves, limestone cliffs, mangroves, trees, plants and wild vegetation; and sandbars in some cases. All are surrounded by clear, living waters.

There are actually more than a hundred islands in a vast area covering 1,844 hectares in the Lingayen Gulf.

An invitation from the Philippine Kayaking Association made it possible for this non-kayaker to experience once more the Hundred Islands National Park in Alaminos City. The event was the Philippine Kayaking Series 2009, specifically "Kayak Explore (Hundred Islands)."

The series includes the forthcoming "Kayak historic/Cavite-Corregidor-Bataan" during the second half of the year and the "Kayak Cebu-Bolo/Islands" in July.

The start of the kayaking competition was in Bolo Beach in Alaminos City, roughly a five-to-six-hour drive from Metro Manila.

Alternative destination

Officials are promoting the site as an alternative destination to the traditional entry point to the Hundred Islands that is Lucap Point Wharf, which has no beach, while Bolo boasts of a big, wide beach cove and a clutch of budget beach resorts.

These are satisfactory if you are not the demanding or fastidious kind of tourist. The cottages and picnic huts are native-style, made of bamboo and bamboo slats, and the rooms have electric fans. The toilets are common. And on weekends, especially Sundays, families flock to the area.

The police headquarters can be found at the Bolo Beach Resort.

The kayaking event was sponsored by a host of firms, including media partners like Inquirer.net, and supporting organizations like the Department of Tourism and Philippine Windsurfing Association.

There were 40 participants, or teams of two. They were mostly fishermen and boat operators, browned due to exposure to the sun, and with strong, sturdy arms.

But there were two adventurous women, and one lone paddler. The challenge ahead of them was a 25-kilometer circuitous marathon around the gulf and many of the islands. ■

Hatton trainer says Pacman was awesome

by ABAC CORDERO
Philstar.com

THE man who helped train Ricky Hatton against Manny Pacquiao has admitted that it was next to impossible to beat the Filipino champion on that night of May 2 in Las Vegas.

"Manny was awesome on fight night. His speed, timing, combination punching and footwork overall was excellent," said Lee Beard, Hatton's assistant trainer, two weeks after the fight.

Beard told boxingscene.com that Pacquiao has tremendously improved over the last 12 months.



Ricky Hatton and Manny Pacquiao

Photos courtesy of Philstar.com

During that period, Pacquiao fought four times in four different weight classes.

And he won them all, beating Juan Manuel Marquez at 130 lb, David Diaz at 135 lb, Oscar dela Hoya at 147 lb and Hatton at 140 lb. Only Marquez lasted the distance.

"Manny is at the top of his game right now - physically and mentally," Beard said, adding that even Floyd Mayweather Jr. might fall into the same predicament against Pacquiao.

While the Pacquiao-Mayweather fight may not take place soon, it's the fight people are talking about right now, a fight between two pound-for-pound champions.

"Do I think Manny could beat Floyd Jr.? I didn't think Manny would beat Ricky but he did. I would favor Floyd but Manny could win. Anything can happen in boxing," he said.

Beard said Pacquiao had relative ease against Hatton when Mayweather Jr. didn't.

"Nobody has done that to Ricky. What Manny did, even Floyd Jr. in the first five or six rounds had nightmares with Ricky and Ricky was fighting in the same way against Manny.

"But (Hatton) wasn't unable to get to him as he did with Floyd. Manny was dominant," said Beard.

So dominant that Hatton, previously undefeated at 140 lb, did not last two rounds. He was floored twice in the first round, and took a crushing blow late in the second to end the fight.

Pacquiao plans to return to the ring by the end of the year and should choose among Miguel Cotto, Shane Mosley, Marquez or Mayweather Jr. ■

Gov't invests more than P5-B in program to train 800,000 workers

WITH thousands of jobs already lost and major Filipino industries on the ropes as a result of the global financial crunch, the Arroyo administration has announced plans to allocate some P5.66 billion in a massive skills training and technical education program to help more than 800,000 workers find higher paying jobs and better employment opportunities this year.

Secretary Domingo Panganiban of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) on Sunday, May 17 said government has already commenced efforts to train some 809,800 unskilled Filipino workers for jobs as call center agents, welders, electricians, machine operators, massage therapists, mechanics and clerks through the "Pangulong Gloria Scholarships Program" of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

"The on-going program is undertaken by TESDA under the leadership of Secretary Augusto Syjuco, and is in line with the basic objectives of President (Gloria Macapagal) Arroyo's Economic Resiliency Plan and our poverty reduction policies," he said.

Panganiban said if government's plans push through, the budget allocation for the Pangulong Gloria Scholarships will be used to finance nine national programs.

He said some 400,000 Filipinos will benefit from TESDA's free assessment services while 282,000 more workers will be trained through TESDA regional and provincial offices.

"Another 45,000 beneficiaries will undergo instruction through the network of TESDA Technology Institutions," he added.

The NAPC chief said TESDA will train an additional 20,000 workers through its partner industry associations and sectoral groups; and 10,000 more Filipinos will be trained through the Ladderized Education Program.

"Beyond this, we aim to train 2,000 workers under TESDA's Balik-Buhay sa Mindanao Program even as we provide instruction to some 10,000 Filipinos under the 'Sa TESDA May Hanapbuhay Ka' Program this year," he said.

Panganiban said government expects to train another 20,800 workers through the National Technical Vocational Education and Training Program (TVET).

Meanwhile, around 20,000 students will be schooled and trained through the Language Skills Institute.

Interested applicants need only to proceed to the nearest TESDA office for any inquiries. (PNA)

RP travel industry needs to diversify, be creative - NGO

THE Philippine travel stakeholders should not curse the darkness that has fallen on the industry and has produced grim financial results, but should instead light a candle by coming up with bright business ideas.

Robert Lim Joseph, chairman emeritus of the National Association of Independent Travel Agencies Inc. (Naitas), said travel stakeholders should not indulge in hanging dirty linen in public in bitterness but should rather spend time wisely by developing new business plans.

"As they say, it's the tough that gets going when the going gets tough," Joseph said. "Adversities do not only pose a challenge but also an opportunity for those who know how."

He cited the cheap air fares being offered by local and international airlines, big and small, which have provoked weeping and gnashing of teeth in the industry due to lost commission fees.

"We in Naitas look at these things positively," Joseph said. "Bargain fares are an opportunity to develop non-traditional markets which can now afford to travel due to give-away fares."

Stressing that the business "is no longer as easy 40 years ago," he said travel agents should meet with air, sea and land transporta-

tion operators and with bar, mall, hotel, resort and restaurant owners to develop new tour packages that will tap the non-traditional market by combining the strength of each sector.

"We should combine cheap fares with discounted rates and low prices for special tour packages, especially during off season, directed at new customers like senior citizens, for example," Joseph said. "This way, we develop a sustainable market."

He said the key to survival in the travel business is diversification by coming up with new packages, like "Lolo and Lola Tours, Home Stay programs, Adventure Tourism, and Student Travel," for example.

This should be combined with upgrading and professionalization of the stakeholders, something Naitas is doing while business is slack, Joseph said. Among these are holding seminars on handling corporate accounts, creation of unique tour destinations, etc. so travel agencies can do inbound business. (Philstar.com)

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