

## Potential of San Fernando Province of Romblon as Ecotourism Destination

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### Abstract

Sibuyan Island, deemed as Galapagos of Asia, is rich in flora and fauna where some are endemic to the place. This opens the door of opportunity for the ecotourism industry. Thus, this study was conducted to determine the potential of San Fernando, Romblon on becoming an ecotourism destination. It also aims to identify different sites favorable for the industry and classify it as focal, complementary and support attraction. Guided by the enhanced Ecotourism Opportunity Spectrum (ECOS), the study focused on biological-physical, socio-cultural, historical-archeological, and economic structure. Questionnaires and interviews were utilized to gather relevant data. Results revealed that there were numerous sites in the area identified as focal and complementary attractions. Identified ecotourism sites have a thick forest and diverse wildlife. However, the municipality has limited dining places and recreational activities. Plant and animal production was low making supply not enough to cover the demand needed, while transportation infrastructure and healthcare services are limited. Despite those facts, the weighted mean of 3.86 for ecotourism potential and the ECOS point of 69 suggests that San Fernando Romblon has strong potential for the ecotourism industry. To increase its potential it is recommended that the Local Government Unit together with the Non-Governmental Organizations and other stakeholders should work hand in hand to improve the services and facilities of the ecotourism site, address the problem in supply of plant and animal products, and improve tourism infrastructure.

**Keywords:** ECOS, Ecotourism, Ecotourism Potential, San Fernando Sibuyan Romblon, Tourism

### 1. Introduction

Tourism is an industry known to be going into places for pleasure and for business. It is a generic term for activities of visitors either foreign or local. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as persons who have activities outside their usual residences and work area for not more than one consecutive year to trade, relax, and for other activities.

With the continuous growth of the industry, it contributed 7% to the world's goods and services exports amounting to 1.4 trillion US Dollars or an average of 4 billion US Dollars daily. It recorded a fast growth and diversification for the past years and been known as one of the key drivers for social and economic progress (UNWTO, 2017).

The industry can be considered as a sector divided into five different industry groups. These are accommodation, food and beverages, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services. It became diverse throughout the years and been classified into different forms such as adventure, birth, business, culinary, dark, disaster, doom, drug, ecotourism, genealogy, LGBT, medical, nautical, religious, sex, slum, space, sports, virtual, and wellness.

### **Tourism in the Philippines**

Tourism in the Philippines started as early beyond Hispanic colonization. Historical facts, evidences, and data shows that foreign visitors mostly from China, India, and other nearby country visit the Philippines to trade. It can be considered as the earliest form of tourism in the country.

Being an archipelago, Philippines has 7,107 island separated by ocean. Heritage and ecological sites spread within its islands offering unique experiences. With the country's main banner, "It's more fun in the Philippines!" Philippines rank 45<sup>th</sup> in the world tourism barometer with 5.9 million foreign visitors. The tourist arrival translated to a total of \$5.1 billion in 2017. (Arnaldo, 2017).

The countries charm to tourist is unquestionable. Tourist inflow increase positively every year which is associated as result of governments marketing effort international events, and social media presence. The growth of the industry paved way on it being the third growth engine within the service sector. It is the biggest contributor next to international remittances and BPO-IT sector. (Villegas, 2017)

In 2017, an increase of tourist arrival was observed to be at 19.60% on month of May compared to the same month of the previous year. It is the same month as well that tourist arrival is at its peak from 2012 to 2015 with a total arrival of more than 300,000 to 500,000 (Arnaldo, 2017).

### **The Ecotourism Industry**

From the diverse kind of tourism, ecotourism is one of the widely known type. It is a kind of tourism where you can experience nature at its best while having fun and relaxation without harming the environment. In Resolution No. 2001-01 of the National Economic Development Council (NEDC), ecotourism is defined as "a form of sustainable tourism within a natural and cultural heritage area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, cultural and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the enrichment of host communities and satisfaction of visitors". The term is a coined word for ecological tourism.

A double-digit gain was recorded since early 90's as concern towards environmental protection and conservation prosper. It is a result of growing concern on environmental impacts of tourism on environment. However, the advent of ecotourism happens only in 2002 when the United Nation declared the year as International Year of Ecotourism.

Ecotourism holds high potential across the globe. New players could always have a chunk out of the growing number of tourist. Tourist arrival is translated into huge economic benefits and become beneficial to every ecotourism destination. It is expected that the industry would continue to grow in years to come unlike mass tourism which is forecast to have a slowdown.

### **Ecotourism Potential**

Ecotourism profile change every time. It does not depend in a single spectrum but rather of multiple aspect. Thus determining potential is necessary. Potential of ecotourism can be will defined through a systematic inventory of its attractions. These attractions may be classified as focal attractions, complementary attractions, and support attractions. (de Silva, \_\_\_\_)

Focal attractions are the main reason why tourist visit a specific destination. Complementary attractions are those which entice the visitors to remain longer while support attractions are those artificial elements contributing to customer satisfaction.

To measure potential, Ecotourism Opportunity Spectrum (ECOS) can be used. ECOS was conceptualized by Boyd and Buttler in 1996 based on Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), Tourism Opportunity Spectrum (TOS), Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), and Visitors Management Process (VAMP) (Acikcoz et. al., 2010).

The ECOS is a conceptual management approach for ecotourism destination using eight (8) important factors. These factors include; (1) Acceptability, (2) Relationship between ecotourism and other resource uses, (3) Attractions in the Region, (4) Presence of tourism infrastructure, (5) Level of users skills and knowledge required, (6) Level of Social Interaction, (7) Degree of Acceptance of impacts and control over use, and (8) Type of management needed to ensure the viability of areas on a long term bases (Boyd and Buttler, 1996), (Acikcoz et. al, 2010), (Yaseera and Sharma, 2014).

## **The Municipality of San Fernando as Ecotourism Destination**

Out of the thousand islands of the Philippines, one which can be considered blessed with rich flora and fauna, and historical narratives is the Sibuyan Island in the Province of Romblon. Romblon is known globally because of its first class marble but within its islands lies a natural landscape and breath taking views.

Sibuyan Island is located 12.26° N 122.38° E / 12.433° N 122.550° E with a size of 455 km<sup>2</sup> / 171.8 sq. mi. enjoying its isolation from the rest of the world since its formation. Its highest elevation is 2,058 (6,752 ft.) above sea level. It is composed of three different municipalities one of which is the Municipality of San Fernando.

The richness of the Island according to the National Museum includes 1,551 trees in one hectare with 123 species, 54 of which are endemic. Thirty three percent (33%) of the island is considered as primary forest covering 140 km<sup>2</sup>. There were also 700 vascular plants including *Nepenthes Sibuyanensis*, 131 species of birds and 10 different species of fruit bats some of which are endemic and other species. These facts proves that the island has a dense forest and can be deemed as the Galapagos of Asia and center of endemism and biodiversity.

San Fernando Municipality, has the biggest land area. It houses numerous falls and river including the well-known Cantingas River and a white sand island called “Cresta de Gallo”. Ecotourism site in the municipality further includes mountain ranges, beach, coral reefs, historical sites, and others. The sites are characterized by natural stone formation and landscape. It has breathtaking view that can capture the heart of anyone.

The municipality offers various experiences and stories to tell. Its unique characteristics and untouched features make it stand out among other ecotourism destination. Thus this study was conducted to determine the potential of the Municipality of San Fernando in the Province of Romblon as ecotourism destination.

### **Objectives**

The study was conducted to determine the potential of the Municipality of San Fernando in the Province of Romblon in becoming an ecotourism destination. Specifically, it aims to cater the following:

1. Identify the different attractions in the Municipality of San Fernando; What
2. Classify identified tourism sites;
3. Determine the potential of San Fernando Romblon as ecotourism destination.

### **2. Materials and methods**

Descriptive method of research was used in this study. It refers to the collection of data to describe a certain situation or phenomenon to objectively enlighten and answer specific questions. Self-made questionnaire, interviews and ECOS matrix was used to gather relevant information for the study. Respondents of the study were classified into four types. Classification of respondents are as follows:

Type I - Local Residents: residing within the municipality

Type II - Local Tourist: Tourist who resides within the island or country

Type III - International Tourist : Tourist who resides outside the country

Type IV – Focal Persons – stakeholders who have knowledge about the ecotourism destination.

There were 378 individuals purposely selected from the 12 barangay comprising the municipality and 385 tourist serving as respondents of the study. Most number of respondents were female, 18 to 27 years of age, single and mostly students.

Survey forms were administered personally or sent via email and other messaging application. The survey was conducted June 2017 to January 2018.

The study has three different phases.

Phase I: Identification of focal, complementary, and support tourist attraction

Phase II: Identifying the factors associated with selecting tourist destination

Phase III: Identifying ecotourism potential

Responses for the instruments used in the study were statistically analyzed. Descriptive statistics was utilized such as frequency count, mean, percent, and rank. The descriptive statistics was used to determine focal,

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complementary, and support attractions. It was also used to understand why a certain ecotourism site was much preferred from others.

In addition Likert scale was used to determine the factors considered by tourist in selecting a destination and to identify the status of the ecotourism destinations as a whole. This will help the researcher understand whether the potential of the ecotourism destination can be improved or not. The following Likert scale was used for the study.

Rate	Verbal Description	Status of ecotourism for destination in San Fernando	Verbal Interpretation
	Importance of Factor for Tourist		For the potential to be an ecotourism destination
4.21	5.0 (VI) – Very Important	Best (B)	To a greater extent
3.41	4.20 – Important (I)	Good (G)	To a certain extent
2.61	3.40 – Neutral (N)	Neutral (N)	To a moderate extent
1.81	2.60 – Lesser Importance (LC)	Bad (BD)	To a lesser extent
1.00	1.80 – No importance at all (NI)	Worst (W)	To no extent at all

Finally, to determine how strong the potential of an ecotourism destination is, ECOS matrix was use. It use point system with 4 as the highest and 1 as the lowest. If none 0, will be given to the criteria. The following are the general point system for ECOS.

Point	General Descriptive	Interpretation
4	Density / Weight Very High	Distance Very Close
3	High	Close
2	Fair	Far
1	Low	Very Far

Those with less than 42 points are considered weak centers, 42 – 48 as average centers and above 48 points as strong centers for ecotourism.

### 3. Results, Discussions, and conclusions

#### *Attractions of San Fernando Romblon and Classification*

**Table 1.** List of the different known tourist attractions in the Municipality of San Fernando

Attractions	Number of Visitors	Rating	Verbal Description
Focal Attractions		<b>4.23</b>	
1. Cresta De Gallo (Azagra)	42%	4.85	B
2. Cantingas River Resort (Taclobo)	59%	4.74	B
3. Dagubdub Water Falls (España)	39%	4.28	G
4. Mount Guiting-Guiting	23%	4.03	G
5. Bila-Bila Falls (Canjalon)	38%	3.42	B
Complementary Attractions		<b>3.66</b>	
1. Lamao Lake (Azagra)	49%	3.74	G

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2. Azagra Light House (Azagra)	36%	3.89	G
3. Busay (Panangcalan)	36%	2.87	N
4. Olango River (España)	35%	4.07	G
5. Groto / Resurrection Hills (Taclobo)	24%	3.88	G
6. Lagting Falls (Taclobo)	22%	3.38	N
7. Kweba Falls (España)	19%	3.71	G
Support Attraction		<b>3.70</b>	
1. Accommodation		3.82	G
2. Transportation		3.73	G
3. Food		3.54	G
Other Identified Tourist Attractions			
1. Anahaw Falls (Otod)			
2. Busay (Cangumba)			
3. Libtong Ilong (Agtiwa)			
4. Lauras Beach			
5. Punta Kawit Light House (Azagra)			
6. Tigpuyo (Coral Reef / Campaligo)			
7. Buntanguigi (Fish Sanctuary/Poblacion)			
8. Resurrection Hills (Taclobo)			
9. Pknikan (Taclobo)			
10. Talisay Garden (España)			
11. Aguho Beach (España)			
12. Olango River/Tarzan (España)			
13. Giub / Dana (Mabini)			
14. Caza de San Fernando (Poblacion)			
15. Nuestra Senora De Candelaria Chapel			
General Rating		<b>3.86</b>	<b>TCE</b>

Table 1 shows the potential of San Fernando Romblon as ecotourism destination using attraction inventory. There were five (5) sites identified as focal attractions, seven (7) complementary attractions and three (3) major support attractions. From the numerous ecotourism destinations the place can offer, Cresta de Gallo rank first based on the rating given by the respondents. It was visited by 42% of the respondents or a total of 161 individuals and received 4.85%. On the second spot is Cantingas River, it has the highest number of visitors of 59% of tourist but it only receive a rating of 4.47. For complementary attractions, Lamao Lake was visited by 49% of the tourist and rated 3.74 or best destination. Next complementary attraction was

Azagra Light House visited by 36% of the tourists and received a rating of 3.89. It is also a best place to visit. Busay Falls located in Barangay Panangcalan rank third with rating of 2.87 and visited by 36% tourists. For support attraction, three factors where considered; accommodation, transportation, and food. In totality, the total average rating received by the Municipality of San Fernando as ecotourism destination is 3.86 which means that it can have a potential to a certain extent.

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ECOS Result

Table 2. ECOS Detailed Report

Component	Criteria	Score	Detailed Explanation
<b>Biological-Physical Structure</b>			
Topographical Structure / Diversity		3	Maintained The eco-sites were highly diverse characterized by untouched landscape and presence of wild life. This means that the area are well maintained and protected.
Scenic Beauty		4	Not Destroyed Tourist destination within the municipality has unique characteristics. Each has different experience to offer. Although there are some alteration to the natural landscape, it is intended for safety, enhancement, and accessibility.
Forest Covered		4	50% - 100% Covered Since the ecotourism site were well maintained, large portion has been covered by forest. However, there were some parts which are destroyed by human activity and natural calamity.
Wild Life Diversity		4	Very High San Fernando is rich in wild life with multiple sightings of different birds, butterfly, insects, and others in each tourist destination. Wildlife diversity was determined through accidental sightings of wild life per visit Average sightings per visit: Ave: ECOS Point Cantingas 5 4 Dabubdob 6 4 Bila-Bilas 7 4 Cresta 4 3
<b>Socio-Cultural Structure</b>			
Young Population Potential		4	Very High It was observed that young population has a high potential. Community engagement and participation was observe.
Human Resources		3	High Human resource for hospitality and tourism industry was available. However, it was noted that most of the hospitality industry and management related
Education Status		3	High Literacy rate within the municipality was very high. There was an elementary school in every barangay, and occasional TESDA trainings. However, there were only few individuals who pursue into higher education like master's degree and doctorate degree.
Consciousness for Ecotourism		4	High There were available educational institution in the municipality. There was one (1) SUC level 2 with 7 dully accredited programs. However available courses were limited. There are 2 senior high school, 5 junior high school, and almost 16 elementary schools.
Organizational Capability		3	High There were organized group managing the tourist destinations. They were trained not only to manage but as well on how to handle tourist.
Accommodation for Tourist		3	High Only 60%-70% of tourist can be accommodated within the municipality. This usually happens on peak season. This means that there was a limited number of available accommodation unit.
Quality of Transportation infrastructure		2	Fair Road network was at about 95% concrete, the remaining 5% was either under construction or rough road. Sea ports were available but only limited to small sea vessels. The sea port was under construction as well. Airport was available but

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		not serviceable. Few bridges were still under construction.
Closeness to road network	4	Very Close All major tourism destination except are close to road network aside from Cresta de Gallo since it is in a separate island. Cantingas : Accessible for vehicle. Dagubdub: approximately 2 km. walk. Bila-bila Approximately more than 2 km. walk.
Health Services	2	Fair There are almost 12 Barangay Health Centers (BHU) and 1 Municipal Health Center (MHU), 1 doctor of General Medicines and few number of Nurses and Midwives. Hospital is not available.
Utilities Infrastructure	2	Fair No sewer system, slightly poor to, moderately good communication in the community. Phone Signal is slightly to not available in ecotourism destination. Electricity is highly available produced via combined hydro and diesel run plant. Water supply was abundant
Distance from National Park	3	Close The nearest national Park which can be found within the island is the Mount Guiting Guiting Natural Park.
Distance from Central Town	3	Near Almost all ecotourism sites are near the central town of San Fernando. The municipality is a ride on land and a sea vessel ride away from the central town of Romblon where major government services are offered.
Existing recreational activities	2	Occasional Recreational activities offered in the Municipality is limited only to motorbike riding, swimming, trekking, mountain climbing, boat riding, etc.
Historical-archaeological value	3	High San Fernando has old Spanish house named Casa de San Fernando (Casa de Sanz) which is considered as National Heritage, The Candelaria Chapel which is one of the oldest churches, the site for the Battle of Sibuyan Sea and the Princes of the Star Tragedy. It also has 2 cannons situated at RSU-SFC.
Cultural Activities	4	Once a Year Cultural activities especially fiesta are celebrated in every barangay. There is also known festival, the Pag-alad Festival every December.
<b>Economic Structure</b>		
Plant Production	2	Low The municipality has limited supply of locally grown plants. Aside from coconut, all other marketable plants and vegetables were not enough or even not available and needed to be imported from nearby provinces.
Animal Production	2	Low Pig, chicken, cow and goat are raised within the municipality. Pigs are more than enough to supply the demand of the local market but the rest is not.
Total	<b>69</b>	<b><i>STRONG CENTER</i></b>

Table 2 shows the detailed ECOS Result. The municipality received highest point in some factors including scenic beauty, forest covered, wild life diversity, young population potential, consciousness to ecotourism, closeness to road network, and cultural activities. On the other hand, there are some factors which received low points, these includes; quality of transportation, health services, utilities infrastructure, dining places, existing recreational activities, plant production, and animal production. The ecotourism potential is accounted to a total of 69 points which can be characterized as strong center.

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**Table 3:** Status of San Fernando as ecotourism destination based on important factors considered by tourist in selecting destination

Factors	Importance	Verbal Description	Rank	Rating for SF	Verbal Description	Rank
1. Location	4.15	I	5	3.93	G	3
2. Activities	3.97	I	12	3.62	G	10
3. Facilities and Amenities	4.04	I	9	3.54	G	12
4. Clean Environment	4.51	VI	1	4.07	G	1
5. Relaxing Place	4.31	VI	2	4.07	G	1
6. Family Friendly Activities	4.14	I	6	3.76	G	7
7. Security	4.11	I	7	3.54	G	12
8. Regional Climate Condition	3.99	I	10	3.66	G	9
9. Events	3.75	I	13	3.57	G	11
10. Features and Landscape	3.98	I	11	3.79	G	6
11. Hospitality of Local Resident	4.30	VI	3	3.93	G	3
12. Local Cuisines and Delicacies	3.72	I	14	3.49	G	14
13. Service Quality and Accommodation	4.20	I	4	3.73	G	8
14. Transportation	4.08	I	8	3.82	G	5
Average Weighted Mean	4.09	TCE		3.75	TCE	

Table 3 shows the status of San Fernando as ecotourism destination based on important factors considered by tourist in selecting destination. It can be noted that very important factor considered by tourist was the cleanliness of the environment with a weighted mean of 4.51. The second factor considered as well as very important by tourist was the relaxing nature of the place with a weighted mean of 4.31. Further, ranking third was the hospitality of the local resident considered as well as very important with the weighted mean of 4.3. On the other hand, three factors considered as important which includes activities with weighted mean of 3.97, events at 3.75, and local cuisines and delicacies with weighted mean of 3.72 ranked 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> places respectively. It can be noted that based on this factors San Fernando has a clean environment and relaxing place both having a weighted mean of 4.07. Another factor where the municipality was good with was the location of the ecotourism destination. However, though still described as Good, Facilities and amenities and security received the lowest rating at a weighted mean of 3.54 while local cuisines and delicacies ranked last at a weighted mean of 3.49.

### Discussion

Result of research shows that the Municipality of San Fernando has multiple place to offer as Ecotourism destination. It has five (5) focal attractions visited by most of the tourist and received best review from the visitors. As complementary attractions seven (7) places were identified. Support attractions also received a good rating. The result using the ecotourism inventory method shows that the municipality has a potential to a certain extent as ecotourism destination. This result means that the municipality has a lot to offer in terms of ecotourism industry.

Using ECOS, data revealed that the municipality was a strong center for ecotourism. It has a high computed ECOS result supporting the result of ecotourism inventory. It can be noted that the municipality possess a strong biological-physical structure with the highest points for scenic beauty, forest covered and wild life diversity. This means that the area was well protected and maintained and can be a good location for ecotourism.

In terms of socio-cultural structure, young population potential, consciousness to ecotourism, closeness of destination to road network and availability of cultural activities got a very high points. These factors

contributed much to a good structure. These factors further proved that it would be easy for the visitors to travel from one place to another and there could be a sustainable support for ecotourism from the locals. However, it can also be noted that the municipality should work out to other factors like quality of transportation infrastructure, utilities infrastructure and health services. The municipality should also entice more investors in dining and restaurants.

In terms of economic structure, it can be noted that both animal and plant production received a low point. This means that the availability of agricultural products was very limited. These would result to relying on exported products from nearby provinces just to cope up with the demand of local residents and the tourists.

Important factor considered by tourist in selecting ecotourism destination was used to determine the reliability of ECOS result and to understand how destination was selected. Result revealed that the municipality possesses a clean environment and provide a relaxing environment. This factor was also the primary consideration of tourist in selecting destination. This means that the municipality offers what the visitors were looking for insuring sustainability of the industry if maintained. The location of the ecotourism sites received as well a good result which proved the accessibility of the place. However, it can be noted that security of the place, facilities and amenities, and availability of local cuisine and delicacies must be considered.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

From the result of the study, it can be concluded that the municipality has a strong potential on becoming an ecotourism destination. It offers various places blessed with natures beauty, untouched and have a diverse wildlife. This experience can be a best offering of being an ecotourism destination. Using the ecotourism inventory, it was determined what places should be the main or focal places to offer to visitors. As focal offering, this ecotourism destination must be given priority in terms of development. Further, it reveals the support attractions in which development is as well important. It can also be concluded that the development provided for the ecotourism destination must not destroy its natural beauty. Prioritization of development to ensure growth must be taken careful consideration. The municipality should create an effective ecotourism development plan to ensure sustainability of the said industry.

To increase ecotourism potential, it is recommended that:

- a. The government must enhance its health services to cater the needs of local residents and the incoming tourists;
- b. Transportation infrastructure must be of great priority to increase access of tourist in the municipality. Sea ports and airports must be made available.
- c. Utilities communication system must be improved to provide better services.
- d. Animal and plant production must be improved to provide enough supply without resorting to export from nearby provinces.
- e. Maintain the beauty of every tourist destination and avoid over exploitation;
- f. Further study in reference to limits of acceptable change (LAC), Visitors activity Management Process (VAMP) must be conducted to identify destination carrying capacity and the ability of the management team to handle tourist and different activity offerings; and

Size technical description must be documented, and conduct environmental impact study to manage and control environmental impact of ecotourism activity.

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