

## **FISHING TO ISLAND HOPPING: ECOTOURISM INITIATIVE OF HONDA BAY BOATOWNERS ASSOCIATION IN PUERTO PRINCESA, PALAWAN**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Using participatory approach and co-management in community-based sustainable tourism initiated by the national government, the Honda Bay Boatowners Association, Incorporated (HOBBAI) was formed in partnership with local non-government organizations (Hilario n.d.). HOBBAI started in 1997 with 29 members composed of fishers and their housewives from the fishing village of Sta. Lourdes in Puerto Princesa City (Saycon 2007 as cited by NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences 2007). At present, the association has 78 members and 108 boats with a combined carrying capacity of about 600 tourists a day.

In this study, field observation and key informant interview methods were used. Field data gathering was done in February to early March 2013. In addition, secondary data from the Puerto Princesa City Tourism Office were used.

### **2.0 FISHING TOWARDS ECOTOURISM**

According to HOBBAI officers, the idea of providing boat transport to tourists came as early as 1992 when tourists hired their fishing boats for snorkeling, diving and island hopping. This idea was hastened as fish catch in Honda Bay declined and the use of trawl fishing was banned under the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998.

Services of HOBBAI include ecological island hopping to Pambato Reef, Starfish, Pandan, and Cowrie Islands. For walk-in clients, information about the bay cruise is posted in the wharf's terminal building (Figure 1). The island ecotour is customized for a half day or a full day depending on client's need.



**FIGURE 1:** The HOBBAI seal stands as landmark at Sta. Lourdes Wharf, Puerto Princesa City

School in the seas (*Dalubhasaan sa karagatan*) was built near Pambato Reef as a learning platform for tourists (Regoniel n.d.). Before an ecotour diver is allowed to go on snorkeling or diving at the reef, he/she shall undergo briefing on conservation of the reef's resources (Figure 2).

Currently, HOBBAI is engaged in "coral gardening" as part of its environmental responsibility. According to association officers, the coral seedling propagation is about 80% survival rate.



**FIGURE 2:** Floating school "Dalub" at Pambato Reef, Honda Bay

### **3.0 PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

With Puerto Princesa Underground River (PPUR) selected as one of the 7 New Wonders of Nature, cruise ships have included Puerto Princesa City as one of their port of calls. Just 30 minutes drive from the port, Honda Bay became an ecotour destination of guests from cruise ships, complementing PPUR.

HOBBAI's current daily carrying capacity of 600 guests is way below the demand from cruise ships with an average of 2,000 passenger-guests. To accommodate this demand may displace other tourists who wish to visit Honda Bay. There is a challenge now to expand the carrying capacity of HOBBAI vis-à-vis the natural environment.

### **REFERENCES**

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