

INCLUSIVE TOURISM AND THE MUNICIPALITY OF LOBO, PROVINCE OF BATANGAS, PHILIPPINES: A BASIS FOR PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

*Mark Gabriel Wagan Aguilar, Angelica Jane P. Terrenal, Jade Naomi M. Vertucio,
Maria Michaela Rochelle M. Villavicencio, Ronela S. Zaraspe*

According to Department of Tourism – Philippines, Inclusive Tourism refers to the sector of the tourism and hospitality industry that caters to making tourism destinations and services accessible to people with physical or mental disabilities in the form of education, reviews, service training and product improvement.

In line with the Government’s thrust of promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the tourism industry and the other tourism-related programs of the Government, the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, prioritize the Accessible Tourism for Person with disabilities in some tourist part here in the Philippines, pursuant to universal policies and principles of Accessible Tourism for All as provided for under existing statutes, such as Republic Act 7277 also known as the Magna Carta for person with disabilities, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Person with Disability (UNCRPD). According to National Council on Disability Affairs (2016), Tourism for All concept ensures tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age as long as they are able to travel and function independently in their socio-cultural and economic activities in places where they want to visit. Relevant to this are the major issues related to accessible tourism and recommend policy measures that would create an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for person with disabilities.

Lobo, Batangas is a municipality of richness and beauty, from the local culture, attractions and delicacies, the municipality harbors a big percentage of the country’s pride. The geographical location of Lobo creates a big impact to the attractions for it’s adjacent to the country’s coastlines. The municipality of Lobo offers variety of tourist attractions—from pebble and fine sand beaches, resorts, land formation, diving sites, up to the numerous mountains famous to mountaineers. Lobo, Batangas, being one of the most visited agro-ecotourism destinations, creates a big impact in terms of economic viability.

The municipality of Lobo has already established its reputation as one of the tourist destinations in the province of Batangas. Its popularity for its beaches has reached even the farthest cities and provinces, however, its goal to cater all sorts of tourists has not yet been achieved. Tourist spots are not yet accessible even to the less opportune group of people, those who have disabilities.

Different sectors in the Philippines recognize the right of every Filipino, including those with disability. They make every facility accessible even to those whom we call PWD or persons with disability. The same principle of consideration should be done in the field of tourism.

The study is focused on the inclusivity of tourism products available in the community of Lobo Batangas which specifically addressed the following questions: 1. Is the community of Lobo aware about the concept of Inclusive Tourism? 2. What are the challenges encountered in sectors under the Tourism Industry towards the promotion of inclusive tourism? 3. What are the existing facilities provided for disabled persons in each sector? 4. What are the trainings conducted focused on handling disabled person in each sector?

This study applied a qualitative approach, and in terms of analyzing the data, the Colaizzi's Strategy was used. The results shows that the municipality of Lobo, Batangas is aware of inclusive tourism, however, tourist products are not accessible to disabled persons; such awareness on the existence of guests with special needs do not lead them to inclusion of PWD's in their programs and amenities. From the result, it is recommended that the Local Government Unit should consider the services needed by PWD's as they visit their establishment. Challenges met by tourist industries in handling PWD's should be addressed. Tourism industry sectors such as accommodation, transportation, food and beverages and recreation should cater the needs of PWD's and considerations should be made for them as potential guests. Facilities in the major tourist destinations should assure that all sorts of guests would be attended to.

To improve the services offered by the accommodation sector, doorways need a minimum width of 85cm. Thresholds should be no taller than 2cm, and no steps should be required for the entrance and exit. Pathways should have a clear width of 100cm or at least 150cm to allow people to pass through with ease. Pathway slope should be 1:20 maximum. Cross slope should be no more than 1:50. Steps should not be required to use in pathways. Objects should be no higher than 120cm and no lower than 40cm; everything should be in reach for anyone standing, sitting, and people short of stature. Restrooms should be located within short walking distances from attractions and public spaces. Doors should open outwards or be sliding to maximize floor space inside the restroom. Minimum doorway width is 85-90cm. Toilet seat height should be 45-50cm from the floor. There should be 120cm of floor space in front of the toilet and 90cm to the side to facilitate a transfer from a wheelchair. A turning radius of 150cm is necessary for any wheelchair users. A nearby washbasin in a stall or restroom offers convenience and cleanliness. Doors to stalls and restrooms should open out to increase usable space inside. Hardware to lock/unlock doors should be easy to use without the need to grip or pinch. Hooks at various heights will allow people to hang items away from the floor while using the restroom. Grab bars should be securely attached to the wall, 80cm from the floor.

In the sector of transportation, the following are recommended: location of transportation hubs, stops, or stations should be dispersed equally throughout city. All stops in the network should allow people to enter without steps. Elevators and lifts or ramps may be needed to allow people to reach their destination, but riders should not be required to seek alternate paths from other patrons just to find an accessible route. The main route should be free from barriers. If terminals require people to travel long distances, moving walkways and areas of rest are important to help decrease fatigue while getting to destinations within the station.

To improve Food and Beverage services, the all aspects of getting food, drinks, utensils, payment seating, and putting away trash should be considered self-service. Items should be easy-to-reach from a seated or standing position. Items should be between 90cm and 120cm from the floor, and can be used using one hand, if applicable, e.g., vending machines. Tables with center supports allow individuals who want to remain in a wheelchair the ability to roll underneath comfortably. The underside of table should be between 70 and 75cm in height. A bar can be accessed by offering seating at a lower table and sinking the floor behind the bar so workers are face to face with their customers.

For the Recreation sector, inclusive playgrounds are a great way for families to interact together. Not only does a playground allow children to play in a safe and welcoming environment, but it allows parents and/or other family members to participate and keep watch over their children. Same concepts of reach, pathway width, and slope apply. Event seating should provide a clear line of sight for all

individuals whether seated or standing. Spaces available for people using wheelchairs should be located on a flat surface next to other seats for friends and family. Seats can be removable to accommodate a wide range of individuals. Designated areas should be close to bathroom and eating areas. Informational displays and signs at museums and other cultural sites where tours are given should provide audio and visual options for visitors to take in the information.

Changes in facilities and amenities will never be enough, since the Tourism Industry's Products are not focused on tangible ones but are on services, which are intangible. This study also recommends training and education. Personnel and staffs of tourist destinations should be given training on handling PWD's. Staffs need to be educated about the potential needs of guests. Training sessions for emergencies, customer service, and communicating accurate and well-thought-out information is important for safety. Disability etiquette training will help create more comfortable conversations and experiences. Local government units should also initiate trainings for public utility vehicle drivers so that they get oriented on handling PWD's as passengers.

To ensure that accessible tourism is developed in a sustainable manner, it requires that tourist destinations go beyond ad hoc services to adopting the principle of universal design, ensuring that all persons, regardless of their physical or cognitive needs, are able to use and enjoy the available amenities in an equitable and sustainable manner. This approach foregoes preferential or segregated treatment of differently abled constituents to permitting uninhibited use of facilities and services by all, at any time, to equitable effect.

Accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable development policy. It is both a human rights imperative, as well as an exceptional business opportunity. In this context, accessible or inclusive tourism does not only benefit persons with disabilities, it benefits all of society.

About Mr. Mark Gabriel Wagan Aguilar:

Mr. Aguilar is a Tourism Management Educator, Practitioner, and Researcher by profession, and a sustainable tourism advocate by passion. He is currently connected to South Mansfield College, a globally recognized Educational Institution, as the Tourism and Hospitality Management Programs Chairperson. He has shown commitment in contributing to the conservation of culture, heritage, and nature by exerting his effort and giving his time in disseminating and teaching concepts, laws, and practices relevant to sustainable tourism through seminars and trainings conducted in Universities and Colleges in the Philippines. Sustainable tourism has been his primary objective since he started his journey in the Tourism Industry, but aside from it, he is also versed in Tourism Education not limited to teaching Ethics, Front Office Operations, Research, Organizational Management, Marketing, Tour Planning and facilitation, and Tourism Development Planning. Currently, he is conducting a research on Ecotourism and Philippine Tourism Law, which he plans to submit to globally known organizations/ associations for recognition and publication.