

Agritourism in the Philippines - untapped potential

“Agritourism is not for everyone, it’s a niche product but it has a lot of potential”, asserted Prof. Eli Paolo Fresnoza, Assistant Professor at UP’s Asian Institute of Tourism during SEARCA’s Agriculture and Development Seminar Series on 5 July 2011 at the Drilon Hall.

As a hybrid concept fusing together the elements of the tourism and agriculture industries, agritourism can be harnessed as a form of special interest tourism focusing on the unique travel experiences and activities that people can have in agricultural settings. When people travel, it is the attraction or experience that people go for; if food and beverage, accommodation and transportation are included in the package, even a farm can be a tourist destination. Prof. Fresnoza explained that agritourism is sustainable tourism as it marries the concept of enjoyment with resource management, community empowerment, cooperation, fair trade and diversification. Moreover, agritourism does not need large capital investment outlay because many existing farm sites just need to be enhanced.

In 2002, with the vision of the Philippines becoming the premier agritourism destination in Asia, the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) worked with the UP Asian Institute of Tourism on a manual that identified initial agritourism sites all over the country such as the C & B Orchid Farm in San Rafael, Bulacan, Sonya’s Secret Garden in Alfonso, Cavite, Oroverde in Guimaras, and Del Monte Plantation in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. In recent years, more agritourism sites have been developed including Bohol Bee Farm in Dauis, Bohol, Dragon Fruit Farm in Burgos, Ilocos Norte and The Farm at San Benito, Batangas.

As the agritourism sector is still largely private-sector-driven, a few challenges to meeting agritourism’s potential in the Philippines include confusion on which government agency will lead the potential (Is it DOT or DA?), and limited standardization and accreditation. Prof. Fresnoza put forward a few specific recommendations to meet these challenges. These include: education and curriculum development in secondary and post-secondary schools, improvement of access to capital, technical training and accreditation and certification, setting up of an agritourism center for research, development and innovation as well as an agritourism destination marketing bureau.

“Harnessing agritourism opportunities is key to regional development”, Prof. Fresnoza reiterated. This can be done in two ways. One is the bottom-up approach, where established farms approach DOT and DA to help them market and promote the experiences they offer. The other is the top-down approach, where through training and financial grants, the two departments help farms that have potential but lack the capability to market their destinations.

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