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**Sustainable Tourism Destination Management in Sorsogon: Strategies and Challenges****Flored Jay N. Medina**

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**Abstract** - This study was a descriptive-narrative examination of Sustainable Tourism Management in Sorsogon: Strategies and Challenges. It focused on the profile of tourism programs implemented in the Province of Sorsogon, including their Scope, Budget, Period of Implementation, and Number of Tourists. The study also investigated the strategies employed by Sorsogon Province in managing its tourism programs, covering aspects of Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling. Additionally, it addressed the challenges encountered in managing these programs and proposed a Sustainable Tourism Destination Management Framework to enhance tourism initiatives in Sorsogon. The study drew primarily on the Theory of Sustainable Tourism by Begum (2021) and Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle Theory as guiding frameworks, aiming to uncover strategies and challenges in Sorsogon's tourism programs and propose a framework for sustainable tourism destination management aimed at improving tourism offerings in the province.

This study generally assessed the status, strategies and challenges of tourism programs in the Province of Sorsogon to formulate a framework and provide guidance for other provinces aiming to improve their tourism initiatives and replicate similar successes. By adopting these practices allows destinations to enhance their overall sustainability and minimize negative environmental, cultural, and social impacts.

Serving as a model for future programs through the adoption of distinguished tourism practices encourages innovation and collaboration within the industry. Destinations that showcase effective sustainable practices inspire others to follow suit and adapt these principles to their unique contexts. This exchange of knowledge and ideas can lead to the development of new technologies, strategies, and partnerships that elevate the entire tourism sector. The study delved into the intricacies of Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling to reveal the dynamics of effective tourism management. Concurrently, it analyzed the challenges encountered in implementing these programs, shedding light on potential obstacles to sustainable tourism in the region. The ultimate goal of this study was to propose a Sustainable Tourism Destination Management Framework customized to the unique context of Sorsogon. By bridging the theoretical foundations of sustainable tourism with real-world challenges and strategies, this study aimed to offer practical recommendations for enhancing tourism programs in the province.

The study found that Sorsogon Province manages its tourism industry through strategic planning, community involvement, and regulatory compliance. The planning phase involves broad engagement with municipal stakeholders and benchmarking against established tourism destinations to customize legislation to local needs and global best practices. The Tourist Code and 7K Advocacy Flagship Program ensure that tourist efforts promote socio-economic development and sustainability in the province. The Quadripartite Agreement encourages the LGU, private sector, community organizations, and government agencies to collaborate on eco-tourism and community-based projects like PRESERVE MRS to improve Sorsogon's eco-tourism offerings and benefit residents.

Effective leadership capable of navigating the complexities of the tourism industry while aligning with community needs and government directives. Without strong leadership, programs risk floundering due to a lack of strategic vision and direction. Internal conflicts within program teams can impede progress, whether stemming from differing priorities, communication breakdowns, or conflicting agendas. Financial matters pose another formidable challenge for locally implemented tourism programs. Securing adequate funding to sustain and expand initiatives is often an uphill battle, especially for grassroots efforts operating within constrained budgets. Ensuring transparent and accountable financial governance is essential to maintain stakeholders' trust and attract further investment. Striking a balance between financial sustainability and socio-economic development goals requires strategic planning and prudent decision-making. The proposed Sustainable Tourism Destination Management framework for Sorsogon Province is grounded in the Triad of Sustainable Tourism: People, Planet, and Profit. This holistic approach recognizes the critical interdependence of social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic viability within the tourism sector.

This study concludes that Scope, budget, Implementation Period, tourist numbers, and manpower affect programs' success. The comprehensiveness and resources of these programs determine their ability to promote tourism and improve visitor experiences. A greater scope allows for a more comprehensive approach to tourism development, while enough budgets enable marketing campaigns, infrastructural improvements, and cultural preservation. Implementation is vital to long-term sustainability and impact. These initiatives' success depends on the number of tourists serviced and the availability of trained staff. Sorsogon Province's tourism management strategy involves careful planning, organizing, directing, and managing to create a sustainable, inclusive, and successful industry. Sorsogon has an effective tourist policy through stakeholder input, benchmarking, and releasing a tourist Code matched with the province's 7K Advocacy Flagship Program. Partners are crucial to resource coordination and program implementation, as shown by the Quadripartite Agreement. Sorsogon's community-based leadership empowers locals to shape the tourism landscape to promote the province's cultural heritage and natural environment. The province's focus on policy and

regulatory compliance and the community's important role in tourism supervision assure responsible tourism growth. These policies show Sorsogon's dedication to a tourism management system that balances economic growth, environmental protection, and social welfare, setting a standard for responsible tourism.

Effective administration, governance, funding allocation, and management are crucial to program success. Despite implementation or mandates, these issues severely impact tourist programs. Well-structured administration provides easy execution, while robust governance structures promote accountability and transparency for trust and sustainability. Adequate financing is needed for programs, infrastructure development, and marketing efforts to attract visitors and promote places. Resource utilization is maximized, and waste is minimized with efficient management. The Triad of Sustainable Tourism—People, Planet, and Profit—is the foundation of Sorsogon Province's Sustainable Tourism Destination Management concept, which promotes a resilient and successful tourism business. Sorsogon's commitment to social equity guarantees that tourism development supports local communities, protects indigenous cultures and prioritizes visitor satisfaction through authentic experiences. The province's environmental pillar emphasizes regulation and rehabilitation to protect its rich natural landscapes and fauna. Diversifying tourism offers and investing in local infrastructure and enterprises ensures sector profitability and sustainability. By balancing these interconnected pillars and engaging in effective policymaking and stakeholder collaboration, Sorsogon can sustainably improve residents' well-being and visitors' experiences, setting a benchmark for responsible tourism management.

Keywords - Sustainable Tourism Management; Tourism; Sorsogon; Strategies and Challenges in Tourism

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## Introduction

Globalization has created new possibilities for the growth of tourism. Sustainable tourism is a major driver of economic development, job creation, and growth (ILO, 2016). According to figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council, the tourism sector directly supported 284 million jobs and produced over 107 billion, or one in every eleven employments worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015). The United Nations Sustainable Development Program includes sustainable tourism (Agenda 2030), for example, in goal 8 thus promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all through tourism while it also promotes local culture and products; and in goal 14 i.e. sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources including targets related to ecotourism.

Sustainable tourism development places a strong emphasis on the values of prudent resource management, environmental protection, and community engagement. As the needs and ambitions of local communities are taken into consideration, such methods promote a feeling of inclusion within the government. Governments can create policies that are more relevant and advantageous for all stakeholders by actively including the people in the planning and decision-making processes (Wen, et. al., 2021). Inclusivity improves citizen trust in government officials and societal cohesiveness, which improves governance results. According to UNTWO (2019), aside from strengthening governance capabilities, tourism also contributes to a stronger economy. A properly run tourist sector creates significant economic benefits, such as more jobs and more income. Governments may increase their financial capacity and be better able to manage resources by making sensible investments in tourist infrastructure and services. Better infrastructure development, social welfare programs, and public service delivery are all made possible by improved governance systems, which raise the standard of living for all residents. Thus, Modern civilization cannot exist without tourism this is according to the study of Joanne, C. & Stephen, C. (2020) where they added that tourism makes a vital contribution to economic development, cross-cultural dialogue, and global understanding.

The direction of tourism programs and governance is greatly influenced by the identification of effective tourist practices. Policymakers and stakeholders can gain important insights that guide the development of more effective and sustainable tourism programs by researching and adopting these successful models. This procedure not only promotes the expansion of the tourism industry but also strengthens responsible governance by promoting the adoption of policies that place a priority on civic participation, environmental protection, and economic viability. The development of better, more sustainable tourism programs that guarantee the long-term benefit of both tourists and host communities results from the careful selection and adaptation of effective tourist methods.

The tourism industry relies heavily on transparent and accountable practices to attract visitors and gain public trust. Governments that prioritize transparency in their tourism policies and practices are more likely to extend the same principles to other sectors. Transparent governance reduces corruption, enhances accountability, and encourages open dialogue between the government and its citizens. In turn, this fosters a positive perception of the government's actions and decisions (UNEP, 2005). Due to changes in consumer preferences, technology breakthroughs, and environmental concerns, the tourist industry throughout the world is continually changing. Sorsogon Province has emerged as a shining example of excellent tourist development and execution among the numerous areas in the Philippines.

Improving tourist practices has a significant influence on governance. Sustainable tourism supports inclusive governance, strengthens economic capacity, encourages transparency, strengthens international connections, and creates advocacy for social

improvement. Governments may enhance their overall governance and achieve beneficial outcomes for their inhabitants and the global community by promoting responsible and sustainable tourism. Better tourist practices integrated into government are a step toward a more affluent, inclusive, and harmonious society.

Sorsogon Province, in the southeastern portion of the Philippines, is noted for its stunning scenery, unique cultural history, and enormous natural resources. Sorsogon tourist business has grown significantly over the last decade, attracting both local and foreign visitors. Through well-structured tourist programs and initiatives, the province government has demonstrated its commitment to developing sustainable tourism. According to Philippine Tourism Industry (2020), In 2018, there were 254,178 tourist arrivals, and this number increased slightly to 271,372 in 2019, suggesting a relatively stable growth in tourism. However, a drastic decline occurred in 2020, with only 66,235 tourist arrivals recorded. This sharp drop can be attributed to the widespread implementation of quarantine restrictions and travel limitations worldwide as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments imposed strict measures to curb the spread of the virus, leading to a substantial reduction in international travel. The data further indicates a partial recovery in 2021, as the number of tourist arrivals increased to 88,463. Although still below pre-pandemic levels, this uptick suggests a gradual reopening of travel and a modest recovery in the tourism sector. By 2022, there is a notable rebound, with tourist arrivals surging to 859,538. This substantial increase signifies a more comprehensive relaxation of travel restrictions and a resurgence in global tourism as the world adapted to living with the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic.

Throughout the years, Sorsogon's tourist development success may be ascribed to its proactive strategy of exploiting its natural resources sustainably. The province is home to some of the world's most beautiful natural attractions, including the world-famous Butanding (whale shark) encounter at Donsol and the tranquil beaches of Matnog, Sorsogon has been able to sustain the allure of its tourist destinations while protecting their natural integrity through a well-balanced combination of marketing methods, infrastructural development, and environmental conservation activities.

The Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon, offers tourists an immersive experience navigating through lush mangrove forests, showcasing the region's rich biodiversity and vibrant ecosystem. The Surf Camps in Gubat, Sorsogon, offer an immersive experience for both novice and experienced surfers, set against the stunning backdrop of pristine beaches and rolling waves of the coastline. While the Bulusan Lake and Forest Park in Bulusan, Sorsogon, is a captivating eco-tourism destination featuring a serene volcanic lake surrounded by lush rainforest, ideal for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Visitors can enjoy activities such as kayaking, trekking, and bird-watching while immersing themselves in the park's rich biodiversity and stunning natural beauty. Thus, this study generally assessed the status, strategies and challenges of tourism programs in the Province of Sorsogon to formulate a framework and provide guidance for other provinces aiming to improve their tourism initiatives and replicate similar successes. By adopting these practices allows destinations to enhance their overall sustainability and minimize negative environmental, cultural, and social impacts. Specifically, it focuses on examining the practical aspects of implementing tourism programs in Sorsogon by identifying the profile of these initiatives in terms of scope, budget, period of implementation, and number of tourists.

Serving as a model for future programs through the adoption of distinguished tourism practices encourages innovation and collaboration within the industry. Destinations that showcase effective sustainable practices inspire others to follow suit and adapt these principles to their unique contexts. This exchange of knowledge and ideas can lead to the development of new technologies, strategies, and partnerships that elevate the entire tourism sector. By setting a benchmark for excellence, destinations contribute to the continuous evolution of the industry, driving it towards greater sustainability, inclusivity, and adaptability in the face of changing trends and challenges

### **Materials and Methods**

This research designed as a pure qualitative descriptive-narrative study to determine the sustainable tourism destination management in Sorsogon: strategies and challenges. The researcher used the data triangulation technique to gather data including document analysis, interview, and focus group discussion. In addition, the researcher used the descriptive method in analyzing and interpreting the findings through a qualitative process. The tourism office of Sorsogon Province identified five (5) Department of Tourism-mandated programs and five (5) Locally Implemented programs. These programs not only reflect the province's dedication to addressing local challenges but also exemplify the potential for knowledge transfer and replication in other regions seeking to improve their governance and better the lives of their citizens. The availability of such valuable data underscores the provincial office's openness to collaboration, ensuring that their successful initiatives can inspire and guide others toward achieving similar levels of excellence. This study used document analysis for the profile of the identified programs to identify briefly the scope, budget, period of implementation, number of tourists and others that may be considered. Interview questionnaire was formulated and was used to analyze the strategies employed and the challenges encountered of the tourism programs. There were three (3) different set of interview questionnaires that was specified for the three (3) different respondents. The questions for the Chairman of the Committee on Tourism of each municipality associated with the identified programs focused on analyzing and assessing their understanding of the strategies and challenges related to the identified programs, specifically focusing on policy formulation. Meanwhile, the interview questionnaire of the Local Administrator emphasized managing, overseeing, and supervising of the tourism programs, offering insights into the challenges and strategies of the program.

Furthermore, the interview questionnaire for the Local Guide concentrated on identifying the strategies and challenges of the on-the-ground implementation and firsthand knowledge offering valuable perspectives. Finally, the questions for the focus group discussion were general inquiries to assess and verify the information gathered from the interview. These discussions brought together the Head Tourism Officer of the Province of Sorsogon, the Chairman of the Committee on Tourism of the Province of Sorsogon, the Chairman of the Committee on Tourism of the municipalities involved in the identified programs, the Local Administrator, and the Local Guide of each of the identified programs. These discussions aimed to gain a deeper understanding of intricate matters, reveal patterns, and identify significant themes.

**Results and Discussions**

Profile of the tourism programs implemented in the Province of Sorsogon:

The following table outlines the Department of Tourism's mandated programs, detailing their scope, allocated budget, period of implementation, relevant metrics such as tourist numbers, and corresponding required manpower.

**Table 1: Department of Tourism Mandated Programs in terms of Scope, Budget, Period of Implementation, Number of Tourist or Applicable Variable, and Manpower.**

Department Of Tourism Mandated Programs	Scope	Budget	Period of Implementation	Number of Applicable Tourism Variable Outcome	Manpower
Accreditation Program (Primary Tourism Enterprises)	Sorsogon Province	4,250,000.00	2019-2023	Number of Accredited Establishments – 172	Department of Tourism (DOT) Regional Office V  Sorsogon Provincial Tourism Culture and the Arts Office (SPTCAO)
Tourism Development Plan Program (TDP):  Municipality of Bulusan Tourism Development Plan (2017-2022) -Castilla Municipal Tourism Plan (2015-2020)  -Irosin Municipal Tourism Development Plan (2018-2022) • - Pilar Local Tourism Development Plan (2020-2030)	Sorsogon Province (Bulusan, Castilla, Irosin, and Pilar)	5,000,000.00	2019-2023	4 LGUs out of 15 LGUs in Sorsogon Province from 2019-2022 with TDP Program	All Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Province of Sorsogon, each comprising Tourism Officers, Technical Staff, Planning Officers, and Sangguniang Bayan Chair on Tourism
Training Program	Sorsogon Province (Bulusan, Pilar,	200,000	2019-2023	Number of Training: 18	Department of Tourism (DOT) Regional Office V

	Matnog, Sorsogon City, Donsol, Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, and Irosin)				Sorsogon Provincial Tourism Culture and the Arts Office (SPTCAO)
Market and Product Development Program:  2019 – Kasanggayahan Festival (October 1-31, 2019)  2022 – International Tour Guide’s Day (February 21, 2022)  9 <sup>th</sup> Regional Travel Fair (April 28 – May 1, 2022)  2023 – Kasanggayahan Festival (October 1-31, 2023)  Grand Santa Cruzan (May 27, 2023)  Experience Bicol – Philippine Experience (October 8-10, 2023)	Sorsogon Province	41,000,000	2019-2023	Number Of Product Developed: 6	Department of Tourism (DOT) Regional Office V  Sorsogon Provincial Tourism Culture and the Arts Office (SPTCAO)
Tourism Road Infrastructure Development Program (TRIP)	Sorsogon Province (Matnog, Bulan, Sta. Magdalena, Bulusan, and Casiguran)	2,893,027.000	2019-2023	Number of Implemented TRIP: Three (3) on-going from 2019-2023	DPWH and DOT

The primary tourism enterprise in Sorsogon province boasts a comprehensive array of accreditations, ensuring quality and reliability in its offerings. With 172 accredited tourism establishments under its umbrella, it covers a broad spectrum of services catering to diverse traveler needs. Backed by a sizable budget of 4,250,000.00, this program is aimed to enhance tourism experiences across the province. This demonstrates a commitment to staying current with industry standards and regulations. Supported by a dedicated team from Department of Tourism (DOT) Regional Office V Sorsogon and Provincial Tourism Culture and the Arts Office (SPTCAO) tourism front liners, this enterprise leverages its resources efficiently to promote Sorsogon as a premier destination. With funding sourced from the Programmed Appropriation and Obligation by Object of Expenditure from the Provincial Government of Sorsogon, this enterprise stands as a testament to effective public-private collaboration in driving tourism development.

Accreditation is essential for tourism facilities as it acts as a quality assurance mechanism, guaranteeing that they adhere to specific service standards, safety, and sustainability. Accreditation instills assurance and tranquility in travelers, as it signifies that the

business has undergone a thorough evaluation and complies with the industry's highest standards. Furthermore, accreditation improves the legitimacy and standing of tourism areas, drawing in more visitors and stimulating economic expansion. Allocating a significant amount of money towards accrediting programs is reasonable as it enhances the overall development of the tourism industry, resulting in enduring advantages like a rise in tourist arrivals, greater revenues, and the creation of employment opportunities. The Department of Tourism's mandate to require accreditation underscores its dedication to promoting excellence in the tourism industry. By allocating resources for manpower and adhering to the latest accreditation guidelines, the department ensures the effectiveness and relevance of the accreditation process. This alignment with evolving industry standards and expectations is crucial. Therefore, the money spent on accreditation programs should be seen as an investment rather than just a cost. This investment contributes to the long-term growth and competitiveness of tourism businesses and destinations.

According to the Department of Tourism allocation of 4,250,000 million pesos for the accreditation programs in the Province of Sorsogon is deemed sufficient due to comprehensive coverage of various aspects crucial to the successful implementation of these programs, including administrative costs, training workshops, marketing, and quality assurance processes. It guarantees that local tourism establishments adhere to national standards, which is crucial for improving the overall visitor experience and advancing sustainable tourism. In addition, the funding shall be used to assist programs aimed at enhancing services and amenities, guaranteeing that Sorsogon maintains its competitiveness and attraction to both domestic and foreign tourists. The financial support is crucial for the preservation of Sorsogon's abundant cultural and natural legacy, as well as for promoting economic growth through tourism.

The Tourism Development Plan (TDP) for the Municipalities of Bulusan, Castilla, Irosin, and Pilar is a comprehensive initiative aimed at fostering sustainable tourism growth in the province of Sorsogon, Philippines. With a budget allocation of 5,000,000.00 and a period of implementation spanning from 2019 to 2023, the plan encompasses a range of strategies and activities tailored to each municipality's unique tourism potential. The 5,000,000 pesos funding allocation from the Programmed Appropriation and Obligation Object of Expenditure under the Tourism Strategy & Plan Development of Sorsogon Province (2019-2023), according to the Department of Tourism, is deemed sufficient to support the Tourism Development Program (TDP) of the Local Government Units (LGUs) because only four out of the fifteen LGUs have active Tourism Development Programs. These LGUs are the Municipality of Bulusan with its Tourism Development Plan (2017-2022), Castilla with its Municipal Tourism Plan (2015-2020), Irosin with its Municipal Tourism Development Plan (2018-2022), and Pilar with its Local Tourism Development Plan (2020-2030). The allocation is structured based on the specific needs and priorities of these LGUs, ensuring that each receives adequate funding for their respective tourism initiatives. The budgeting process involves thorough deliberation to align financial resources with the strategic goals and development priorities of each LGU, ensuring that the funds are utilized effectively to enhance tourism infrastructure, marketing, and services within these municipalities.

The manpower driving these efforts consists of dedicated teams from all Local Government Units (LGUs) in Sorsogon Province, including Tourism Officers, Technical Staff, Planning Officers, and Sangguniang Bayan Chair on Tourism, synergizing their expertise and resources to realize the shared vision of vibrant and sustainable tourism across the region.

The municipalities of Bulusan, Castilla, Irosin, and Pilar in the province of Sorsogon would greatly benefit from a comprehensive Tourism Development Plan, as it provides a systematic method for promoting sustainable tourism expansion. The strategy aims to customize strategies and activities for each municipality based on its tourist potential. This approach will capitalize on their distinctive strengths and promote a unified and inclusive approach to development. Nevertheless, the effective execution of such a strategy requires the active participation and cooperation of all Local Government Units (LGUs) in Sorsogon Province. By collaborating with Tourism Officers, Technical Staff, Planning Officers, and Sangguniang Bayan Chairs on Tourism from each Local Government Unit (LGU), the plan acquires the essential workforce and specialized knowledge to effectively address obstacles, take advantage of favorable circumstances, and finally accomplish its objectives. This collaborative endeavor guarantees that the advantages of tourist advancement are fairly allocated throughout the province while preserving its natural and cultural legacy for future cohorts.

The Training program initiated by the Department of Tourism within the municipalities of Bulusan, Pilar, Matnog, Sorsogon City, Donsol, Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, and Irosin from 2019 to 2023 showcases a comprehensive approach to capacity-building in the tourism sector. With a focus on enhancing skills and knowledge pertinent to hospitality and tourism management, this program aims to elevate the quality of services and experiences offered to visitors in these areas. The current roster of 18 training modules covers a wide array of topics, ensuring that the manpower, totaling 719 individuals, receives holistic development catering to the diverse needs of the industry. By investing in such initiatives, the Department of Tourism not only fosters economic growth within these municipalities but also cultivates a sustainable tourism ecosystem grounded in professionalism and excellence.

Between 2019 and 2022, the Sorsogon local government unit (LGU) dedicated a total of PHP 200,000 towards tourism training programs, resulting in an annual allocation of PHP 50,000. The limited budget allocated funds for logistics, accommodation, and meals for speakers, while any extra expenses were handled by the Provincial Tourism Office. In 2023, the training programs did not receive any funding allocation due to the redirection of funding towards human resources and other essential sectors to expedite the recovery from the effects of the pandemic. As a result, the tourist training programs did not receive much financial support during this time since the LGU focused on other recovery measures that had a wider and more immediate impact.

The Department of Tourism has implemented training programs in the municipalities of Bulusan, Pilar, Matnog, Sorsogon City, Donsol, Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, and Irosin. These programs have been essential in demonstrating a holistic strategy for enhancing the skills and abilities of individuals in the tourism industry. These programs aim to improve the skills and knowledge necessary for managing hospitality and tourism. They help to enhance the quality of services and experiences provided to visitors in these sectors. The program offers a comprehensive range of 18 training modules that cover many themes, including customer service and sustainable tourism practices. This ensures that persons enrolled in the program undergo holistic growth. The Department of Tourism is allocating resources to training programs to promote economic growth and establish a sustainable tourism ecosystem based on professionalism and excellence. This will ultimately contribute to the long-term prosperity of the region.

The Market and Product Development program of the Department of Tourism V has a comprehensive scope covering the entirety of Sorsogon Province, aiming to enhance tourism offerings and promote local attractions. The funding of 41,000,000 pesos to Tourism promotion, market, and product development projects in Sorsogon highlights the region's deliberate focus on utilizing its cultural assets to drive economic growth. Events and festivals play a crucial role in this plan as they carry great cultural and social importance for the people of Sorsogon. These cultural celebrations attract both local and global tourists, generating a lively tourism industry. The significant budget provides financial backing for the production and promotion of these events, guaranteeing that they are efficiently planned, extensively advertised, and capable of delivering distinctive and engaging experiences. This investment not only stimulates local companies and generates employment opportunities, but also contributes to the conservation and promotion of the diverse cultural legacy of Sorsogon. Consequently, it enhances the appeal of the region as a captivating cultural tourism destination.

Leveraging the manpower of both DOT V and SPTCAO, this program plays a pivotal role in fostering tourism growth, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of Sorsogon Province while facilitating economic development in the region.

The Market and Product Development program of the Department of Tourism V is an important initiative that covers the entire Sorsogon Province. This program is meant to advance the province's tourist sector by strengthening tourism activities, enhancing offerings, and promoting local attractions. The significant existing budget and the suggested augmentation emphasize the crucial function this program serves in the province's tourist advancement. Through the collaboration of DOT V and SPTCAO, this initiative garners comprehensive support, establishing it as a fundamental element in promoting the expansion of tourism. By showcasing the varied cultural history and unspoiled natural beauty of Sorsogon Province, this program not only improves tourism experiences but also stimulates economic progress in the region.

The Tourism Road Infrastructure Development (TRIP) program, spearheaded by the Department of Tourism V, focuses its efforts on enhancing the tourism potential of the municipalities of Matnog, Bulan, Sta. Magdalena, Bulusan, and Casiguran. With a substantial budget of 2,893,027,000 pesos allocated for the period of 2019-2023, this initiative aims to improve road networks crucial for promoting accessibility to key tourist destinations within these areas.

The Tourism Road Infrastructure Project received a budget of 2,893,027 pesos because this allocation is both just and sufficient to address the critical repairs and developments needed for the roads that serve key tourism areas. By improving these essential routes, the project aims to enhance accessibility and safety for tourists, which is expected to boost visitor numbers and, in turn, stimulate local economies. Adequate road infrastructure is a fundamental component of a thriving tourism sector, as it not only improves the overall travel experience but also supports local businesses and attractions by facilitating smoother and more reliable transportation. This budget allows for targeted investments in the most urgent areas, ensuring that the roads can handle increased traffic and meet the demands of both domestic and international tourists, ultimately leading to better tourism opportunities and economic growth.

The program's ongoing implementation, supported by the collaborative efforts of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Tourism (DOT), underscores a concerted push towards bolstering local infrastructure to stimulate tourism growth and socioeconomic development in the region.

This program is a strategic endeavor focused on the municipalities of Matnog, Bulan, Sta. Magdalena, Bulusan, and Casiguran. Its objective is to unleash the underutilized tourism opportunities in these areas. By allocating a substantial number of resources, this initiative is positioned to rejuvenate the tourism industry in the area. The main focus of this initiative is to improve the road infrastructure that is crucial for providing easy access to important tourism destinations in these local areas. The continued partnership between the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Tourism (DOT) demonstrates a joint effort to strengthen local infrastructure, which will stimulate tourism growth and promote socioeconomic progress in the region. These municipalities have the potential to gain from enhanced connection through the TRIP program, which will ultimately position them as attractive locations with great potential for tourism development.

**Table 2: Profile of the Locally Implemented Programs of the Department of Tourism V in terms of Scope, Budget, Period of Implementation, Number of Tourist, and Manpower.**

Locally Implemented Programs	Scope	Budget	Period of Implementation	Number of Tourists	Manpower
Whale Shark Interaction (Donsol)	Barangays - Dancalan - Pangpan - Gimagaan - Vinitahan - Tinanogan - Sibago - San Rafael - Santa Cruz	17,971,353.20	2019-2023	2019: 18,384 2020: 2,375 2021: 422 2022: 5,079 2023: 9,182 TOTAL: 35,422	Boatmen: 168 Bio: 38
Buhatan Rivercruise (Sorsogon City)	Barangay Buhatan	500,000.00	2019-2023	2019: 1,000 2020: NONE 2021: NONE 2022: 500 2023: 1,300 TOTAL: 2,800	Boatmen: 38
Mangrove Cruise (Prieto Diaz)	Barangays -Diamante, -Maningcay De oro -Gogon - San Isidro - Bulawan - Santa Lourdes - Ulag -Calao -San Fernando -Carayat	2019: No data 2020: 145,000 2021: 145,000 2022: 145,000 2023: 185,000	2019-2023	2019: 2,359 2020: NONE 2021: 1,384 2022: 1,520 2023: 776 TOTAL: 6,039	Boatmen: 52
Surf Camps (Gubat)	Barangays - Buenavista - Panganiban	1,100,000	2019-2023	2019: 43,481 2020: 12,628 2021: 22,437 2022: 33,355 2023: 13,525 TOTAL: 125,426	Surfers: 22
Bulusan Lake and Forest Park (Bulusan)	Barangay San Roque	1,000,000	2019-2023	2019: 47,073 2020: 8,867 2021: NONE 2022: 69,225 2023: 81,680 TOTAL: 206,845	Workers: 113

The Locally Implemented Program of the Department of Tourism V focusing on Whale Shark Interaction in Donsol operates across several barangays including Dancalan, Pangpan, Gimagaan, Vinitahan, Tinanogan, Sibago, San Rafael, and Santa Cruz, boasting a budget allocation of Php 17,971,353.20 and an implementation period spanning from 2019 to 2023. Despite fluctuations due to various factors including global events, the program has consistently attracted a significant number of tourists, recording 18,384 visitors in 2019, followed by a decrease to 2,375 in 2020, and 422 in 2021 due to the pandemic, and a notable recovery to 5,079 in 2022, and culminating in 9,182 visitors in 2023, amounting to a total of 35,422 tourists over the four-year span. Integral to the program's success are the 168 boatmen and 38 biostaff members who contribute to its operation and management, ensuring both the safety of visitors and the conservation of the whale shark habitat.

Whale Shark Interaction in Donsol, Sorsogon, is a premier ecotourism experience that allows guests to swim with the world's largest fish, the beautiful whale shark. This sustainable tourism project has received international acclaim for its ethical approach to wildlife encounters, which prioritizes education, protection, and little disruption to the marine environment. From November to



June, Donsol's rich waters attract whale sharks, giving travelers a unique opportunity to see these gentle giants up close while also supporting marine conservation efforts. The initiative not only promotes tourism in Sorsogon but also increases awareness about the significance of conserving marine environments and saving endangered animals such as whale sharks. Donsol's Whale Shark Interaction program exemplifies how tourism may benefit both local businesses and the natural world by providing visitors with an unforgettable experience while also encouraging environmental stewardship.

The Whale Shark Interaction program in Donsol, Sorsogon received a budget of 771,595.83 pesos to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness. This funding is justified due to the need for continuous conservation efforts, which include monitoring and protecting whale shark populations, ensuring the safety and education of tourists, and maintaining the local economy that heavily relies on ecotourism. These funds support training for local guides, improve infrastructure, and promote environmental awareness. Sustaining this program not only preserves the unique marine biodiversity but also enhances the community's livelihood by attracting eco-conscious tourists, thereby creating a balanced approach to conservation and economic development.

The Buhatan Rivercruise in Sorsogon City, focuses on enhancing tourism in Barangay Buhatan with a budget of 500,000.00 and a period of implementation spanning from 2019 to 2023. This aims to promote the scenic beauty and cultural heritage of the area through river cruises. Despite facing challenges such as the pandemic, which halted tourism activities in 2020 and 2021, the program saw a gradual increase in tourist numbers from 2019 to 2023. In 2019, there were 1,000 tourists, while in 2022 there were 500, and in 2023, there were 1,300, totaling 2,800 tourists over the period. The success of the program can be attributed to the dedication of 38 boatmen who assist in providing memorable experiences for visitors, showcasing the rich natural landscapes and vibrant local culture of Buhatan.

The Buhatan Rivercruise in Sorsogon City has been allocated a budget of 500,000 pesos, which is the necessary amount required to efficiently manage and operate the program. This allocation, albeit appearing little, demonstrates the local government's deliberate ranking of its initiatives and the resources at its disposal. The money guarantees the long-term viability of the river cruise by covering the maintenance of boats, salaries of workers, and essential marketing efforts to attract guests. The size of the budget reflects a strategic decision made by the local government unit (LGU) to effectively manage limited financial resources while promoting tourism projects that can enhance local economic growth.

The Buhatan Rivercruise program is a dynamic effort that aims to boost tourism in Barangay Buhatan by highlighting its beautiful natural landscapes and strong cultural history via immersive river activities. This eco-tourism initiative not only aims to attract visitors, but also provides an important source of income for residents by allowing them to demonstrate their traditional practices, artisan goods, and amiable hospitality. This initiative promotes both economic growth and a deeper appreciation for the region's unique tapestry of nature and culture by providing remarkable experiences on the peaceful waters of the Buhatan River. Furthermore, it serves as a gateway to a variety of leisure activities, which enhances the entire visitor experience in Buhatan.

The Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz is a flagship program of the Sorsogon Province, operating under the Locally Implemented Program of the Department of Tourism V. Spanning across several barangays including Diamante, Maningcay De Oro, Gogon, San Isidro, Bulawan, Santa Lourdes, Ulag, Calao, San Fernando, and Carayat, this initiative had a commendable budget of 620,000 for its implementation period from 2019 to 2023. The Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz was allocated a budget of 620,000 pesos largely for covering the crucial operational expenses and maintenance required to operate the program. Despite its seemingly small size, this allocation demonstrates the Local Government Unit's (LGU) method of priority, effectively distributing scarce resources among several initiatives. This fiscal choice guarantees the ongoing promotion of eco-tourism, the cultivation of environmental consciousness, and the sustenance of local livelihoods that rely on the preservation of mangroves. The allotment highlights the LGU's dedication to both environmental sustainability and economic development, despite limited financial resources.

It has successfully attracted a significant number of tourists, totaling 6,039 over the specified time frame, thereby bolstering local tourism and economic growth. The program is sustained by the dedicated efforts of 52 skilled boatmen, who not only navigate the cruise but also serve as ambassadors for the rich biodiversity and cultural heritage of the region, making the Mangrove Cruise an immersive and educational experience for visitors.

The Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz is a prominent example of ecotourism in the Sorsogon Province. It spans across several barangays, including Diamante, Maningcay De Oro, Gogon, San Isidro, Bulawan, Santa Lourdes, Ulag, Calao, San Fernando, and Carayat. This effort is specifically designed to preserve and explore the mangrove ecology, with a budget of 620,000. The success of the attraction is demonstrated by its capacity to attract a significant number of people, amounting to 6,039 within a certain period. This has resulted in a boost to the local tourism industry and has contributed to economic development. Importantly, the long-term success of the program relies on the proficiency and commitment of 52 experienced boatmen, who not only navigate the voyage but also serve as ambassadors, sharing information about the region's varied biodiversity and valuable cultural history. The Mangrove Cruise goes beyond just a simple recreational activity. It provides tourists with a deep and instructive experience, allowing them to explore and appreciate the natural and cultural wonders of Sorsogon. This ensures that the Mangrove Cruise remains attractive and influential for a long time.

The Surf Camps in Gubat, a Sorsogon Province initiative under the Locally Implemented Program of the Department of Tourism V, embody a strategic effort to bolster tourism and economic development in the region. With a substantial budget of 1,100,000.00 as of 2024, the program focuses on enhancing the tourism potential of Barangays Buenavista and Panganiban. Spanning from 2019 to 2023, the program aimed to attract visitors and foster sustainable growth in the surfing industry. Despite fluctuations in tourist numbers over the years, with peaks in 2019 and 2022 and declines in 2020 and 2023, the cumulative total of 125,426 visitors underscores its significance. Moreover, the involvement of 22 local surfers highlights the community-driven approach, indicating not only an increase in tourism but also the empowerment of local talent and resources.

The Surf Camps Program in Gubat, Sorsogon, was allocated a budget of 1,100,000 pesos since it fulfills the essential financial criteria for the efficient maintenance and operation of the program. While the local guides may perceive this amount as small, it demonstrates the local government unit's (LGU) deliberate prioritization of initiatives. The local government unit (LGU) probably allocated the financing for this program in conjunction with other crucial community needs and projects, guaranteeing an equitable use of resources. The program's funds are crucial for maintaining activities such as surf training, equipment upkeep, and promotional campaigns aimed at attracting tourists. These investments not only promote local tourism but also encourage community development by generating chances for economic expansion and cultural enhancement.

The Surf Camps initiative in Gubat demonstrates an organized strategy to stimulate tourism and accelerate economic development in the area. Given a significant allocation of funding, which reflects its crucial position as a top tourist destination in the province, the program is ideally positioned to enhance the tourism potential of Barangays Buenavista and Panganiban. The initiative aims to attract visitors and promote sustainable growth in the surfing industry by emphasizing the appeal of surfing. Although there have been variations in the number of tourists, with noticeable increases in 2019 and 2022, and decreases in 2020 and 2023, the overall total of 125,426 visitors highlights the lasting importance of the effort. The involvement of 22 surfers from the local area highlights a focus on the community, indicating an increase in tourism and the promotion of indigenous skills and assets. This is significant because the region is home to some of the most skilled surfers in the Bicol region. This diverse and comprehensive strategy not only enhances the tourism environment but also promotes local pride and economic strength within the community.

The Bulusan Lake and Forest Park Bulusan, a flagship program of the Sorsogon Province under the Locally Implemented Program of the Department of Tourism V, epitomizes a concerted effort to promote eco-tourism and preserve natural resources. Situated in Barangay San Roque, this endeavor received a significant budget allocation of 1,000,000.00 and was executed between 2019 and 2023. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the project managed to attract a notable influx of tourists, with numbers fluctuating from 47,073 in 2019 to 81,680 in 2023, totaling 206,845 visitors over the period. This success was fueled by the dedication of 113 workers who contributed to the park's maintenance and operation, ensuring a memorable experience for visitors while fostering sustainable development in the region.

The Bulusan Lake and Forest Park in Bulusan exemplifies the proactive adoption of eco-tourism and the conservation of natural resources. Located in Barangay San Roque, this project has been supported by a significant budget of one million pesos, recognizing its growing popularity among tourists and the potential for further improvement. Although facing challenges caused by the pandemic, the project showed resilience and had a significant increase in visitor visits after the outbreak. The success can be mostly credited to the steadfast dedication of the 113-member team, who are committed to maintaining and operating the park, thereby assuring a satisfying and long-lasting experience for visitors. The park functions as both a recreational sanctuary and a symbol of sustainable development in the area, promoting a balanced relationship between tourism and the protection of the environment.

Bulusan Lake and Forest Park in Bulusan received a budget of 1,000,000 pesos because this amount meets the necessary budgetary requirements to sustain the park's operations and maintenance. According to the tourism officer, this allocation is deemed sufficient to cover essential expenses such as staffing, maintenance of facilities, environmental conservation efforts, and tourism promotion activities. However, this budget is not fixed and can fluctuate based on the local government's prioritization of projects. If other projects are deemed more critical or if additional funding becomes available, the budget for Bulusan Lake and Forest Park may be adjusted accordingly. This flexibility ensures that the park can continue to operate effectively while also allowing the local government to address varying community needs and priorities.

## 2. Strategies employed by Sorsogon Province in the management of its tourism programs

Table 3 presents the findings of this qualitative investigation into the strategies employed by Sorsogon Province in the management of its tourism programs, specifically in (a) planning, (b) organizing, (c) leading, and (d) controlling. This uncovers the multifaceted approaches taken to foster a sustainable tourism industry that promotes economic growth and prioritizes preserving the province's natural and cultural heritage. Through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including local government officials, tourism operators, and guides, alongside content analysis of policy documents and promotional materials, the researcher has distilled the essence of Sorsogon's tourism management strategies. The discussion that follows will expound on how these strategies align with the province's vision for its tourism sector and its potential implications for the future of tourism in Sorsogon Province.

The table below outlines the various strategies employed by Sorsogon Province in the management of its tourism programs, categorized by planning, organizing, leading, and controlling functions.

**Table 3: Strategies employed by Sorsogon Province in the management of its tourism programs**

Management Phases		Strategies employed
Recurring Themes		Collective Description
A. Planning	<i>Consultation and Benchmarking: The crucial initial steps</i>	Engage in targeted consultations with lawmakers and local stakeholders to capture a wide range of perspectives, fostering consensus for robust tourism legislation. By Benchmarking with successful tourism destinations and adopting best practices, Sorsogon learns from others' experiences, avoids common pitfalls, and adapts innovative solutions to its local context, as evidenced by the benchmarking trips to prominent tourism spots.
	<i>Promulgation of Tourism Code: The critical phase</i>	Promulgating a Tourism Code serves as a formal commitment and legislative framework at the municipal level, outlining regulations, standards, and guidelines for tourism, emphasizing the conservation of resources, enhancement of facilities, and promotion of responsible tourism practices.
	<b>Tourism Plan: Alignment with the Sorsogon Province's 7K Advocacy Flagship Program</b>	Aligning each of the Municipality's Tourism Plans to the province's 7K Advocacy Flagship Program ensures a holistic approach to community development and guarantees that tourism initiatives contribute positively to the province's cultural, economic, and social fabric.
B. Organizing	<i>Collaboration and Partnership: The Quadripartite Agreement</i>	Local Government Units (LGUs) are at the forefront, handling local governance and policy execution to shape the tourism landscape. The private sector fuels the industry by providing diverse tourism services and making crucial investments that enhance the region's appeal. Community organizations play a key role in preserving the rich cultural heritage, ensuring that tourism growth does not come at the expense of local traditions and identity. The Provincial Government offers overarching policy guidance and coordinates initiatives across the region, while the National Government, particularly through agencies like the Department of Tourism, provides strategic direction, resources, and oversight to align local efforts with national tourism objectives, creating a cohesive and sustainable tourism ecosystem.
C. Leading	<b>Citizen and Community-Based Approach in Tourism Leadership</b>	Sorsogon Province's tourism management thrives on a community-centric leadership model that champions local involvement and capacity building. LGUs spearhead participatory platforms for inclusive dialogue and skill development, fostering a tourism sector that balances economic advancement with preserving cultural and natural heritage. This approach ensures that the tourism industry prospers and aligns with the province's identity and sustainability goals.
	<i>Flagship Programs and Political Will</i>	The interplay between thoughtfully designed flagship programs and determined political will underpin a dynamic tourism strategy. These flagship programs, such as the Gayon Program,

	<p>ATLAS, and PRESERVE MRS, are strategically crafted to spotlight Sorsogon's natural and cultural allure, driving visitor interest and sustainable development. Political will is crucial in these endeavors, as government leaders invest in and support these initiatives through improved infrastructure, policy-making, and resource allocation. This commitment also fosters partnerships across sectors and ensures tourism growth benefits local communities while preserving the environment.</p>
<p>D. Controlling</p> <p><i>Compliance with Policy and Regulatory Requirements</i></p>	<p>Adherence to policy and regulatory frameworks is fundamental to managing tourism sustainably and responsibly. The province enforces comprehensive policies that span environmental protection, cultural preservation, business operations, and community welfare. These regulations protect Sorsogon's natural treasures, like Donsol Bay and Bulusan Volcano, ensuring eco-tourism remains a viable and attractive sector. The commitment to regulatory compliance also safeguards the province's cultural heritage, ensuring that tourism activities celebrate and support local traditions rather than undermining them. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are in place to ensure stakeholders meet these standards, with penalties for non-compliance.</p>
<p><i>The People as the central drivers of Tourism Oversight</i></p>	<p>The local community stands at the heart of tourism oversight, driving a grassroots approach that ensures sustainable development aligns with the people's values. This participatory model empowers residents to influence decision-making, fostering a shared responsibility for preserving tourism assets. Regular community meetings and involvement in monitoring processes allow locals to maintain oversight, balancing economic benefits with community well-being. Training programs further equip residents with skills to lead in the tourism sector, enhancing service quality and economic empowerment. Collaborations with stakeholders amplify resources and expertise, creating a unified management approach that mirrors the community's collective goals.</p>

a. Planning

At the heart of Sorsogon's approach to managing its expanding tourism sector lies a commitment to meticulous planning, as defined by Weihrich & Koontz (1993), where objectives are set, and a course of action is determined to achieve those objectives. This outlines and discusses the comprehensive planning efforts undertaken by the province, focusing on the development of a sustainable tourism industry that harmonizes infrastructure growth, environmental conservation, and community engagement.

As Sorsogon Province embarks on enhancing its tourism landscape, the municipalities are taking strategic steps to ensure that their tourism programs are competitive, sustainable, and reflective of the community's values. The first phase in this meticulous planning process involves two fundamental activities: consultation and benchmarking.

Consultation according to the participants from each of the municipality's legislative body, plays a critical role in the legislative process by providing a platform for stakeholder participation. It ensures that the voices of various groups—local communities, business owners, tourism professionals, and environmental experts—are heard and their concerns addressed. Additionally, this engagement is essential for building consensus and for the legislation to reflect the diverse interests and needs of the population it will impact. It also helps to identify potential challenges and opportunities that may not be immediately apparent to policymakers,

“we want to make sure na people are aware of it and people have a voice na makapag-suggest, makapag-recommend pa para mas mapaganda at mapaimprove pa yung aming ordinance” (we want to ensure that people are aware of it and that they have a voice to suggest and recommend improvements to enhance further and refine our ordinance), stated by the chairman of the Committee on Tourism in the City of Sorsogon. By involving stakeholders early in the legislative process, municipalities in the Sorsogon province foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the proposed tourism initiatives, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and compliance, “yung realization namin was that the government needs just to recognize and activate, just need to empower the people, find a mechanism for them to be empowered like tourism because it's one of the very equitable industries” ( we need to recognize and empower people in the tourism sector because it’s a very equitable industry), a councilor from the Municipality of Bulusan stated.

Benchmarking, on the other hand, is the practice of looking outward to compare with other successful tourism destinations. It involves analyzing and learning from the best practices of other municipalities and regions that have excelled in managing their tourism sectors. This process helps legislators in the local government units in Sorsogon Province to understand what has worked elsewhere, which pitfalls to avoid, and how innovative solutions can be adapted to the local context, “pumunta kami mismo sa mga surfing spot ng iba't-ibang bansa. Like, pumunta na kami ng Siargao atsaka ng Boronggan, Samar” (we go to different places both outside and within the countries with surfing spots to benchmark), a chairman of Gubat’s Tourism Committee said during the interview.

In the context of Sorsogon’s municipalities, the interplay of consultation and benchmarking in tourism legislation ensures that the laws enacted are grounded in global best practices and tailored to the province's unique cultural, environmental, and economic landscape. This blend of internal insight and external expertise leads to a more holistic, informed, and adaptive approach to tourism legislation, which is crucial for the sector's sustainable development and for securing long-term benefits for all stakeholders involved (Topcu et al.; 2023; Bichler, 2019; Nunkoo, 2015; Guo et. al., 2019; Fidrmuc et. al., 2019; Singalen et. al., 2017).

In consideration of the province’s flagship advocacy program, the promulgation of a Tourism Code in every Municipality is their first concrete step in Planning, as narrated by most of the Chairmen in the local legislative’s tourism committee. According to them, the adoption of such a code signifies a formal commitment to the structured advancement of tourism at the municipal level. It serves as a legislative framework that outlines the regulations, standards, and guidelines governing tourism activities within their municipality, “We had a series of committee hearings, public hearings, to institute it”, stated by Chairman of the Committee on Tourism of Sorsogon City’s Local Government Unit.

When asked about why we need such a tourism code, a participant councilor said, “Because it is our basis of Tourism Plan”. The Tourism Code addresses a range of critical elements necessary for the sustainable growth of the tourism sector especially in Sorsogon Province with a diverse and lively tourism industry. Legislating Tourism Code, according to the participants includes consideration of the conservation of natural and cultural resources, the enhancement of tourist facilities and services, and the promotion of responsible tourism practices that benefit both visitors and the local populace. By implementing a Tourism Code, they lay down the groundwork for coordinated efforts in tourism management, ensuring that all stakeholders — from government entities to private businesses and community members — work towards a shared vision for the future of tourism in their region

The Tourism Code of Sorsogon Province is a critical legislative framework that underpins the booming tourism sector by establishing clear guidelines and standards for sustainable development, management, and promotion of tourism activities. It plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the province's natural and cultural assets, ensuring responsible growth while maximizing social and economic benefits for local communities. Through the implementation of the Tourism Code, Sorsogon can offer a structured and consistent approach to tourism that enhances visitor experiences, encourages ethical practices, supports local entrepreneurship, and maintains the ecological balance, thereby securing the long-term viability and attractiveness of the province as a premier tourist destination.

Based on most of the participants' narratives, central to each Municipality’s agenda in planning its tourism pathway is aligning it with the province’s 7K Flagship Program of basic services to Sorsogonans. The 7K Program which stands for *Kabuhayan* (livelihood), *Kalusugan* (health), *Kadunungan* (education), *Katrangkilohan* (peace and order), *Kagandahan* (beauty), *Kalinisan* (cleanliness) and *Kalikasan* (environment), is an innovative and holistic approach to community development of Sorsogon Province that seeks to address the multifaceted needs of a society to foster overall growth and well-being. Each "K" represents a crucial aspect of life and community that, when combined, provides a comprehensive framework for progress and sustainability. As Donsol’s Chairman of the Committee on Tourism narrated, “Yun talaga yung parang backbone namin dito and even the legislative, kasi it's really hard na support ng legislative if hindi rin kami support na executive” (this serves as the backbone of our tourism legislation because its hard if you do not have the support of the executive).

Aligning a tourism plan with this program involves creating tourism initiatives that enhance the province's cultural heritage and historical significance (*Kasaysayan* and *Kultura*) while ensuring that they contribute to the local economy (*Kabuhayan*) without compromising public health and safety (*Kalusugan* and *Kaayusan*). Simultaneously, it would necessitate measures to ensure that tourism practices uphold social justice and equity (*Katarungan*), and foster educational opportunities through exposure to the province's rich cultural narrative (*Karunungan*). This alignment ensures that tourism development in Sorsogon Province is not only

economically beneficial but also preserves and celebrates its unique identity, supports its citizens, and adheres to principles of sustainability and social responsibility (Pan Xuanming et al., 2023; International Labour Organization (ILO), 2019; Jin et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2016).

#### b. Organizing

Organizing lies at the core of Sorsogon Province's approach to tourism management, comprising the careful structuring and coordination of human and material resources to execute tourism initiatives successfully. This introductory section will explore the organizing processes that underpin the effective and efficient management of Sorsogon's tourism sector. Central to this effort is establishing collaborative partnerships and communication channels that unite diverse stakeholders, ensuring that the collective endeavor toward tourism development is well-organized, integrated, and strategically aligned.

The Quadripartite Agreement in Sorsogon's Tourism Management is a strategic alliance that brings together four key stakeholders: the Municipality's LGU, the private sector and community organizations, the government of Sorsogon Province, and the National Government (e.g. through the Department of Tourism Regional Office V). This alliance is a concerted effort among the Municipality's Local Government Units (LGUs), which are closest to the on-the-ground realities of tourism; the private sector, including local businesses and investors who are essential for offering tourism services and experiences; community organizations that represent the interests and preserve the cultural heritage of the local populace; the Sorsogon Provincial Government, which provides broader policy support and coordination; and the Department of Tourism Regional Office V, which brings national-level oversight, resources, and strategic direction.

For instance, Bulusan's Participatory Restoration with Eco-Livelihood Support, Education and Research, and Venture for Eco-Agritourism from Mountain Rivers, and Seas (PRESERVE MRS) is an innovative program designed to integrate environmental conservation with sustainable livelihood and educational opportunities for local communities. This multifaceted initiative focuses on restoring and preserving Bulusan's diverse ecosystems, including its mountains, rivers, and seas, which are critical for the community's well-being and the local tourism industry. The collaboration between the Local Government Unit (LGU), the local community, the Sorsogon Province Government, and the Department of Tourism Region V (DOT V) is pivotal. The Bulusan LGU plays a central role in coordinating efforts, implementing policies, and providing support for restoration and sustainable development projects. They work closely with the community to ensure that initiatives meet local needs and are embraced by those they affect most. The people and community of Bulusan are the lifeblood of the initiative, actively engaging in restoration activities, adopting eco-livelihood practices, and participating in educational programs to enhance their skills and knowledge for sustainable living. Their involvement ensures that the projects are grounded in local realities and have a lasting impact.

The Sorsogon Province Government bridges local and regional efforts, scaling up successful practices and integrating them into broader development strategies. (Fidrmuc et. al., 2019; Singalen et. al., 2017) this ensures local initiatives contribute to regional conservation goals and sustainable economic growth. DOT V is essential in promoting Bulusan as an eco-tourism destination, helping to create a market for the community's eco-livelihood initiatives and ensuring that tourism development is both environmentally responsible and beneficial to local residents. Together, these stakeholders form a dynamic network that drives the PRESERVE MRS initiative, combining conservation with community development and education to create a sustainable future for Bulusan.

In the case of Donsol's Whale Shark Adventure Tours, the Quadripartite Agreement between the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Donsol, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Donsol Project, the Sorsogon Provincial Tourism Council (SPT CAO), the Province of Sorsogon, and the Department of Tourism Region 5 (DOT-5) is a collaborative framework aimed at managing and promoting sustainable tourism practices in Donsol's Whale Shark Adventure and Tours. This agreement functions by leveraging the strengths and resources of each party to achieve a shared vision for conservation and tourism development. The LGU of Donsol plays a crucial role in local governance, ensuring that tourism activities comply with local regulations and benefit the community. WWF Donsol brings conservation expertise, particularly in protecting the whale shark population and marine biodiversity. Their involvement is key to research, monitoring, and the implementation of best practices for eco-tourism.

SPTCAO and the Province of Sorsogon work together to integrate the whale shark tours into the broader tourism strategy of the province, aligning it with cultural, historical, and environmental initiatives. They also facilitate infrastructure development and capacity building for local stakeholders. Lastly, DOT-5 is instrumental in marketing and promotion at the regional and national levels. They support the development of tourism standards and training for service providers to ensure visitors have high-quality and memorable experiences. The synergy of these entities under the Quadripartite Agreement ensures that Donsol's Whale Shark Adventure and Tours operate within a sustainable framework that prioritizes the well-being of the whale sharks, the environment, and the local community while fostering economic growth through responsible tourism.

Sorsogon Province's Tourism Program hinges on the collective efforts of key stakeholders, each bringing essential contributions to the table. The provincial government and its local government units are pivotal in steering the program, providing the necessary infrastructure, regulatory framework, and promotional strategies to position Sorsogon as a desirable destination. They ensure that tourism development aligns with broader economic objectives and sustainable practices while safeguarding the province's natural

and cultural assets. Local communities are the cultural ambassadors of Sorsogon, offering genuine interactions and experiences that define the province's identity. Their involvement guarantees that tourism benefits are equitably distributed and that the development reflects their values and preserves their way of life. The private sector is a driving force in creating tourism products, services, and experiences that appeal to diverse visitor segments. Their innovation, investment, and operational expertise are crucial in delivering quality and sustainability in the tourism offering.

Lastly, NGOs often champion environmental conservation and community development, ensuring that the tourism program contributes to the economy, adheres to eco-friendly principles, and enhances social welfare. The synergy among these stakeholders (International Labour Organization, 2019) is critical to building a resilient and dynamic tourism program that can adapt to changing trends while fostering inclusive growth and protecting Sorsogon's unique environment and heritage.

### c. Leading

Leading, as defined by Northouse (2021), is the art of motivating a group of people to act toward achieving a common goal. Within the context of Sorsogon Province's tourism management, this concept manifests as the strategic efforts and initiatives aimed at setting a direction, establishing priorities, and exerting a positive influence on tourism programs. The discussion below delves into how leadership in Sorsogon has been instrumental in driving the collaborative, innovative, and sustainable development of the province's tourism sector.

Leadership in tourism management within Sorsogon Province is grounded in a citizen and community-based approach, an exercise in participatory governance and local empowerment. This dominant leadership style among the province's municipalities recognizes that the most effective tourism strategies emerge from a deep understanding of the local context, which is best accessed through the active participation of the residents themselves. The LGUs act as facilitators, enabling the community to voice their aspirations and concerns regarding the development and management of tourism in their locale.

In Sorsogon, such an approach to leadership involves creating platforms for dialogue and collaboration where local stakeholders can gather and contribute. This includes community forums, participatory planning workshops, or advisory committees that include representation from various community groups, including indigenous peoples, youth, women, and local entrepreneurs. Leaders serve to guide these discussions, ensuring that they are structured, goal-oriented, and inclusive. A municipal councilor from Gubat shared "So una, una sa lahat ay consultation talaga, engagement with the stakeholders" (the first step is conducting consultations with stakeholders).

The LGUs especially the executive department also focus on capacity building within the community. They work to identify and nurture local talent, provide educational opportunities, and create pathways for residents to lead and participate in tourism initiatives. Whether it's through training programs in eco-tourism, heritage conservation, or hospitality management, the goal is to equip the community with the skills needed to take ownership of the tourism sector and ensure it reflects local values and priorities, "Kung ano yung nakikita namin na hindi maganda, siguro tanggalin na iyan. Tapos dapat talaga kaming lahat ay magmalasakit sa sariling atin" (we remove those that we think are not good and show that we all genuinely care for what is ours), a Tourism Officer from Bulusan shared.

Moreover, community-based leadership in tourism management in Sorsogon Province is characterized by advocating for sustainable practices that consider the long-term well-being of the environment and the local population. Leaders in Sorsogon Province champion these initiatives that balance economic growth with ecological preservation and cultural integrity. This involves protecting natural assets like the province's surfing spots, whale sharks, the iconic Mount Bulusan, and vast mangroves and ensuring that tourism development does not come at the expense of the local culture and way of life.

Ultimately, leadership in a community-based tourism management approach in Sorsogon Province is about stewardship and collaborative vision. It's about leaders who listen, engage, and empower, acting not as sole decision-makers but as partners in a collective effort to create a tourism sector that is both prosperous and respectful of the province's unique heritage and natural splendor. Through this leadership style, Sorsogon can set an example of how tourism can be a force for good, benefiting visitors and residents alike.

Flagship programs within Sorsogon's tourism sector are carefully crafted initiatives that aim to showcase the province's most compelling offerings and draw visitors to its shores. These programs are meticulously selected for their potential to highlight the natural beauty, cultural richness, and unique experiences that Sorsogon has to offer. They often center around the province's key attractions, such as the serene beaches of Gubat and Prieto Diaz, the majestic Bulusan Volcano, or the gentle whale sharks of Donsol, which provide not just a draw for tourists but also an opportunity for education and conservation.

For instance, in Sorsogon City, the Mayor's Gayon Program of 10-point plus 1 agenda, Donsol has its ATLAS Program, and Bulusan's PRESERVE MRS. These flagship programs are not chosen at random; they are the result of strategic planning and reflect the province's commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism. They serve multiple purposes: enhancing the visibility of Sorsogon in the competitive tourism market, creating jobs, generating income for local communities, and preserving the natural

and cultural heritage. For instance, a flagship program may involve the promotion of community-based eco-tourism that enables visitors to engage with local culture while ensuring that tourism revenues benefit the residents directly. Another program might focus on adventure tourism, tapping into the growing market of travelers seeking active, outdoor experiences in pristine natural settings.

The implementation of these flagship programs requires concerted effort and resources. This is where political will becomes indispensable. Political will refers to government leaders' and policymakers' determination and commitment to prioritize and support the tourism sector. It is the driving force that can mobilize the necessary financial investment, foster an enabling environment for tourism businesses to flourish, and enact policies that protect and promote the province's natural and cultural assets.

Strong political will is evident when leaders take definitive actions to improve infrastructure, such as roads leading to tourist destinations, ports, and airports, which are crucial for accessibility. It is also reflected in the allocation of resources for marketing campaigns that effectively communicate Sorsogon's brand to a wider audience. Moreover, political will is critical in crafting and enforcing environmental regulations that ensure the sustainability of tourism activities, balancing economic benefits with ecological preservation.

Furthermore, political will is necessary for stakeholder engagement. Leaders must cultivate partnerships among the private sector, local communities, NGOs, and other government agencies to create a cohesive and collaborative approach to tourism development. This includes establishing training programs for local service providers, encouraging the development of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, and supporting initiatives that promote cultural heritage preservation, "yung ATLAS Program ni Mayor emphasizes stakeholder engagement that the people and the government have a strong foundation", a chairman on the committee on Tourism from Donsol shared.

In Sorsogon, the synergy between flagship programs and political will can lead to a tourism strategy that is economically lucrative, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. It ensures that tourism development is a shared endeavor, with benefits and responsibilities distributed among all stakeholders. Ultimately, the success of Sorsogon's tourism hinges on this intricate interplay, where the vision and commitment of its leaders match the aspirations and potential of its natural and human resources.

#### d. Controlling

Conceptually, controlling refers to the implementation of measures to monitor, evaluate, and regulate tourism activities (Robbins & Coulter 2018). This undertaking includes enforcing regulations, using technology to monitor visitor flows, and establishing mechanisms to address and mitigate negative impacts on the environment and local communities.

Compliance with policy and regulatory requirements is a cornerstone of Sorsogon's controlling strategy in managing its tourism sector. This approach is critical to ensuring that tourism development is sustainable, responsible, and aligned with the province's broader goals for environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community welfare.

Sorsogon's tourism management strategy involves creating and enforcing policies that guide the development and operation of tourism-related activities. These policies cover a wide range of areas, including land use, business licensing, health and safety standards, labor laws, and environmental protection. Ensuring that all tourism stakeholders comply with these policies is essential for maintaining order, safety, and a high standard of service within the industry.

Environmental regulations are particularly important Given Sorsogon's rich natural assets, such as the Donsol Bay and Bulusan Volcano Natural Park. Compliance with environmental laws and guidelines ensures the protection of these ecosystems, which are the foundation of the province's eco-tourism appeal. Regulations may include restrictions on development in sensitive areas, waste management protocols, and guidelines for interacting with wildlife, such as the whale sharks, a tourism officer from Donsol shared their municipality's experience from DOT V, "they're very strict when it comes sa mga statistics sa tourist arrivals na dahil isa po yun talaga sa essential requirements na talagang hinihingi po nila sa amin" (hey are very strict regarding the statistics on tourist arrivals because that is one of the essential requirements that they strictly ask from us).

Regulatory requirements also extend to the protection of Sorsogon's cultural heritage. This involves the preservation of historical sites, the promotion of local arts and crafts, and the support of cultural festivals. Compliance ensures that tourism does not erode the province's cultural identity but rather celebrates and revitalizes it.

Sorsogon has established monitoring mechanisms and regulatory bodies that oversee tourism operations to enforce compliance. These may include regular inspections, audits, and the requirement for permits and environmental clearances. Non-compliance can result in penalties, fines, or even the suspension of business operations, which serves as a deterrent and ensures adherence to regulations. (Weng Chou Wong & Ka Wai Lai, 2022) prioritizing compliance with policy and regulatory requirements, Sorsogon's tourism management strategy can control and direct tourism growth to safeguard its assets for future generations while creating a robust and equitable tourism sector that benefits all stakeholders.



In Sorsogon's controlling strategies for tourism management, the people are positioned as the central drivers of oversight, embodying a grassroots approach to ensuring that tourism development is sustainable and reflects the community's values. This people-centric model places importance on local involvement and decision-making, ensuring that the residents who are most affected by tourism activities have a significant role in shaping policies and practices. This approach not only empowers the community but also fosters a sense of collective responsibility towards managing and preserving the region's tourism assets. Through such a framework, Sorsogon's strategy acknowledges that the long-term success of its tourism sector hinges on active participation and vigilant oversight by its people, "it takes a village para maging sustainable ang turismo dito sa lugar na ito", a municipal councilor from Gubat narrated.

The community's involvement in tourism oversight manifests itself in various ways. Locals monitor tourism operations to ensure they adhere to environmental standards, respect cultural heritage, and contribute to the local economy without causing disruption or displacement. Regular community meetings and forums are held where residents can voice concerns, suggest improvements, and share their visions for the future of tourism in their province. This continuous dialogue helps to maintain a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the preservation of the community's quality of life, "Pag June kasi nagkakaroon kami ng post evaluation. Lahat ng stakeholders are invited at sila magbibigay ng mga comments and suggestions, kung paano na namin aayusin for the next season", (we conduct a post-evaluation every June. All stakeholders are invited, and they provide comments and suggestions on how we can improve for the next Butanding season), as shared by Donsol's Tourism Officer.

Moreover, Sorsogon's tourism management strategies often include training and capacity-building programs for residents. These initiatives aim to equip them with the skills necessary to take on leadership roles within the tourism sector, from guiding tours to managing small businesses. This fosters professional development and economic empowerment and ensures that tourism services are provided by those who have a deep understanding and appreciation for the local context.

In addition, the people's role as tourism overseers extends to collaboration with various stakeholders, including local businesses, NGOs, and government agencies. Through such partnerships, the community can leverage additional resources and expertise to enhance tourism offerings and address challenges more effectively. These collaborative efforts help to create a cohesive and comprehensive approach to tourism management that aligns with the community's collective aspirations.

Sorsogon's controlling strategies in tourism management, with the people as central drivers of oversight, create a resilient and responsive tourism sector. This people-focused approach helps to mitigate the risks associated with tourism development, such as environmental degradation and cultural dilution, while maximizing the benefits for the community. In essence, it is an approach that not only respects but relies on the local people's wisdom, passion, and active participation (Jin et al., 2018) to steer tourism towards a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

### 3. Challenges encountered in the management of the tourism programs:

#### DOT Mandated

According to the Tourism Officer of the Sorsogon Provincial Tourism, Culture, and Arts Office, the primary challenge across the five DOT-mandated programs, which include Accreditations (Mabuhay Accreditation), Tourism Development Plan (TDP), Trainings (Filipino Brand of Service), Market and Product Development, and Tourism Road Infrastructure Project (TRIP), lies in the realm of administration and governance. While the implementation of these programs may be proceeding smoothly, there is a recognized need for enhanced accountability and transparency within their management. This means ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently, goals are clearly defined, and progress is adequately tracked and reported.

Despite the apparent smooth sailing of the programs, the Tourism Officer highlights the potential for improvement, particularly in the realms of accountability and transparency. Strengthening these aspects not only ensures that taxpayer funds are utilized effectively but also fosters trust and confidence among stakeholders. Moreover, enhanced accountability and transparency can lead to better decision-making processes, allowing for adjustments and optimizations to be made where necessary to maximize the impact of each program.

Furthermore, the Tourism Officer emphasizes the importance of technological innovation in streamlining tourism-related processes. One particular area of focus is the need for better internet connectivity across all tourism transactions. By leveraging technology and improving internet infrastructure, the efficiency and effectiveness of various activities required to comply with the mandated programs can be significantly enhanced. This includes everything from online trainings and accreditation processes to market research and product development initiatives. Overall, the recognition of these challenges underscores the ongoing commitment of the Sorsogon Provincial Tourism, Culture, and Arts Office to continually improve and innovate in its efforts to promote tourism and development within the province.

## Challenges of The Locally Implemented Programs

### Whaleshark Interaction, Donsol Sorsogon

The Municipality of Donsol's Committee Chairman on Tourism states that obtaining the support and involvement of the local populace is the main challenge facing the Butanding Whaleshark engagement program. Even though the initiative aims to conserve the environment and may have some economic advantages, resident participation is crucial to its success. The intended objectives for the growth and sustainability of the tourism program cannot be achieved without their direct participation. The Chairman emphasizes the critical role that community participation plays, emphasizing that the program's potential benefits would not materialize without the collaborative effort and support of the locals, which would eventually impede the expansion and sustainability of tourism in Donsol.

Despite this obstacle, the Donsol Council is always looking for ways to encourage more community participation in the whale-shark interaction. Understanding the importance of grassroots involvement, the Council has prioritized putting initiatives in place that will involve and inspire each member of the community. Employing many outreach programs and cooperative endeavors, the Council aims to foster in the citizens a sense of ownership and responsibility regarding the program. The Council hopes that placing a high value on community collaboration and involvement, will not only improve the tourist program's performance but also promote an inclusive and sustainable approach to tourism development that will benefit both tourists and residents.

The primary challenge of the whale shark interaction program in Donsol Sorsogon, as stated by the Tourism Officer, is effectively handling the expectations and requests of tourists regarding their encounters with these magnificent species. A significant number of tourists express a strong desire for more intimate interactions with the whale sharks, proposing techniques such as providing them with food or even confining them in cages to guarantee their presence. Nevertheless, these efforts are considered harmful to the overall health and instinctive behavior of the whale sharks, giving rise to ethical and ecological problems. The tourism officer highlights the presence of a scientifically and legally approved method for engaging with these creatures, which ensures the preservation of their natural behaviors and habitats.

In response to these problems, the tourism office has implemented extensive educational campaigns intending to educate the public about the right interactions with whale sharks. By providing information on proper behavior, including both recommended actions and actions to avoid, visitors are encouraged to interact with whale sharks in a way that reduces disruption and shows respect for their natural habitat. In addition, the tourist officer emphasizes that the presence of whale sharks varies according to the season, and attributes these oscillations to climate change. The period from December to May is considered the optimal season for interactions, when visitors have the greatest chance of witnessing these wonderful creatures in their native environment. The tourism office aims to promote healthy and courteous interactions with whale sharks by developing education and awareness among tourists, while also respecting the environmental elements that influence the behavior of these marine giants. This approach ensures the welfare of the whale sharks is safeguarded.

The Tourism Guide of the Whale Shark contact program in Donsol, Sorsogon, emphasizes some significant obstacles encountered by the endeavor. The primary challenge in providing continuous and dependable interactions for eager tourists is the limited availability of whale sharks during specific seasons. As the occurrence of whale sharks in the region is not consistently assured throughout the year, there are occasions when optimistic tourists may experience disappointment as a result of the nonexistence of these magnificent beasts. In addition, unanticipated obstacles such as the pandemic worsen this difficulty by affecting the number of tourists, therefore hurting the earnings of tourist guides who enjoy gratuities from visitors. The variability in tourist numbers highlights the program's susceptibility to external circumstances that are beyond its influence, emphasizing the utmost need for sustainability.

In addition, effectively managing the expectations of tourists poses another significant obstacle for the program. To minimize the possibility of disappointment, tourist guides provide guests with prior information on the unpredictable occurrence of whale shark sightings. It is important to emphasize that there is no guarantee of witnessing a whale shark during their trip. This proactive step seeks to manage expectations and reduce discontent among tourists who may have unrealistic expectations of observing these secretive sea creatures. The program aims to improve visitor satisfaction and maintain the integrity of the whale shark engagement experience by establishing achievable expectations and offering comprehensive information, despite the unpredictable nature of animal interactions.

### Buhatan River Cruise in Sorsogon City

The chairman councilor of the committee on tourism highlights a major obstacle encountered by the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism effort in Sorsogon: the need to begin the program from the initial phase after assuming control. This indicates that there were very few pre-existing structures, techniques, or established systems that could be used or developed further. As a result, the committee had to start the eco-tourism project from scratch. This situation can be challenging since it requires careful planning, allocation of resources, and coordination to create the required infrastructure, marketing tactics, and operational frameworks to guarantee the success and long-term viability of the eco-tourism project.

Nevertheless, the chairman councilor acknowledges the continued presence of proactive individuals in the tourism industry, who serve as a source of enthusiasm and direction in developing the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism program. These individuals have a profound comprehension of the tourist industry, together with creative concepts and forward-thinking strategies, which allows them to create a well-defined plan for the advancement and expansion of the eco-tourism project. Utilizing their specialized knowledge and perspectives, the committee can access valuable information and viewpoints to guide the program's trajectory, take advantage of emerging opportunities, and overcome encountered challenges, ultimately leading the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism project towards prevailing and long-term viability.

The tourism officer of Sorsogon City emphasized that their main challenge stems from financial limitations. Obtaining financial support for the improvement of infrastructure tends to be challenging but essential for the success of tourism initiatives. The official stressed the importance of providing thorough justification to obtain the required budget allocation. The process of justification frequently involves not just showcasing the immediate advantages of a specific infrastructure project but also its enduring effects on the whole tourism industry of Sorsogon City. The objective of this method is to influence key stakeholders, such as government officials and financial decision-makers, about the strategic significance of investing in tourism infrastructure to ensure the sustainable expansion and advancement of the city's tourism sector.

Moreover, the councilor emphasized that the difficulty in allocating the funding arises from the need to harmonize the demands of specific tourism initiatives with the overall needs of Sorsogon's tourism industry. This viewpoint highlights the interdependence of different tourism efforts and the necessity for a holistic strategy in allocating funds. Instead of allocating funding only for particular projects, it is acknowledged that budget allocation should take into account the comprehensive development of tourism in Sorsogon, including infrastructure, marketing, and community engagement initiatives. This comprehensive strategy guarantees the effective allocation of resources to optimize their influence on improving the overall appeal and competitiveness of Sorsogon as a tourist hotspot.

As stated by the tourism guide of Sorsogon City, a major obstacle they encounter is the laborious endeavor of launching the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism program from the very beginning. The commencement stage of any tourism endeavor necessitates careful strategizing, significant financial commitment, and efficient implementation to attract the attention and interest of prospective tourists. As the program is still in its early stages, it is essential to build a dependable network of local partners, such as lodging facilities, transportation services, and tour guides, to give tourists a smooth and unforgettable experience.

One significant challenge encountered by the tourist authorities in Sorsogon City is properly advertising and promoting the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism program in its early phases. To effectively raise awareness and generate interest among tourists, it is necessary to employ creative marketing methods that are specifically designed for the target population. Establishing a unique identity for the Buhatan River cruise experience is crucial due to the competition posed by well-established tourist locations. Employing diverse marketing channels, including social media platforms, travel websites, and collaborations with travel agents, can effectively expand the reach to a broader target population.

#### Mangrove Cruise, Prieto Diaz Sorsogon

The Chairman Councilor on the Committee on Tourism of Prieto Diaz emphasizes a major obstacle they encounter: the lack of a Tourism Development Plan at the start of their council tenure. This inadequacy makes it extremely challenging to develop and carry out new projects from the beginning. In the absence of a pre-existing framework, all aspects of tourist development need to be started and built from scratch, which makes the process difficult and time-consuming. The absence of a well-defined plan not only adds complexity to the first phases but also obstructs the successful execution of initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable tourism growth. As a result, a significant number of resources, time, and effort are used in the process of planning and organizing tourism projects. The lack of a plan worsens the challenge of obtaining support and collaboration from stakeholders, as there is a lack of clarity and direction. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, the counselor noted that they have now started the process of formulating a comprehensive plan. The development observed is promising, suggesting a transition towards a more proactive approach in dealing with difficulties associated with tourism. Having established the required foundation and with a favorable perspective, they are prepared to take the essential measures to improve tourism in Prieto Diaz.

The tourist officer of Prieto Diaz has identified numerous significant obstacles faced by the Mangrove Tours. Previously, residents engaged in the deforestation of mangroves to obtain firewood, resulting in a substantial decline of the mangroves. The exploitation posed a threat to the fragile equilibrium of the ecosystem and reduced the possibility of developing sustainable tourism. Presently, there has been a significant change towards the preservation and control of natural resources, with involvement from several government entities such as the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO), Local Government Unit (LGU), and Philippine National Police (PNP). These interventions seek to replenish the mangrove population by engaging tourists in activities such as planting mangroves throughout their visit. This approach aims to cultivate a sense of ownership and participation towards environmental sustainability.

One further problem emphasized by the tourism officer concerns the internal administration of the trips, including addressing the coordination of tour guides' schedules. On days without tourists, the scheduled tour guide will not earn any additional money,

resulting in internal conflicts regarding arrangements. This challenge highlights the significance of effective organizational frameworks and communication channels within the tourism industry.

The budgetary limitations resulting from Prieto Diaz's classification as a fifth-class town constitute a substantial hurdle to the establishment and upkeep of the Mangrove Tours. Financial constraints limit the extent to which marketing activities, infrastructure enhancements, and conservation projects can be pursued. Although facing budgetary constraints, the Mangrove Tours serve as a prime example of the municipality's dedication to promoting sustainable natural eco-tourism. The tourist program effectively utilizes innovative strategies and carefully allocates resources to achieve maximum impact, while also prioritizing the preservation of the mangrove habitat. The ability to bounce back and the commitment to long-term environmental responsibility demonstrate the potential of creating impactful tourist opportunities, especially in places with few resources.

The primary obstacle encountered by Mangrove Tours, as stated by the Tourist Guide of the Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz, is the usage of unsuitable boats, particularly fiberglass vessels, which are ill-equipped for negotiating the complex waterways of the mangrove forests. This problem emphasizes the difficulties that exist within the LGU and local mangrove administration, which require cooperative actions to resolve issues related to boat maintenance and replacement. Despite this hindrance, proactive initiatives are now being taken to discover appropriate resolutions, guaranteeing the safety and long-term viability of the tour operations. Another obstacle arises at a period when residents partake in the unsustainable activity of deforesting mangroves for fuel, leading to a substantial decrease in mangrove populations. Nevertheless, the combined endeavors of diverse entities such as the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO), Local Government Unit (LGU), and Philippine National Police (PNP) have resulted in the successful implementation of management plans. Currently, tourists are actively engaging in mangrove planting activities as part of their trip, so making a valuable contribution to the restoration and long-term viability of these crucial ecosystems. In addition, the budgetary limitations resulting from Prieto Diaz's categorization as a fifth-class municipality create more difficulties for the Mangrove Tours. To make the most of limited budgets for tourist programs, it is necessary to employ innovative strategies that optimize resources efficiently. Despite the budgetary constraints, the Mangrove Tours serve as a prime example of sustainable environmental eco-tourism, demonstrating the municipality's dedication to conserving its natural heritage while offering distinctive and informative experiences for tourists. Prieto Diaz showcases its commitment to preserving and promoting its mangrove ecosystems despite economic limitations, by employing effective management strategies, involving the community, and implementing innovative approaches.

#### Surf Camps, Gubat Sorsogon

One major obstacle facing the Surf Camp program, according to the Councilor Chairman of Tourism in Gubat, is convincing residential beachfront landowners to turn their properties into commercial spaces to maximize the potential of the Surf Camp locations. This shift is essential to increasing traveler opportunities and meeting the rising demand for surfing activities. To overcome any reservations about changing the nature of their neighborhoods, landowners may need to be convinced of the transformation's advantages. It is a difficult endeavor that calls for cooperation between stakeholders and community involvement to strike a balance between the economic potential of tourist development and the preservation of the local environment and culture. The Councilor Chairman also highlights another issue that the Surf Camp program must overcome: promoting harmony among local business owners, especially concerning the diverse surf culture. Disagreements between surfers from various surf spots can ruin the whole vibe and turn off potential guests. Cohesion and harmony are the ideal conditions, with surf camps acting as gathering places for friendship and mutual love of the sport. To achieve this togetherness, surfers must be encouraged to work together and appreciate one another, regardless of the surf camp they frequent. The Surf Camp program may be made more appealing and help Gubat's tourism business flourish and survive by creating a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere.

The Tourism Officer of Gubat highlights two main challenges facing the Surf Camp program. Firstly, there's an internal administrative hurdle concerning surfers' camaraderie, where a sense of competition among them prevails. This competition can potentially hinder the cooperative atmosphere essential for a successful camp experience. Secondly, financial administration poses a significant challenge as the program operates within a limited budget. Despite this constraint, the Surf Camp manages to thrive and retain its status as the best despite the financial limitations. This resilience underscores the effective management and resourcefulness of the program's organizers, who skillfully navigate the financial constraints to maintain its quality and reputation. The tour guide at the Surf Camp in Gubat asserts that the primary challenge they deal with is the government's paucity of financial assistance for local surf guides to compete and improve their abilities. Although there is now some support in place, the guide emphasizes how advantageous it would be to have more funding. Increased financing would allow local surf guides to compete at higher levels and access better training programs and equipment. This support is essential for Gubat's general growth and recognition as a surfing destination, as well as for the guides' personal development.

The tour guide argues that increasing government funding would improve the abilities and self-assurance of the local surf guides while also boosting tourism and the local economy as a whole. The government can enhance Gubat's standing as a top surfing destination and draw more tourists and money to the area by supporting the growth of local talent. More financial support may also result in the opening of surf academies and training centers, which would promote the sport's expansion in the surrounding area.

Bulusan Lake and Forest Park, Bulusan Sorsogon

The Chairman Councilor of Tourism has identified the primary challenge facing Bulusan Lake Forest Park as the need for improvement in its organizational structure. Within the program, there exists room for enhancement to streamline operations and optimize efficiency. The councilor acknowledges that while the administration is competent, there is still ample opportunity for improvement, particularly in terms of internal organizational programming. This suggests that while the administrative aspect of the park may be functioning adequately, there are areas where it could be further refined to better serve its objectives. By addressing these organizational shortcomings, the park can maximize its potential to offer a more seamless and enriching experience for visitors while ensuring effective management of its resources. Ultimately, this emphasis on refining the internal workings of the park aligns with the goal of enhancing its overall effectiveness and impact within the community.

According to the Tourism Officer, the primary obstacle lies in effectively managing the program, a challenge that has been acknowledged as improving gradually over time. However, the guide emphasizes that enhanced administration is crucial, as it plays a pivotal role in steering the program forward with greater efficiency and effectiveness. This need for better administration extends beyond mere operational logistics; it encompasses strong leadership qualities that can inspire confidence and foster collaboration among stakeholders. Moreover, the guide suggests that improved administration will likely lead to better funding opportunities, as it instills trust in potential investors and sponsors. Ultimately, the guide underscores the vital importance of sound leadership and effective management in ensuring the success and sustainability of tourism initiatives.

The Tourism Guide highlights that its primary hurdle lies in internal program management, a critical aspect for ensuring effective administration. By addressing this challenge, the guide anticipates a notable enhancement in administrative processes, fostering a smoother operation overall. This improvement in administration is seen as crucial for demonstrating strong leadership within the program, as efficient management often correlates with effective guidance. Moreover, the guide emphasizes that better administration can lead to improved funding opportunities, as stakeholders are more inclined to invest in well-organized and professionally managed initiatives. Despite these obstacles, the program has shown promising signs of advancement, steadily improving and reaching a peak in its trajectory, suggesting a positive outlook for the future.

The table below outlines the various strategies employed by Sorsogon Province in the management of its tourism programs, categorized by planning, organizing, leading, and controlling functions.

**Table 4: Challenges of the Locally Implemented Programs in the Sorsogon in terms of Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling**

	<b>Challenges</b>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of support and involvement of the local populace is the main challenge facing the Butanding Whaleshark engagement program</li> <li>- Insufficient financial support for the improvement of infrastructure for Buhatan rivercruise (Tourism Officer)</li> <li>- Misappropriate usage of unsuitable boats, particularly fiberglass vessels, which are ill-equipped for negotiating the complex waterways of the mangrove forests in Prieto Diaz.</li> <li>- Budgetary Constraints of Mangrove in Prieto Diaz</li> <li>- Hardship in convincing residential beachfront landowners to turn their properties into commercial spaces to maximize the potential of the Surf Camp locations</li> </ul>
Organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Laborious endeavor of launching the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism from the very beginning</li> <li>- Illegal engagement of residents in the deforestation of mangroves in Prieto Diaz to obtain firewood, resulting in a substantial decline of the mangroves</li> <li>- Budgetary limitations of operation in administration and organization of the Surf camps in Gubat.</li> </ul>
Leading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ineffectively handling the expectations and requests of tourists regarding the Butanding Whaleshark</li> <li>- Lack of a Tourism Development Plan in Prieto Diaz at the start of the tenure of the councilor.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflict in internal administration of the trips, including addressing the coordination of tour guides' schedules of Mangroves Cruise in Prieto Diaz</li> <li>- Difficulty in promoting harmony among local business owners, internal administrative hurdle concerning surfers' camaraderie, where a sense of competition among them prevails</li> <li>- Hardship in effectively managing the internal operations of Bulusan Lake and Forest Park</li> </ul>
Controlling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited availability of whale sharks during specific seasons according to the tourist guide.</li> <li>- Difficulty in the inception of the Buhatan rivercruise from the initial phase after assuming control according to the tourism councilor</li> <li>- Financial constraints limit the extent to which marketing activities, infrastructure enhancements, and conservation projects can be pursued regarding the Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz.</li> <li>- Paucity of financial assistance for local surf guides of Gubat to compete and improve their abilities</li> <li>- Difficulty in the enhancement to streamline operations and optimize efficiency of Bulusan Lake and Forest Park</li> </ul>

Locally Implemented Programs

Planning

The Municipality of Donsol's Committee Chairman on Tourism states that obtaining the support and involvement of the local populace is the main challenge facing the Butanding Whaleshark engagement program. Even though the initiative aims to conserve the environment and may have some economic advantages, resident participation is crucial to its success. The intended objectives for the growth and sustainability of the tourism program cannot be achieved without their direct participation. The Chairman emphasizes the critical role that community participation plays, emphasizing that the program's potential benefits would not materialize without the collaborative effort and support of the locals, which would eventually impede the expansion and sustainability of tourism in Donsol.

Despite this obstacle, the Donsol Council is always looking for ways to encourage more community participation in the whale-shark interaction. Understanding the importance of grassroots involvement, the Council has prioritized putting initiatives in place that will involve and inspire each member of the community. Employing many outreach programs and cooperative endeavors, the Council aims to foster in the citizens a sense of ownership and responsibility regarding the program. The Council hopes that placing a high value on community collaboration and involvement will not only improve the tourist program's performance but also promote an inclusive and sustainable approach to tourism development that will benefit both tourists and residents.

The tourism officer of Sorsogon City emphasized that their main challenge stems from financial limitations. Obtaining financial support for the improvement of infrastructure for Buhatan Rivercruise in Sorsogon City tends to be challenging but essential for the success of tourism initiatives. The official stressed the importance of providing thorough justification to obtain the required budget allocation. The process of justification frequently involves not just showcasing the immediate advantages of a specific infrastructure project but also its enduring effects on the whole tourism industry of Sorsogon City. The objective of this method is to influence key stakeholders, such as government officials and financial decision-makers, about the strategic significance of investing in tourism infrastructure to ensure the sustainable expansion and advancement of the city's tourism sector.

Moreover, the councilor emphasized that the difficulty in allocating the funding arises from the need to harmonize the demands of specific tourism initiatives with the overall needs of Sorsogon's tourism industry. This viewpoint highlights the interdependence of different tourism efforts and the necessity for a holistic strategy in allocating funds. Instead of allocating funding only for particular projects, it is acknowledged that budget allocation should take into account the comprehensive development of tourism in Sorsogon, including infrastructure, marketing, and community engagement initiatives. This comprehensive strategy guarantees the effective allocation of resources to optimize their influence on improving the overall appeal and competitiveness of Sorsogon as a tourist hotspot.

The primary obstacle encountered by Mangrove Tours, as stated by the Tourist Guide of the Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz, is the usage of unsuitable boats, particularly fiberglass vessels, which are ill-equipped for negotiating the complex waterways of the

mangrove forests. This problem emphasizes the difficulties that exist within the LGU and local mangrove administration, which require cooperative actions to resolve issues related to boat maintenance and replacement. Despite this hindrance, proactive initiatives are now being taken to discover appropriate resolutions, guaranteeing the safety and long-term viability of the tour operations.

In addition, the budgetary limitations resulting from Prieto Diaz's categorization as a fifth-class municipality create more difficulties for the Mangrove Tours. To make the most of limited budgets for tourist programs, it is necessary to employ innovative strategies that optimize resources efficiently. Despite the budgetary constraints, the Mangrove Tours serve as a prime example of sustainable environmental eco-tourism, demonstrating the municipality's dedication to conserving its natural heritage while offering distinctive and informative experiences for tourists. Prieto Diaz showcases its commitment to preserving and promoting its mangrove ecosystems despite economic limitations, by employing effective management strategies, involving the community, and implementing innovative approaches.

One major obstacle facing the Surf Camp program, according to the Councilor Chairman of Tourism in Gubat, is convincing residential beachfront landowners to turn their properties into commercial spaces to maximize the potential of the Surf Camp locations. This shift is essential to increasing traveler opportunities and meeting the rising demand for surfing activities. To overcome any reservations about changing the nature of their neighborhoods, landowners may need to be convinced of the transformation's advantages. It is a difficult endeavor that calls for cooperation between stakeholders and community involvement to strike a balance between the economic potential of tourist development and the preservation of the local environment and culture.

#### Organizing

As stated by the tourism guide of Sorsogon City, a major obstacle they encounter is the laborious endeavor of launching the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism program from the very beginning. The commencement stage of any tourism endeavor necessitates careful strategizing, significant financial commitment, and efficient implementation to attract the attention and interest of prospective tourists. As the program is still in its early stages, it is essential to build a dependable network of local partners, such as lodging facilities, transportation services, and tour guides, to give tourists a smooth and unforgettable experience.

One significant challenge encountered by the tourist authorities in Sorsogon City is properly advertising and promoting the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism program in its early phases. To effectively raise awareness and generate interest among tourists, it is necessary to employ creative marketing methods that are specifically designed for the target population. Establishing a unique identity for the Buhatan River cruise experience is crucial due to the competition posed by well-established tourist locations. Employing diverse marketing channels, including social media platforms, travel websites, and collaborations with travel agents, can effectively expand the reach to a broader target population.

The tourist officer of Prieto Diaz has identified numerous significant obstacles faced by the Mangrove Tours. Previously, residents engaged in the deforestation of mangroves to obtain firewood, resulting in a substantial decline of the mangroves. The exploitation posed a threat to the fragile equilibrium of the ecosystem and reduced the possibility of developing sustainable tourism. Presently, there has been a significant change towards the preservation and control of natural resources, with involvement from several government entities such as the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO), Local Government Unit (LGU), and Philippine National Police (PNP). These interventions seek to replenish the mangrove population by engaging tourists in activities such as planting mangroves throughout their visit. This approach aims to cultivate a sense of ownership and participation towards environmental sustainability.

Financial administration poses a significant challenge as the program operates within a limited budget. Despite this constraint, the Surf Camp manages to thrive and retain its status as the best despite the financial limitations. This resilience underscores the effective management and resourcefulness of the program's organizers, who skillfully navigate the financial constraints to maintain its quality and reputation.

#### Leading

The primary challenge of the whale shark interaction program in Donsol Sorsogon, as stated by the Tourism Officer, is effectively handling the expectations and requests of tourists regarding their encounters with these magnificent species. A significant number of tourists express a strong desire for more intimate interactions with the whale sharks, proposing techniques such as providing them with food or even confining them in cages to guarantee their presence. Nevertheless, these efforts are considered harmful to the overall health and instinctive behavior of the whale sharks, giving rise to ethical and ecological problems. The tourism officer highlights the presence of a scientifically and legally approved method for engaging with these creatures, which ensures the preservation of their natural behaviors and habitats.

In response to these problems, the tourism office has implemented extensive educational campaigns intending to educate the public about the right interactions with whale sharks. By providing information on proper behavior, including both recommended actions and actions to avoid, visitors are encouraged to interact with whale sharks in a way that reduces disruption and shows respect for

their natural habitat. In addition, the tourist officer emphasizes that the presence of whale sharks varies according to the season, and attributes these oscillations to climate change. The period from December to May is considered the optimal season for interactions, when visitors have the greatest chance of witnessing these wonderful creatures in their native environment. The tourism office aims to promote healthy and courteous interactions with whale sharks by developing education and awareness among tourists, while also respecting the environmental elements that influence the behavior of these marine giants. This approach ensures the welfare of the whale sharks is safeguarded.

The Chairman Councilor on the Committee on Tourism of Prieto Diaz emphasizes a major obstacle they encounter: the lack of a Tourism Development Plan at the start of their council tenure. This inadequacy makes it extremely challenging to develop and carry out new projects from the beginning. In the absence of a pre-existing framework, all aspects of tourist development need to be started and built from scratch, which makes the process difficult and time-consuming. The absence of a well-defined plan not only adds complexity to the first phases but also obstructs the successful execution of initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable tourism growth. As a result, a significant number of resources, time, and effort are used in the process of planning and organizing tourism projects. The lack of a plan worsens the challenge of obtaining support and collaboration from stakeholders, as there is a lack of clarity and direction. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, the counselor noted that they have now started the process of formulating a comprehensive plan. The development observed is promising, suggesting a transition towards a more proactive approach in dealing with difficulties associated with tourism. Having established the required foundation and with a favorable perspective, they are prepared to take the essential measures to improve tourism in Prieto Diaz.

One further problem emphasized by the tourism officer of Prieto Diaz regarding the Mangrove cruise concerns the internal administration of the trips, including addressing the coordination of tour guides' schedules. On days without tourists, the scheduled tour guide will not earn any additional money, resulting in internal conflicts regarding arrangements. This challenge highlights the significance of effective organizational frameworks and communication channels within the tourism industry.

The Councilor Chairman of Gubat also highlights another issue that the Surf Camp program must overcome promoting harmony among local business owners, especially concerning the diverse surf culture. There's an internal administrative hurdle concerning surfers' camaraderie, where a sense of competition among them prevails. This competition can potentially hinder the cooperative atmosphere essential for a successful camp experience. Cohesion and harmony are the ideal conditions, with surf camps acting as gathering places for friendship and mutual love of sport. To achieve this togetherness, surfers must be encouraged to work together and appreciate one another, regardless of the surf camp they frequent. The Surf Camp program may be made more appealing and help Gubat's tourism business flourish and survive by creating a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere.

According to the Tourism Officer, the primary obstacle lies in effectively managing the program, a challenge that has been acknowledged as improving gradually over time. However, the guide emphasizes that enhanced administration is crucial, as it plays a pivotal role in steering the program forward with greater efficiency and effectiveness. This need for better administration extends beyond mere operational logistics; it encompasses strong leadership qualities that can inspire confidence and foster collaboration among stakeholders. Moreover, the guide suggests that improved administration will likely lead to better funding opportunities, as it instills trust in potential investors and sponsors. Ultimately, the guide underscores the vital importance of sound leadership and effective management in ensuring the success and sustainability of tourism initiatives.

#### Controlling

The Tourism Guide of the Whale Shark contact program in Donsol, Sorsogon, emphasizes some significant obstacles encountered by the endeavor. The primary challenge in providing continuous and dependable interactions for eager tourists is the limited availability of whale sharks during specific seasons. As the occurrence of whale sharks in the region is not consistently assured throughout the year, there are occasions when optimistic tourists may experience disappointment because of the nonexistence of these magnificent beasts. In addition, unanticipated obstacles such as the pandemic worsen this difficulty by affecting the number of tourists, therefore hurting the earnings of tourist guides who enjoy gratuities from visitors. The variability in tourist numbers highlights the program's susceptibility to external circumstances that are beyond its influence, emphasizing the utmost need for sustainability.

In addition, effectively managing the expectations of tourists poses another significant obstacle for the program. To minimize the possibility of disappointment, tourist guides provide guests with prior information on the unpredictable occurrence of whale shark sightings. It is important to emphasize that there is no guarantee of witnessing a whale shark during their trip. This proactive step seeks to manage expectations and reduce discontent among tourists who may have unrealistic expectations of observing these secretive sea creatures. The program aims to improve visitor satisfaction and maintain the integrity of the whale shark engagement experience by establishing achievable expectations and offering comprehensive information, despite the unpredictable nature of animal interactions.

The chairman councilor of the committee on tourism highlights a major obstacle encountered by the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism effort in Sorsogon: the need to begin the program from the initial phase after assuming control. This indicates that there were very few pre-existing structures, techniques, or established systems that could be used or developed further. As a result, the committee had to start the eco-tourism project from scratch. This situation can be challenging since it requires careful planning,



allocation of resources, and coordination to create the required infrastructure, marketing tactics, and operational frameworks to guarantee the success and long-term viability of the eco-tourism project.

Nevertheless, the chairman councilor acknowledges the continued presence of proactive individuals in the tourism industry, who serve as a source of enthusiasm and direction in developing the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism program. These individuals have a profound comprehension of the tourist industry, together with creative concepts and forward-thinking strategies, which allows them to create a well-defined plan for the advancement and expansion of the eco-tourism project. Utilizing their specialized knowledge and perspectives, the committee can access valuable information and viewpoints to guide the program's trajectory, take advantage of emerging opportunities, and overcome encountered challenges, ultimately leading the Buhatan Rivercruise eco-tourism project towards prevailing and long-term viability.

The budgetary limitations resulting from Prieto Diaz's classification as a fifth-class town constitute a substantial hurdle to the establishment and upkeep of the Mangrove Tours. Financial constraints limit the extent to which marketing activities, infrastructure enhancements, and conservation projects can be pursued. Although facing budgetary constraints, the Mangrove Tours serve as a prime example of the municipality's dedication to promoting sustainable natural eco-tourism. The tourist program effectively utilizes innovative strategies and carefully allocates resources to achieve maximum impact, while also prioritizing the preservation of the mangrove habitat. The ability to bounce back and the commitment to long-term environmental responsibility demonstrate the potential of creating impactful tourist opportunities, especially in places with few resources.

The tour guide at the Surf Camp in Gubat asserts that the primary challenge they deal with is the government's paucity of financial assistance for local surf guides to compete and improve their abilities. Although there is now some support in place, the guide emphasizes how advantageous it would be to have more funding. Increased financing would allow local surf guides to compete at higher levels and access better training programs and equipment. This support is essential for Gubat's general growth and recognition as a surfing destination, as well as for the guides' personal development.

The tour guide argues that increasing government funding would improve the abilities and self-assurance of the local surf guides while also boosting tourism and the local economy as a whole. The government can enhance Gubat's standing as a top surfing destination and draw more tourists and money to the area by supporting the growth of local talent. More financial support may also result in the opening of surf academies and training centers, which would promote the sport's expansion in the surrounding area.

The Chairman Councilor of Tourism has identified the primary challenge facing Bulusan Lake Forest Park as the need for improvement in its organizational structure. Within the program, there exists room for enhancement to streamline operations and optimize efficiency. The councilor acknowledges that while the administration is competent, there is still ample opportunity for improvement, particularly in terms of internal organizational programming. This suggests that while the administrative aspect of the park may be functioning adequately, there are areas where it could be further refined to better serve its objectives. By addressing these organizational shortcomings, the park can maximize its potential to offer a more seamless and enriching experience for visitors while ensuring effective management of its resources. Ultimately, this emphasis on refining the internal workings of the park aligns with the goal of enhancing its overall effectiveness and impact within the community.

**Department Of Tourism Mandated Programs**

The table below outlines the primary challenges faced by the Department of Tourism in implementing mandated programs across the key managerial functions of Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling.

**Table 5: Challenges of Department of Tourism Mandated Programs in terms of Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling**

	<b>Challenges</b>
Planning	- Ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently
Organizing	- Clearly defined goals
Leading	- Enhanced accountability and transparency
Controlling	- Progress is adequately tracked and reported - Technological innovation in streamlining tourism-related processes

The management of the Department of Tourism encounters substantial difficulties in the areas of Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling. The issue in Planning is to properly allocate resources while establishing well-defined objectives that are in line with the tourism potential of the province. The requirement for more accountability and transparency is impeding organizing efforts, as it is crucial to prevent mismanagement and guarantee that all stakeholders are well-informed and actively involved. Leading projects face the issue of promoting collaboration across many sectors, including local communities, to advance tourism development. Controlling operations should focus on addressing the challenge of effectively monitoring and reporting progress, ensuring that performance metrics are achieved, and making necessary modifications. The incorporation of technological

advancements to optimize tourism-related procedures poses a twofold difficulty in deploying novel systems while successfully teaching staff to adjust to these progressions.

According to the Tourism Officer of the Sorsogon Provincial Tourism, Culture, and Arts Office, the primary challenge across the five DOT-mandated programs, which include Accreditations (Mabuhay Accreditation), Tourism Development Plan (TDP), Trainings (Filipino Brand of Service), Market and Product Development, and Tourism Road Infrastructure Project (TRIP), lies in the realm of administration and governance. While the implementation of these programs may be proceeding smoothly, there is a recognized need for enhanced accountability and transparency within their management. This means ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently, goals are clearly defined, and progress is adequately tracked and reported. Despite the apparent smooth sailing of the programs, the Tourism Officer highlights the potential for improvement, particularly in the realms of accountability and transparency. Strengthening these aspects not only ensures that taxpayer funds are utilized effectively but also fosters trust and confidence among stakeholders. Moreover, enhanced accountability and transparency can lead to better decision-making processes, allowing for adjustments and optimizations to be made where necessary to maximize the impact of each program.

The Tourism Officer emphasizes the importance of technological innovation in streamlining tourism-related processes. One particular area of focus is the need for better internet connectivity across all tourism transactions. By leveraging technology and improving internet infrastructure, the efficiency and effectiveness of various activities required to comply with the mandated programs can be significantly enhanced.

#### 4. The proposed Sustainable Tourism Destination Management Framework

After careful analysis of the status, strategies employed, and challenges experienced by Sorsogon Province in its Tourism management, this section presents the proposed Sustainable Tourism Destination Management Framework to enhance the Tourism Programs of Sorsogon Province and to offer a framework for provinces seeking to augment their tourism initiatives and replicate similar successes. This is underpinned by a multifaceted approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of tourism's social, environmental, and economic factors. At its core lies the proposed Triad of Sustainable Tourism: People, Planet, and Profit. This model is designed to address the tourism industry's immediate needs and ensure its viability and resilience in the long term.

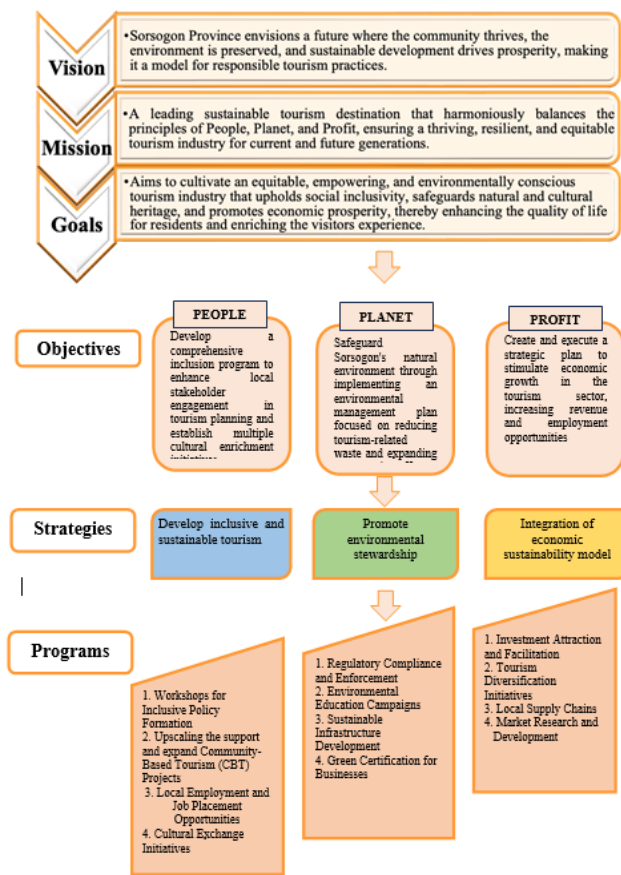


Figure 3. Proposed Tourism Destination Management Framework

The proposed tourism framework is justified through the example of Sorsogon Province's multifaceted approach to sustainable tourism management. By actively involving the local community, as seen in the Whale Shark Interaction Program and extensive training initiatives, the framework ensures community engagement, creates sustainable job opportunities, and fosters a sense of ownership and pride among residents. Meanwhile, environmental conservation is prioritized through programs like the Mangrove Cruise, which shifts from harmful practices to sustainable eco-tourism, and the Tourism Road Infrastructure Development Program, which enhances access while preserving natural landscapes. These efforts guarantee that tourism development does not compromise, but rather preserves and enhances, the province's rich natural heritage. Economic sustainability is achieved through strategic resource allocation, such as significant budgets for accreditations and market and product development initiatives like the Kasanggayahan Festival, which stimulate local economic growth and showcase cultural and natural attractions. This balance between community involvement, environmental conservation, and economic growth exemplifies a holistic and sustainable approach, addressing challenges like financial constraints and limited natural attractions with innovative solutions and public-private partnerships. By integrating these elements, the proposed framework not only fosters a thriving tourism industry beneficial to all stakeholders but also ensures the preservation of Sorsogon's unique heritage, making it a model for sustainable tourism development.

#### The Framework's Vision, Mission, and Goals

Situated in the heart of the Philippine Archipelago, Sorsogon is a province glowing with rich natural and cultural heritage becoming one of the most sought tourism destinations in the Bicol Region. Amidst this, practices and cultures in the local tourism industry stand at a crossroads, seeking to navigate a balance between growth and sustainability. Thus, a framework was proposed to establish Sorsogon as a tourism destination that not only promotes sustainability but also thrives on a balance of the principles of People, Planet, and Profit. This maintains a durable and inclusive tourism sector that can support both current and future generations, cultivating a symbiotic relationship between the visitors, stakeholders, and the natural environment.

Guided by a clear vision, Sorsogon Province is positioned to be a beacon of sustainable tourism. It is a dream of a community that flourishes both socially and economically, while also carefully safeguarding the environment and prioritizing sustainable development. This vision places Sorsogon as a model for responsible tourism practices that can inspire and guide other provinces toward an upscaled tourism industry.

The overarching goal of this endeavor is to cultivate a tourism industry that is equitable, empowering, and environmentally conscious. This industry will uphold social inclusivity, safeguard natural and cultural heritage, and stimulate economic prosperity. By achieving this, the industry will not only enhance the quality of life for the residents of Sorsogon but also enrich the visitor experience, creating a legacy of sustainability and success that can be shared with the world.

#### Objectives

Anchored on the tenets of People, Planet, and Profit, this framework prioritizes a direction of developing equitable and sustainable tourism, promoting environmental stewardship, and integrating a model of economic sustainability to achieve social equity and community well-being by fostering inclusive growth and cultural enrichment, safeguard the natural environment through eco-conscious practices and biodiversity conservation, and drive economic viability by creating sustainable income and employment opportunities, all while preserving the province's cultural and environmental integrity.

#### People

**Social Equity in Tourism** The 'People' aspect of the framework focuses on the social dimensions of sustainable tourism. It emphasizes the need for tourism development to be inclusive and equitable, providing tangible benefits to local communities to achieve social equity and community well-being through inclusive tourism development that provides opportunities, cultural enrichment, and a voice in decision-making for all local stakeholders. This involves conducting policy workshops and creating employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for marginalized or underserved groups. It also means protecting populations' rights and ways of life and ensuring that they have a voice in the planning and management of tourism in their areas. Additionally, it stresses the importance of cultural exchange and visitor satisfaction, ensuring that tourists have enriching, authentic experiences that foster a positive image of the destination and encourage repeat visits.

#### Planet

Sorsogon's natural landscapes, from its serene beaches, surfing paradise, to the iconic Mount Bulusan, are central to its tourism appeal. Recognizing this, the province must implement stringent environmental protections to ensure the sustainability of its natural resources. Environmental Stewardship in Tourism The 'Planet' principle addresses the environmental responsibilities of sustainable tourism. This involves the conservation of natural resources, the protection of wildlife and their habitats, and the minimization of tourism's carbon footprint. Key components include sustainable practices such as reducing waste, conserving water, and promoting energy efficiency. This pillar also involves educating tourists and industry stakeholders about the importance of environmental conservation, encouraging them to act as stewards of the destinations they visit. By safeguarding the natural environment, the tourism industry can ensure that it remains an asset for future generations, rather than depleting the resources that make travel destinations appealing.

## Profit

Integration of economically sustainable model in Tourism The 'Profit' principle recognizes that for tourism to be sustainable, it must be economically viable (Begum, 2021). This doesn't just mean profitability for businesses rather it encompasses the broader economic impact of tourism on a destination, including the generation of revenue for local and national economies. Sustainable economic practices in tourism include fair pricing, ethical sourcing of products, and investment in local infrastructure that benefits both tourists and residents. The 'Profit' pillar also encourages the diversification of tourism offerings, which can make destinations more resilient to changes in market trends and reduce dependency on a single type of tourism.

## Strategies

### Planning

Local planning in Sorsogon must prioritize community-based tourism (CBT) development, which emphasizes community participation. Sorsogon's local tourism boards can actively engage with communities to create culturally and environmentally sustainable tourism offerings. This participatory approach ensures that tourism benefits the local populace while preserving cultural heritage. Emphasis is placed on preserving local traditions and heritage sites to maintain the province's unique cultural identity. In parallel, DOT mandates the Tourism Infrastructure Development Project (TIDP). This program focuses on constructing essential tourism infrastructure, such as roads, visitor centers, and accommodations, funded and managed by DOT. Additionally, the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) spearheads national campaigns and marketing efforts to promote Sorsogon to a broader audience, thereby increasing its visibility and attractiveness to tourists.

### Organizing

The organizing function involves creating structures to implement tourism strategies effectively. Locally, Local Tourism Councils (LTCs) are pivotal. These councils can organize tourism activities and ensure that community members are actively involved in tourism development. Collaborations with local entrepreneurs can also fostered to create networks of businesses that provide tourism services. This grassroots approach is complemented by DOT's establishment of regional offices and satellite centers. These offices oversee the implementation of national tourism guidelines, ensuring consistency and quality across the region. Accreditation programs conducted by the DOT ensure that local tourism operators meet national standards, maintaining a high level of service for tourists.

### Leading

Leadership is crucial to the success of tourism management. Locally, leadership training programs are implemented to develop capable leaders in tourism management. Capacity-building workshops can also be conducted to enhance the skills and abilities of local tourism stakeholders. To support these efforts, DOT may provide leadership seminars designed to instill essential leadership qualities and management skills in tourism practitioners. Furthermore, DOT offers scholarships and educational programs to enable advanced studies in tourism-related fields, ensuring a continuous pipeline of well-educated professionals in the industry.

### Controlling

The controlling function ensures that tourism initiatives are effective and adhere to set standards. Locally, feedback mechanisms such as regular surveys and feedback sessions with tourists and residents are employed to assess the performance of tourism programs. Local audits help ensure that funds are used appropriately and that tourism activities comply with local laws and ethical standards. On the national level, DOT conducts annual performance reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of tourism programs systematically. Compliance checks are also carried out to ensure that local tourism operators adhere to national standards, thereby maintaining the overall quality and reliability of the tourism sector.

### Financial Aspects

The financial aspects of tourism management in Sorsogon are supported by both local financial strategies and DOT financial programs. Locally, community funding mechanisms pool resources from local businesses and government grants, thereby financing community-driven projects. Revenue generated from local tourism taxes also helps finance these initiatives. On the national scale, DOT provides budget allocations specifically for tourism infrastructure and development projects. Additionally, grants and subsidies are offered to local tourism operators, providing them with financial aid to support various tourism initiatives and ensure their sustainability.

### Programs

Under this strategies and objectives, Sorsogon Province may initiate programs that highlight community engagement, cultural integrity, and economic inclusion. Workshops for Inclusive Policy Formation are envisioned as collaborative spaces where

community voices are amplified in the shaping of tourism policies. These workshops not only facilitate a democratic approach to policy development but also ensure that the resulting strategies are well-informed by the needs and insights of local stakeholders, from indigenous groups to small business owners.

Complementing these policy workshops, the province seeks to Upscale Support and Expand Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Projects. This program aims to strengthen existing CBT initiatives and launch new ones, enabling communities to showcase their unique cultural and natural assets while generating direct economic benefits. By providing technical support, funding, and marketing assistance, the province can elevate the quality and reach of these CBT projects, making them more competitive and sustainable.

Recognizing the importance of employment in fostering community prosperity, the province also proposes creating Local Employment and Job Placement Opportunities within the tourism sector. By developing targeted training programs and job placement services, the local workforce can be equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in tourism-related roles, ensuring that the economic gains from tourism directly contribute to reducing unemployment and improving the standard of living.

Lastly, Cultural Exchange Initiatives are planned to enrich the cultural fabric of Sorsogon and promote mutual understanding between visitors and residents. These initiatives may include cultural festivals, artist residencies, or exchange programs that allow for the sharing of traditions, arts, and heritage. Such exchanges not only enhance the visitor experience but also foster pride among locals, preserving cultural practices for future generations while opening avenues for cultural tourism. Together, these programs underpin Sorsogon's commitment to a tourism industry that is equitable, culturally vibrant, and supportive of its people.

While currently, Sorsogon's commitment to the 'People' aspect of the framework is evident in its community-centric tourism practices, this proposal encouraged the province to invest more in local capacity building, ensuring that the benefits of tourism extend to its residents. Initiatives such as community-based tourism projects empower local stakeholders, providing them with the tools and knowledge to participate in and benefit from the tourism industry actively. These projects often highlight the cultural heritage of Sorsogon, allowing visitors to engage with the local history, traditions, and arts in a manner that respects and preserves them. Education plays a key role here, with programs designed to teach both tourists and locals about the cultural significance of the region, fostering mutual respect and understanding. By enhancing the community's capabilities, this sub-component ensures that the tourism services offered are of high quality and authentically represent the local culture and environment, (UNWTO, n.d.) ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth and resilience of the tourism industry in Sorsogon Province.

Regulatory Compliance and Enforcement can be a flagship program of the province's commitment to the environment. This program involves the development and strict enforcement of environmental regulations that govern tourism activities. By ensuring that all tourism operators comply with these standards, the province can prevent environmental degradation and promote sustainable practices across the industry. This ensures that all tourism activities operate in harmony with environmental laws and regulations. This entails the vigilant enforcement of existing policies that safeguard natural assets, the development of new regulations in response to emerging challenges, and the regular monitoring of tourism operations to ensure adherence to environmental standards. Through policy compliance, Sorsogon's tourism sector is held to a high standard of environmental responsibility, which is crucial for mitigating the impact of tourism on the planet and preserving the province's natural beauty.

Environmental Education Campaigns are also crucial in raising awareness and changing behaviors related to environmental conservation. Through these campaigns, Sorsogon Province can inform and inspire tourists, local businesses, and the community at large about the importance of preserving the natural environment. The campaigns would likely include information on waste management, conservation of natural habitats, and the importance of protecting endangered species.

Another program that can be proposed is Sustainable Infrastructure Development, essential in minimizing the environmental footprint of tourism, this program will focus on creating eco-friendly facilities and infrastructure that meet the needs of tourists without compromising the province's natural assets. This could involve the construction of green accommodations, the development of non-invasive transport options, and the implementation of renewable energy sources.

Lastly, the introduction of a Green Certification for Businesses program will incentivize tourism-related businesses, encouraging them to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Certifications would be awarded to businesses that meet certain sustainability criteria, such as energy efficiency, responsible waste management, and the use of sustainable materials. This not only encourages businesses to go green but also helps tourists make informed choices about the services they use. These efforts aim to maintain the ecological integrity of tourist destinations, ensuring that they remain vibrant and accessible for future generations while also serving as a foundation for eco-tourism experiences (Butler, 1980).

A program on Investment Attraction and Facilitation can be a critical initiative, designed to catalyze economic growth by attracting and nurturing investment in the tourism sector. The program's objective is to position Sorsogon as an ideal location for both local and foreign investors who are looking to capitalize on opportunities in a tourism market that values sustainability and profitability. To achieve this, the program emphasizes the simplification of investment procedures, making it easier for investors to navigate legal and administrative requirements. Streamlining processes such as business registration, and permit approvals can significantly

reduce the time and effort required to launch and operate tourism-related ventures in the province. By establishing a transparent and informative investment promotion platform, Sorsogon can effectively communicate the array of investment opportunities that exist within its tourism landscape. This may involve detailed guides on how to invest, success stories of existing investments, and comprehensive data on tourism trends and market potential.

While diverse tourist attractions are evident in Sorsogon such as Whale Shark Interaction in Donsol, Buhatan Rivercruise of Sorsogon City, and the Mangrove Cruise in Prieto Diaz, duplication in other municipalities' tourism programs is possible. With this, Tourism Diversification Initiatives is designed to ensure and expand the province's appeal to a wider audience by offering a variety of attractions and experiences that tap into the unique characteristics of the locals.

For instance, Sorsogon's lush landscapes and diverse ecosystems make it an ideal candidate for eco-tourism ventures such as treks, where visitors can explore the rich biodiversity that includes rare species and extraordinary flora. Meanwhile, cultural tours can offer deep dives into the history and traditions of the local communities, perhaps through storytelling sessions or hands-on craft workshops that celebrate the province's heritage. For adrenaline seekers, adventure sports such as surfing in the renowned waves of Gubat or hopping across the beautiful islands in Sorsogon can add an exhilarating dimension to the tourism portfolio. Gastronomy experiences, too, can be a draw, with food trails that allow tourists to savor the unique flavors of Sorsogon's cuisine, from fresh seafood dishes to local delicacies like pili nuts. By diversifying its tourism offerings in this way, Sorsogon not only becomes more resilient to changes in tourist preferences and global market trends but also enriches the visitor experience, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits.

The program on Local Supply Chain focuses on ensuring that the prosperity derived from tourism is shared across Sorsogon Province's society. This means that the economic resources and benefits—such as income, employment, and business opportunities—are accessible to a broad spectrum of the population, including marginalized and traditionally underrepresented groups. The aim is to create a tourism economy that supports local livelihoods and contributes to poverty alleviation, while also fueling the region's overall economic engines. Initiatives could include supporting local entrepreneurship, sourcing goods and services from within the community, and investing tourism revenue back into local development projects.

By continuously engaging in market research and development, Sorsogon can ensure that its tourism strategies are not only responsive to current demands but also proactive in anticipating future trends. This program is a critical tool for maintaining a dynamic and competitive tourism industry that meets the needs of travelers and supports the sustainable growth of the province's economy.

For example, detailed surveys and focus groups could reveal that tourists are increasingly looking for immersive cultural experiences. In response, Sorsogon could develop interactive tours that involve participation in local festivals or workshops led by artisans. Analysis of travel review websites and social media platforms might indicate a growing interest in sustainable travel options, prompting Sorsogon to highlight eco-friendly accommodations and activities within its marketing efforts. Tourist behavior analysis, such as peak visit times, spending patterns, and preferred activities, can help Sorsogon optimize resource allocation. For instance, if research shows a surge in visits during certain festivals or seasons, the province can prepare accordingly by ensuring adequate infrastructure and services are in place to handle the influx of tourists.

Understanding market trends also enables Sorsogon to stay ahead of the curve and identify emerging opportunities. If there's a trend toward wellness tourism, the province might explore the development of wellness retreats that utilize its natural hot springs and serene beach settings. Market research can further assist in developing targeted marketing campaigns. By identifying key demographics and their media consumption habits, Sorsogon can craft messages that resonate with potential visitors and choose the most effective channels, whether it's social media advertising, collaborations with travel influencers, or features in niche travel magazine.

Effective tourism management in Sorsogon Province hinges on both locally developed strategies and Department of Tourism (DOT) mandated programs. These efforts are systematically categorized into various management functions: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, each of which incorporates distinct local and national elements.

In summary, the management of tourism in Sorsogon Province involves a comprehensive approach that merges local and national strategies. This balanced framework not only ensures compliance with national standards but also addresses the unique needs of the local context, fostering a resilient and thriving tourism sector.

In the implementation of this framework, it's crucial to strike a balance between the principles of people, planet, and profit ensuring that no single aspect is prioritized at the expense of others. Effective policy-making, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring are necessary to navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise. By adhering to the triad principles, destinations like Sorsogon can create a tourism industry that supports the local economy, preserves the environment, and enhances the well-being of residents and visitors.

## Conclusion

1. The success of these initiatives is significantly influenced by various factors including scope, budget, period of implementation, tourist numbers, and manpower. The effectiveness of these programs in promoting tourism and enhancing visitor experiences is intrinsically tied to their comprehensiveness, as well as the resources allocated to them. A broader scope allows for a more holistic approach to tourism development, while adequate budgetary provisions ensure that essential activities such as marketing campaigns, infrastructure improvements, and cultural preservation efforts can be effectively carried out. Period of implementation plays a crucial role in achieving long-term sustainability and impact. The number of tourists served and the availability of skilled manpower to manage and execute these programs are pivotal in determining their overall success.
2. Sorsogon Province's strategic approach to tourism management is a comprehensive model that integrates meticulous planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to foster a sustainable, inclusive, and thriving tourism sector. Through extensive stakeholder consultation, benchmarking, and the promulgation of a Tourism Code aligned with the province's 7K Advocacy Flagship Program, Sorsogon has established a strong legislative foundation for tourism. Collaborative frameworks, such as the Quadripartite Agreement, demonstrate the importance of partnerships in resource coordination and program implementation. Leadership in Sorsogon is characterized by a community-based approach that empowers local residents to actively participate in shaping the tourism landscape, ensuring that the sector supports the province's cultural heritage and natural environment. The province's focus on compliance with policy and regulatory requirements, along with the central role of the community in tourism oversight, further ensures the responsible growth of tourism activities. Collectively, these strategies underscore Sorsogon's commitment to a tourism management system that balances economic development with environmental stewardship and social welfare, setting a benchmark for responsible tourism practices.
3. The success of the program is intricately tied to effective administration, governance, financial allocation, and management. Despite implementation or mandates, these factors significantly influence the outcomes of tourism initiatives. Well-structured administration ensures smooth execution, while strong governance frameworks foster accountability and transparency, vital for building trust and sustainability. Adequate financial allocation is essential for funding initiatives, infrastructure development, and marketing campaigns, all critical for attracting visitors and promoting destinations. Additionally, efficient management ensures resources are utilized effectively, maximizing impact and minimizing wastage.
4. The Sustainable Tourism Destination Management framework for Sorsogon Province, anchored the Triad of Sustainable Tourism—People, Planet, and Profit—demonstrates a comprehensive approach to fostering a resilient and thriving tourism industry. Sorsogon's dedication to social equity ensures that tourism development is inclusive, offering benefits to local communities and protecting indigenous cultures, while also prioritizing visitor satisfaction through authentic experiences. The environmental pillar underscores the province's commitment to conservation practices, safeguarding its rich natural landscapes and wildlife through regulation and restoration efforts. Economic viability is strategically pursued by diversifying tourism offerings and investing in local infrastructure and businesses, ensuring the industry's profitability and sustainability. By maintaining a balanced focus on these interconnected pillars and engaging in effective policymaking and stakeholder collaboration, Sorsogon is poised to sustainably enhance the well-being of its residents and the experiences of its visitors, setting a benchmark for responsible tourism management.

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