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Tourism Through Local Eyes: A Potential Assessment of Danawan Lake

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ABSTRACT

Tourism bridges different aspects together. It depends most of its assets on the abundance of nature. This study was conducted in Danawan Lake, located at Sitio Darayaw, Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro. This study, in partnership with the local government unit, is focused on the potential assessment of Danawan, a mountain lake, with a specific lens on gauging community perception when it comes to tourism development. Aside from the physical attributes of a destination, community participation in tourism development is very important as it will dictate its sustainability. This ethnographic study employed a qualitative approach from SWOT analysis through observation, mapping, and personal interviews. The results showed that Danawan Lake has potential for adventure and ecotourism, but its sustainable development requires careful consideration of both strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The indigenous community living near the lake has signified their acceptance of tourism activities and development in the area if advanced communication is considered. Collaboration and inclusivity should be at hand to attain the desired goals reflecting that the community considers the lake sacred. Future researchers may use other alternative potential assessment tools to gain more in-depth findings.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism bridges different aspects together. Just like how it enhances the well-being of our nature and culture. Tourism depends most of its assets on the abundance of nature. Natural assets play a critical role in tourism and are often among the primary attractions for travelers. The importance of natural assets to tourism is multifaceted and includes attraction and beauty, recreational activities, cultural significance, wildlife, and sustainability. Tourism must be sustainable more than ever as it will cover the future of the younger generations depending on the richness of nature and culture we enjoy at present.

The Philippines is filled with natural resources that are transformed into its tourism destinations. From the wide array of beaches, mountains, rivers, forests, and lakes, it is not just boasting its natural richness but its abundant blessings as well. The province of Oriental Mindoro is one of the provinces in the Philippines which highly depends on the beauty of its physical and natural environment. From the white beaches of Puerto Galera to some of the unexplored beaches of the South primarily from Bulalacao, Mansalay and Roxas as well as the richness of the bodies of water in Bongabong, Bansud and Pinamalayan, the province has boasted its naturally beautiful treasures. The vision for Oriental Mindoro is one of sustainable development, where the province nurtures its natural resources while promoting responsible tourism and preserving its cultural heritage. It aims to continue being a haven for nature lovers, adventure seekers, and those seeking an authentic taste of Filipino culture.

Mansalay, officially the Municipality of Mansalay (Tagalog: Bayan ng Mansalay), is a 2nd class municipality

in the southern part of the province of Oriental Mindoro, Philippines. According to the 2020 census, it has a population of 59,114 people. This town is notable for its indigenous Mangyan population. The town also has a wide ammonite formation area discovered in the 1940s. Since then, thousands of ammonite fossils have been discovered. Due to the complexity and vastness of the collection found in the area, the town has been called the Ammonite Capital of the Philippines. Various local and international scientific institutions have researched the ammonite formations of Mansalay. Scholars have argued that due to the natural significance of the area to Southeast Asian pre-history, the site has a big chance of being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site or a UNESCO Geopark Reserve. It is 144 kilometers (89 mi) from Calapan, the only city and the capital of the province. From the official statistics provided by the municipality, a total of 24,351-day tourists visited various attractions for the year 2023. It is a great manifestation that tourists both local and international exist in the area. Mansalay envisioned, by 2028, to be committed to be the eco-cultural tourism destination as the center of Mangyan cultural heritage in Oriental Mindoro, with vibrant agricultural production supported by efficient infrastructure benefiting empowered citizens who are proud to be Mansaleños, striving for safe and clean environment responding appropriately to global climate change and dedicated to becoming an industrialized town. That is why there is a continuous effort to realize this vision.

This study is focused on the potential assessment of Danawan Lake as a tourism destination with a specific lens on gauging community perception. Aside from

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the physical attributes of a destination, community participation in tourism development is very important as it will dictate its sustainability. This is also suggested in the study of González & Llopis (2019) that there is a need to collect the resident's points of view before undertaking any tourism development activity. What is more, residents play a critical role in the tourism system.

There is very limited information on the Danawan lake based on the reviewed literature. The Provincial Tourism Development Master Plan (PTDMP) 2023-2028 as well as the Municipal Tourism Development Plan has also provided inadequate data, but the lake was reached by some of the local government officials who have provided secondary data based on their first-hand observation. The researchers have also reached the lake and have recorded the figures that may appear in this paper. Currently, there is no available proclamation that the lake is a protected area based on Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SWOT Analysis in Tourism

SWOT analysis has been widely used in assessing the internal and external assets of a business, its environment, and as well as tourism industry. A SWOT analysis is crucial for tourism development as it provides a comprehensive picture of a destination's internal strengths and weaknesses (e.g., natural beauty, infrastructure) and external opportunities and threats (e.g., political stability, changing travel trends). According to Mondal (2017), a SWOT analysis is essentially a tool that examines both internal and external factors influencing a system. Internally, it assesses strengths and weaknesses, while externally, it considers opportunities and threats. This comprehensive analysis empowers decision-makers to craft the best strategy by leveraging internal strengths, minimizing weaknesses, and capitalizing on external opportunities while mitigating external threats. Through SWOT analysis, tourism development can start with its assets and may look beyond its opportunities. However, according to Gerami & Hosseini (2021), achieving sustainable tourism centers on well-crafted strategic planning. Planning should always involve the community. Additionally, to achieve sustainable tourism development, each region necessitates a multi-pronged approach, encompassing identifying unique attractions and promoting them, evaluating existing infrastructure, capitalizing on local opportunities, and analyzing the social and environmental impacts on the host community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The ethnographic study conducted on Danawan Lake employed several qualitative methodologies to comprehensively evaluate its tourism potential. The methodologies included observation, mapping, and personal interviews to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) associated with the lake. Observation: This likely involved direct, on-site

assessments of the lake and its surrounding environment. Observations could encompass various aspects such as the natural beauty of the area, the conditions of the lake, surrounding landscapes, flora, fauna, and any existing infrastructure or amenities. Mapping: Mapping would have been utilized to create visual representations of the area. This involved plotting geographical features, identifying landmarks, and mapping out potential areas for development or conservation around Danawan Lake. Personal Interviews: Speaking with individuals, particularly the community leader of Sitio Darayaw, would provide crucial insights into the local perspectives, challenges, and



Figure 1: Drone shot of Danawan Lake during the researcher's fieldwork



Figure 2: Danawan Lake



Figure 3: The researcher together with the community during the fieldwork

opportunities. this approach allows a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and economic dynamics within the community related to the lake.

The study's fieldwork included organizing a trek to Sitio Darayaw, Barangay Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, culminating in reaching Danawan Lake between October 19-21, 2023. The said fieldwork was communicated in advance through the local government unit (LGU) of Mansalay specifically the Community Development Office (CDO). The LGU was granted a permit from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) before the hike for both the safety and security of the researchers and the community. This hands-on approach allowed the researchers to directly experience the area, interact with the local community, and gather information first-hand. The interview with the community leader would likely have provided valuable information regarding the community's relationship with the lake, their concerns, aspirations, and perspectives on potential tourism development. By combining these methods, the researchers aimed to get a holistic view of Danawan Lake's status and its prospects. The strengths and weaknesses might be related to the environmental, cultural, or infrastructural aspects. Opportunities could include the potential for sustainable development, while threats might involve issues that could hinder or negatively impact the region's tourism potential. The insights gathered from these activities would provide a solid foundation for recommendations and strategies to harness the positive aspects and mitigate the negative factors, aiming for sustainable and responsible tourism development in the area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SWOT Analysis: Adventure and Ecotourism Potential Strength

Danawan lake in Sitio Darayaw, Barangay Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro has potential for adventure and ecotourism. To reach the majestic catchment lake, trekkers should ride a habal, a local term for motorcycle riders, for two hours from the town proper and walk for six to eight hours. Said travel on a motorcycle includes crossing rivers and hilly terrain which causes difficulty for both drivers and travelers. The walk contains trails on a mountainous track with challenges that travelers may face such as dangerous cliffs and craggy paths. Potable water is available while en route through a bukal, a local term for spring. Aside from the impressive beauty of the green and fresh view going to the lake, what will amaze the travelers is that near the lake, there is a sitio called Darayaw that is made up of households from the Buhid tribe of the Mangyan, the indigenous community in the province. This tribe is one of seven tribes that make up the initial settlers in the province. They have built their houses from the land that has been passed from their ancestors. Though far from some of the convenience, public, and social services, they are living peacefully in their territory with their means of living such as poultry, animal, and vegetable farming. Children are also far from

access to basic education because the nearest school would take time a four-hour walk to reach. According to the locals specifically the community leaders of Sitio Darayaw, the lake was formerly rich with hito or catfish in English terms. However, due to high demand from the community as well as from other barangays, it was all consumed and was not reproduced and sustained. Now it is used as a natural thirst-quencher for animals such as cows, carabaos, and horses. The lake is a mountain lake located at Mt. Habugao, located on the boundary of Oriental and Occidental Mindoro, approximately 975 meters above sea level (masl). Danawan is a local term for lake. But for the clarity of this study, it was confined to using both Danawan and the lake in English language. Community leaders conveyed that tourism development will be a contributing factor if it is communicated in advance. Community acceptance of tourism activities is important as it is vital as a contributory factor to a bottom-up approach (Gutierrez, (2019). Bottom-up is the ideal practice in community development. Communities should actively partake in the planning, organizing, and implementing initiatives on the ground.

Weakness

Due to the difficulty of reaching the place, tourists with differentiated physical capabilities will probably not be in the market for this potential attraction. Sitio Darayaw is a remote area, which means it may lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and accommodations. The lack of proper infrastructure can make it difficult for tourists to access the area comfortably.

Opportunities

The area has imposed a lot of opportunities such as future investment as well as the unexplored beauty of the place made it fresh for new development. It has made the lake a gem of its own. Photography tourism is also a great niche for Danawan Lake and its nearby areas. The picturesque landscapes and unique flora and fauna make it an excellent destination for photography tours. Tourism can be a source of income for the local community, leading to improved living standards and infrastructure development. The area's remote location and unique offerings can be marketed as a niche destination like natural parks for those seeking off-the-beaten-path adventures.

Threats

Opening a tourist attraction may pose many threats not just to the environment but to the community that embodies it as well. Specifically, in Darayaw, limited access to basic services like healthcare and emergency services can pose a threat to the safety and well-being of both tourists and residents. In remote areas, safety concerns, such as the risk of accidents during adventure activities, are more pronounced. Proper safety measures may be lacking. Since Danawan Lake may be open for adventure and ecotourism activities, safety measures associated with its development are required.

Community Perception

From the conducted personal interview with the community leader, several themes were acquired:

Danawan is Not Just a Lake

When the community leader was asked how the lake helped them, he recalled: “Some of our colleagues decided to release the fish here. There are quite a few of them. However, because of the involvement of many people from... in the nearby area, hmm, they were caught”. (Yung ibang kasamahan namin bumitaw ng hito dito. Marami po ito. Kaya lang gawa ng maraming mga tao mula sa... Dito sa kalapit na sityo, Hmm. Hinuli nila). It signifies that the lake was their means of survival back then, however, it was not sustained due to factors they could not control. The lake was also home to their animals. Their lake is sacred. Therefore, communication must be done first before tourism development in the area.

Tourism is Acceptable When Talks are Made First

When asked if they accept future tourism activities, the community leader responded: “Perhaps it’s okay, but it would be better if the city leader and our group could discuss first”. (Seguro ayos lang. Kaya lang, mag-usap-usap muna po yung city leader at saka yung kami mga tao). As part of the indigenous community, getting their approval is a major concern. They believe that natural resources like their land will be taken away from them. But because there is a perceived benefit out of the lake that was felt before as a means of survival, they somehow know benefits will be sustained in the long run. Getting the community’s perception and acceptability is a great start to determine if the community will be willing to accept tourism. This is in support of the bottom-up approach where the willingness of the community to participate in tourism activities should be considered first before tourism development.

CONCLUSIONS

Danawan Lake in Sitio Darayaw, Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro has potential for adventure and ecotourism, but its development requires careful consideration of both strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Danawan Lake has stunning natural beauty with a diverse ecosystem. It has a great potential for adventure activities like trekking, camping, and photography. In contrast, Danawan Lake may impose difficulty in access due to its remote location and lack of infrastructure. It also has limited basic services like healthcare and emergency response. Safety concerns associated with adventure activities in remote areas like the Sitio Darayaw are also prevalent. Furthermore, Danawan Lake has a wide array of opportunities. The niche market for eco-tourists seeking off-the-beaten-path experiences posed future probable tourists. Potential for income generation and improved living standards for the local community is also feasible. Conservation and protection

of the lake and its surrounding ecosystem are attainable because of tourism activities that will entice investments. The threats may be composed of overexploitation of natural resources, negative environmental impact, cultural disruption, and loss of the traditional way of life may take place because of future tourism activities. From the SWOT analysis that was carried out, Danawan Lake is capable of tourism development. However, this potential for development requires open and two-way communication between tourism developers and the indigenous community as they consider their natural resources sacred.

It is therefore recommended prioritizing community engagement and participation ensuring the community is involved in all stages of planning and decision-making to address their concerns and ensure benefits are shared equitably. Secondly, collaborative efforts must be adhered to develop infrastructure sustainably focusing on eco-friendly solutions for transportation, accommodation, and waste management to minimize environmental impact. It is also imperative to implement safety measures with a focus on training residents in first aid and emergency response and establishing clear safety protocols for adventure activities. Promoting responsible tourism is also recommended through educating tourists about the local culture and environment and encouraging responsible behavior to minimize negative impacts. Lastly, understanding the preferences and behaviors of potential tourists interested in visiting Danawan Lake may also be carried out. Community is a significant part of tourism development and must partake in the development process starting from zero. Future researchers may use other alternative potential assessment tools to gain more in-depth findings.

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