

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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A Teardrop in the Sand

Environmental issues in Boracay Island

By Rolly Reyes

A fifteen-minute boat ride from Caticlan Island is the country's most precious jewel: the island of Boracay. Once in the boat, one can feel oneself engulfed in a strange feeling of closeness to our Creator's caring hand guiding us in traversing that aquamarine blue waters. The sea wind bathing one's face will immediately betray a blissful experience about to unfold once reaching the shores. One is always mesmerized by that panning and hovering glance sizing up that famous kilometric stretch of talcum-powdery white sands. You will almost want to genuflect as you feel like your body was wrapped with sudden serenity. So much metaphors and mystical descriptions emerged from tourists that left their footprints in this magical place.

My four-year government service in the Department Of Tourism enabled me to learn the prose and poetry of almost all of our treasured destinations in our "string-of-pearls" archipelago, agonizing at times when engaged in forum discussions with travel stakeholders and foreign visitors. I was a dutiful student-observant of tourism developments across Asia Pacific constantly educating myself along the way.

My role was to promote and market our destinations and before I could do that, I had to make sure that I had a complete knowledge of the product and the content of that product. We embarked on the slogan "WOW Philippines" knowing "wow" is a world-wide accepted and understood word for anything that aroused exclamatory admiration and surprised amazement and enjoyment. "Wealth Of Wonders" was the prime meaning of the acronym but further diversified into "Warm Over Winter", "Watch Our Whales", etc.



Special Year-End Edition

Started way back in January 2008, *Environmental Awareness* continued on as a monthly publication until the middle of this year. A quarterly issue was planned beginning January 2010 but the contributions kept on coming on a monthly basis – until July of this year.

Now on its 34th Issue in 36 months, *Environmental Awareness* has dealt with various aspects of our Mother Earth – from useful and innovative farming and gardening tips, to the advocacy for cleaner ocean, rivers and air; from rainforests and marine life, to environmentally oriented exhibits; from the destabilizing effects of the Arctic and Antarctic meltdown, to the flooding problem in Manila; from toxic conditions brought about by poor garbage management, to problems encountered in our very own Centennial Forest in UP Visayas and how we have been able to cope with them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brod Rolly Reyes, Spirit of '66, is a man of many talents – a writer, an artist, an advanced photographer, a corporate executive, a high government official. He was Undersecretary of Tourism for Marketing and Promotions; a team head of "WOW Philippines" marketing and advertising campaign. He was also head of the Bureau of International Tourism Promotion and Bureau of Domestic Tourism Promotion. We'll get to know more about Brod Rolly in some other parts of this website.

The case of Boracay is always a favorite topic. Endless discussions emerge on what to do and what not to do have simply caused infamy to an already deteriorating situation. Claimants of land titles, resort owners fighting government claims, environmentalists, local officials, and tourism authorities are still engaged in a protracted search for solutions to address concerns to preserve the island's premier status.



An increasing number of tourists visit Boracay every year.

This I have learned through years: any tourist destination should have a maximum capacity and should be limited as such. Beach coastline is constant and you can't keep on constructing to accommodate the influx of more tourists that the place can handle. Volumes of tourists will slowly kill the place. Look at what happened in Pattaya, Thailand. It used to be a paradise but over-accommodation caused its early demise, environment and all. It is now Phuket that's undergoing the same abuse. What we need to do is to develop more Boracays somewhere else and keep Boracay a delightful place by maintaining its current capacity. The stakeholders there (resort owners and local officials) are equally to blame by encroaching precious beachfronts to expand existing improvements. As for the local government officials, it is a matter of the amount or what's to be shared in their individual coffers plain and simple. Each has its own selfish motives. Mother Nature is eventually the victim and of course the people themselves.



This Boracay resort has encroached on the beach waters.



The popularity of Boracay as tourist destination has resulted in structures such as these.

If my opinion is to be asked, everything concrete and metropolitan should be in Caticlan, big hotels, dormitories, shopping malls, and other entertainment amenities. Boracay should be left alone with small cottages or cabanas with restrictions in building materials - only local ethnic construction materials should be used, like wood, bamboo, nipa, cogon with local rocks and stones for foundation.



The owner of this Boracay resort used local ethnic construction materials.

On the other side of the coin, no trailblazing development can be realized if we listened to critics and protesters. The Golden Gate Bridge, the Hong Kong Tunnel, the Hoover Dam, the English Channel Tunnel connecting London and Paris, or the Osaka airport will never be built if we listened to dissenters.

We should compose ourselves and stop crying. Let us stop running away from the problem let us not waste our energies in boycotts, rallies and court battles. Once and for all, let us build. As I learned, any destination to reap worldwide recognition should possess the following basic requirements: safe, clean, attractive, and exciting. Tourists will always pay premium for premium enjoyment anywhere in this planet.

The solution is proper planning, consultation and action deprived of selfish agenda and greed.



At Sea Wind Resort – Rolly, Nonoy Nolasco, owner Joebert Cocjin, Tatang, Noli and Lerio Ancheta.