

PHILIPPINES' TOURISM ON THE RISE



The Republic of the Philippines, a newly industrialized country, is made up of 7,107 islands, although most of the 85.2 million inhabitants live just on 11 of them. The country reflects diverse indigenous cultures from its many islands as well as a European-American influence from Spain, Latin America and the United States, and the official languages are Filipino and English.

Investors and business people in the Philippines have recently begun to look on tourism as “the next big thing”. “We think there is a huge potential in the tourism industry,” said SM Investments Corp. Vice-President for Investor Relations, Corazon P. Guidote. Not so long ago the tourism industry witnessed a decline. From its peak of 2.2 million foreign tourists in 1997, this number fell to a low of 1.7 million in 2001 - less than one-tenth of the numbers that neighboring Malaysia attracted that year. Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace H. Durano identified a number of areas of concern, one of which was that the government wasn’t pushing tourism as a major program. Nevertheless, there has been a change in the government’s approach in recent years, as President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has included tourism as a mainstay of her latest Development Plan. According to the Tourism Secretary, this renewed focus on the tourism industry has reaped tremendous benefits. “For the first time in many years, the tourism industry is growing at a very strong pace. For the past two years, we have grown at an average of 14 percent.” The Philippines have also changed their target market from the U.S. and Europe to other countries. “We’re now focusing on the East Asian countries,” the Tourism Secretary said, adding, “We want more visitors from Japan, Korea and China.”

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