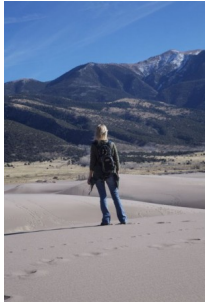


ARMY TO DEVELOP TOURISM ON THE SPRATLY ISLANDS



The Spratly Islands is an archipelago of approximately 100 islands and islets between the Philippines and Vietnam. It is a disputed part of world as several states claim it. Chinese, Malaysian, Philippines, Taiwanese and Vietnamese military personnel are present on some of the islands. Even Brunei wants one of the islands. The archipelago has got a strategic position in the South China Sea near several primary shipping lanes. The area is also a rich fishing ground and it is also believed to have gas and oil deposits.

The majority of the islands is uninhabited and being a military base makes them unreachable for ordinary people. There are no indigenous people only soldiers and civilians from the involved states. The accessibility is also very bad. The only island with a regular air service is the Malaysian controlled Layang Layang. Some islands could be reached by irregular cargo services. It is therefore a very difficult thing to get to one of these islands these days but a determined traveler could manage.

The tropic archipelago has its tourism potential too. It has coral reefs and beautiful sea life that make it interesting for divers. At present there is virtually no economic activity taking place on the Spratly Islands but it may change in the future.

Experts study the possibility to transform the Philippines controlled Pag-Asa Island into a tourism destination. The army would participate in the transformation and the navy would transport tourists in here. According to the mayor of Pag-Asa, a town on the island, there are good diving sites, many of which are still unexplored. The area, however, lacks tourism infrastructure. There are no hotels or resorts. The army hopes the area will be interesting for eco-tourists who would enjoy the pristine nature of the island. Perhaps in the future the island will become a unique tourism destination offering wonderful experience to divers and eco-tourists.

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