Ecotourism community perception in Southern Cagayan Valley: Proposed sustainable action plan

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Abstract

Tourism is a major contributor and immensely significant to the nation. Ecotourism encourages conservation, lessen tourist impacts, and offers beneficial socioeconomic involvement. Numerous academic works have documented how local communities have not actively participated in the development of ecotourism owing to a variety of reasons. Their perceptions and participation may influence the success or failure of ecotourism development and sustainability initiatives. This research delved into the community's perception of ecotourism sustainability. Primarily, it trails the ecotourism's various management practices, local community perceptions, and significant differences in the response, including problems encountered in this management journey. Anent to employ a descriptive approach. A survey questionnaire was used to collect the data, which SPSS was then used to statistically analyze. Revealed thereof, management practices on ecotourism sites are moderately practiced these are deemed to be substantial and need attention. Community perception of tourism has moderately agreed with the necessity for augmentation and supplementation of programs and agendas promoting responsible and sustainable tourism is necessary. Perceived awareness of local communities' role in tourism had influenced their perceived knowledge of sustainable tourism principles. Also, problems, such as few number of tourist arrival noted, lack of equipment for recreational activities in ecotourism sites, and Lack of equipment for search and rescue were the factors that require attention. With these revelations above, a proposed ecotourism sustainable action plan in the Southern Cagayan Valley was molded.

Keywords: community perceptions, ecotourism, local communities, socioeconomic involvement, sustainability

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1. Introduction

The practice of ecotourism is a sort of responsible travel that aims to accomplish a number of objectives, including visiting natural parks and sites, reducing the harm done by traditional tourism, supporting regional businesses, and raising environmental consciousness. Another important aspect of responsible travel is promoting civil rights, empowering local populations, and their culture. The Philippines has the potential to become a popular destination for ecotourism. The Department of Tourism (DOT) elevates ecotourism in the new normal as these will heighten domestic travel in the province amidst the pandemic (DOT, 2021). Southern Cagayan Valley is rich in unpopular ecotourism which highly require the aid of the local community to sustain, manage, and protect the flora and fauna resulting for sustainable result. The Cagayan Valley (Region 2) Regional Development Plan (RDP) 2017–2022 highlights strategies for the environment, agriculture, and tourism. Through community perceptions and their participation in tourism have the ability to influence the success or failure of ecotourism development initiatives, locals are regarded as a crucial pillar of ecotourism development towards sustainability.

Ecotourism is a type of travel that aims to protect the environment while also having a positive impact on the community. The ecotourism in the area is in the primer leg which need to be emphasized and support from the government and non-government agencies to augment the tourist destination in terms of funding and training program provisions. Furthermost ecotourism sites are located in the rural area of the provinces, mostly the local community is the frontliners in degrading the area to sustain their lives such as turning into agricultural purposes, charcoal entrepreneurship, kaingin, treasure hunting, and sometimes they turn it into recreational places resulting for various problems such as climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, calamities, and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions because they are not unacquainted or aware with the benefits of ecotourism sustainability.

Rural ecotourism development can support thriving rural communities while also catering to the demands of a different type of traveler (Kant, 2022). Management practices of ecotourism attractions include overseeing lodgings, infrastructure, and services while taking environmental effects into account. According to Hussain et.al. (2022), community participation in the development of ecotourism is defined as "ecotourism programs that take place under the control and with the active participation of local people who inhabit or own a natural attraction." Tourism can encourage support for conservation among host communities by involving them, provided that these communities reap some advantages. Acquaintance in the encountered problems in ecotourism sites is the opportunity to addressed, update, and attract tourist revenue while maintaining the long term economic and environmental viability.

One of the persistent challenges in the tourism industry revolves around the possible destination plans that heighten the equitable benefits for the locals while reducing the adverse impacts of tourism. Numerous academic works have documented how local communities have not actively participated in the development of ecotourism owing to a variety of reasons, including socioeconomics, a lack of skills, the rural location, a misunderstanding of roles, etc. (Gumede & Nzama, 2021; Kunjuraman & Aziz; 2019; Mtapuri et.al., 2019). Local communities have the power to determine the success or failure of ecotourism development initiatives, local community perceptions are regarded as a crucial pillar of ecotourism development (Gumede & Nzama, 2021; Khalid et.al., 2019). In developing an ecotourism action plan, this research seeks to investigate the present management status, community perception, and encountered problems of ecotourism sites in southern Cagayan Valley. The researcher focused in sustaining ecotourism to emphasized the preservation of the environment, valuing culture, inform tourists about the significance of responsible travel and emphasizing local community perception to

develop participations and for the tourism authority and stakeholders to make even programs and agendas to ensure integrated decision-making and proper implementation to ascertain the conservation of resources and sustainability of ecotourism in the provinces.

2. Research methodology

The research methodology used in this study is descriptive. This design seemed appropriate given that the goal of the study is to determine the perception of the local community in the southern Cagayan Valley as a tourist destination by using the answers to questions like what, when, and how they relate to particular residents or gatherings and proposed a program or development of an instrument in research. A total of 416 respondents, including 280 locals and 136 representatives of the provincial and municipal tourism industries, were aged 18 and above taking part in the study. Purposive-random sampling was also used in this study to choose instances methodically without knowing in advance how the results will turn out and to define an interested population. The objective is to increase trustworthiness rather than promote representativeness. The statistician gathered, tallied, calculated, and distributed the data in Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino provinces.

A survey questionnaire was adapted from existing studies, and modified based on the subject matter in collecting the needed data for the specific problems of this study. Composed of four parts namely; the first part of the instrument was designed to gather information about the profile of the respondents, Second, the management practices of the ecotourism destinations which was adapted from (Dagdag, 2021), third, the community perception in tourism which was adapted from (Fong & Lo, 2015) lastly, the encountered problems to the ecotourism sites, which was adapted from (Dagdag, 2021). Considering the Pearson product-moment correlation using SPSS, the significant value, it can be concluded that all items were validly denoting the r value of 0.05. The result of reliability statistics showed that the computed Cronbach's alpha value for Management Practices of Ecotourism Attractions (0.970), and Community Perception in Tourism (0.974) signifies that the instrument has strong or excellent internal consistency in the rule of thumb. The researcher obtained permission from the head of the tourism office to conduct surveys of department heads and staff members of tourism offices within the provincial government. The researcher also obtained permission from the officers of the Barangay Local Government Unit at the selected ecotourism sites to survey residents. The surveys were personally issued and discussed objectives to the respondents. After retrieving the questionnaire, an informal interview with the respondents was conducted to get information about their individual experiences, such as the difficulties they encountered in the tourist destination.

In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the study ensures the security and confidentiality of the ecotourism locations in the southern Cagayan Valley. Requesting permission, the researcher modifies the instrument from the source. The survey is entirely voluntary, and respondents are free to stop taking it at any time. At no time during the study were any names or particular organizations mentioned. The study also made use of a consent form to verify that the respondents gave their free consent and desire to take part in the study. The researcher coded, totaled, and reviewed the data using several statistical tools for data analysis. Frequency and percentage distribution are used to evaluate the respondents' classification, province, sex, age, marital status, education, and work status to test the profile of the respondents. To test the management status of ecotourism sites in the provinces', the weighted mean is utilized to assess the training for tourist personnel, responsibilities on ecotourism sites, facilities, services and infrastructures, conservation, local communities, cultural heritage, monitoring, and marketing; local community perception in decision-making, knowledge sharing, community empowerment, and community knowledge on tourism; and problems of ecotourism sites. In testing the significant difference of responses when grouped according to profile these are the following statistical tool used: independent samples t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), two-sample t-tests, and post-hoc sheffe.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents' demographic variables. The

residents make up the highest percentage (67.3). The tourism employees (32.7), both permanent and contractual, are ranked lowest at the province, municipal, and local levels.

Table 1

Profile Distribution of the Respondents

Respondents Classification	Frequency (*f*)	Percentage (%)
Tourism Personnel	136	32.7
Residents	280	67.3
Province		
Quirino	166	39.9
Isabela	116	27.9
Nueva Vizcaya	134	32.2
Sex		
Male	140	33.7
Female	276	66.3
Age		
Below 18 years old	4	1.0
19-35 years old	306	73.6
36-50 years old	94	22.6
51 years old above	12	2.9
Marital Status		
Married	155	37.3
Single	254	61.1
Others	7	1.6
Education		
Elementary	19	4.6
Highschool	50	12.0
College	295	70.9
Post graduate	48	11.5
Others	4	1.0
Employment Status		
Employed- Private	103	21.4
Employed- Public	136	33.8
Unemployed	150	36.1
Retired	27	8.7

Due to their involvement in the administration of tourist locations in the provinces, tourism officials must weigh their observations and answers. It was discovered that locals are given priority by the provinces' tourism departments as their tourism personnel in order to give them the chance to improve their quality of life. They also believe that locals are the only ones who can understand and relate to the real-world circumstances of the provinces' tourist destinations. Growth in the ecotourism sector could affect the environment, nearby communities, and livelihoods in both positive and negative ways, according to Zoysa (2022).

Regarding province, 166 or 39.9% of responders were from Quirino. There, 116 people or 27.9%, or 134 people, were from Isabela and Nueva Vizcaya, respectively. Taking into account the province's abundance of tourist attractions. Taking into mind the regional and demographic profile effect of having the largest number of respondents, several restrictions are being implemented in the ordinance in the pandemic state, from the barangay level to the province level. The researchers' ability to reach the intended respondents may be significantly enhanced by a good location that is simple to get to and has minimal restrictions (Stedman et al., 2019). People were mostly invisible during the COVID-19 epidemic and had difficulty moving from one location to another due to stringent implementation of travel restrictions (Vărzaru et al., 2021).

In terms of gender, there were 276 females, or 66.3 percent of the total population, and 140 males, or 33.7 percent. The majority of responders were female, and they were all physically capable of handling the tasks necessary for running tourist attractions. In the most current research by Liu-Lastres et al. (2023), the tourism industry offers excellent work opportunities for women and young people. A total of 306 people, or 73.6 percent, were aged 19 to 35. There were 94 people, or 22.6 percent, in the 36–50 age range, 12 people, or 2.9 percent, were over the age of 51, and just 4 people, or 1.0 percent, were in the 18–and-under age range. Respondents who are

between the ages of 19 and 35 are more likely to be productively interested in engaging in trainings and advances, particularly in tourism. People who are between the ages of 19 and 35 are typically described as being exceedingly adaptable, wise, and tolerant. However, they are also a group that will pave the way for innovation and responsible tourism due to their diverse lifestyles, motivations, and habits (Kyriakaki & Kleinaki, 2022).

According to the table, 155 people, or 37.3 percent, were married, while 254 people, or 61.1 percent, were single. There were 7 or 1.6% more people. Single people may relish their lack of parental responsibilities and spend most of their time thinking about community responsibilities relating to tourism. In their study of Malichová et al. (2020), found that factors influencing preferred travel times were marital status, nationality, and period of residency. Regarding education, there were 295, or 70.9 percent, college graduates, 50, or 12.0 percent, high school graduates, 48, or 11.5 percent, post-graduates, and 4 (or 1.0 percent), others. College graduates are involved in ecotourism sites because they are more likely to do so in order to improve their standard of living. They frequently serve as elected officers in organizations, voice their opinions, and learn about the initiatives and programs being carried out in the region. Education can act as a bridge between different groups and promote cooperation and respect among community members (Zainuri & Huda, 2023).

According to the table employment status information, there were 150 respondents, or 36.1%, who did not have a job. A total of 136 respondents, or 33.8 percent, worked for the government, compared to 103, or 21.4 percent, who worked for a private company. Retirement age individuals made up 27 or 8.7%. Due to a dearth of business investors, a shortage of highly qualified personnel (public and private), and regions where tourist attractions are located, career prospects for people who have completed their education and are interested in employment are few in the region. Unemployment rates among the poor continue to remain high due to social prejudices and the multiple detrimental psychological effects society lays on persons trying to break the cycle of poverty (Manstead, 2018).

Table 2

Summary of Management Practices of Ecotourism Attractions

Management Practices	Weighted Mean	Rank	Interpretation
Trainings for tourist personnel	3.3197	8	Moderately Practiced
Responsibilities on ecotourism sites	3.5346	1	Highly Practiced
Facilities, services and infrastructures	3.4204	4	Moderately Practiced
Conservation	3.4291	3	Moderately Practiced
Local Communities	3.3990	5	Moderately Practiced
Cultural Heritage	3.3942	6	Moderately Practiced
Monitoring	3.4359	2	Moderately Practiced
Marketing	3.3750	7	Moderately Practiced
OVERALL	3.4135		Moderately Practiced

Legend: 4.00-3.5 (Highly Practiced) 3.49-2.5 (Moderately Practiced), 2.49-1.5 (Less Practiced) and 1.49-1.00 – (Not Practiced)

Table 2 shows the summary of management practices implemented in ecotourism attractions, with an overall weighted mean of 3.4135 regarded as being practiced. With the highest mean of 3.5346 and a rating of "highly practiced," ecotourism site responsibilities ranked in first. The tourist management oversees a number of initiatives that have an impact on rural areas as well as ecotourism businesses that may provide support for eco-friendly lodgings and other initiatives that complement morally and environmentally responsible travel. Environmentally conscious and tolerant tourist staff can be found in ecotourism destinations. To sustain and effectively implement these aspects of ecotourism in the province, monitoring may be frequently stressed by the tourism management. Programs for ecotourism are implemented, tourism personnel are responsible for carrying out their duties and responsibilities, and there is also equipment in the tourist attractions.

This is supported by the Cagayan Valley Regional Development Investment Program (CVRDIP) 2017–2022 intended to pursue significant, inclusive, and high-impact programs and initiatives that aim to sustain our region's needs, which are anticipated to last beyond the current planning and programming period, in order to lay a solid foundation for the trajectory of the region's development. According to Mamirkulova et.al. (2020), claims that responsible tourism places more emphasis on the industry's responsibility for generating greater economic

benefits for locals and enhancing the wellbeing of host communities, enhancing working conditions, involving locals in decisions that affect their lives and future opportunities, positively influencing the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, facilitating access for people with disabilities, and encouraging respect between tourists.

Cultural heritage ranked sixth with a mean of 3.3942 interpreted as moderately practiced. Marketing ranked seventh with a mean of 3.37 interpreted as moderately practiced. Eighth in the rank training for tourist personnel having the lowest mean of 3.31 indicates as moderately practiced. To improve collaborations and professional capabilities, increase knowledge, and improve service in ecotourism sites, the Department of Tourism and other tourism-related stakeholders in the province may implement and provide additional seminars, training, activities, and programs for tourism officials and personnel as well as the local community. The State claims that tourism is a crucial part of the economy and a significant industry for the nation. In order to draw in investment, foreign exchange, and jobs, as well as to strengthen everyone's sense of national pride, it must be used as a catalyst for socioeconomic development and cultural affirmation (The Tourism Act of 2009). Tourism education is closely linked to employment and professions in the industry (Cassel et.al., 2018; Kim & Jeong, 2018).

Table 3

Summary of Community Perception in Tourism

Community Involvement in Tourism	Weighted Mean	Rank	Interpretation
Participation In Decision Making	3.0837	2	Moderately Agree
Knowledge Sharing	3.1313	4	Moderately Agree
Community Empowerment	3.0673	3	Moderately Agree
Community Knowledge on Tourism	3.2500	1	Moderately Agree
OVERALL	3.1331		Moderately Agree

Legend:4.00-3.5(Strongly Agree) 3.49-2.5 (Moderately Agree), 2.49-1.5 (Disagree) and 1.49-1.00 - Strongly Disagree

Table 3 shows the summary table of community perception in tourism having the overall weighted mean of 3.1331, interpreted as moderately agree. Community knowledge on tourism ranked first with the mean of 3.2500 interpreted as moderately agree. Participation In Decision Making ranked second having the mean of 3.1313, interpreted as moderately agree. Since they are the ones that manage, experience, and explore the tourist site, almost all of the respondents or locals have understanding of tourism principles. The local community has little knowledge of trends and advancements available. Free admission, a feeding program, and job-hunting tactics might be used in program implementation to entice and motivate locals to take part. This is supported in the study of Chapple et al. (2018) and Chili & Ngxongo (2017), variety of issues, including a lack of knowledge and awareness, corruption, monopolization of government resources, and a lack of proactive leadership, are obstacles to community participation in tourism. These issues are among the most significant ones that the community has raised. Its success is correlated with community-based tourism, which involves nearby local communities (Giampiccoli et al., 2021). Local communities need to be aware of the tourist sector to actively participate in it and have an impact on its development and practices (Pham et al., 2019; Kala & Bagri, 2018).

Followed by Community Empowerment, with the weighted mean of 3.0837 and indicates moderately agree. Fourth in the rank Knowledge Sharing having the lowest mean of 3.0673, interpreted as moderately agree. Local community have liberty to express their thoughts on the policies and practices of tourism attractions. The largest barriers to information sharing within a company and the community in the province, however, are a lack of trust between individuals, time restraints, one's current state of affairs, the nature of one's employment, and an appropriate setting for sharing. Empowerment of the community in the province recognizes this relationship, acts strategically on it, and ensures that power is spread at both levels. Poquiz (2018), to develop and promote the tourism industry, the Department of Tourism (DOT) will serve as the major planning, programming, coordinating, implementing, and regulatory government agency. It is responsible for ensuring the effective coordination, integration, prioritizing, and execution of local tourist development plans as well as the LGUs' compliance with national requirements in the licensing of tourism firms (Sandhu, & Berse, 2022).

Table 4

Encountered Problems to the Ecotourism Sites

Problems	Weighted Mean	Rank	Interpretation
Few numbers of tourist arrival	2.8606	1	Often
Lack of cleanliness on the sites	2.5721	4	Often
Lack of rest area for tourists	2.5096	10	Often
Lack of qualified tour guides	2.5457	6	Often
Lack of equipment for search and rescue	2.5769	3	Often
Lack of equipment for recreational activities in ecotourism sites	2.5817	2	Often
Lack of parking areas	2.5505	5	Often
Lack of maintenance of ecotourism sites	2.5192	9	Often
Lack of access to ecotourism sites	2.5264	8	Often
Lack of waste disposal facilities	2.5288	7	Often
COMPOSITE MEAN	2.5772		Often

Legend:4.00-3.5 (Always) 3.49-2.5 (Often), 2.49-1.5 (Sometimes), and 1.49-1.00 – (Never)

Table 4 shows the encountered problems to the ecotourism sites with a composite mean of 2.5772 interpreted as often. First rank few numbers of tourist arrival with the highest mean of 2.8606, interpreted as often. Second rank lack of equipment for recreational activities in tourism sites having the mean of 2.5817 interpreted as often. Third rank lack of equipment for search and rescue having the mean of 2.5769, interpreted as often.

A few of the challenges the province's tourism business faces include low visitor numbers, taxation, travel advertising, safety worries, poor infrastructure, fluctuating demand, competition, and regulations that cross international borders. Most tourist destinations are not equipped to satiate visitors. The tools and equipment that the on-site tourism staff has access to are those that the tourism office has provided and that needs to be updated and added for the visitor to receive a high-quality service. Concerning this, emphasis is placed on search and rescue training and development for the on-site tourism staff. This is supported by William (2020), the Philippines has built an unjust and adverse image as a dangerous and underdeveloped travel destination. Sustainability in tourism requires management (Hall, 2019). The appropriate administration of the tourism industry involves keeping an eye on all activities related to the travel and hospitality industries (Ranasinghe et al., 2020).

Ninth rank lack of maintenance of ecotourism sites with the mean of 2.5192 indicates as often. Lack of rest area for tourists ranked tenth having the lowest weighted average of 2.5096 interpreted as often. The provision of adequate funding to build facilities, additional security personnel, CCTV cameras, and free internet access are important considerations because the presence of rest areas enables tourists to provide comfort, ease of travel to visitors, and accommodations to numerous tourist attractions in the province. The regional tourism agenda is unique based on the capacities and potentials for tourism that are present in the destinations; as a result, there is an equal impact on the programs, activities, and incentives in a particular province. Strategies, proper management, and allocations are important to local and provincial tourism authorities. This is supported by the study of Agyeiwaah et.al.2019; Agnes et al. (2019), convenience and distinctiveness of a tourist site encourage visitors to go there. Tourists and visitors are amazed by the tourist spot's beauty through attractions and tourist attractions, and they can be satisfied by it (Barkah & Febriasari, 2021; Nugroho et.al., 2021).

The table 5 displays the differences of Responses on Management Practices, Community Perception, and problems Encountered when grouped according to profile of respondents. In terms of respondent's classifications, there is a significant difference in Community Perception in Tourism since the obtained p-values were less than the alpha level of 0.05. It was found that decision-making tourism professionals scored higher than residents because they are the authority figures and are directly involved in developing the plans for the initiatives to be put into effect in the tourist areas that are included in Republic Act No. 9593. The Tourism Act of 2009 sought to safeguard people's right to a stable and healthy natural system by encouraging efforts aimed at environmental protection, conservation, and restoration. To implement successful decision-making in the tourist destination,

tourism employees may need to integrate their perspectives. The local community is essential in the creation of tourism campaigns and programs (Lasso & Dahles, 2021; Pasanchay & Schott, 2021).

Table 5

Differences of Responses on Management Practices, Community Perception, and problems Encountered when grouped according to the Profile of the Respondents

Variable	t/F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Respondents Classification			
Management Practices	1.903	0.058	Not Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	4.705	0.000	Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	-1.634	0.103	Not Significant
Province			
Management Practices	32.371	0.000	Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	14.586	0.000	Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	7.113	0.001	Significant
Sex			
Management Practices	-0.039	0.969	Not Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	1.907	0.057	Not Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	0.556	0.578	Not Significant
Age			
Management Practices	0.883	0.450	Not Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	2.068	0.104	Not Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	6.911	0.000	Significant
Marital Status			
Management Practices	0.551	0.647	Not Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	0.959	0.412	Not Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	5.425	0.001	Significant
Education			
Management Practices	4.652	0.001	Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	1.327	0.259	Not Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	7.470	0.000	Significant
Employment Status			
Management Practices	1.707	0.147	Not Significant
Community Perception in Tourism	1.419	0.227	Not Significant
Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites	9.663	0.000	Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

In terms provinces, there is a significant difference along management practices of ecotourism attractions, Community Perception in Tourism, and Encountered problems in ecotourism sites have all the same p-value (0.000). It was discovered that Quirino province had the highest ratings, followed by Isabela and Nueva Vizcaya. From the barangay level to the provincial level, several constraints are being applied in the pandemic state's ordinances, taking into account the geographic and demographic profile effect of having the highest number of responders. According to the Tourism Act of 2009, the State views tourism as an essential part of the economy, an industry of national importance, and one that must be used as a catalyst for socioeconomic development and cultural affirmation to generate investment, foreign exchange, employment opportunities, and to continue fostering a stronger sense of national identity. People were largely invisible during the COVID-19 epidemic and had trouble moving from one location to another since travel restrictions were severely enforced, which made accessibility impossible (Yasmin et al., 2021; Vărzaru et al., 2021). The province's total land area is 895.63 square miles (2,319.66 square kilometers). A total of 203,828 individuals called it home, as per the 2020 Census. This amounts to 5.53% of the entire Cagayan Valley population, 0.33% of the entire Luzon Island chain, or 0.19% of everyone living in the Philippines. These numbers are used to calculate a population density of 88 people per square kilometer, or 228 people per square mile (PhilAtlas, 2023).

In terms of sex, there is no significant difference were found in the management practices of ecotourism attractions, Community Perception in Tourism, and Encountered problems in ecotourism sites. Since the overall result exemplifies a higher p-value at 0.05 alpha level which is (0.969). This indicates homogeneity of answers. Regardless of demographic profile, the respondents have similar viewpoints.

In terms age, there is a significant difference along Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites have the same p-value (0.000). Ages between 19 and 35 were shown to be greater than those between 18 and 17. Respondents are more likely to have more useful travel interests, look for a reason to visit each destination, learn about the local culture, and engage in new social interactions. Millennials are devoted workers, compulsive shoppers, and experienced partygoers who live life to the utmost. According to Aceron et al. (2018), people are more likely to spend money on memorable experiences than on material items. The millennial generation is both the first to have grown up online and the most educated ever (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018).

In terms marital status, there is a significant difference along Encountered Problems in Ecotourism Sites have the same p-value (0.000It was found that individuals who were single scored better than married people. A basic human right is the freedom to travel. Because it provides them the ability to take on new challenges, be responsible for other people, and increase their confidence, singles like traveling in circumstances where they feel free and autonomous. Single people may relish their lack of parental responsibilities and spend most of their time thinking about community responsibilities relating to tourism. According to Malichová et al. (2020), the study found that factors influencing preferred travel times were marital status, nationality, and period of residency. Because independent travel provides travelers more freedom to choose how they want to spend their time, most people prefer it to group trips (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2018).

In terms education, there is a significant difference along management practices and encountered problems in ecotourism sites have the same p-value (0.000). It was found out that elementary have lowest scores and College have highest scores. Because of the poverty that was prevalent in rural areas, respondents in popular tourist areas have completed their baccalaureate degrees. The national government has created a number of scholarships and free tuition programs for public schools. College graduates are also involved in the tourism industry because they are frequently elected as officers in organizations or because they are motivated to address issues with sustainability in the tourism industry. Residents have a variety of chances to successfully participate in tourism development initiatives, to mobilize their capacities as social agents rather than as passive subjects, to make decisions, and to regulate the activities that affect their life (Setini et al., 2021).

In terms employment status, there is a significant difference along encountered problems in ecotourism sites have the same p-value (0.000). It was found out that retired people have lowest scores and employed-private highest scores. They observed the procedures followed by privately owned businesses engaged in the tourism industry, service providers to the local populace and tourists, and how tourists made use of the tourism resources on offer, enabling them to better understand the issues and challenges that exist in ecotourism destinations. Participation of the local population is essential for the expansion of tourism (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

Table 6

Proposed Sustainable Ecotourism Action Plan in Southern Cagayan Valley

KRA/ Objectives	Sustainable Strategies and Programs/Plan	Success Indicators
Management Practices of Ecotourism Attractions		
Training and Development To efficiently work together on projects and policies that seek to combat poverty and promote social inclusion.	Consultation with the staff on what training they would like to receive with mandatory training sessions focusing on sustainable tourism may be conducted on a regular basis.	It will take into account current practices and trends to update and improve the knowledge, abilities, responsible, and productive tourism staff.
Improvement on facilities, service and infrastructures To guarantee the effective and secure mobility of workers, people, and communications throughout the site.	Local government and the tourism sector may work together, lessen the processes, and enough funding across the travel, transportation, infrastructure, and conservation sectors, assisting like-minded organizations to elevate successes and create a destination that is genuinely sustainable incorporating the advanced technologies suitable in the operation in the tourist destination.	It will ensure that the ecotourism sector in the southern Cagayan Valley is able to protect, comfortable, and keep up with the rise in tourist numbers.
Maintenance and Conservation To protect the area's vital ecological functions and its regional	Promote regenerative tourism alternatives such as enough trash cans and composting areas, dos and don'ts in the tourist attraction, including warning signs, ordinances, and Republic Acts that support	It will increase the chances of a conservation gain and increase tourists' and visitors' awareness of and comprehension of the region.

life-supporting systems.	destination sustainability in the local community and among tourism firms and strictly observing and putting into practice the fundamental orientation to the area.	
Emphasis on Cultural Heritage To protect and advance the Filipino people's national heritage through travel.	Integrate culture by presenting basic information on electronic and no-electronic marketing strategies, requiring tour guides to emphasize culture in the duties, and cultural exhibitions in the area.	It will raise awareness, and participation of cultural heritage among tourism workers, local community, and both domestic and foreign tourists.
Marketing or Promotion of the Tourist Destinations To increase visitors' awareness and enthusiasm before they travel to the area.	Raise general public awareness and incentives to SMEs supporting and practicing sustainable travel. Funded marketing strategies with updated tourism features of tourism products and services with the involvement of beauty pageant title holders in the tourist destinations.	It will offer consistent expectations and outline the processes involved in promoting a tourism site and keep current with any modifications to the strategy to win the support of travelers and tour operators.
Community Perception in Tourism		
Community Decision-making To increase community engagement and communication while fostering equity.	The distribution and equitable consolidation of survey instruments (both electronic and paper versions) regarding the plans and initiatives to be put into place in the tourist sites.	It will bring the community's viewpoints and the goals of the programs under consideration into alignment.
Community Empowerment To promote neighbourhood development and increase neighbourhood capacity for participating in and exercising their rights.	Collaboration of Department of Tourism, DENR, and the Provincial Government may collaborate with the Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education and private sectors to conduct extension and outreach programs in the community, schools, and businesses concerning tourism and nature preservation until it is sustained.	It will increase the involvement and appreciation of the local community and other stakeholders in developing, and updating skills and competencies for sustainable tourism.
Information and Awareness Enhancement To raise public awareness of the services and initiatives being offered by the public and commercial sectors in the name of sustainable development.	Holding frequent OPLAN missions, orientations, or parade events with the involvement of LGUs, the private sector, and the local populace to increase knowledge and raise awareness about tourist destinations and about tourism. The preservation of nature and regulations for eco-friendly tourism may be topics that should be stressed more.	It will increase the effectiveness of word-of-mouth advertising by ensuring that locals have the necessary knowledge, information, and level of awareness to effectively promote the province's tourist attractions.
Encountered Problems to the Ecotourism Sites		
Improving Tourist Arrivals To provide a positive visitor and host experience, lessen the negative effects of tourism on the environment, improve employment and income opportunities for people, and encourage conservation by providing financial incentives.	Adopt and strictly implement environmentally conscious techniques, products, and policies, updated facilities and amenities with free WIFI, Well-organized provision of medications, and hiring locally-based workforces with appropriate training and development in the tourist destination.	It will create job opportunities in the local community, lessen stress to the employee and encourage visitors to stay longer in the tourism region with adequate health services, practice self-control, improve cleanliness, and preserve tourist attractions.

4. Conclusion

Most participants were female when the study was conducted due to some consideration that they carried out the duties and activities necessary for operating tourist attractions. People between the ages of 19 and 35 actively participated in gathering data because they are the most productive, capable of handling their responsibilities properly, and eager to participate in any local tourism-related activities during these years. The Department of Tourism Management in the provinces is carrying out its duties to promote and preserve ecotourism, so the management status revealed that the duties on ecotourism sites are most commonly practiced. However, training for tourist personnel is the least prevalent and should be highlighted to increase the capacity of ecotourism in the provinces. The perception of the provinces' residents toward tourism is generally positive; it appears that for residents to understand tourism, they must engage in it themselves. However, there is room for improvement in knowledge sharing with the help of stakeholders and local government units. Communities will be empowered if there are equal opportunities in every status quo. Few visitor arrivals are the most noticeable issue in the province's ecotourism sector as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, which was expected. The encountered problems in ecotourism sites are subject to assessment and disclosed scores that are described as "Often," which is an indicator that these items must be promptly addressed in order to increase the potential of the local community in handling the tourist destinations leading to the development of sustainability. It was discovered that Department of Tourism officials and officers, as opposed to citizens of the provinces, observed positively the management practices of ecotourism sites. Additionally, it is discovered that there are some

notable distinctions between the variables influencing the management status of tourist locations and the respondents' profiles when categorized. The provinces in the southern Cagayan Valley may need an action plan for improving their ecotourism destinations.

Limitation and recommendation - To elevate our successes and create a destination that is truly sustainable, the local government, in particular the Department of Tourism, and the tourism industry may collaborate across the travel, infrastructure, transportation, and conservation sectors. These can also raise visitor or tourist knowledge and value culture inside the tourist location. They can also promote and safeguard the authenticity of local community culture so that it will not be forgotten. Both contract and permanent employees of the province's Department of Tourism may receive relevant and current training, such as by taking part in seminars to learn about and carry out win-win decision-making for the community and other interested stakeholders. Then, the representatives and staff may incorporate marketing and promotion methods and think about utilizing the many web platforms in social media. To learn about the projects or plans to be launched at ecotourism destinations and to exchange ideas for sustainable tourism in the area, the local communities of the provinces may take part in promoting tourism. The Department of Tourism, Local Government Units, and other stakeholders may form partnerships or work together with State Universities and Colleges to organize extension and outreach programs to the participating organizations or local community in order to promote tourism in the area. The data would be utilized as a reference for the future researcher to create and for their future study, serving as baseline data, if their research is likewise conducted in line with the subject matter of this study.

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