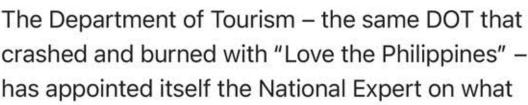


Absence of competence: The DOT's culture and scenery delusions By J. Manuel González (The Philippine Star) -July 15, 2023 - 12:00am

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constitutes 5-star, as well as what constitutes

Philippine culture.

We need to be brutally frank with ourselves. The DOT is simply WRONG in thinking that "Philippine culture" and "Philippine scenic attractions," however you slice them, are big factors in tourist

decisions. They imagine that people sitting in

New York or London will suddenly resolve that "I must see those Igorots before I die" or "I must go see where the nurse-with-syringe came from."

Most of the bureaucrats in the DOT have never lived abroad or traveled much, and their main goal when traveling is to find an outlet mall and a McDonald's whose toilet isn't keypad-protected. Naturally they have no idea what might draw large numbers of tourists, and wind up sounding

like e-Bayers proudly selling Michael Jordan's

better, they keep trying to convince tourists to

unwashed socks. Since they don't know any

come for Philippine culture and Philippine

scenery.

OPM Por-eber. Many hotels are grumbling about the DOT's directive to play OPM (Original Filipinocomposed and Filipino-performed music) in lobbies. There is no other country in the Free World with a similar requirement. Does Canada require its hotels to play Celine Dion? Why not? Because, in case you forgot, Canada is a free country.

So are we, in theory, but apparently not in the opinion of our DOT.

The overwhelming choice of the 4- and 5-star

hotels I have stayed in over the years is to play

lobbies. After a journey people don't want to be

and wash up. It is the lower-end hotels that play

"entertained." They want to get to their rooms

loud music, which is to keep the desk clerk

awake, not welcome the guests.

NO MUSIC, or practically-inaudible music, in

In my hotel, Plantation Bay Resort & Spa, guests arrive at the lobby to the sound of a gentle

waterfall. We are a truly world-class resort, 100 percent designed and run by Filipinos with no input from any international chain, perfectly competent to compete internationally. Instead of just leaving us alone, the absence-of-competence DOT and other elements of our government have, over three decades, repeatedly sabotaged us. How did some clueless bureaucrat

"culturally-brand" based on their baduy idea of

Once we consider what other industries culture-

branding could be imposed on, we quickly realize

that THIS IDEA IS STUPID. Shall we culture-brand

our beer? Hospitals? BPOs? Condos? Airlines?

Instant noodles? Shoes? Military? Export

Hilot by the book, DOT's book. As part of its

culture branding, the DOT has also instructed

that all spas in the country must offer a native

garments? THE IDEA IS STUPID.

in Manila acquire the right to force me to

Filipino service?

hilot massage with a precise sequence for its entire hour, minute by minute. As you might guess, Plantation Bay Resort & Spa has a spa. I have been directly involved in the development of several of our treatments, and I assure you this hilot-by-the-book idea is also STUPID.

How the DOT plans to enforce this directive

without thousands of hidden cameras all feeding

to central command in Manila is a mystery to me.

At Plantation Bay we have a hilot massage but we

are CUSTOMER-focused, not time-and-motion

focused. A good massage is a work of art. Our

DOT in its blissful ignorance wants to make it a

mass-production-line.

Giving instructions that aren't capable of being

obeyed or verified is absence of competence.

world where people from far away travel for the scenic wonders. The Grand Canyon, Norwegian fjords and the Pyramids come to mind. The Philippines is not on this short list, and never will be. We need to understand that, accept it and get over it. Indonesia has rice terraces just like us, and to most people either version is worth just two minutes. Between our "perfect cone" and Mt.

Fuji, most tourists will prefer the snow-capped

Fortunately, scenery is not what most customers

version. Naked tribesmen appeal to nobody.

Scenery, anyone? There are several places in the

want to buy. So let's stop selling it. What most tourists want to buy is illustrated by Thailand, Spain, Mexico, Hawaii, the Caribbean and most successful tourist destinations: ease of access, comfortable accommodations, climate, rest, relaxation and some diversions (but not round-the-clock diversions).

Sino ba ang general? The DOT is run by clueless bureaucrats who believe that everyone in tourism should "Obey us, kasi kami ang Expert." In fact, what they mean is, sila ang general.

Our tourism industry – formerly 15 percent of the entire economy, now only 5 percent – is in the hands of petty bureaucrats with no relevant

So, have these self-appointed "generals" won any

war, battle or even skirmish in the past 30 years?

Nonetheless they believe that this is a Communist country, and that they are Stalin.

experience, no basic business sense and not

even any common sense.

Mr. González is owner of Plantation Bay Resort & Spa in Cebu.