

# Philippine tourism: Wrong choice of constituency

By J. Manuel González (The Philippine Star) -

June 4, 2023 - 12:00am



## (Conclusion)

- Clear up traffic jams. Manila is probably hopeless, but other metro areas can be ameliorated without much cost by simply enforcing no-parking/no-stopping zones, introducing one-way street systems and constructing UK-style roundabouts (rotondas) instead of intersections with traffic lights.
- More vocational training. Some people waste four years and hundreds of thousands of pesos getting HR degrees, and still cannot clean a hotel room. A basic hotel employee can be trained in six months. The diploma mills won't like it, but many young people could become productive citizens much sooner, and before they learn bad attitudes at diploma mills, such as how to spend four years expending the least possible mental effort.
- The average Filipino cannot comprehend how bad our bureaucracy is. Give tourism businesses a One-Stop Shop to expedite most government approvals. Simple matters often need half a dozen signatures, and the signatories are usually in no rush. Many matters require multiple approvals from any or all of: city council, city mayor, city assessor, city attorney, DPWH, DOT, Coast Guard, MARINA, DOTransportation, DOTrade, DENR, agency this, agency that. If we truly need all these signatures, at least centralize the applications and require all approvals for a given application to be processed in the same time frame. By presidential decree, the One-Stop Shop should have the authority to command all other executive instrumentalities. Failure to reply would be deemed approval. Few mayors have the guts to do their job, so the Shop should have authority to direct the police to impound cars, clear roads, confiscate outdoor disco equipment, imprison dynamite fishermen.  
Toilets are good, but we have to ensure maintenance as often as every two hours in high-traffic locations. Without continuous cleaning, you may as well not build the toilets.
- Enforcement. Imprison and dismiss without pension the Immigration, Customs and other supposed public servants who defraud tourists or are negligent in performing their jobs related to tourism. Hold the bosses equally guilty.
- More enforcement. As typhoons become more frequent, prompt payment by insurance companies is essential to tourism. Following Odette, Plantation Bay filed a P550-million claim under our Replacement Value insurance policy with the Echauz Family's Standard Insurance. 15 months after the typhoon, Standard claimed, on easily-disproven grounds, it owed us NOTHING. The claims adjuster was Crawford, a US multinational that boasts that it "Does the Right Thing, Always and Everywhere." Both Standard Insurance and Crawford merit 0/10 in Customer Service, but they are apparently confident they will get away with paying us NOTHING. If they succeed, other insurers will conclude they have the Marcos administration's green light to follow. More hotels will suffer similar fates.
- Run a Philippine ad campaign to teach Filipinos the importance of tourism. Shame and punish those who mistreat tourism workers and establishments, or post false reviews.

To avoid creating just another layer of bureaucracy, the One-Stop Shop needs to be fully automated and under the control of unpaid business professionals (not academics, not "career" civil servants, not former elective or appointive officials) on 2-year sabbaticals from their usual jobs. Everyone complains about corruption and red tape; here's a chance to do something about it.

While we're at it, the One-Stop Shop could actually serve ALL businesses, cutting through the Byzantine bureaucracy that drives away investors and is one of the principal reasons for our backwardness. Vietnam just shot past us; Myanmar will be next.

Another factor is our inability to do arithmetic. Tourism arithmetic: dollars and votes. Is there anyone in government capable of doing arithmetic? Years ago, Plantation Bay had a European royal guest with his family. They all enjoyed themselves thoroughly until their sixth night, when an outdoor disco started up nearby and kept going at full volume until dawn, despite all our pleas. The disco promoter made P5,000 that night. We as a country lost hundreds of millions, because that guest almost certainly told everyone he knew "Never go to that country."

In normal years, tourism provides about 15 percent of Philippine GDP, more if we count spillover purchases of every kind of goods and services, from papayas to garbage collection. Tourism directly employs 15 percent of Filipinos. Tourism is also the training ground for many OFWs. These "alumni" are now everywhere, sending remittances. Summing everything up, tourism probably accounts for 30 percent of our national income.

The 8 million employed in tourism probably support at least two more adults each (based on personal anecdotes of my own 450 employees.) That's 24 million, vs. 50 million registered voters in 2022. HALF! The biggest voting demographic in the entire country. Yet most Filipinos, and most politicians, demean tourism employees and allow clueless bureaucrats to steal our futures. So far this voting group isn't organized, but if our government keeps ignoring us, maybe it will be. WE, the tourism workers and establishments, do a lot for YOU (the rest of the country).

STOP smearing cake on our faces because you were in a foul mood.

START treating us right, and SUPPORT us for a change.

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