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Durano to stakeholders: Nurture tourism revival

"Pump Up the Volume!" Tourism Secretary Ace Durano took a page from a 1980s hit single as he rallied travel and trade stakeholders to sustain the current tourism renaissance in the Philippines via increased volume in tourist receipts and arrivals.

Keynoting the recent "National Dialogue on Enhancing Philippine Competitiveness in Tourism: The Tourism Act of 2009," Durano said solid investments in the last four years by mainstream and non-traditional players have made the tourism sector an important driver of growth in the nation's economy.

Durano added that the upgrading as well as the introduction of products and services has created a better tourism value for all stakeholders concerned, particularly in terms of job and livelihood generation.

"*Kapag malakas ang turismo, maraming trabaho,*" he said.

The public-private tourism dialogue was spearheaded by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) Tourism Committee in partnership with the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the German Development Cooperation (GTZ).

Local and international participants identified critical issues in the new tourism act and proposed recommendations to the DOT for the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) due for completion toward the end of the year.

Durano said the new law will help local tourism keep pace with the dynamic market and competitive landscape as it strengthens DOT's collaboration with all stakeholders.

"The DOT is married to the industry, so we remain together for better or for worse," he said.

In particular, Durano acknowledged the efforts of PCCI in helping shape the IRR through the recommendations of its members and officers.

Saying that "new capital smells like old capital," Durano cited the continued upgrading of accommodation facilities by established and new hotels, which has led to some 8,000 new rooms across the nation in 2008 alone.

In the local aviation industry, he said the dynamic expansion of air seats has made travel comfortable, enjoyable and quite cheap for tourists.

Local tour operators have restructured their marketing ef-



From left: Shahram Saber, GTMS managing director; Samie Lim, PCCI vice chairman; Dr. Volker Steigerwald, GTZ-PSP program manager; Tourism Secretary Ace Durano; Edgardo Lacson, PCCI president; and Ruy Moreno, National Competitiveness Council executive director.

orts to specific markets, resulting in triple-digit increment in arrivals from China and Korea, according to Durano.

Durano said, "The empirical evidence only shows that the strong partnership between the government and private sector has created and nurtured a good value for the Philippines."

He highlighted the positive results of across-the-market exit surveys conducted in all gateways that showed 89 percent of foreign tourists indicating their desire to come back to the Philippines because of the Filipinos' warmth and hospitality, apart from the beauty of the country's nature-based products.

"The number one reason cited by these tourists in recommending the Philippines as a holiday destination to their respective families and friends is the Filipinos' spontaneous hospitality. More than the local hotel personnel that they generally come across with, foreign tourists cited the warmth of Filipinos that they meet on the streets or wherever they go," he said.

Durano, nonetheless, cautioned all stakeholders against complacency given the dynamic nature of the tourism sector.

"We need to sustain the good tourism value that we have created in order for the Philippines to remain highly competitive," he said.