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Practices of Hotels and Resorts in Batangas Province towards Adoption of Global Tourism Sustainability Standards

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to assess the practices of hotels and resorts in Batangas Province towards their readiness to adopt global sustainability standards. Resort and hotel owners/managers were asked to evaluate their sustainable tourism practices based on GSTC Criteria on the areas of Effective Sustainable Management, Social and Economic Benefits to the Local Community, Cultural Heritage and Environmental Benefits. In the course of the study, the problems and challenges as well as the benefits and advantages of adopting sustainable tourism practices were highlighted. The study revealed that of all the respondents listed on the website of the Provincial Tourism Office, only two are accredited under the new star rating of the Department of Tourism. However, most of them are already into sustainable tourism particularly in the areas of energy conservation, waste reduction and waste management. Majority are also unaware of the awards and certifications given to establishments for practicing sustainability. Descriptive method of research and triangulation technique were used as it aimed to come up with strategies that will serve as a guide to these tourism establishments for the adoption of global sustainability standard. It contains detailed activities, programs and persons involved.

Keywords: IJLLCE, hospitality management, hotels and resorts, tourism, practices, sustainability, standards, Philippines

Introduction

Tourism is one of the prime movers of the economy. It creates employment, generates income, builds a nation and promotes the image of the country. Yet it is still a business. Why is tourism therefore important? Tourism brings in money. It has multiplier effect. Tourists fly or travel by sea, so airports and seaports are needed and when we build them we employ thousands to do so and thousands again to maintain and man them. When the tourists arrive at their destination, they need a place to stay and food to eat. Thousands will be more employed to give them comfort (Parr, 2012).

Each country has its own way of attracting tourists. But as countries develop their tourism industry, the question still arises: Do they provide Sustainable Tourism? It is very imperative to define what sustainable Tourism is and UNESCO 2013 clearly states that: Sustainable Tourism is defined as a tourism that respects both local and the traveller, cultural heritage and the environment. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2011) defines sustainable tourism as tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and the host communities.

Part of the Global Initiatives of the United Nations World Tourism Organization is the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and Council (GSTC), which was established in August 2010 as the result of the merger between GSTC and the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) in September 2009. It is a global initiative dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism practices around the world. It is currently active in all UNWTO regions, including Africa, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, Europe and Middle East. It serves as an international body for promoting the increased knowledge, understanding and adoption of sustainable tourism practices.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) 2013 affirms that, Sustainable Tourism is on the rise: consumer demand is growing, travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, and governments are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism. The GSTC Criteria was created in an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and are the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized in four main pillars. The first one is about effective sustainability planning. Second is maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community. Third is enhancing cultural heritage and the Fourth is about reducing negative impacts to the environment.

The province of Batangas prides itself to be an excellent tourist destination. It is the nearest tourist attraction to Metro Manila and the jumping board to other tourist places such as Puerto Galera of Mindoro and Boracay of Aklan. It has pristine waters in the beaches of San Juan, Lobo, San Luis, Lemery, Calaca, Balayan, Lian, Calatagan and Nasugbu. It boasts of Isla Verde Passage which is the center of marine shore fish biodiversity where more than half of the species of shore fish in the world are found. The Anilao diving place in Mabini has coral reefs as large as a cathedral. Taal Lake of Batangas is the only lake in the world with a volcano in the midst of the lake and also a sunken church which remains intact despite the vicissitudes of time and the lapse of at least two centuries. The maliputo and tawilis which are only caught in Taal Lake are worth travelling to Batangas for. The famous barako coffee and bulalo made of Batangas beef are among the delicacies Batangas tourists crave for.

Tourism is one of the important activities in the province of Batangas and as such it is imperative that the hotels and resorts therein must maintain sustainable tourism practices and be at par with global sustainability standard. Noteworthy though are the environmental protection and conservation issues while tourism development is taking place. They remain as a vital challenge not only to the hotel and resort owners and the government but most especially affect everyone.

Purpose of the Study

The researcher believes that the task of being sustainable is everyone's responsibility. The development of sustainable tourism necessitates the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Otherwise, the global initiatives done by the United Nations World Travel Organization would be futile if the tourism industry would not cooperation. With the adoption of a global sustainability standard, particularly that of the GSTC, the current practices of hotels and resorts would be guided with accordingly.

The purpose of this study is to assess the practices of hotels and resorts in Batangas province and to propose strategies for the adoption of global tourism sustainability standards based on the GSTC Criteria.

Objectives/Research Questions
Specifically, it has the following research objectives:
1) To determine the profile of the hotel/resort in terms of DOT classification, length of operation, location, ownership and management structure, number of guests rooms, occupancy rate in a year for domestic tourists, occupancy rate in a year for foreign tourists, participation in sustainable tourism practices, certifications and awards and environmental policies in place;
2) To find out how hotel and resort managers/officers assess their readiness to adopt sustainable tourism practices based on the GSTC Criteria namely: effective sustainable management, social and economic benefits to local community, cultural heritage and environmental benefits;
3) To identify the problems and challenges encountered by the respondents in terms of practicing sustainable tourism;
4) To specify the benefits and advantages of adopting sustainable tourism practices;
5) To recognize the programs and assistance offered by the Provincial/Municipal Tourism Office in promoting sustainability; and
6) To propose specific strategies for the adoption of global sustainability standards.

Theory

Cruz (2011) asserts that, one of the strongest motivations for travel at the present time is interest in the natural environment as well as in the heritage, arts, history, language, customs and cultures of people in other countries. She likewise emphasized the importance of sustaining tourism by conserving and maintaining those resources for future generations to enjoy. The present study strongly supports the idea of Sustainable Tourism. In the context of this assertion, the researcher strongly believes that the hotels and resorts in Batangas province, as one of the most frequently visited destinations by local and international tourists and as part of the tourism industry, should start advocating sustainable tourism practices.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) 2013 affirms that, Sustainable Tourism is on the rise: consumer demand is growing, travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, and governments are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism. The GSTC Criteria was created in an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and are the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized around four main themes. The first one is about effective sustainability planning. Second is maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community. Third is enhancing cultural heritage, and the fourth is about reducing negative impacts to the environment. Although the criteria are initially intended for use by the accommodation and tour operation sectors, they have applicability to the entire tourism industry.

Formal coining of the phrase Triple Bottom Line has been attributed to John Elkington in 1994, and later expanded on in his 1998 book Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business. In a Triple Bottom Line scenario, any venture that produces and markets a product would be responsible for it all the way through to final disposal. People (social) + Planet (environmental) + Profit (economic/financial) is one of the most common Triple Bottom Line heuristics to neatly describe the complex interactions of sustainability and business demands. (Jedlicka, 2009). This very concept is in line with the GSTC's Criteria on sustainable tourism which

is based on four pillars: sustainable management, socio-economic impacts which is equivalent to Profit, cultural impacts or People and environmental impacts or Planet.

The thrust of this study is shown in Figure 1. Using the model, the input component includes Profile of Selected Hotels and Resorts in Batangas Province. It also involves the assessment on the readiness of the hotels and resorts in adopting GSTC Criteria and its performance indicators. In so doing, the problems and challenges in Implementing Sustainable Tourism Practices as well as the Benefits and Advantages of Adopting Sustainable Tourism Practices will be determined. Likewise, the author of the present study also considered the Programs/Assistance offered by the Provincial/Municipal Tourism Office in terms of promoting sustainability. As input components are laid out, the pursuit of throughput began by means of questionnaire, interview, observation and documentary analysis. The respondents can voluntarily implement the proposed strategies for the adoption of global standards in sustainable tourism practices based on GSTC Criteria.
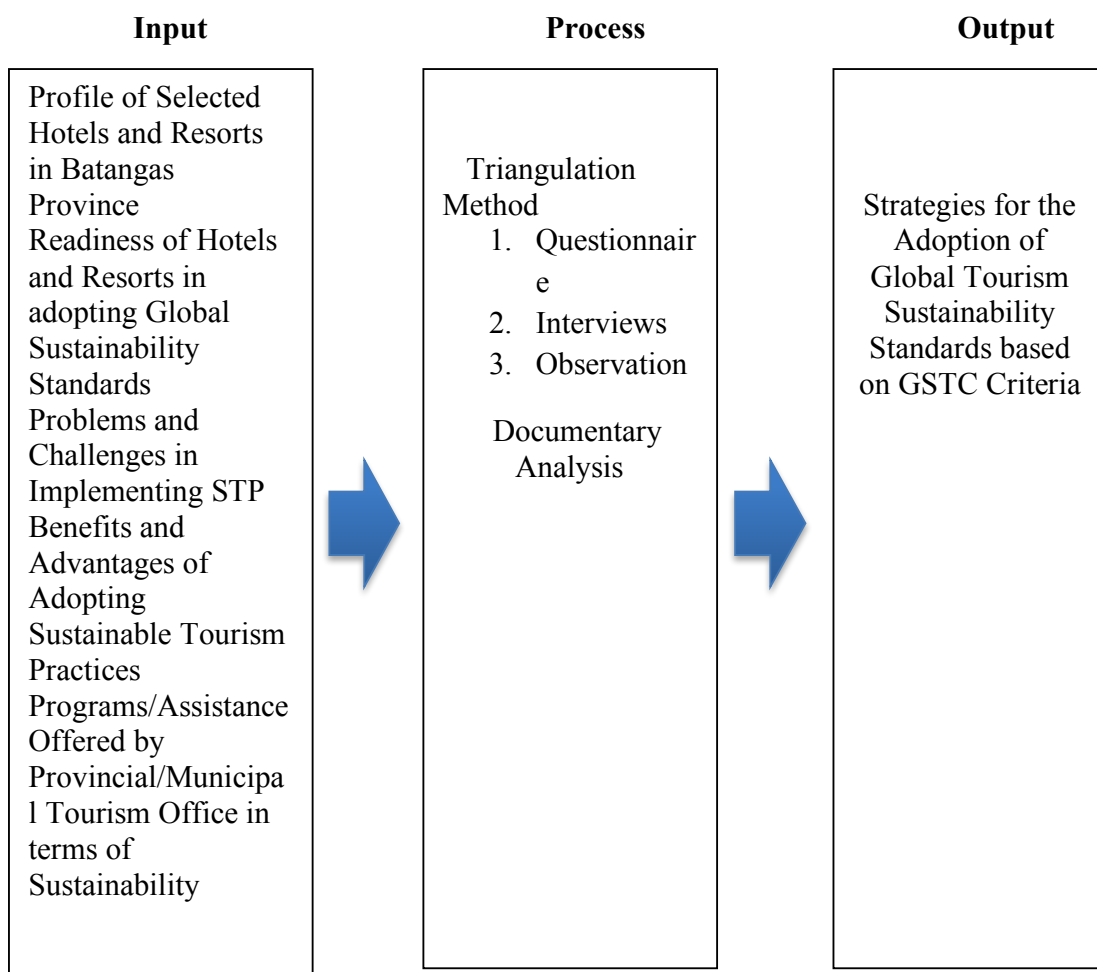
Input	**Process**	**Output**
Profile of Selected Hotels and Resorts in Batangas Province Readiness of Hotels and Resorts in adopting Global Sustainability Standards Problems and Challenges in Implementing STP Benefits and Advantages of Adopting Sustainable Tourism Practices Programs/Assistance Offered by Provincial/Municipal Tourism Office in terms of Sustainability	Triangulation Method 1. Questionnaire 2. Interviews 3. Observation Documentary Analysis	Strategies for the Adoption of Global Tourism Sustainability Standards based on GSTC Criteria

Figure 1: Research Paradigm

Methodology

This study made use of descriptive method of research as it aimed to come up with strategies for the adoption of local, regional and global sustainability standards based on the GSTC Criteria. Specifically, the study assessed the readiness of the hotels and resorts

in Batangas province in adopting global sustainability standard based on their sustainable tourism practices.

In the same way, this research gathered opinions, comments and recommendations from the concerned persons, officers and government agencies regarding the problems and challenges as well as the benefits and advantages of adopting sustainable tourism practices.

Triangulation technique, particularly the methodological triangulation which refers to the use of more than one method for gathering data, was used in this study. The collection of data includes both quantitative by survey questionnaire method and qualitative methods through archival data (documentary analysis), unstructured interviews, observation and immersion.

The status in terms of readiness was measured using the following verbal interpretation: 4- Most Ready; 3 – More Ready; 2- Less Ready, 1 – Not Ready and 0- Not Applicable. The extent as to whether they agree or disagree was measured using the following verbal interpretation: 4 – Strongly Agree; 3 – Agree; 2 – Disagree and   1 – Strongly Disagree.

The researcher sought the approval of the GSTC Council by way of sending them a letter thru e-mail requesting permission to use the GSTC questionnaire. The said Council gave their approval and requested for a copy of the study when finished. Thereafter, the researcher likewise requested the approval of the General Managers and Owners of selected Hotels and Resorts in Batangas province concerning the conduct of the study. The questionnaire consisted of seventeen pages and some of the questions asked were open-ended.

Questionnaires were retrieved, summarized, tabulated, analyzed and statistical treatment was applied. The researcher also interviewed some government officials and private organizations officers to obtain pertinent data needed in the study. The researcher also acted as a participant observer by visiting the respondents and getting first-hand experience of the kind of service the respondents are providing.

Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to analyze and interpret the data gathered. Statistical measures applied were weighted mean and standard deviation. Based on the results of the study, strategies for the adoption of local, regional and global sustainability standards were proposed. The strategies contain detailed activities, programs and persons involved.

Literature Review

Complementary literature and studies have been gathered to buttress the proposition of an action plan towards an adoption of global sustainability standards. Tourism is acknowledged worldwide to assume a major role in the economy and having a strong correlation with sustainable environmental policy. Sustainable tourism has progressed to international dimensions and noteworthy are the following findings: 1.) Sustainable tourism allows for the rational use of biological diversity and can contribute to the preservation of that diversity, 2.) The development of tourism must be controlled and carefully managed so that it remains sustainable, 3.) Particular attention must be paid to tourism in ecologically and culturally sensitive areas, where mass tourism should be avoided, 4.) All parties concerned, including in particular the private sector, have a part to play in bringing about the sustainable development of tourism, and voluntary initiatives (codes of conduct, quality labels) should be encouraged. Particular importance should be attached to the local level, which is not only responsible for the sustainable development of tourism but should also derive particular benefit from tourism.

The Department of Tourism is urging all tourism establishments to undergo accreditation to ensure quality of services being provided to tourists and continuously meet the standards. The agency also offers a lot of programs, assistance and benefits to all accredited establishments in terms of sustainability. With the implementation of ASEAN Economic Integration last 2015, Philippines cannot do away with complying with the ASEAN Standards. In terms of Tourism, the ten member countries have considered the standardization of tourism services essential for helping ASEAN to be a Quality Single Destination.

The GSTC Criteria was created by the tourism community in part as a response to the global challenges of the United Nation's Millenium Development Goals. Poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability – including climate change – are the main cross-cutting issues that are addressed through the criteria. Beginning in 2007, a coalition of 27 organizations – the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria – came together to develop the criteria. They have reached out to approximately 80,000 tourism stakeholders, analyzed more than 4, 500 criteria from more than 60 existing certification and other voluntary sets of criteria, and received comments from over 1,500 individual. The first version of the criteria was released in October 2008 and was publicly available for comment until April 2011.

The literature and studies reviewed all proved pertinent in the drafting of a proposition, starting from the introduction and preliminaries to the framing of strategies and testing their workability and arriving at the conclusions. One major inference is that the approach to sustainable development stems from the general fundamental intent to prosper a business and to meet the needs of present and future generations.

Another major inference taken as a guide is the creation of values and improving standards involved operating to the highest safety standards, positively impact clients, minimize environmental impacts of one's operations, and constantly improving the energy and material efficiency of operations. It is only by understanding and responding positively to the opportunities associated with sustainable development can they arrive at a long-term development beneficial to everyone.

Results and Discussion

This part of the paper presents, analyzes, and interprets the data resulting from the assessment on the readiness of hotels and resorts in Batangas Province towards adoption of global sustainability standards based as conducted by the researcher. For clarity of presentation and consistency in the discussion, the data are presented according to the objectives of the study.

Majority of the respondents gave no answer corresponding to their classification for hotels while most of the establishments surveyed are beach resorts. Most of them are operating for 6 to 10 years and are located in the town proper. In terms of ownership and management structure, majority are independently owned and self-managed with less than 50 rooms. The occupancy rates in terms of domestic and international tourists are from 56% to more than 75% and less than 25%, respectively. A great number of respondents are already participating in sustainable tourism practices, however they are unaware as to the certifications and awards given in relation to this. Part of their sustainable tourism practices include energy conservation, waster reduction/management, water conservation and procurement process advocating green purchasing.

Table 2

Assessment on the Readiness of Hotels and Resorts to Adopt GSTC

Four Pillars of GSTC	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Sustainable Management	3.01	More Ready
Socio-economic Impacts	2.89	More Ready
Cultural Impacts	2.95	More Ready
Environmental Impacts	2.95	More Ready
Composite Mean	2.95	More Ready

Legend: 3.5 – 4.0 = Most Ready; 2.5 to 3.49 = More Ready; 1.5 – 2.49 = Less Ready and 1 – 1.49 = Not Ready

Table 2 shows the assessment of hotel and resort managers/officers as to their readiness to adopt GSTC criteria based on its four pillars namely: sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts (maximize social and economic benefits to the host community and minimize negative impacts), cultural impacts (maximize benefits to communities, visitors, culture and minimize negative impacts) and environmental impacts (maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts). All respondents are More Ready to adopt the GSTC Criteria with a composite mean of 2.95.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has been promoting the use of sustainable tourism indicators since the early 1990s, as essential instruments for policy-making, planning and management processes at destinations. It has developed together with Rainforest Alliance and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC). These are set of 37 voluntary standards representing the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation. It is based on the four pillars.

The first pillar is about Effective Sustainable Management which is composed of the following criteria and indicators: Sustainable Destination Strategy (2.96), Destination Management Organization (3.04), Monitoring (2.93), Tourism Seasonality Management (3.08), Climate Change Adaptation (2.75), Inventory of Tourism Assets and Attractions (2.92), Planning Regulations (3.11), Access for All (2.85), Inventory of Tourism Assets and Attractions (2.92), Planning Regulations (3.11), Access for All (2.85), Property Acquisitions (2.88), Visitor Satisfaction (3.21), Sustainability Standards (2.67), Safety and Security (3.25), Crisis and Emergency Management (3.06) and Promotion (3.17). Each establishment conforms to the fire, food hygiene and electricity safety. They have the necessary permits for all of these. In terms of first aid, they have designated clinics and health stations. Some even have nurses on duty and doctor on call. Visitor safety remains an important topic worldwide. Perceived or real threats to visitor safety have immediate impacts on a destination's reputation and can dramatically affect visitation. If visitor health and safety is not well managed, adverse incidents can significantly impact on the profitability and sustainability of an individual business, community or destination. If a visitor feels threatened or unsafe during a trip, this may impact on length of stay and expenditure in a destination and decrease the likelihood of repeat visitation and word-of-mouth referrals. If a destination develops a negative image for visitor safety this will likely result in a declining visitor market for the region. (Sustainable Tourism Online, 2010). In terms of Sustainable Management, all respondents are More Ready to adopt the GSTC criteria with an over-all weighted mean of 3.01.

The second pillar is about Socio-economic impacts, which is composed of the following criteria and indicators: Economic Monitoring (2.90), Local career opportunities (3.13), Public Participation (2.81), Local community opinion (2.84), Local Access (2.93), Tourism Awareness and Education (2.79), Preventing Exploitation (3.04), Support for Community (2.92) and Supporting Local Entrepreneurs and Fair Trade (2.71). Tourism is already a priority for the Philippines, but there are further opportunities to increase the gender responsiveness of the tourism strategy. Based on the criteria, there should be legislation or policies supporting equal opportunities in employment for all local people employed, including women, youth, disabled people, minorities, and other vulnerable populations. Tourism provides employment opportunities for women at a number of different occupational levels, and ecotourism in particular could provide significant opportunities for rural women. (Asian Development Bank, 2013). Likewise, there is Presidential Decree 442, A Decree Instituting a Labor Code thereby Revising and Consolidating Labor and Social Laws to Afford Protection to Labor, Promote Employment and Human Resources Development and Insure Industrial Peace Based on Justice. This includes equal employment opportunity for all. The respondents are More Ready to adopt the GSTC Criteria on Socio-economic impacts with an over-all weighted mean of 2.89.

The third pillar is about Cultural impacts, which is composed of the following criteria and indicators: Attraction Protection (3.19), Visitor Management (3.04), Visitor Behavior (2.90), Cultural Heritage Protection (2.90), Site Interpretation (2.69) and Intellectual Property (2.85). Cultural and historical heritage are important components of a destination's attractiveness and should be conserved to ensure their enjoyment for future generations. Collaboration with local residents and preservation bodies ensures that tourism-related activities do not damage sites of prevent local people from visiting or using them. Preservation and enhancement of local cultural and historical assets increase the tourism experience and make the product offering stronger. (Sloan, et. al, 2013, p. 319). The respondents are More Ready to adopt the GSTC Criteria on Cultural impacts with an over-all weighted mean of 2.95.

The fourth pillar is about Environmental Impacts which is composed of the following criteria and indicators: Environmental Risks (2.91), Protection of Sensitive Environments (2.95), Wildlife Protection (2.82), Greenhouse Gas Emissions (2.58), Energy Conservation (2.96), Water Management (3.04), Water Security (3.07), Water Quality (3.07), Wastewater (3.06), Solid Waste Reduction (2.98) and Light and Noise Pollution (2.98). According to United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change. Uncontrolled conventional tourism poses potential threats to many natural areas around the world. It can put enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea, natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often puts a strain on water resources, and it can force local populations to compete for the use of critical resources. Majority of the hotels and resorts in the Philippines are currently advocating water conservation by way of informing guests through reminders that can found inside the room such as the use of towels and bed linens and where to place them in case they want to re-use it the following day. Most of the establishments surveyed are already compliant on this measure. However, when it comes to monitoring and reporting of water consumption/usage, there is a need for improvement. Similarly, (McCook, et. al, 2016) emphasized that, the tour operator at the destination level participates in strategiest to support management systems in place to prevent causing negative environmental impacts.

This may include items such as participating in programs that monitor, minimize, and report energy use, water use, water quality issues, solid waste reduction, noise and light pollution. The responsibility of the tourism operator is again active and participatory, and moves towards stewardship of the destination forward. With this, the respondents are More Ready to adopt the GSTC Criteria on Environmental impacts with an over-all weighted mean of 2.95

Table 3
Problems and Challenges that Might Encounter in Practicing Sustainable Tourism

Problems and Challenges	WM	VI
Budgetary Requirements	3.32	Agree
Support from the Hotel/Resort Owner/Administration	2.79	Agree
Time Consuming (Document Preparation)	3.18	Agree
Climate Change	3.11	Agree
Financial Support from the Government thru Provincial/Municipal Tourism Office	3.18	Agree
Lack of Participation from the local community	2.81	Agree
Composite Mean	3.07	Agree

Legend: 3.5 – 4.0 = Strongly Agree; 2.5 to 3.49 = Agree; 1.5 – 2.49 = Disagree and 1 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

It can be gleaned from Table 3 that in terms of Problems and Challenges that might encounter in practicing sustainable tourism is budgetary requirements, with the highest weighted mean (WM) of 3.32 followed by time consuming in terms of documentary preparations with a WM of 3.18. According to Dambyte (2011), the decision to adopt sustainable practices presents many challenges for tourism related enterprises. It leads to long process of change. Each organization has its corporate culture, composed of values, beliefs and attitudes. If people do not see the necessity for change, they refuse it and they do not stand for it and any attempt to introduce the novelty is most likely to fail. Therefore, if employees do not understand the necessity for adopting innovations, they will not be able to perceive this sustainable tourism image to their customers. Implementation of sustainability requires long-term thinking.

Moreover, Dambyte (2011) pointed out, that one limiting factor for innovations is that sustainable practices are considered to be expensive. Companies do not realize that once they invest, the economic gains in a long-term will be bigger. The idea of high expenses while implementing sustainability partly arises because of governmental policies. Quite often such organization establishes guidelines for nature and culture friendly approach and certifies the companies who follow the rules. However, acquiring such certificates leads to many hours of bureaucratic work and requires solid financial resources to fulfill the imposed obligations. This barrier could be removed, if governments would agree on more friendly policies towards sustainability implementation like for instance, providing subsidies for necessary technology.

The literature above supports the findings of this study. Indeed, the implementation of sustainable tourism practices requires a lot of consideration and planning before an organization could make a final decision. However, this issue cannot be avoided. Everyone is into sustainability. The respondents must act accordingly or they will be left behind. All of them likewise agree with the listed problems and challenges that they will encounter in practicing sustainability.

Table 4
Benefits and Advantages of Adopting Sustainable Tourism Practices

Benefits and Advantages	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Educational Advantage	3.37	Agree
Cost Saving	3.33	Agree
Improves hotel/resort image	3.48	Agree
Generate customer loyalty	3.37	Agree
Competitive Advantage	3.36	Agree
Environmental Protection	3.54	Strongly Agree
Boost Employees Morale	3.37	Agree
Safe Working Environment	3.44	Agree
Cultural Preservation	3.30	Agree
Composite Mean	3.41	Agree

Legend: 3.5 – 4.0 = Strongly Agree; 2.5 to 3.49 = Agree; 1.5 – 2.49 = Disagree and 1 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

In terms of benefits and advantages presented on Table 4, environmental protection ranked first with a score of 3.54. The respondents strongly agree that it would be beneficial to the environment if they will adopt sustainable tourism practices. The next in rank is it improves hotel/resort image. Dambyte (2011) states that most of the scholars related sustainability with the positive image of the company. Therefore, marketing is recognized to be the biggest driving force towards sustainability. Companies strive to get "green label" because they believe that this creates a good image and distinguish them from the competitors. By implementing environmental friendly approach, companies save costs on energy, water and waste bills but they are not willing to share the saved costs with their clients by offering lower prices. Similarly, travel industry is focused on natural resources and the negative impacts caused by tourism provoke attention to change management strategies to tourism businesses. In the same manner, cultural preservation is also one of the benefits of adopting sustainable tourism. To ensure sustainability of cultural heritage assets, it is necessary to define strategy that involves all stakeholders, from the local, national, regional and international communities in a manner that is participatory and transparent.

In the last part of the survey questionnaire, the respondents were asked regarding the existing programs and assistance offered by the Provincial/Municipal Tourism Office in promoting sustainability. They enumerated the following: Tourism Office promotes their establishment by coordinating with various schools and offices, Ecological fee that is being collected to tourists, Being a member of Batangas Tourism Association, and Strict implementation of cleanliness in the municipality.

On the other hand, they were also asked about their suggestions to further promotes sustainable tourism in their area wherein they gave the following answers: Street lighting, Road widening, Environmental preservation programs, Training of staff on safety, basic life support, first aid and water rescue, Dive site collection, Daily garbage collection, There should be an organization of resort administrators and resort owners within the area, Supplemental programs for freelance tour guides, Collect environmental fee for additional budget to protect tourist spots, To promote ecotourism in the area, Cultural heritage and historical preservation of site involving private owners of heritage houses, Marketing and promotion by way of inclusion to municipal activities such as

hosting an event, etc. to all major programs of the local and provincial government, Ecotourism program with industry tie-up and National events management program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Majority of the respondents are Managers, holding regular appointment and in a better position to assess the readiness of their respective establishment to adopt the GSTC Criteria. They hold key roles in terms of decision making in areas of product development, education and training, accreditation and standards.

When it comes to the profile of the respondents, all are listed on the website of the Provincial Tourism Office. However, very few are accredited under the new star rating of the Department of Tourism. Moreover, most of them fall under the category Beach Resort. They have also been operating for almost 10 years, which means that they are ready to take actions toward sustainable tourism. In terms of accessibility, majority are located within the town proper, which gives them more competitive advantage because tourists can easily come and go and will have definitely more time to enjoy their vacation for they will not spend longer time in travelling. The owners of these establishments can solely make decisions in terms of adopting sustainable tourism standards since majority are independently owned and self-managed. Majority of their guests are local tourists. However, most of them are into sustainable tourism practices. In fact, they already have programs related to energy conservation, waste reduction/management and energy conservation. But only few are aware of the awards and certifications given to establishments for doing so.

All respondents are More Ready to adopt a sustainability standard particularly the GSTC Criteria which is anchored on the four pillars namely: Sustainable Management, Socioeconomic Impacts, Cultural Impacts and Environmental Impacts. Conversely, they are one in saying that budgetary requirements remain to be the main problem/challenge in terms of practicing sustainable tourism. On the other hand, the primary benefit/advantage of its adoption is for environmental protection. According to them, there are also existing programs and assistance offered by the Provincial/Municipal Tourism Office in terms of promoting sustainability. But, they also pointed out suggestions to improve the promotion of sustainability within their area. In this regard, strategies are needed to guide these establishments on how to adopt sustainability standards.

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are offered. Foremost, improve the overall hotel services, facilities, and business practices to obtain higher rating, accreditation to be sustainable and to be globally competitive. Second, aim for national accreditation under the Department of Tourism, regional accreditation under the ASEAN Tourism standards and an international accreditation for sustainability based on GSTC Criteria which is part of the three-phase approach which contains detailed strategies for the adoption of global sustainability standards. Third, intensify sales and marketing efforts to capture the majority of the foreign market and to be the preferred destination of the country. Enhancement of company website to include new services, product offering, promos and others. The said website must also be interactive. Fourth, close coordination with the Provincial Tourism and Cultural Affairs Office (PTCAO) for assistance and implementation of sustainable tourism programs. Active participation to various local, national and international tourism and travel fairs, exhibitions and events hosted by the said office. Fifth, membership to Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines (HRAP), an association that addresses all concerns, helps protect the interests and develops businesses. They are the collective voice of the national hotel, resorts and restaurant industry in the Philippines.

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