



## 2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title of the Story:** Mangrove Forest Protection through Community-based Eco Tourism Project

**Destination Name:** Suyac Island, Sagay Marine Reserve, Sagay City, Negros Occidental

**Country:** Philippines

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**Position:** Sagay City Information and Tourism Office

**Submission category:** *(Please check one of the boxes that indicates the focus of your story)*

*Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.*

- Governance, Reset & Recovery
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

*Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".*

*Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact [top100@greendestinations.org](mailto:top100@greendestinations.org)*





## DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

*Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.*

### Issues faced

*What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice?*

Sagay Marine Reserve, situated in the Visayan Sea of the Philippine territorial waters was once called the Alaska of the Philippines. People thought fishes in the sea is limitless. And so man's wanton abuse of the marine environment resulted to a massive destruction of the coral reefs in the area. In 1970s, marine conservation efforts was initiated in a 200-hectare marine reserve which later expanded to 32,000-hectare protected seascape. With the strict protection efforts, some of the fisherfolks using illegal fishing methods and those within "no-take" zone were displaced. Thus, there is a need a to provide an inclusive, sustainable, bio-diversity-friendly livelihood to communities inside the reserve.

One priority community to make the first laboratory for sustainable tourism development inside the Sagay Marine Reserve is Suyac Island in Brgy Taba-ao, Sagay City, Negros Occidental, Philippines. Dr. Jurgenne Primavera, one of the world's expert on mangroves during a consultation identified Suyac Island mangrove forest as a priority site due to its compelling natural assets such as the presence of old growth mangrove species particularly the *Sonneratia alba* mangrove species and the flying foxes.

The community prior to the intervention has negative perceptions about government programs due stricter enforcement. It is a very small island, with 1.8 hectares with 750 inhabitants and 15.5 hectares of mangrove forest. They don't have any alternative livelihood, except fishing. They have little participation in the conservation efforts, hence eco-tourism was introduced.





### Methods, steps and tools applied

*How was the good practice implemented?*

Although there is a national law creating Sagay Marine Reserve, it is being managed jointly by DENR and the local government of Sagay. The LGU in partnership with Sagay Marine Reserve Office and City Information and Tourism through its Sustainable Tourism Development Framework laid out the foundation for this development and initiated its program in Suyac Island. Here are the methods, steps and tools applied:

- Sense of pride. Social marketing as a communication tool to promote sense of pride and Theory of Change have created a dent towards the much needed behavioural change in the island. Our experience was one of the basis in the crafting of Manual on Social marketing for the Conservation of Coastal Ecosystems by the GIZ ProCoast Project. The power of pride cannot be undermined. Before their attitude towards mangrove is where they dump their trash, get firewood for cooking and where they defecate. They see their island as quite ordinary. Then because of the campaign, with the new lens, they saw the richness of their place and their desire to protect it. Aside from natural sciences, conservation is also largely shaped by the social sciences and multimedia arts. Sustainability is inter-disciplinary. A qualitative and quantitative surveys were conducted and have become basis for their campaign roll outs including the creation of young environmental scouts.
- Community Organization and Planning for Sustainable Transformation. During the presentation of the sustainable development program, most of the community members were adamant to allow tourism to take place. Involving them to the planning process is a crucial step in the development.
- Creation of a pro-environment, pro-community bio-diversity friendly livelihood for community members provided them an additional average income of P4,000.00 during peak season. The Philippines has one of the mega-diverse marine biodiversity, however fisherfolks are among the destitute sector. Wildlife conservation and ecotourism in Suyac Island are being handled entirely by the community. The site-based activities inside the natural mangrove forest provides the inclusive economic opportunities for their families and community as they also allotted community development fund.
- Streamline bio-diversity knowledge to the community. With the series of workshops and training tailored fit for the community who are mostly high school graduates while some elementary graduated capacitated the community and have become fully aware of the importance of the marine ecosystem. Despite their limited education, they can readily identify mangrove species by their leaves. They can germinate mangrove species and plant them using science-based protocols. They can scientifically count flying foxes based on their available resources. Understanding the ecosystem is one of the basis for their membership in the community-led management eco tourism site.
- Arts and Culture. Arts mimics life. Arts reflects the richness of life. And so it did with the series of arts and culture activities including visual arts, theatre, music composition and film making. An international director filmed in the island showcasing the beauty of the mangrove island with some locals as actors.





### Key success factors

*What helped you tackle the issues?*

- Leaders political will, how they championed sustainable tourism principles and have invested in the crafting sustainable tourism development framework plan
- Establishment of community-led bio-diversity friendly livelihood through eco-tourism
- Promoted sense of pride through social marketing pride campaign
- Continued protection of 15.5 mangrove forest in Suyac Island
- Raised up community champions for the environment and community development through tailor-fit seminars, workshops and trainings.
- Used communication tools for behavioral change from (Pre-contemplation to Action)
- When typhoon Yolanda hit the Visayas, Sagay City was in its path. One of the badly affected areas of the super typhoon Yolanda was the northern part of Negros Occidental considered vulnerable to natural hazards and risks, like typhoons, tsunami and storm surges. However due to the greenbelts of mangroves in place inside Sagay Marine Reserve including Suyac Island, the impacts were not so grave as mangrove forests shielded the islands. This underscored all the more the protection of the mangrove ecosystem in the area with forest cover as Biodiversity Monitoring System Report says “intact and in excellent condition.”

### Lessons learned

*While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?*

- Lack of participation. Pride is a powerful tool that can be used towards conservation goals.
- Despite the negativity, leaders stood their ground and continue to pursue what is right for the community through sustainable tourism development
- Eco tourism can work and it can also help transform communities to be protectors and participators in bio-diversity conservation and community building one island at a time.
- Our current measurement of success is detrimental to the sustainability of our destinations. We adhere to carrying capacity. Use low volume, high value tourism.
- Gestation process is painful and long. Must be strategic in raising community leaders.
- Participatory-approach in community-based ecotourism is imperative in ensuring active participation of the community and sustained growth.





- No one should be left behind. Each has the right to have the dignity of work despite educational status. For as long as one is willing and actively participates in capacity building, a community resident despite limited educational opportunity can be able articulate its knowledge on bio-diversity.
- Community-based ecotourism program+ social marketing pride campaign + empowered community = a vision of a healthy, thriving, harmony with nature community
- Protectors + Entrepreneurs + Sustainable Development = Good Governance

NOTE: Currently the mangrove eco-park is undergoing major repair and is expected to be completed by November 2022.

## Results, achievements and recognitions

*What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice?*

### Awards & Recognition

- 2018 National Level, Grand Winner, Best Practices on Community-based Responsible Tourism : Community-based Tourism Campaign - The Suyac Island Journey, Association of Tourism Officers of the Philippines – Assn of Tourism Officers and Department of Tourism Pearl Awards Best Practices
- 2018 National Level, First Runner-up, Best Practices on Community-based Responsible Tourism : Community-based Tourism Campaign - The Suyac Island Journey, Association of Tourism Officers of the Philippines – Assn of Tourism Officers and Department of Tourism Pearl Awards Best Practices
- 2019 National Level - PARA EL MAR, Best Mangrove Awards 2019 – 3rd Runner Up, MSN and ZSL.

### Achievement

- Behavioral change of the community from inactive to pre-contemplation to action towards solid waste management, protection of flying foxes and mangroves and participation to community development. Conducted perception survey on biodiversity awareness in 2013: 28% and in 2022 : 81.6% hence there is an increase in awareness by 53.6 %. Study: Frequency and mean method.
- Creation and establishments of three community Associations
- Implementation of science-based mangrove rehabilitation and reduction of environmental impact from mass tourism by laying down the foundation of sustainable tourism development including limiting influx by following carrying capacity limits. Based on the result of Biodiversity Management System on Suyac Island mangrove forest cover states “intact and in excellent condition; the forest cover in the island increased due to community initiatives.” Based on 2021 Remote Sensing Data, the mangrove forest cover increased to approximately 1,400 square meters.





- Increase in the bats/ flying foxes population  
Distribution and Population of Flying Foxes in 2012 is 1161  
Distribution and Population of Flying Foxes in July 2022 is 7,303

Note: Two flying fox species only; large flying foxes and island flying foxes using Quick Total Count & Total Species Count

Invitation to the International Forum. We were invited to speak and share about our Suyac Island Story and its mangroves at COP26 Event: Coastal Blue Panel: The vital role of mangroves for climate change mitigation and adaptation last November 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2021. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_23c5r11hc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_23c5r11hc) at 24:28

- An international movie was filmed in Suyac Island, highlighting the beauty of mangrove forest and the community. <https://mb.com.ph/2022/06/03/mangrove-island-in-negros-occidental-featured-in-intl-film-amon-banwa-sa-lawod>

#### Additional references

*Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from YouTube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL (not WeTransfer).*

Google Drive of Videos:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UFTL0hB8BPOo3dqIx5vmClrHNCEn1A7x?fbclid=IwAR3jS-4BS5DY1UCDJgWiN226SH2JR6guOSS7FzVdW7owHI-xBFLixW5kPOk>

<https://www.lorenlegarda.com.ph/sagay-marine-reserve-in-11th-episode-of-protected-areas-series/>

[https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press\\_release/2009/0320\\_legarda1.asp](https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2009/0320_legarda1.asp)

Video: Our Fragile Eco System- Sagay :<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0qOPDxMgeQ>

<https://www.facebook.com/philippinesbiodiversity/photos/pcb.2085322591494156/2085324194827329/>

<https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/manila-bulletin/20171012/281711204870010>

Video Suyac Island : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqRJV3pJniU&t=3s>

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/537063/mangroves-shielded-sagay-islets-residents>

<https://www.facebook.com/philippinesbiodiversity/photos/a.171877932838641/6152178194808555/>

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=errol%20abada%20gatumbato%20suyac>

