



Good Practice Story Title:

"Regenerative Agritourism: Cultivating a Sustainable Future for Bago City"

- Going towards Bago City's Climate Positive Tourism

Destination: Bago City

Country: Philippines

Submitting Organization: City Government of Bago

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Situated just 21.5 kilometers from Bacolod, the capital city of Negros Occidental province, Bago City is known as the "Home of Historical and Natural Treasures, a 40,120-hectare agroecological destination in the Philippines.

Its mountains support the Bago Watershed and offer stunning views of Mt. Kanlaon, rich with diverse flora and wildlife. The coastal areas, part of the 7th Ramsar Site in the country, are crucial wetlands and vital stopovers for migratory birds on the East Asia-Australasian Flyway.

Bago City's Marine Protected Area is one of the only three estuaries in the Philippines where endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins are found. Known as the "Rice Granary of Negros Occidental," with rich volcanic soil from Mount Kanlaon Natural Park that nourishes its expanse, making Bago City a treasure trove of extraordinary food biodiversity, home to one of the rarest and finest cacao beans in the world, the "Criollo" Cacao, and the native species of the giant mottled eel found in the Bago River.





Summary of Good Practice Story:

To support Bago City's economic recovery, the local Tourism and Agriculture agencies launched the "Booming GREEN AGritOurism" (BAGO) program. This initiative transforms farmers into "Agri-Entrepreneurs", maximizes farm resources, and promotes sustainable tourism, prioritizing the triple bottom line: Planet, People, and Prosperity.

Before "BAGO", Bago City's agritourism potential was untapped, with low tourist arrivals and few attractions. Introduced in 2018, agritourism shifted the focus to sustainable, climate-positive development, leveraging in the city's rural landscape, agroecological biodiversity, and rich farming culture.

The BAGO program includes Booming GREEN "Farm Tours," Booming GREEN "Farmers Weekend Market," and Booming GREEN "Gastronomy Tourism." These initiatives have positioned Bago City as a prime agritourism destination in the Philippines, recognized for its extraordinary agroecological biodiversity and exemplary environmental practices.

Issues faced:

Previously, Bago City was just a "gateway" for the tourists going south of the Negros Island. The city as a destination is not popular with foreign visitors and premium domestic tourists. It has been a big challenge for the local tourism industry to market and position Bago City as a "must visit" destination with these issues at hand:

- **Low Tourist Arrivals:** Due to a lack of overnight facilities and proximity to Bacolod City.
- **Limited Tourism Initiatives:** Attractions catered mainly to daytime tourists.
- **Mass Tourism Threats:** Existing attractions were prone to high utilization and low spending, with long-term negative impacts on natural resources.
- **Lack of Sustainable Tourism Attractions:** The city had not fully explored its agro and ecotourism potential.
- **No Established Tourism Destination Marketing Program:** Despite recognitions, Bago City lacked a strong tourism brand.
- **Basic Tourist Facilities:** Existing facilities were not climate-responsive.
- **Diminishing Cultural Heritage:** Modernization threatened the preservation of rural cultural traditions.

Solutions:

In 2016, *the local government prioritized tourism alongside agriculture*, leading to:

- **Tourism as an Economic Driver:** Recognizing its potential for economic growth.
- **Assessment of Tourism Potentials:** Identifying and developing tourism products and services.
- **Sustainable Tourism Programs:** Implementing initiatives aligned with national and international standards. (National standards -Department of Tourism Philippines & international standards, UNWTO, GSTC, Green Destinations and Slow Food International)
- **Adoption of Farm Tourism Development Act:** Promoting farm tourism to leverage agricultural strengths.



These actions culminated in the "Booming GREEN AGritOurism" (BAGO) program, revitalizing the local tourism industry through sustainable and climate positive tourism. The program enriched Bago City's cultural heritage and introduced its unique brand as a "Climate Smart Agroecological Destination," helping to combat the climate crisis by reducing the carbon footprint of travel.

The success of "Booming GREEN AGritOurism" (BAGO) is evident in its significant contributions to tourism development and environmental conservation, showcasing Bago City as a model for climate-responsive tourism that balances environmental stewardship, economic growth, and cultural preservation.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

"Booming GREEN AGritOurism" (BAGO) - Bago City's Climate Positive Tourism or Regenerative Farm Tourism Program. The program consists of three major components:

"Booming GREEN "Farm Tours"

- The foundation of BAGO program lies in empowering local agritourism stakeholders. Started in 2018, with capacity-building activities, including group sessions and personalized consultations on destination packaging, farm site development, and operations. Farmers were trained in farm guiding, tour costing, and creating enriching visitor experiences.
- To market these initiatives, farm tourism circuits were introduced, featuring media familiarization tours and collaborations with Slow Food Community, emphasizing Good, Clean, and Fair practices. This helped in promoting Bago City's extraordinary biodiversity, attracting special interest tourists globally.

Sample Slow Travel Circuit:

- o **Cocoon to Cloth:** OISCA Sericulture Farm, showcasing silk production from silk worms giving guests knowledge on silk farming and the cocoon to cloth traditional processes.
 - o **Criollo Cacao Bean to Bar Experience:** Chris Fadriga Cacao Plantation, highlighting award-winning cacao farming and chocolate production. A bean to bar experience - tablea and chocolate tasting includes a walking tour and propagation demo.
 - o **Highlands Farm Lunch:** Fare and Jaegon Integrated Farm, offering farm-to-plate experiences with organic produce, home to the locale's organic village association with the farmers treating guests with a demo on specialty traditional rice delicacies.
 - o **Sunset "Sili" and "Santol Wine" Cocktails:** Bantayan Park, alongside the scenic Bago River featuring a fabulous sundown chill out experience by the riverfront with grilled Bago River Eel, a Slow Food Ark of Taste
- These farm tours ensured low carbon footprints and leveraged organic farms as natural carbon sinks, aligning with Bago City's sustainability goals.



- **"Farmers Weekend Market"**

Started in December 2020, the "Farm to Park" market turned weekends into profitable opportunities for farmers and local sellers. It tackled pandemic-related oversupply issues by promoting organic produce and local culinary arts. By 2024, it generated over one million pesos for farmers and sellers, supporting "Eat Local" which preserves food biodiversity and local traditions. This market empowered farmers as resilient agri-entrepreneurs and inspired the younger generation to adopt sustainable farming and culinary practices.

- **Booming GREEN "Gastronomy Tourism"**

As an agri-industrial hub and the "Rice Granary of Negros Occidental," Bago City focused on food sufficiency and preserving culinary heritage. Key initiatives included:

- **Slow Food Orientation and Community Engagement.** In partnership with Bago City College, students were trained as future tour guides to ensure the transmission of culinary traditions.

- **Negros Food Mapping.** Documenting heritage ingredients and practices, which led to the inclusion of the Bago River Eel in the Slow Food Foundation's "Ark of Taste." These efforts highlighted Bago City's rich food culture, promoting sustainable and heritage culinary practices.

- **Collaboration and Achievements:**

The success of **BAGO** was driven by partnerships with the Department of Tourism, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Negros Occidental Tourism Division, Negros Cultural Foundation, Slow Food International, Slow Food Community of Negros Island, and most especially the local farmer and fisherfolks associations. These collaborations expanded marketing reach and conserved resources.

Achievements and Results:

Through the establishment of **"Booming GREEN AGritOurism" (BAGO) Program**, the destination was able to achieve the following:

- Increased quality tourist arrivals from post pandemic figures in 2021 of 127,027 to 199,047 visitors in 2023 which includes quality tourism market from Europe and other nations for the BAGO program.
- Established Biodiversity and Ecosystem-Friendly Tourism Activities and programs: the Booming GREEN "Farm Tours", the "Booming GREEN "Farmers Weekend Market" and the Booming GREEN "Gastronomy Tourism".
- The BAGO Program was recognized as one of the country's top "Creative Tourism". One of the 9 National Awardees for Creative Tourism Awards in the 1st Philippine Creative Tourism Congress last December 2023.
- Proliferation of Agritourism, Department of Tourism Philippines- accredited Farm Sites and Learning Centers.
- Establishment of Slow Food Community in Bago City (Slow Food Safeguard and Promote the Food and Cultural Heritage of Bago).
- Promotion of Low Carbon Travel Circuit through its inclusion in the Slow Travel Western Visayas Circuit.





- Increased Agro- and Ecotourism Sites that are carbon – sinks at the same time due to their organic and natural farming practices. From 2 farm sites in 2016 to 10 in 2024.
- Inclusion in the Ark of Taste of 2 Extraordinary Food Biodiversity of Bago – the Criollo Cacao and the Bago River Eel.
- Protection of its Marine Wildlife and Biodiversity especially the Irrawaddy Dolphin.
- Improved and well-developed tourism attractions, services and support facilities with green tourism infrastructures and inclusive facilities.
- World-class quality agro-industrial products like the Negros Silk Project, Tumandok Crafts Industries, Herbanext and Altertrade.
- Better livelihood and quality of life for the farming communities. Empowered farmers aid in reversing biodiversity loss and contribute in the achievement of intergenerational justice.
- Transformed farmers to agri-entrepreneurs and ecological guardians.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

- The implementation of “**Booming GREEN AGritOurism**” (**BAGO**) required strong political will, good governance, and community support.
- Key lessons included the importance of organizing and capacitating the community, which resolved critical issues and advanced the welfare of farming villages. Additionally, innovation, flexibility, and resilience were vital in adapting to challenges and achieving the program’s goals. And to further empower the community, the local government acts as enabler and transformer of results.
- Bago City's experience serves as a model for other destinations aiming to integrate climate action and environmental conservation into their tourism strategies. These can be done by growing a healthy ecosystem that can support livelihoods, reverse biodiversity loss and provide social economic empowerment.

Recognitions and Additional References:

Bago City has garnered significant acclaims for its Agro-Eco Best Practices of which the “**Booming GREEN AGritOurism**” (**BAGO**) program is a significant part. This reflects its commitment to climate action and environmental conservation. Here are some of these prestigious awards and recognitions:

International Recognitions

1. **Green Destinations Story Awards 2023:** Third Place in the Environment & Climate Category.
2. **Top 100 Stories of the Green Destination 2022:** Awarded in Greece, for the inspiring story "Reviving the Majestic Diversity of Bago Watershed," emphasizing ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation.
3. **Top 100 Stories of the Green Destinations 2023:** Honored in Tallinn, Estonia, for "Growing a Food Sufficient and Climate Smart Agroecological Destination," underlining Bago City's efforts in sustainable agriculture and food security.





4. **International Cocoa Awards 2021:** Gold Award for the heirloom Criollo Cacao Beans of Christopher Fadriga, highlighting the excellence in organic and sustainable cacao farming.

National Recognition

Last year, *the BAGO program reaped Bago City the recognition as one of the 9 National Awardees for Creative Tourism Awards in the 1st Philippine Creative Tourism Congress last December 2023* by the Department of Tourism.

Other National Recognitions:

1. **Galing Pook Finalist 2023:** Recognized for the Integrated Ecosystem Management Program, demonstrating Bago City's leadership in sustainable environmental practices.
2. **Hall of Fame Rice Awardee:** From 2018 to 2020, Bago City achieved a remarkable 262.62% Rice Sufficiency Level, reflecting its success in agricultural productivity and sustainability.

Farmer Awardees and Agritourism Stakeholders

1. **Christopher Fadriga:** Received the Gold Award in the 2021 International Cocoa Awards in Paris, France.
2. **Maria Gina P. Banowski:** 1st Runner Up in the Outstanding Woman Engaged in Agriculture category for the REWARD initiative by the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist
3. **Pastor Jerry A. Dionson:** Awarded the 2016 National Organic Agriculture Achievers Award as Outstanding Small Farmer.
4. **Renato A. Catiempo:** Honored with the GAWAD SAKA Award as Bago City's Regional Outstanding Organic Agriculture Farmer.
5. **Engr. Almario Senoro:** Named as Best Organic Farmer Practitioner, 16th Negros Island Organic Farmers Festival
6. **Gina P. Dela Rosa:** Named Best Organic Agri-preneur at the 2019 Negros Island Organic Farmers' Festival.

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