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**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIALS FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT  
IN CENTRAL AURORA,  
AURORA PROVINCE, PHILIPPINES**

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**Abstract:**

Tourism is an important human activity not only of economic significance, but also of social, political, cultural, and educational significance. As such, it is an interesting and deserving study on its own right, for a greater understanding of the economy and society. It is quite apart from any vocational or other utilitarian purpose. But tourism is also an important economic and industrial activity in which many individuals, forms, enterprises, and other organizations are engaged in, and of which has direct and indirect concerns for many others. For them, the study of tourism is of practical necessity and usefulness.

A paragraph definition of ecotourism, extracted from the book on Ecotourism by David A. Fennel, shows that: *“Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas”*.

This research studies the development of ecotourism in Central Aurora. It assesses the real potentials for ecotourism development in the four municipalities that comprise it, namely, Baler, San Luis, Maria Aurora, and Dipaculao. The study also identifies various problems that require important solutions. The results and evidences from this study proved that Central Aurora has great potentials for ecotourism development and that ecotourism must be considered as a key economic industry long with agriculture, forestry, and fishery. The study also analyzes the strengths and opportunities for developing ecotourism in the study area.

However, in order to attain the above mentioned objectives and goals, the results and observations in this study will also serve to point out weaknesses and/or obstacles to ecotourism development which are encountered by the key players in Central Aurora. Investigations through the questionnaires, surveys, and interviews with key respondents affirm these weaknesses as poor infrastructure, inadequacy of ecotourism facilities and services, lack of close coordination and cooperation between multi-stakeholders, lack of proper policies and strategies for ecotourism development, and low awareness among the local people of the need to protect and conserve their environment and natural resources.

Based on the findings and conclusions and in view of the potentials and problems of ecotourism development in Central Aurora, some proper and necessary solutions were presented with the hope of solving these existing problems that hinder the development of ecotourism in the study area of Central Aurora. The research particularly emphasizes the important roles of the Provincial Government and Provincial Tourism Office, as well as the Municipal Tourism Council, as regulating authorities to guarantee full coordination among all stakeholders.