



# An Assessment on the Environmental Viability of Ecotourism within Boracay Island, Philippines

## I. Introducing Boracay Island

It is a tourist hotspot that is famous for its white beaches, wind surfing and diverse coral reefs.

The Island is located in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. It is roughly 10 square kilometres, with a permanent population of 17,000. This includes the indigenous Ati People, and the common languages spoken are Aklan, Tagalog and English.

In 2022 the Island hosted over 1 million tourists (Barreiro, 2022).

As seen in Figure 1, there are a huge amount of tourist amenities on the small island. In 2018, the island was controversially shut down for 6 months to perform a closure and redevelopment plan.



Fig.1 Map of Hotels in Boracay Island



Map generated through GIS programming

## II. The Rise of Ecotourism in Boracay

Ecotourism is a term that refers to a type of tourism that prioritises environmental conservation, economic development and sustainability education for incoming tourists and locals.

The ecotourism model became popular within Boracay Island, after the island was shut down for 6 months in 2018. This was because “over-tourism” had led the Island to become a “cesspool” with the natural environment and resources exploited (Varga, 2020).

The government introduced the Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Management Group (BIAMF). Now, the Island has reopened, with a strict tourist quota, an electric transportation system, strict environmental regulations for businesses and more efficient sanitation and water infrastructure. The legacy effect of this policy is the rising popularity in sustainability-focused tourism, and the market now shifting towards inviting the environmentally-conscious tourist.

## III. Methodology

Research question: **To what extent was the temporary tourist exclusion policy on Boracay Island, and the resulting rise in ecotourism environmentally viable?**

### Literature review:

Extensive literature review was conducted to gauge the successes of ecotourism as a form of environmental conservation. The models presented in existing literature were adapted and applied to the Boracay Island case study.

### Case study analysis:

Specific case study analysis was conducted from the various stakeholder perspectives. This includes the local and national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local business owners, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and media organisations. This was done through an interviewing process, in-depth research, and collecting media coverage from local, national and international perspectives.

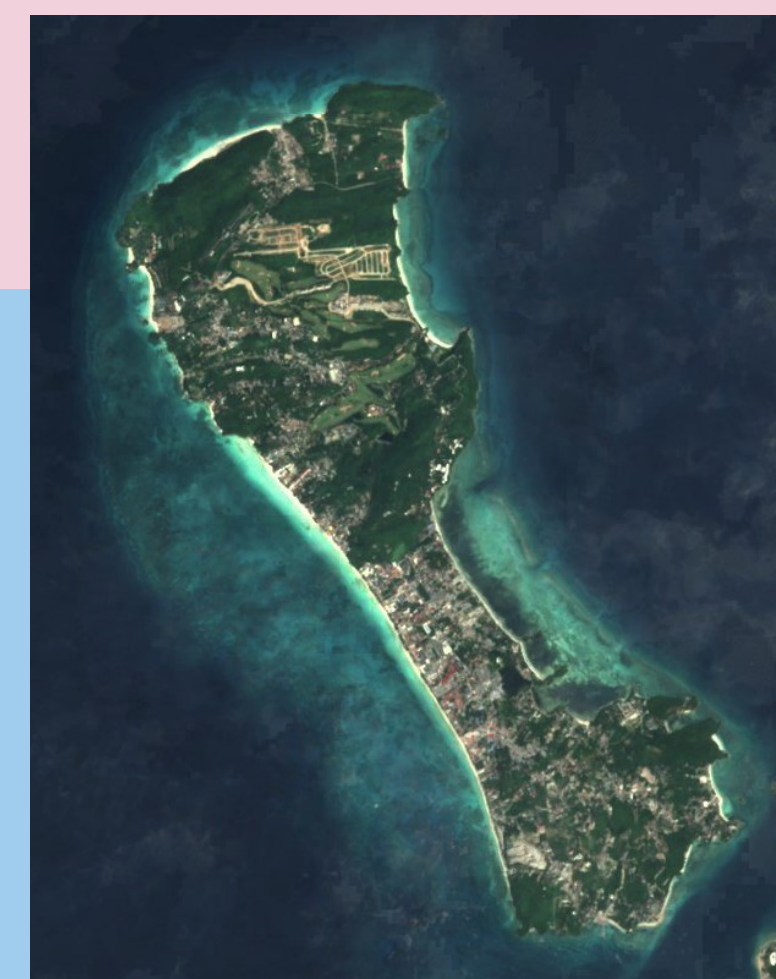
## IV. The Government as a Stakeholder

The Boracay rehabilitation and temporary closure kickstarted the Department of Tourism’s (DOT) new #MoreFunForever campaign. This outlines the goal for increasing levels of ecotourism nation-wide.

Former-President Duterte views the rehabilitation as a “success” (CNN Philippines, 2019).

BIAMF continues to operate on the island, continuing to renovate the infrastructure and enforcing the environmental regulations. 17 officials were sued by the government for “neglecting” Boracay (Nestor P. Burgos Jr., 2018).

There is concern, that now the closure has occurred, less support and sub-par management has come back to Boracay. For the transition to ecotourism to be successful there needs to be a standardised procedure for ensuring that the efforts are not too “profit-driven” and that the environment is prioritised (Ross and Wall, 1999).



## V. Tourism Businesses as a Stakeholder

Through interviewing hotel workers local to the Island, there was a common sentiment that the rehabilitation policy in 2018 was difficult. One interviewee explained that “there was no revenue, and many local businesses had to shut-down”. This meant that the very rich hotel chains thrived, but the local hotels and businesses could not continue.

Hotels now commonly use sustainability and conservation as a marketing strategy on the Island. While definitely environmentally beneficial, still these efforts are criticised for being a form of greenwashing.

The bigger otels are now required to have their own sewage treatment plans. This creates greater sense of responsibility and reduces the eutrophication that was damaging the ocean surrounding Boracay.

Dive shops and other local businesses now come together to host regular beach clean-ups. Part of the Boracay Island Paradise Community explained to me how now businesses can come together and there is a “greater sense of community”.

## VII. Results and Implications

The investigation exhibits that ecotourism does have the potential to be environmentally viable for Boracay Island.

The literary review exhibited the strategies and components that are necessary for ecotourism to be a successful strategy for environmental conservation.

The case study analysis shows how from a all stakeholders perspectives there is avid efforts being made, and the exclusionary policy was to some extent a success. Due to the extreme measures of the policy, it shouldn’t be recommended to other tourist hotspots globally, and nationavilly.

The results of the report could be used to recommend for there to be further NGO and government cooperation. It could also be elevated through further on-site research to be conducted on the state of the ecosystems at the site.

## VI. The Community as a Stakeholder

Throughout the closure, over 30,000 jobs were at stake, with an estimated loss of revenue of 56 billion pesos (Katrina Domingo, 2018). There was 2 billion pesos set aside as a calamity fund to assist the locals during this time. However, my interactions with the locals gave the impression that this wasn’t enough and many were forced to emigrate. Now the island seems to be a success, but at the time of closure was extremely difficult for not only tourism workers, but also fishermen and farmers.

The Ati people were given ownership over their land. They now provide the many hotels with fresh produce, and promote their “agri-tourism” (Zabal, 2019). The group, according to my correspondent, still views tourism as a “threat to their culture and land”.

The closure of the Island according to an NGO correspondent “created environmental stewardship” on the Island. Now programs like High 5 Boracay and other regular community meet-ups work to clean pollution from the beaches.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank both my supervisors, Dr. Iris Moeller and Dr. Susan Murphy for guiding me throughout this process.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw foundation for funding this research; and the Laidlaw team at Trinity College Dublin for making it all possible.