

3rd Philippine International Tourism Fair
Forum on Green Tourism
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20% of the world's population consumes 80% of the planet's resources

5,000 people die every day because of polluted drinking water.

1 billion humans have no access to safe drinking water

1 billion people are going hungry

Over 50% of grain traded around the world is used for animal feed or biofuels

40% of arable land is degraded

Every year, 13 million hectares of forest disappear

1 mammal in 4, 1 bird in 8, 1 amphibian in 3 are threatened with extinction. Species are dying out

1,000 times faster than the natural rate

75% of the world's fishing grounds are exhausted, depleted or in danger of being so

The average temperature of the last 15 years has been the highest since records began

The ice cap is 40% thinner than 40 years ago

There could be 200 million climate refugees by 2050

Those are just some of the facts taken from watching the film 'HOME', culled from various reliable sources like the United Nations Environment Program, the FAO, NASA and other scientific bodies.

In the last 5 decades the Philippines has lost 2/3 of its forest cover, one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. Only 5% of Philippine Coral reefs are in good condition according to

reef check. In Palawan where I live, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development says that only 2.8 % of Palawan reefs are in excellent condition. These are more facts.

Green tourism, eco tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, eco resorts, eco lodge, eco center, new paradise.

Those are words.

But do those words have any more meaning, if you weigh them against the weight of those facts? Can those words mean something else other than a marketing tool to capture a new public trend?

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for allowing me the honor of addressing you, the noblesse of the tourism industry, today during the Third International Tourism Fair's Seminar and Educational Forum on Green Tourism vis-a-vis Climate Change. Thank you too to the secretariat for inviting me and believing that I have something interesting to say.

Eco-tourists or Green Tourists are an emerging market at the present, green or eco tourism establishments are a developing product. But soon, maybe sooner than we think, they may be a major market and the only products -- out of necessity.

I am neither a scientist nor an expert, I am just a concerned citizen, an advocate for the environment and a tourism practitioner as well, who has been living with nature for the past 20 years, give or take a few months of each year. I have my home on an island in Palawan called Boayan where I share a habitat with the creatures who were there before me, the

creatures who are responsible for maintaining the fragile equilibrium of that habitat. Creatures who are important for the wholistic health of our planet whether we realize it or not. We have been fighting for years to try to protect that habitat.

It is also from my home that I have seen the rapid degradation of the environment, the suffering of nature. Where I have seen the lushness of the forests go up in smoke due to poverty,

necessity, and yes, sad to say, even ignorance and greed. I have seen reefs being blasted and poisoned for the same reasons, I have seen untrained fishermen diving the seas at night with their hookahs and lights taking everything alive that can be eaten or sold, sometimes going to depths of over a hundred feet at the risk of the bends, also for the same reasons,

It is also from my home on the island where I actually felt the first effects of climate change and global warming. I have seen the beach front diminishing because the seas are rising, coral bleaching from the elevated temperatures of the El Niño, and storm surges attacking my house.

I will read to you another grim story, an article that came out last month, the 20th of May 2009 in a British newspaper which sums up a long report that came out of MIT.

Global temperatures could rise by more than 7°C this century killing billions of people and leaving the world on the brink of total collapse, according to new research.

The study, carried out in unprecedented detail, projected that without 'rapid massive action' temperatures worldwide will increase by as much as 7.4°C by [the year] 2100, from levels seen in [the year] 2000.

Previous estimates have concluded that the likely increase this century would probably be 2.4°C. However the new study by scientists at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) included projected economic growth in developing countries and new information on the effect increased carbon emissions will have on biological processes, such as the capacity of the ocean to absorb greenhouse gases.

The results are based on 400 trials of the new system,

each time using slightly different variations in data at the start, to try and iron out errors.

Co-author of the study, Ronald Prinn, Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry and director of MIT's Center for Global Climate Change, said all the results resulted in an increase in temperatures.

The projections average out a likely Earth temperature increase of 5.2°C this century, and conclude there is a 90% chance the temperature change will be between 3.5° and 7.4°C.

"There is significantly more risk than we previously expected," he said.

"This increases the urgency for significant policy action. There is no way the world can and should take these risks."

Environmentalists are screaming catastrophe! Scientists are screaming catastrophe!

They are calling "for the world to try and reduce the chance of such an increase in temperatures by committing to reduce carbon emissions at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen at the end of this year.

"The consequences of such changes would be [out of] the known scale. They are unthinkable," .

"A 7.4°C rise would mean severe ecosystem collapse worldwide, with total economic collapse in many parts of the world.

"The planet would face resource wars between people, and you can safely say many, many hundreds of millions of people would die," they said.

This sounds apocalyptic doesn't it? Like doomsday is about to descend on us, but only if we allow it to.

2500 leading environmental experts held an emergency climate summit last March, "they agreed that "worst case scenarios" were already becoming a reality, so drastic action had to be taken soon. Addressing the statement directly to politicians, they said there "was no excuse for inaction", "steps should be

vigorously and widely implemented to reduce greenhouse gases. Failure to do so would result in "significant risk of irreversible climatic shifts".

So if we heed the pleas of the scientists, the experts on climate change and global warming, then we can still do something about it, we still have the chance to lessen the rise in temperature and decrease the impacts of global warming, but it has to be the concerted effort of each individual, each sector of society as well as governments and international bodies working together to make and implement policies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the world, and hopefully stem the progression of global warming. In another urgent plea, this time made by Prince Charles, he said we have "less than 100 months" to save our planet.

(Taken from an article published by Richard Alleyne, Science Correspondent in Copenhagen)

If that is true, then we do not even have 10 years, that's tomorrow. Statistically, most of us in this room will still be alive! If we are to believe the Prince of Wales, it is more than an urgent matter.

So what is our role in the Tourism Industry given the context of this whole doomsday scenario? Do we just sit back and keep the ball rolling, hoping that the number of pax will not diminish? Do we keep on planning and developing using old models, strategizing using frameworks from the past?

In the stock market they say: "Past performance is no indication of future gains." In other words, what has worked or succeeded in the past in terms of tourism development may no longer be applicable in the present context given the forecasts for the future. A good example of this may be Boracay, one of our biggest financial success stories, the most popular tourist destination in the country, which the environment is now paying for. The stakeholders and the government are scrambling around trying to correct the mistakes while still

more developers try to cash in on the success of Boracay. Already we have far exceeded the carrying capacity of the island and yet development continues. So despite the present financial gains, it does not mean we should create other Boracays does it? Don't get me wrong, it is not development per se, but the type of development.

Ronald Prinn, one of the main scientists behind the MIT study said, "Because vehicles last for years, and buildings and powerplants last for decades, it is essential to start making major changes... The least-cost option to lower the risk is to start now and steadily transform the global energy system over the coming decades to low or zero greenhouse gasemitting technologies."

Again, what does this mean for the tourism industry? How do we build? Large scale or small scale? With what materials? Where will our energy source come from? What appliances? Where will supplies come from? Who will be our workforce? One of the questions I was asked to tackle by the PITF secretariat was, "Why do people turn to green tourism?" when now the question is, "Why should people turn to green tourism?" with a policy statement, "All tourism should go green!" It becomes a duty and an obligation as responsible practitioners. Does that sound drastic? It is. At this point in time, if we are to listen to all the experts, as we should, I do not really think we have a choice, do you?

It's not just the market asking for it, as more and more people look for eco-destinations, search the internet for establishments that are labelled green or eco-friendly, all the market trends show it. We don't have to cite the numbers. It's Mother Nature demanding that we act now. Global warming is a reality, climate change is upon us: seasons are unpredictable, typhoons are hitting further south, rivers are drying up causing droughts in numerous places, while flooding has become commonplace in areas that didn't flood before, the

oceans are not absorbing as much carbon dioxide as they used to, sea levels are rising, permanent glaciers are disappearing, the ice cap is melting, and so on and so forth. This is all happening now, not in 2050, by then it will be too late!

In the midst of climate change, all these facts we are being bombarded with, where do we see the future of tourism? We are one of the largest industries in the world, many economies and jobs depend on tourism, do we just stop and let the doomsday predictions overcome us? No, we adapt and we are adapting, we put substance into those words green, sustainable, responsible, ecological, environmental.

Travel predictions all show that the cost of air travel will only go up meaning long haul flights will be minimized. Tourists will pick and choose where they go and why they go. Already we see a rise in local tourists, Filipinos visiting the Philippines, Asians visiting Asia. This phenomenon will only increase with the inevitable surge in the price of fuel. The advent of peak oil is no longer a question, it is a certainty. Whether it is now or later does not change the problem of an increase in demand for oil and a decrease in fossil resources.

People are looking to destinations that are distinct in their local culture and traditions, destinations with a social responsibility. More and more, supplies will be sourced locally as the costs of importations will go up with the cost of travel. Carbon footprints of establishments will be measured and weighed against the costs.

Alternative transportation will be developed and slow travel the trend.

I quote Justin Francis, "Smart destinations will no longer just pursue more tourists per se. Instead they will focus more on types of tourists they need and matching these to the most suitable areas and communities within their county. As a result, economic benefits will be maximized, while social and environmental costs are kept to a minimum."

These are the trends: quality and sustainability versus quantity, solidarity versus walls.

Once again I quote the film HOME,

"Must we always build walls to brake the chains of human solidarity, separate peoples and protect the happiness of some from the misery of others? It is too late to be a pessimist."

Public awareness of reality is rising and will climax so that we in the tourism industry have to urgently decide, can the industry take a leadership role in facing these realities or will we collapse?

THAT IS THE CHALLENGE WE POSE TO OURSELVES!