



PHILIPPINES

CHAPTER

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DOLPHIN WATCH MARINE LIFE TOUR

I.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

Official Name of “Best Practice” Initiative	Dolphin Watch Marine Tour
Name of Contributor/ Organization	Pamilican Island Dolpin & Whale Watching Organization
Address/Contact Details	Tel: +63 917 9713101 Contact Person: Mr Leo Sumalpong
Year The Initiative Was Started & Completed	1998
Location of Best Practice Project	Pamilican Island, Baclayon, Bohol, Philippines

2.0 KEY SUMMARY

- 2.1 Pamilacan Island is an offshore barangay of Baclayon town in the province of Bohol, one of the islands in the Central Visayas, Philippines. Pamilacan Islands is 14 nautical miles away from the Baclayon pier. The island has a land area of 1,391,668 sq.m. The islanders’ main occupation is fishing. However during their free time, they also cultivate small patches of land with corn and root crops.
- 2.2 The Marine Life Tour in Pamilacan, Bohol is operated by Pamilacan Island Dolphin and Whale Watch Organizations, a business cooperative of fishermen and the villagers.
- 2.3 The Philippines has 19 confirmed species of whales and dolphins and a possibility of 7 other species. 11 species or about 60% are confirmed to be found in the Pamilacan waters which makes them as one of the country’s main migration routes for marine mammals.
- 2.4 Whaling has existed in Pamilacan over hundred of years. In fact, the island’s name was derived from the Visayas word ‘pilak’, a large hook used to hand spear whales, manta rays, whale sharks and dolphins. Initially, a limited number of whales were captured each year, but the introduction of new technologies and financing of new engines and fishing boats in the 1990’s has transformed local whaling into a lucrative commercial enterprise. Whale meat was sold locally and internationally then.

2.5 In 1998, WWF-Philippines, under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Marine Mammal Conservation, started to implement a community based whale watching project in the island. Pamilacan Island Dolphin & Whale Watching Organization (PIDWWO) was organized with the help of WWF. A series of training were undertaken to prepare the organization for dolphin and whale watching tours. Loans were made available to fishermen for refurbishing their boats and purchasing the necessary safety equipments to make them suitable for dolphin watching.



- 2.6 Undoubtedly, Pamilacan has always had the potential to become a major dolphin and whale watching destination. The island is easily accessible; only a short drive and boat ride from the provincial capital and Panglao Island. The community has a vast knowledge on whales and dolphins and is skilled at spotting marine mammals from a distance. These factors, combined with the immense volume of marine mammals found in the area, indicated that the right ingredients were in place to develop an excellent community based ecotourism product.
- 2.7 In the initial stage of its operations, it faced serious problems. Essentially, the product did not meet many of the tourists' requirements and expectations. The tour offered was of low quality. It was a basic boat hire to the dolphin areas and there was no product interpretation, no itinerary and no alternative product when there was no sighting. Tourist handling was also inefficient and safety measures were not in place.
- 2.8 According to PIDWWO members, ecotourism as an alternative to marine mammal hunting was neither feasible nor beneficial to the local folks. Consequently, mammal hunting was not totally stopped as a means of livelihood. Given the poor product quality, it could not compete well with tough local competition and changing market trends.
- 2.9 The consequent serious downturn in business had been so severe that the original dolphin watching operation was in need of complete overhaul and change of direction. However, the Philippines Department of Tourism saw the potential of the tour product in contributing to the economic wellbeing of the islanders and to the environment. In addition, Bohol was already identified as a ecotourism priority sites in the Philippine National Ecotourism Strategy.
- 2.10 The PIDWWO, community, local government and private sector within the province were willing to cooperate amongst themselves for the success of both tourism and environmental conservation. More importantly, the PIDWWO members were willing to give ecotourism another chance, despite



difficulties they had experienced in the past. The project development came under the auspices of the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).

3.0 THE OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Establish Dolphin Watch Pamilacan as a new business cooperative;
- 3.2 Professionalize and enhance tourist's experience of fun, education and safety;
- 3.3 Generate additional income to be shared with the island community;
- 3.4 Conserve the islands marine resources.

4.0 THE MODEL

- 4.1 A few key stages were undertaken to create a more viable and compelling product for greater sustainability:

- **Product Interpretation**

One of the critical factors for the project to be viable was the need for guides. The fisher folks were transformed into guides and were trained in terms of client handling and product interpretation. Local guides were contracted for several sessions as PIDWWO's potential guides. Interpretation scripts were drafted and other information materials on the cetaceans and other marine life found within the marine sanctuary and also the island trivial history were given to PIDWWO in order to give the tour more educational substance. A flyer was produced as an interpretation guide cum souvenir item to clients;

- **Safety Standards**

Guidelines on tourist safety and cetacean interaction were drafted by the local government to address environmental issues particularly with regard to marine mammal interaction. Likewise, guidelines on handling tourist in the waters were drafted. Standard procedures were drawn up to be followed in cases of emergency. Life vests were provided as 'must-wears' for the tourists. This policy covers both the safety of the guests and the protection of the corals



from snorkellers accidentally hitting them with fins or standing on them to rest. One mobile phone per boat was provided to ensure easy communication with the island operations, and also with the emergency services on the mainland. Most importantly, members of the crew had to undergo a certification course on First Aid and Safety in the waters;

- **Facilities & Equipment**

The boats were upgraded in order to comfortably accommodate tourists and hold equipments required on the tour. Restrooms on the island were upgraded in terms of structure and user-convenience was provided. Members of the PIDWWO personally worked on the construction of additional comfort rooms, and the upgrade of the old ones. Site plans were drawn for the old fort of the island to preserve the structure and at the same time, facilities were built for aerial viewing and dolphin watching from the island;

- **Tour/Entertainment**

The Marine Life Tour itinerary was formulated and test-run, which included the practice of the guides and their interpretation. As there is no guarantee of the sightings of the migratory cetaceans, snorkeling at the marine sanctuary was included as part of the tour's secondary product. As such, masks, snorkels and fins are now provided and have been incorporated as part of the tour cost;

- **Training on Catering**

A 5-day training session was conducted with focus on menu preparation, food handling and presentation

- **Marine Life Training and Operations**

Training sessions on cetaceans and environmental protection and management were conducted. Likewise, several workshops were also conducted to iron out tour operation procedures, and an operations manual was developed for future crew and operations members.





- **Business Planning**

A business plan was formulated in order to ensure the feasibility of the project. The plan included the vision of organization for the Marine Life Tour, the costing and pricing strategies to help sell the product, and possible contributions to the community when revenue is generated. This business plan undergoes constant updates in the course of the project;



- **Marketing**

Instead of using the PIDWWO's logo, Dolphin Watch Pamilacan has been designed as the brand for any of the product offered by PIDWWO. With this new branding, promotional materials and drop banners were produced to support sales and promotions. Likewise, veering away from the dependence on walk-in clients, the PIDWWO tied-up with Travel Village, a local tour operator to act as its booking and sales agent. Coordination with several travel writers have also resulted in PIDWWO's Marine Life Tour being included in the Lonely Planet, a well-known travel manual. Similarly, the tour is currently included as one of the Department of Tourism's tours in its WOW Philippines promotions campaign.

5.0 THE IMPACT

- 5.1 The viability of the product has now become a good income earner to supplement their income derived from the fishing activities. What the community has come to term with is that this marine life tour product will not be able to generate jobs for everyone in the community. They are also aware that not everyone in the community can be a tour guide, dolphin spotter or boatman. However, what can be achieved though is a small group of the most capable people running a business that can provide few jobs but can generate enough profit that can be used for community initiatives such as basic utilities, health care and livelihood programs. Eventually, as the tourism business in the island increases, it is anticipated that other livelihood opportunities will be made possible such as food preparations, craft making and others.
- 5.2 Notwithstanding this, since the launching of the Dolphin Watch Pamilacan Marine Life Tour in April 2003, the organization has conducted 437 trips as against 80 trips before the launching, reaping a total gross sale of PHP 1,311,000.00 pesos.
- 5.3 To date, the PIDWWO has purchased a solar power device to be installed in a strategic location on Pamilacan shoreline to guide the fishermen and dolphin-watching operators in coming and going out of the island at night. Rainwater collectors have been constructed to provide sufficient supply of fresh water for household use. Livelihood programs are also being conducted for the community.



- 5.4 With the success of the Dolphin Watch Pamilacan Marine Life Tour, the small fishing village, a once-upon-a-time dolphin and whale hunting community, is now reaping the benefits of ecotourism for their family and the entire community.

6.0 LESSONS LEARNED

- 6.1 This could have been a case where a product was left to die a natural death. But what was demonstrated is that the political will and determination to succeed can uplift fledging fortunes, making this a viable economic activity for the community as well as adding on another product offering to domestic and international tourists;
- 6.2 Taking a step by step approach to revive the product is clearly a good management practice to ensure all areas of concerns are addressed; and more importantly, ensuring the needs and expectations of the customers are met. This product had shifted focus; from one that was product-driven to one that is customer-driven.
- 6.3 Participation of the local community in sustainable tourism is once again demonstrated to be an important ingredient for success.



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WHALE SHARK INTERACTION PROGRAM

I.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

Official Name of “Best Practice” Initiative	Whale Shark Interaction Program.
Name of Contributor/ Organization	The Sorsogon Provincial Tourism Council
Address/Contact Details	Donsol Tourism Office Donsol, Sorsogon Province Republic of the Philippines Tel: +63 927 233 0364 Fax: +63 098 541 1303 e-mail: ecotour_donsol@yahoo.com Contact Person: Badong Adrao
Year the Initiative Started & Completed	1998
Location Of Best Practice	Donsol, Sorsogon Province
Awards/Recognitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TIME Magazine award ‘Best Place for an Animal Encounter’, 2004. ● 11th KALAKBAY Award (Philippines National Tourism Award), Special Award For The Eco-Tourism Product Category, 2003.

2.0 KEY SUMMARY

- 2.1 Donsol is a fishing village of 36,000 people, located in the province of Sorogon, about 600 kilometers southeast of Manila. Until a few years ago, it was not considered a tourist destination and was relatively unknown to the rest of the world.
- 2.2 An event which occurred on January 2, 1998 transformed this sleepy, remote fishing village into a major eco-tourist destination almost overnight when a large concentration of whale sharks called ‘butanding’ was spotted there. This breed of whale sharks is the world’s biggest fish. It can measure up to 20 meters and weighs up to 40 tons. Despite its enormous size, these gentle

giants of the sea are harmless, friendly and playful; allowing humans to swim along, play and interact with them. Donsol is among the very few places in the world where tourists are more or less guaranteed to see the whale sharks. These whale sharks have given the town a new and thriving industry - whale sharks ecotourism. The town has earned the title 'the Whale Sharks capital of the world' and it is Philippines' most successful ecotourism product.



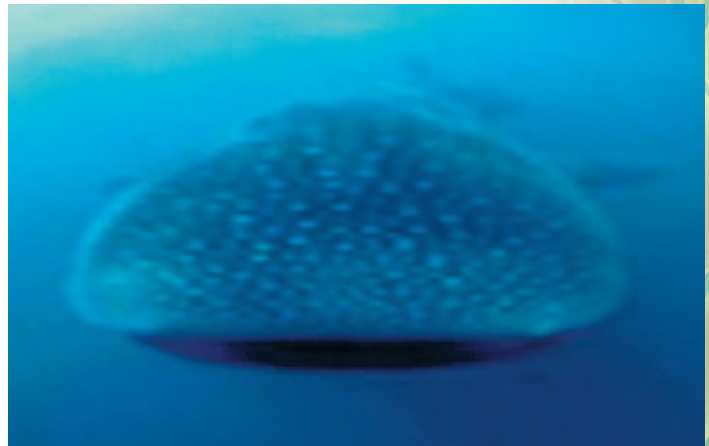
- 2.3 While this was good news whetting the interest of scientists and tourists, it was also bad news because it also attracted poachers and hunters who came for their meat and fins which could be sold for a very high price at HKD500 or PHP1,700 per kilo. The turning point came in March 1998, when 6 of these whale sharks were found to have been slaughtered by these hunters.
- 2.4 Donsol did not have any tourism infrastructural facilities and was ill prepared to handle the sudden tourism boom and the influx of tourists pouring into the town. It needed to have a tourism product which is low-impact with minimal disturbance to the animals, and provide the visitors with an unforgettable adventure experience of interacting and swimming with the whale sharks.

3.0 THE OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Upgrade and develop the local tourism industry and destination in order to widen the economic opportunities for local residents and improve their quality of life;
- 3.2 Protect the interests, welfare, rights and culture of the host community;
- 3.3 Strengthen the capabilities of the local tourism administration in planning, developing and promoting the province's rich natural and man-made resources for sustainable growth;
- 3.4 Ensure a pleasant stay and experience for tourists through proper guidelines of whale shark interaction practices;
- 3.5 Provide a favorable atmosphere for investment flows in local tourism development;



- 3.6 Encourage the adoption and enactment of local legislative measures for the protection and enhancement of the environment and mitigating the negative impacts of local tourism development.



4.0 THE MODEL

- 4.1 The Ecotourism Management Plan with its programs is the outcome brought about by a partnership of multi stakeholders' participation. It involves the national, provincial and local government, universities, concerned NGOs and international agencies like the United Nations Development Program.
- 4.2 Some key roles undertaken by the various bodies are:
- The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) provides the funding;
 - University of the Philippines' Asian Institute of Tourism, in cooperation with the Department of Tourism provides the marketing and tourism management know how;
 - Ningaloo Marine Park in Australia which has a similar but more established interaction program, provides inputs on the tourism potential of the whale sharks;
 - The Department of Conservation and Land Management of Western Australia assists with tagging the whale sharks and installing a tracing satellite to monitor their movements;
 - The local government sets up the Donsol Municipal Tourism Council.
- 4.3 The WWF together with the local community helped to develop the Ecotourism Whale Shark Interaction Program to enable the tourists enjoy a quality whale shark interaction experience.
- 4.3.1 It came up with these guidelines:
- Do not touch or ride on the whale shark;
 - Do not restrict the movement of the Whale Shark, or impede its natural path;
 - Maintain a distance of 3 meters from the head or body of the Whale Shark, and 4 meters from its tail;
 - Do not use flash photography;
 - Do not use scuba gears, scooters, jet skis or any other motorized underwater propulsion machines;
 - Use only snorkel mask;
 - A maximum of six (6) swimmers per Whale Shark is allowed and only one (1) boat per Whale Shark.

- 4.3.2 Rules and regulations were also formulated to cover:
- All visitors are to register with the local tourism office which has a list of resorts or home-stay accommodations;
 - All visitors are to attend a brief orientation session on the rules and guidelines and a short video documentary prior to heading out to sea;
 - Local tourists are to pay a registration fee of PHP100; while foreigners pay PHP300;
 - Hire boat/banca and crew from any member of the Boat Operators' Association;
 - Boat hire (12m/40 ft) includes a boatman, a spotter and a local resident who is trained to spot a butanding;
 - Visitors who plan to venture into the water may hire the services of Butanding Interaction Officers or BIOs who are usually local fishermen who will serve as guides and also their group leaders;
 - The maximum number of registrants per boat is 7 people.
- 4.4 In addition to this, the Fisheries Administrative Order which took effect in 1998 protect and conserve the whale sharks. It prohibits catching, selling, buying, possessing, transporting and exporting of whale sharks and manta rays in Philippines waters. The Order also forbids wounding or killing these animals while targeting other fishes.

5.0 THE IMPACT

- 5.1 A new industry, the Whale Shark Tourism was set up in Donsol as a result of the discovery of whale sharks. It has made Donsol a household name and became the main ecotourism destination in the province. It is now one of the top 3 tourist attractions in Philippines.
- 5.2 Whale shark ecotourism has buoyed up the local economy, transformed the lives of an entire community and turned their town into a world-renowned tourism destination. The townsfolk have learned that ecotourism is a much better alternative than hunting or poaching and without the whale shark, there will be no tourism.
- 5.3 It buoyed up the local economy, created jobs for local residents; and is still pulling in the crowd. In 1998, it recorded 800 registered visitors to Donsol and a total income of PHP454,875 generated from registration fees and boat rentals. In 2005, the number increased to more than 7,000 tourists, contributing around 300 jobs and PHP35 million (or US\$623,000) to the local economy. More than 300 fishermen have gained employment.
- 5.4 Previously ranked 76th in the poverty line among the poorest municipalities of the region, Donsol now ranks 17. Revenue from tourism has elevated it



from a 5th class municipality to 4th class now with an annual income of PHP7 million to PHP13 million. It is on the way to becoming a 3rd class municipality;



- 5.5 However these socio-economic returns are only the tip of the iceberg of what the future lies ahead considering the average returns of A\$127 million a year it generates for Ningaloo Reef in Australia. Given time, Donsol's tourism revenue from whale sharks are expected to grow even more.
- 5.6 Income from the whale sharks interaction program has supported many other conservation initiatives such as coastal resource management activities, environmental education, coastal-clean up, and mangrove rehabilitation.
- 5.7 This has also led to the development and promotion of other ecotourism and cultural and heritage attractions in the area. Some examples are the Nahulugan Falls in Barangay San Rafael, the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in Barangay San Antonio, the Astillero archeological site and firefly's river tours were developed for whale sharks visitors to help them occupy the remaining time after their main program. An annual festival to specially celebrate the whale sharks annual return to the village is now being held annually. This is one way for the town to promote its main attraction as the 'Whale Shark Capital of the World'.
- 5.8 WWF Philippines and Donsol's local government, local authorities, NGOs and local community formed a task force to protect the whale sharks and its habitat where they regularly monitor the municipal waters, particularly against illegal pangulong or purse seine fishing.
- 5.9 A tourist oriented community based police unit has also been formed to provide safety and comfort for the increasing number of tourists coming to Donsol. This unit is made up of the Philippines National Police and the Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) in cooperation with the local authorities.
- 5.10 In addition, the Bantay-daga, a voluntary sea patrol bay watch has also been set up to check on illegal fishing operations.

6.0. LESSONS LEARNED

- 6.1 The decision to accord the animals protection after its discovery in 1998, for long term gain instead of killing and hunting them for quick profit has proven to be a much better business decision for all the stakeholders.

- 6.2. When wildlife and human's paths crossed, it often can be turned into an opportunity of 'interaction' for mutual benefits. Like this one, the many safari parks in the world is another testimony of this. Through ecotourism, everyone is a winner, including the whale sharks in Donsol.
- 6.3. Whale sharks tourism has been proven as a successful economic alternative to hunting or commercial fishing for the local economy. Ecotourism can be used as a tool to lend a helping hand for wildlife conservation.
- 6.4. The protection of the whale shark is very important because not only are they vulnerable to over exploitation by man, but its slow growth and reproduction rate, e.g. only reaching maturity at around 30 years old means that they cannot populate fast enough to keep up with man's consumption.
- 6.5. It is important to continually enhance the tourism product appeal through diversifying the content portfolio. It is also good practice for not 'putting all the eggs in one basket'. The development of the other cultural heritage and ecotourism attractions like in Donsol has helped to further accelerate the socio-economic development of the area. It has strengthened its main product, whale sharks tourism, while at the same time the town also gained many other leverages of a wider range of products that can stabilize and strengthen the industry.
- 6.6. Taking a 'precautionary approach' to proper management effectiveness and monitoring of the tourism impacts on whale shark, environment and community regulations must not be relaxed. This is particularly relevant to Donsol as the ecotourism industry is not older than 10 years while a whale shark can live up to 80 years. (Norman 2000). Therefore, any negative effects of tourism and disturbance might not be seen until more years have passed. Given the lack of scientific knowledge about these species, employing precautionary approach like monitoring and strengthening are important.
- 6.7. This also means that the implementation of fisheries legislations is important and its enforcement is critical for protection and conservation. This is emphasized here because despite its national ban in 1998, whale shark fishing is still rampant and active today. Tighter enforcement is still needed.





- 6.8 The fast pace of tourism development in Donsol warrants the development of a comprehensive master plan to address proper land use, tourism management, and conservation. The danger from over and unrestrained development will threaten the town long-term tourist potential. Data shows that from January 1 to April 30 2005, about 5,600 tourists visited Donsol to swim with the whale sharks. This is more than five times the number of tourists who visited back in 2000. There is a need to further look at the 'carrying capacity' more seriously now.
- 6.9 Finally, it is also important to note that the whale sharks conservation and the interaction program needs to be approached from a much bigger picture. To ensure the long term sustainability of the whale sharks tourism industry in Donsol, the protection and conservation of whale sharks cannot be implemented in isolation. There is a need to go beyond and look at the other considerations for an integrated framework to address other related issues such as coastal resource management, illegal fishing, over fishing, mangroves conservation, destructive fishing methods, poaching, marine biodiversity, whale sharks habitat and feeding ground, etc. All these issues are connected to the whale sharks. We therefore cannot conserve the specie and neglect other components of the ecosystem.