



ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL OF MOLINO RIVER THROUGH KEY DESTINATION FACTORS AS PERCEIVED BY LOCAL TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the ecotourism potential of Molino River in Balayan, Batangas, with the goal of promoting sustainable tourism development that integrates environmental preservation, community participation, and economic growth. The study recognizes ecotourism as a vital strategy for community empowerment and environmental stewardship, emphasizing the need to balance tourism expansion with ecological protection. Using a quantitative research design, data were gathered from 124 respondents composed of local tourists through a structured survey questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and tests of significant differences to determine perceptions across demographic variables.

Results revealed that respondents strongly agreed on Molino River's high suitability for ecotourism development, with high mean ratings in site and infrastructure, community participation, tourism impact, market demand, and socio-economic linkages to biodiversity conservation. The study concludes that Molino River possesses high potential for sustainable ecotourism development. It emphasizes the strategic importance of enhancing the Ecotourism Potential Framework with layout integrity. This enhanced framework serves as a comprehensive and visual guide for planners, researchers, and local government stakeholders in formulating effective strategies for sustainable tourism development.

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