

Assessment of Eco-Tourism Products in Tuba, Benguet: A Basis for an Action Plan Toward Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract. Tourism plays a vital role in fostering national development by driving economic growth and cultural exchange. For local government units, the challenge lies in innovating and promoting diverse tourism products and services, a task that necessitates strong collaborations between public institutions and private stakeholders. The study aimed to ascertain the potential of Tuba, Benguet as an ecotourism destination by examining the level of implementation of its tourism plan, as well as activities and problems in the different tourism destinations in various barangays. The study used a quantitative-descriptive survey to assess its potential as a tourism destination and the marketing of its eco-tourism products. The analysis uncovered no significant differences in some dimensions of the tourism plan, except in the implementation of strategic promotional activities, indicating a significant difference. Activities in the different selected tourism destinations in this town offer unique tourist experiences depending on the typographical features and location. Among the problems and concerns identified in this study were related to maintenance and cleanliness, road network improvement, signage, billboard installation, destination information fact sheet, convenience stores, lack or unavailability of tour guides, and lack of safety and security. The findings suggest that the tourism plan should capture improvements along with accessibility, accommodation services, and tourism amenities and services. In addition, the town's tourism blueprint must strengthen its public-private partnership, which is essential in improving the strategic promotional activities across the town's destinations.

Keywords: Public-private partnership; Strategic promotional activities; Tourism destination; Tourism plan; Tourism products; Service

1.0 Introduction

The tourism development plan is a strategic framework that guides government marketing efforts for a specific tourist destination, shaping actions that align with tourism goals, desired outcomes, and overall success. A crucial element in this process is the assessment of local-level program implementation, as it offers insights into how tourism plans can evolve in line with sustainable development. By addressing local challenges and leveraging opportunities, a robust tourism plan ensures the long-term viability of tourism activities. A key aspect of modern tourism planning is the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which advocate for a balance between economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The Organization of American States (2021) emphasizes the need to minimize negative impacts on the environment and communities by promoting sustainable tourism. This approach includes reducing the carbon footprint of travel, conserving natural heritage, and fostering active community participation in tourism growth.

The tourism sector is recognized as a driver of economic development, contributing significantly to national income and job creation. Sky Land Tourism (2021) underscores the role of tourism businesses in prioritizing environmental sustainability, with eco-friendly initiatives such as eco-tours, which simultaneously protect natural areas and educate tourists on conservation. This growing emphasis on sustainability not only strengthens the local economy but also raises awareness about the importance of preserving the environment and local cultures. Thakur (n.d.) highlights tourism's broader significance, noting its impact beyond just attracting visitors—it helps shape a country's identity and contributes to the prosperity of various industries. In this context, ecotourism stands out as a specialized form of tourism that seeks to combine environmental conservation with community empowerment. The International Ecotourism Society defines it as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment while benefiting local populations through education and economic opportunities.

Countries like Costa Rica exemplify the successful integration of ecotourism into national tourism strategies. With its biodiversity-rich landscapes, Costa Rica not only draws eco-tourists but also fosters sustainable economic development by protecting natural resources (Sayyah, 2017). However, Hikmah et al. (2020) caution that poor management of ecotourism can lead to environmental degradation, necessitating strong governance frameworks that foster collaboration among stakeholders. Indeed, as Wondirad et al. (2020) argue, effective governance remains a challenge in ecotourism, with inadequate stakeholder participation often hindering its sustainability. The absence of shared objectives or a lack of trust among stakeholders can lead to fragmented approaches, undermining the long-term benefits of ecotourism initiatives.

In the Philippines, the government's strategic approach to ecotourism is framed within the broader goal of enhancing national economic growth through sustainable practices. The country's rich biodiversity, which includes 70–80% of the world's plant and animal species, positions it as a promising ecotourism destination (Garcia, 2018). With growing recognition of the economic potential of ecotourism, the Philippines has adopted various policies aimed at ensuring the sustainable use of its natural resources while benefiting local communities (Yu, 2020). The Cordillera region, home to the municipality of Tuba in Benguet, exemplifies a destination where ecotourism could play a key role in both conservation and community development. As noted by Alipio (n.d.), the region's environmental significance as a major watershed makes it crucial to manage tourism activities responsibly to avoid ecological degradation. Local governance, guided by the Benguet Environment Code (2014), facilitates the coordination of tourism initiatives, ensuring that tourism development contributes to the well-being of residents while preserving the region's natural resources.

Tuba's natural attractions, including Mount Santo Tomas and Asin Hot Springs, remain underutilized in terms of tourism. The development of ecotourism in lesser-known sites, such as Ubong Cave and Paryok Falls, could diversify the region's offerings and create new opportunities for local communities (Kiper, 2012). This study aims to assess the potential of these sites, offering recommendations for enhancing tourism strategies that align with the National Tourism Development Plan 2016–2022. By focusing on sustainable development practices, the local government could bolster the local economy while ensuring the protection of the region's natural heritage.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a concurrent triangular mixed design to collect, process, tabulate, and analyze data. The method combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, allowing for the cross-validation of findings (Kroll & Neri, 2020). The primary instrument used for data collection was a quantitative descriptive survey, which incorporated a questionnaire checklist. This design enables the triangulation of results from both methods, ensuring comprehensive insights into the research objectives.

2.2 Research Participants

In Tuba, Benguet, sustainable farm tourism plays a pivotal role in advancing local development, particularly by promoting environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable practices. This type of tourism focuses on visiting rural areas, where local agricultural practices and natural resources form the primary attractions.

The study targeted two key groups: Municipal Council (MC) and Barangay Councils (BCs), which are instrumental in local tourism development. According to the Local Government Code (RA 7160, 1991) and the Tourism Act of 2009 (RA 9593), these councils are tasked with fostering tourism growth and ensuring sustainable

management of local resources. The Municipal Council comprised nine (9) members, representing various government and private sectors, including tourism, environment, agriculture, and indigenous communities. The Barangay Councils involved 11 respondents, representing five barangays: Camp 4 (3), Camp 6 (2), Camp 3 (3), Ansangan (1), and Tabaan Sur (2).

Most participants had relatively short tenures, with 9 out of 11 barangay council members serving for less than 3 years, and 6 out of 9 municipal council members serving for less than 3 years. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their involvement in tourism planning and implementation at the local level. While 20 individuals were initially targeted, the final sample reflected those present and available at the time of data collection.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study used a questionnaire checklist as the primary instrument for data collection, supplemented by informal interviews to provide richer insights. The questionnaire was structured into two parts. Part I focused on the demographic profile of respondents, categorized by their roles in the Municipal or Barangay Tourism Councils. Part II covered key variables related to strategic promotional activities, tourism activities, issues within selected tourism destinations, and suggestions for promoting ecotourism in Tuba. The questionnaire assessed areas such as private sector participation, market development, and tourism promotion strategies, as well as challenges encountered by stakeholders. The instrument underwent a reliability test, yielding a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.850, indicating strong reliability.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process involved several steps. The researcher reviewed relevant literature, including journals and sources from Google Scholar, to inform the study's conceptual framework and survey design. A draft of the thesis proposal was submitted for review and feedback. After incorporating suggestions, the proposal was forwarded to the Research and Development Center (RDC) for further review and approval. Once the study was approved, letters of communication were sent to the target respondents. These letters introduced the research and invited participation. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire, encouraging respondents to ask questions and clarifying any misunderstandings. Upon retrieval, responses were reviewed for completeness, and further clarification was sought where necessary. The collected data were then tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted.

2.5 Treatment of Data

For the quantitative data, responses to Statement of the Problem (SOP) 1 were analyzed using an independent t-test to determine whether there were significant differences between groups. A four-point Likert scale was employed to evaluate perceptions and attitudes towards tourism activities and challenges. In addition, the weighted mean was calculated to assess the overall trends in stakeholder responses. For the qualitative data, responses from informal interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. This analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to ecotourism challenges, strategic promotional efforts, and suggestions for improvement – the combination of both methods allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the local tourism landscape.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher emphasized in the letter of introduction the objectives of the study, that the respondents volunteered to participate with an option to withdraw, and an assurance that personal information and responses were treated with utmost confidentiality such that the identity and the office of the respondent were not be mentioned in any part of this study, and that this undertaking was utilized for academic purposes only, thus ensuring the principles of research integrity and research ethics were followed. The researcher provided a copy of the study's findings to the local government unit of Tuba. The researcher disseminated the study's output through publication and inclusion in the research center's collection of published studies at the University of Baguio.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The findings from Table 1 reflect the level of implementation of the tourism plan for strategic promotional activities in Tuba, Benguet, as perceived by members of the barangay and municipal tourism councils. Specifically, the study examines key areas related to promoting sustainable ecotourism, including the management of tourism databases, private sector involvement in promotional planning, and marketing strategies targeting distinct target

markets. The overall result, which indicates partial implementation (OMV=2.42), suggests that Tuba's tourism development is still a work in progress. Although specific initiatives have been set in motion, the complete realization of these plans remains to be fully achieved. This aligns with the municipality's trajectory toward realizing its potential as an eco-tourism destination, underpinned by its cultural and natural assets.

Table 1. *The Overall Level of Implementation of the Tourism Plan on the Strategic Promotional Activities in Tuba, Benguet*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
A. Database Information on the Different Tourism Destinations			
1. Accessibility to any destinations in the locality, or how to get to a particular place, is established	2.35	0.933	Partially Implemented
2. Accommodation services that provide short-term lodging and other hospitality services, such as hotels, hostels, campsites, and apartments for rent, as well as other private accommodation facilities, are duly listed.	2.22	1.003	Partially Implemented
3. All places of interest that tourists can visit or attractions in this town are enumerated	2.53	1.073	Implemented
4. Every tourism destination offers specific activities	2.58	0.902	Implemented
5. Tourism amenities that include services and facilities added with attraction, accommodation, and accessibility to create tourism are identified.	2.44	1.097	Partially Implemented
Sub-Mean	2.34	0.902	Partially Implemented
B. Private Sector Participation in Developing a Promotional Plan			
1. Private business establishments provide a forum for discussion and solving common problems associated with tourism-related enterprises	2.32	1.003	Partially Implemented
2. The private sector makes coordinated recommendations to the government offices for the improvement of the tourism sector	2.42	1.071	Partially Implemented
3. The private sector provides support and assistance in the conduct of research, training, and marketing related to tourism	2.21	1.084	Partially Implemented
4. Private business establishments sponsor special events	2.58	1.017	Implemented
5. Private business establishments render representation in tourism boards and/or committees	2.53	1.124	Implemented
Sub-Mean	2.35	0.949	Partially Implemented
C. Product Development Programs			
1. Development of farm-tourism sites	2.26	0.872	Partially Implemented
2. Development of culture-based attractions	2.25	0.851	Partially Implemented
3. Development of nature and mountain-based attractions	2.37	0.831	Partially Implemented
4. Development of public tourism amenities (Ex, View deck)	2.30	1.081	Partially Implemented
5. Development of authentic tourism activities	2.32	1.108	Partially Implemented
Sub-Mean	2.30	0.858	Partially Implemented
D. Marketing Trusts			
1. Develop a tourism brand for every destination	2.25	0.967	Partially Implemented
2. Make Tuba a top-mind destination	2.84	1.068	Implemented
3. Promote Tuba as a safe and fun eco-tourism destination	3.11	0.994	Implemented
4. Optimize attraction potential	2.68	0.946	Implemented
5. Strengthen tourism governance	2.65	0.933	Implemented
Sub-Mean	2.67	0.890	Implemented
Over-all Mean	2.42	0.825	Partially Implemented

Accommodation services, particularly short-term lodging, emerged as a critical gap (MV=2.22), as certain areas, such as Barangays Ansagan, Camp 3, and Tabaan Sur, still lack adequate facilities. This issue is consistent with Del Vecchio et al. (2018), who note the rapidly changing competitive environment in the accommodation sector, which requires constant attention to service quality to ensure visitor satisfaction. Dutt (2024) further highlights the role of accommodation as a cornerstone for tourism, facilitating deeper engagement with the destination. The mixed responses from the municipal and barangay tourism council members, particularly regarding knowledge of local events and activities, suggest a disparity in exposure and involvement. This disparity may explain why members of the municipal tourism council, being more directly engaged with promotional efforts, were more attuned to the region's tourism planning.

The study also found that the database system (MV=2.58) designed by the local government unit (LGU) to provide specific activities for each tourist destination has been significantly implemented. This is a positive indication that the LGU is advancing its goal of uniform activity offerings across Tuba's destinations, which can enhance marketing efforts. The findings echo Wariboko's (2018) assertion on the importance of unique and authentic

attractions in tourism development. Unoriginal attractions, he argues, are less appealing and require continuous improvement to sustain interest. Thus, Tuba's progress in cataloging and diversifying its attractions is a crucial step in creating a distinct destination identity.

However, the database on tourism destinations (SMV=2.34) still requires further refinement. According to Huertas and Miguel (2022), improving and expanding databases is crucial to meet the evolving needs of tourists, who seek more detailed, accessible information about local attractions, transport, and services. The limited engagement of some municipal council members in this area underscores the need for greater awareness and education around these data systems, which are integral to effective tourism planning.

Private sector engagement in tourism development, particularly in areas such as training, research, and marketing (MV=2.21), was found to be somewhat lacking. However, the sector was more involved in sponsoring special events (MV=2.58). This suggests that private sector participation is more opportunistic, focused on events rather than on long-term strategic development. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Folgado-Fernández et al. (2021), who emphasized the economic potential of tourism events, which can drive both visitor interest and local economic growth. The Dolma Eco-Tourism Foundation (2018) also stresses the importance of community and private sector involvement in tourism planning for ensuring sustainability and environmental stewardship. However, challenges remain in the private sector's understanding of tourism's broader objectives, which can hinder its active participation, as noted by Liu et al. (2023) and Amoako (2022).

Furthermore, the development of culture-based (MV=2.25) and nature-based attractions (MV=2.37) has seen partial progress, with respondents noting the potential of Tuba's natural landscape to attract tourists, although accessibility remains an issue. This finding supports Romeo et al. (2021), who suggest that well-managed mountain-based tourism can serve as a significant driver of socioeconomic development. Tuba's potential for sustainable tourism growth lies in its ability to leverage its rich natural resources while addressing infrastructure gaps. In line with product development (SMV=2.30), improvements in transport accessibility, service quality, and the introduction of cultural activities are needed to enhance the overall tourist experience. These findings reflect the region's ongoing efforts to refine its tourism offerings and improve the accessibility of its attractions, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable tourism as outlined by various scholars.

The need for a distinct tourism brand (MV=2.25) was identified as a critical area for development. While Tuba has made strides in branding itself as a safe and sustainable eco-tourism destination (MV=3.11), further work is needed to build a cohesive brand that resonates with tourists. Turgambekova et al. (2022) emphasize the role of destination branding in regional development, particularly in areas rich in natural resources. Effective branding, as Grinenko et al. (2021) argue, requires the active coordination of multiple stakeholders to communicate the unique characteristics of the destination. Furthermore, food, increasingly recognized as a key element in destination branding (Rather, 2020), could play a pivotal role in shaping Tuba's tourist appeal.

As for marketing trusts (SMV=2.67), while most activities have been implemented, the findings indicate that further enhancement is required to maximize the potential of collaborative marketing initiatives. Fang et al. (2022) highlight the importance of such initiatives in pooling resources and coordinating efforts among stakeholders. Developing a distinct brand for each destination, as Fernandez et al. (2022) argue, is essential for enhancing destination visibility and attracting a broader market. Finally, the promotion of Tuba as a safe and enjoyable eco-tourism destination, as emphasized by Teodorov et al. (2020) and Huang et al. (2023), is integral to its development. Raising awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism and cultural preservation is crucial to ensuring the long-term success of Tuba's tourism sector. The need for ongoing training and community education, as suggested by Aryal (2022) and Ruseva (2023), will ensure that both locals and tourists understand the importance of responsible tourism practices, aligning to create a sustainable and resilient tourism model for Tuba. In summary, while significant strides have been made in implementing the tourism plan in Tuba, there remain areas in need of improvement. The integration of strategic activities, particularly in the private sector's involvement, tourism infrastructure, and destination branding, will be key to fully realizing the town's potential as a leading eco-tourism destination.

The findings presented in Table 2 reveal no significant difference in the perceptions of the barangay and municipal tourism council members regarding the level of implementation of strategic promotional activities in Tuba, Benguet (p -value = 0.05). This lack of statistical divergence suggests that both groups share a similar

understanding of the ongoing efforts to promote Tuba as an eco-tourism destination. Such uniformity in perception implies a coherent approach to tourism development, reflecting a collective recognition of the strategic importance of tourism promotion for the municipality's future. The acceptance of the null hypothesis, therefore, signals a significant opportunity for Tuba to build upon this shared vision and move forward with a unified strategy that all stakeholders can support.

Table 2. Database Information on the Different Tourism

	Tourism Council	N	Mean	DI	P-Value	Decision
1. Accessibility to any destinations in the locality, or how to get to a particular place, is established.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	11 9	2.27 2.44	Partially Implemented Partially Implemented	0.694	No Sig. Diff.
2. Accommodation services that provide short-term lodging and other hospitality services, such as hotels, hostels, campsites, and apartments for rent, as well as other private accommodation facilities, are duly listed.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 8	1.80 2.75	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.042	Sig. Diff.
3. All places of interest that tourists can visit or attractions in this town are enumerated.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	2.30 2.78	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.347	No Sig. Diff.
4. Every tourism destination offers specific activities.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	2.60 2.56	Implemented Implemented	0.918	No Sig. Diff.
5. Tourism amenities that include services and facilities added with attraction, accommodation, and accessibility to create tourism are identified.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 8	2.20 2.75	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.304	No Sig. Diff.
Average (Database information on the different types of tourism).	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	11 9	2.15 2.58	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.298	No Sig. Diff.

Table 3. Private Sector Participation in Developing a Promotional Plan

	Tourism Council	N	Mean	DI	P-Value	Decision
1.Private business establishments provide a forum for discussion and solving common problems associated with tourism-related enterprises.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	2.10 2.56	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.337	No Sig. Diff.
2. The private sector makes coordinated recommendations to the government offices for the improvement of the tourism sector..	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	2.10 2.78	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.175	No Sig. Diff.
3. The private sector provides support and assistance in the conduct of research, training, and marketing related to tourism.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	1.60 2.89	Not Implemented Implemented	0.011	Sig. Diff.
4. Private business establishments sponsor special events.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	2.30 2.89	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.217	No Sig. Diff.
5. Private business establishments render representation in tourism boards and/or committees.	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	10 9	2.20 2.89	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.19	No Sig. Diff.
Average (Private sector participation in developing a promotional plan)	Barangay Tourism Council Municipal Tourism Council	11 9	1.98 2.80	Partially Implemented Implemented	0.052	No Sig. Diff.

Table 4. Product Development Programs

	Tourism Council	N	Mean	DI	P-Value	Decision
1. Development of farm-tourism sites.	Barangay Tourism Council	11	2.00	Partially Implemented	0.126	No Sig. Diff.
	Municipal Tourism Council	8	2.63	Implemented		
2. Development of culture-based attractions.	Barangay Tourism Council	11	2.00	Partially Implemented	0.151	No Sig. Diff.
	Municipal Tourism Council	9	2.56	Implemented		
3. Development of nature and mountain-based attractions.	Barangay Tourism Council	10	2.10	Partially Implemented	0.142	No Sig. Diff.
	Municipal Tourism Council	9	2.67	Implemented		
4. Development of public tourism amenities (Ex, View deck).	Barangay Tourism Council	11	1.82	Partially Implemented	0.023	Sig. Diff.
	Municipal Tourism Council	9	2.89	Implemented		
5. Development of authentic tourism activities.	Barangay Tourism Council	11	1.82	Partially Implemented	0.017	Sig. Diff.
	Municipal Tourism Council	8	3.00	Implemented		
Average (Product development programs)	Barangay Tourism Council	11	1.96	Partially Implemented	0.047	Sig. Diff.
	Municipal Tourism Council	9	2.72	Implemented		

Tuba's eco-tourism journey is still evolving, and the results of this analysis highlight the alignment in the goals and strategies between the two groups of respondents. Despite differences in specific opinions regarding individual aspects of the tourism plan, the lack of significant variation in overall promotional efforts indicates a collaborative spirit. This consensus can serve as a foundation for future promotional initiatives, where coordinated efforts and targeted actions can enhance Tuba's visibility as a sustainable eco-tourism destination.

However, closer examination of the data reveals some subtle discrepancies in how the two councils perceive certain aspects of the implementation. For instance, differences in opinion emerged regarding the database information for tourism destinations. While members of the Municipal Tourism Council (MTC) believe the database system is fully operational, members of the Barangay Tourism Council (BTC) view it as only partially implemented. This divergence highlights the varying levels of engagement and awareness between the two groups, which could be attributed to differences in their direct involvement with the tourism projects at the grassroots and municipal levels. As Chan et al. (2021) note, effective eco-tourism requires a cooperative approach that engages both local communities and stakeholders in all stages of development, ensuring that ground-level realities inform promotional efforts.

Further disparities were observed in the opinions regarding accommodation services. BTC members indicated that accommodation services, particularly in certain barangays like Ansagan, Camp 3, and Tabaan Sur, are only partially implemented ($p\text{-value} = 0.042 < 0.05$). The lack of proper accommodation in these areas stands as a bottleneck in the development of a fully functional tourism infrastructure. This aligns with Senevira's (2018) assertion that the success of tourism relies heavily on the active participation of the private sector, particularly in facilitating essential services like accommodation. On the other hand, the MTC regarded the accommodation services as well-established, perhaps due to their broader oversight and access to more comprehensive data about lodging facilities in Tuba. This discrepancy suggests that local challenges, such as insufficient resources and awareness, continue to impede the full realization of accommodation services at the barangay level, as emphasized by KSPN Ijen (2023).

The findings also revealed differences in how private sector support in research, training, and marketing is perceived. While BTC members reported minimal involvement from the private sector ($p\text{-value} = 0.011 < 0.05$), the MTC felt that the private sector had played a more significant role in tourism development. This gap highlights the crucial role of the private sector in the tourism ecosystem. As Senevira (2018) notes, private sector involvement is essential for comprehensive tourism strategies, yet its engagement at the barangay level remains limited. This disconnect could reflect the private sector's focus on immediate returns from events and short-term tourism activities, rather than long-term, sustainable strategies for community-based tourism development.

In terms of product development, discrepancies between the two councils also emerged. BTC members considered the product development program as partially implemented ($p\text{-value} = 0.047 < 0.05$), pointing to a lack of progress in some areas, such as public amenities and authentic tourism activities. These findings are supported by Bassani (2020), who highlighted the importance of local tourism councils in fostering democratic governance and social participation, yet also pointed out the challenges such councils face, such as financial limitations and political inexperience. The MTC, however, seemed to perceive these activities as more thoroughly integrated into the tourism development process, which suggests a difference in access to resources and oversight.

Moreover, the emphasis on authentic tourism activities resonates with the broader trend in the tourism industry, where there is increasing demand for experiences that reflect the cultural and natural heritage of a destination (Peleg, 2022). These activities, such as local tours, homestays, and community-based events, not only provide tourists with immersive experiences but also help preserve intangible cultural heritage (Ruhanen et al., 2021). As Ruseva (2023) and Agarwal and Singh (2022) argue, creating such experiences requires a nuanced understanding of local traditions and stakeholder collaboration, both of which must be strengthened in Tuba for its tourism offerings to thrive fully.

Social media, too, plays a crucial role in modern tourism marketing, offering a powerful tool for reaching and engaging target audiences. However, as Gingles (2021) and Tjoi (2022) observe, the effectiveness of social media as a promotional platform depends on the development of a clear strategy that aligns with both the needs of the target audience and the objectives of tourism promotion. The development of a cohesive and compelling narrative that taps into the emotional connection of potential visitors, as emphasized by Kartinawati et al. (2024), will be crucial for Tuba's ongoing efforts to strengthen its branding as a sustainable eco-tourism destination.

Ultimately, the application of collaboration theory underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement, adaptive management, and capacity-building in ecotourism initiatives (Wondirad et al., 2022). Tuba's future success in promoting its eco-tourism sector hinges on deepening the involvement of both municipal and barangay-level councils, private sector actors, and local communities. This collaborative effort will allow Tuba to present a unified, compelling eco-tourism narrative that resonates with both local and international visitors.

In conclusion, while there are differences in the perceptions of the MTC and BTC, the general lack of significant divergence in the overall level of implementation provides a strong foundation for Tuba's eco-tourism strategy. Moving forward, enhancing communication, collaboration, and resource-sharing between the councils and other stakeholders will be essential in refining promotional efforts and ensuring the sustainable growth of Tuba as an eco-tourism destination. By addressing the challenges identified, particularly in accommodation, private sector involvement, and product development, Tuba can strengthen its position as a leading destination for responsible and authentic tourism.

The findings in Table 5 highlight the diversity of tourism activities available across various sites in Tuba, Benguet, with each destination offering distinct experiences tied to its unique natural attractions. At Ubong Cave in Barangay Ansagan, all eight identified activities—such as bird watching, hiking, spelunking, mountain climbing, and swimming—are perceived to be available by the respondents (R=27.30%). This broad range of activities suggests that Ubong Cave is considered a multifaceted destination capable of catering to different types of eco-tourism interests. By contrast, Taluan Cave in Barangay Tabaan Sur is associated with only three activities: caving, hiking, and flora and fauna observation (R=9.1%–18.2%). The limited scope of activities at Taluan Cave may reflect either physical constraints or underutilization of the site's full tourism potential.

Table 5. *Activities in Selected Tourism Destinations in Tuba, Benguet, According to the Barangay Tourism Council (N=11)*

	Ubong Cave/ Barangay Ansagan	Taluan Cave/ Barangay Tabaan Sur	Budahaw Falls/ Barangay Tabaan Sur	Paryok Falls/ Camp 3	Aran Cave/ Camp 3	No Answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bird Watching	27.3	0	27.3	0	9.1	36.4
Caving	27.3	9.1	9.1	9.1	27.3	18.2
Hiking	27.3	18.2	18.2	9.1	0	27.3
Mountain Climbing	27.3	0	27.3	9.1	9.1	27.3
Observation of Flora and Fauna	27.3	9.1	0	9.1	27.3	27.3
Sightseeing	27.3	0	27.3	27.3	0	18.2
Spelunking	27.3	0	0	18.2	27.3	27.3
Swimming	27.3	0	18.2	36.4	0	18.2

Similarly, Budahaw Falls, located in the same barangay, offers a mix of activities, with bird watching and sightseeing most frequently cited (R=27.3%), while swimming and hiking are also popular (R=18.2%). These findings highlight the diversity of recreational activities associated with the natural features in Tabaan Sur. The relatively high perceived availability of swimming at Paryok Falls in Camp 3 (R=36.4%) further emphasizes the

site's appeal as a destination for water-based recreation. Activities such as spelunking, caving, and hiking were also mentioned ($R=9.1\%$ – 18.2%), showing that Paryok Falls attracts a variety of visitors interested in both water and adventure activities.

The Aran Cave, also located in Camp 3, offers a combination of activities—such as caving, observation of flora and fauna, and spelunking—where the perception of availability is notably high ($R=27.3\%$). Given the emphasis on spelunking, a niche yet popular activity, Aran Cave appears to be another focal point for eco-tourism in Tuba. These insights into the activities available across various tourism destinations are not only valuable for tourism planning but also indicate areas where future investments and promotional efforts may be focused.

In light of these findings, one important development is the management planning for Aran Cave, as organized by the Tuba Tourism Office, local Barangay Local Government Units (BLGUs), and key stakeholders, including the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Cordillera (DENR-CAR). As described in Tuba Tourism (2023), the management planning activity, which took place in April 2023, focused on reviewing the old management plan, inspecting the current cave conditions, and identifying necessary actions for tourism development. This proactive approach to updating the management plan for Aran Cave is crucial for its future as a sustainable eco-tourism destination. This example aligns with Kosmala and Chylinska's (2021) argument that rural tourism activities—ranging from trekking to wildlife observation—depend on leveraging local resources to promote sustainable tourism. It underscores the importance of community-led initiatives in developing tourism facilities and supporting local economic growth.

The planning of Aran Cave is emblematic of how local initiatives play a crucial role in sustainable tourism development. As Kosmala and Chylinska (2021) point out, rural tourism offers numerous outdoor recreational activities tailored to the natural geography of a region. These activities, such as those available at Aran Cave, not only enhance the visitor experience but also contribute to the empowerment of local communities. The involvement of local stakeholders in the management planning process helps ensure that tourism development is not only environmentally sustainable but also economically beneficial for the host community.

The findings underscore the potential for Tuba to enhance its tourism offerings by capitalizing on the diverse range of activities available at each destination. The perceived availability of caving, spelunking, and other outdoor pursuits suggests that these activities could be strategically highlighted in future promotional campaigns. As Kosmala and Chylinska (2021) suggest, developing comprehensive, community-driven management plans is essential for transforming local attractions into well-regulated and sustainable tourism destinations.

Moreover, the need to strengthen community involvement and build human capital is critical in ensuring that the tourism sector grows in a way that benefits all stakeholders. As Tuba Tourism (2023) emphasizes, continued collaboration with local governments, DENR-CAR, and other stakeholders will be essential in refining the management strategies for Aran Cave and other tourism sites. This cooperation is not only vital for enhancing the quality of the tourism experience but also for ensuring that local communities directly benefit from the growth of tourism in the region. By addressing the challenges of infrastructure, resource management, and community engagement, Tuba can establish itself as a premier eco-tourism destination in the Philippines.

The findings presented in Table 6 offer a nuanced understanding of the tourism activities available at various destinations in Tuba, Benguet, as observed by the Municipal Tourism Council (MTC). Across the destinations, there is a notable emphasis on outdoor and adventure-based activities, with each location offering a distinct set of experiences shaped by its natural features. At Ubong Cave in Barangay Ansagan, the broad range of activities—such as bird watching, caving, mountain climbing, and observation of flora and fauna ($R=33.3\%$)—suggests that the site appeals to a diverse group of tourists seeking both passive and active engagement with nature. Activities like spelunking and hiking ($R=22.2\%$) further expand the range of options for adventure enthusiasts, while swimming and sightseeing ($R=11.1\%$) cater to those looking for more relaxed experiences. This diversity reflects Kosmala and Chylinska's (2021) assertion that rural tourism thrives when a destination offers a mix of physical activities that cater to various interests, enabling it to attract a wider array of visitors.

Table 6. *Activities in Selected Tourism Destinations in Tuba, Benguet, According to the Municipal Tourism Council (N=9)*

	Ubong Cave/ Barangay Ansagan	Taluan Cave/ Barangay Tabaan Sur	Budahaw Falls/ Barangay Tabaan Sur	Paryok Falls/ Camp 3	Aran Cave/ Camp 3	No Answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bird Watching	33.3	44.4	0	0	11.1	36.4
Caving	33.3	33.3	11.1	0	22.2	18.2
Hiking	22.2	33.3	33.3	0	0	27.3
Mountain Climbing	33.3	33.3	11.1	11.1	0	27.3
Observation of Flora and Fauna	33.3	33.3	11.1	0	22.2	27.3
Sightseeing	11.1	44.4	22.2	0	0	18.2
Spelunking	22.2	44.4	11.1	0	11.1	27.3
Swimming	11.1	44.4	11.1	22.2	0	18.2

In comparison, Taluan Cave at Barangay Tabaan Sur presents a somewhat more specialized selection of activities. The prominent activities – bird watching, sightseeing, spelunking, and swimming (R=44.4%) – align with the type of eco-tourism experiences that are gaining traction in rural areas. However, unlike Ubong Cave, the inclusion of hiking and mountain climbing is more restricted here, revealing the potential for Taluan Cave to diversify its offerings in the future. The popularity of certain activities, such as spelunking and swimming, aligns with Agarwal and Singh’s (2022) findings that outdoor adventure activities continue to drive interest in eco-tourism. The MTC’s focus on expanding and promoting these activities is consistent with Bassani (2020), who highlights the role of local tourism councils in diversifying activities to meet evolving tourist preferences.

Similarly, Budahaw Falls, located in Barangay Tabaan Sur, offers a range of activities, with hiking (R=33.3%) and sightseeing (R=22.2%) being the most common. In contrast, more specialized activities like caving and spelunking are less prominent (R=11.1%). The relatively lower emphasis on more physically demanding activities, like mountain climbing, could suggest an opportunity to tailor promotions to attract more adventurous tourists. This could also signify a gap in available infrastructure or the level of training required to support these activities at the local level, which is consistent with the need for capacity building and local engagement emphasized by Senevira (2018).

In contrast, Paryok Falls at Barangay Camp 3 sees a marked preference for swimming (R=22.2%) over mountain climbing (R=11.1%), emphasizing a distinct appeal for water-based activities. The local natural environment, which supports both water and land-based activities, allows for versatile tourism development, but also underscores the importance of targeted marketing and infrastructure development to cater to specific tourist interests. According to Tuba Tourism (2023), promoting diverse activities, as reflected by the different types of recreation offered across these destinations, can attract a broader audience while sustaining local engagement.

At Aran Cave, also in Barangay Camp 3, the prominence of activities like caving and the observation of flora and fauna (R=22.2%) suggests that the site is positioned as an eco-tourism destination with strong potential for nature exploration. Although activities like bird watching and spelunking (R=11.1%) are less frequent, they offer additional avenues for niche tourism development. The popularity of caving at Aran Cave, as opposed to the more varied offerings at Paryok Falls, highlights a potential gap in interdisciplinary tourism—where both natural heritage and adventure tourism can be combined to enhance the visitor experience (Peleg, 2022).

The differences in activity preferences between the various destinations are not merely reflective of visitor interest but also the operational dynamics within the tourism sector. Local officials’ focus on specific activities, such as hiking and swimming at Budahaw Falls and Taluan Cave, points to a strategy aimed at enhancing the site’s core strengths. In contrast, the MTC’s broader approach, which includes activities like spelunking and mountain climbing, suggests a deliberate attempt to offer a more comprehensive tourism experience across the municipality. These observations underscore the critical role that local tourism councils play in promoting diverse activities while fostering collaboration between government bodies, private stakeholders, and local communities. Bassani (2020) and Muhammad-Shamayleh (2022) highlight that this collaboration is pivotal in creating sustainable tourism strategies that cater to both economic and social objectives. It is also clear that local communities benefit significantly from the tourism industry, not only in terms of economic growth but also through enhanced cultural exchange and mutual understanding between locals and visitors, as discussed by Ekstrom (2023).

In conclusion, the data from the MTC offers valuable insights into the tourism dynamics of Tuba, Benguet. While some destinations like Paryok Falls and Aran Cave focus on a narrower set of activities, others, such as Ubong Cave, provide a diverse array of options that cater to a broader range of tourist interests. As Kosmala and Chylinska (2021) note, the diversity of outdoor recreational activities in rural tourism contributes to the empowerment of local communities and helps foster sustainable economic development. For Tuba, the challenge and opportunity lie in balancing the promotion of existing activities with the expansion of newer, more adventurous options to ensure long-term growth in its tourism sector.

Table 7 presents problems in selected tourism destinations in Tuba, Benguet.

Table 7. Problems in Selected Tourism Destinations in Tuba, Benguet (N=20)

	Ubong Cave/ Barangay Ansagan	Taluan Cave/ Barangay Tabaan Sur	Budahaw Falls/ Barangay Tabaan Sur	Paryok Falls/ Camp 3	Aran Cave/ Camp 3
	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of billboards	30.0%	23.3%	23.3%	13.3%	%
Maintaining cleanliness in the area	53.6%	21.4%	14.3%	10.7%	10.0%
Implementation of conservation management	27.5%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Availability of a convenience store	33.3%	20.5%	20.5%	15.4%	12.5%
Lack of facts and information about the destination	28.3%	26.1%	19.6%	13.0%	10.3%
Internet connectivity	17.9%	17.9%	23.1%	15.4%	13.0%
Difficulty in local coordination	27.8%	22.2%	22.2%	16.7%	25.6%
Poor road network	16.7%	10.0%	13.3%	26.7%	11.1%
Lack of safety and security.	28.6%	23.2%	17.9%	16.1%	33.3%
Insufficient signages	25.5%	17.0%	19.1%	19.1%	14.3%
Availability of a tour guide	24.1%	17.2%	20.7%	17.2%	19.1%
Insufficient mode of transportation	24.0%	24.0%	20.0%	16.0%	20.7%

The survey data in Table 7 highlights several pressing concerns regarding tourism destinations in Tuba, Benguet, that need urgent attention to enhance both the tourist experience and long-term sustainability. At Ubong Cave in Barangay Ansagan, respondents identified cleanliness (53.6%) and the lack of convenience stores (33.3%) as significant issues. These concerns reflect the broader need for adequate infrastructure and services to ensure a positive visitor experience. While cleanliness and maintenance are fundamental to any tourism destination, the absence of convenience stores underscores a lack of basic amenities, which is often a barrier for tourists seeking convenience and comfort. This is consistent with Abbasi's (2023) argument that local government units must play a proactive role in enhancing the infrastructure and services to support sustainable tourism practices at the grassroots level.

Similarly, Taluan Cave faces its own set of challenges, primarily the lack of information about the destination (26.1%), insufficient signage (17.0%), and the limited availability of tour guides (17.2%). These issues directly impact the quality of the tourist experience, highlighting the importance of educational tourism management (Soliman & Abdelmoaty, 2021). The absence of clear signage and adequate information materials is a barrier to understanding the cave's historical and natural significance, which reduces the potential for knowledge-driven tourism. Moreover, the insufficient availability of tour guides suggests a lack of well-trained personnel to enhance visitor engagement and provide educational value, a point emphasized by Pongsuppat et al. (2023), who argue that local communities must be equipped with the knowledge and resources to engage tourists effectively.

At Budahaw Falls, the challenges include the lack of billboards (23.3%), poor internet connectivity (23.1%), and poor cleanliness maintenance (14.3%). These issues point to an underlying challenge in marketing and accessibility. Billboards are a fundamental aspect of destination marketing, and without them, potential visitors may remain unaware of the site's attractions. Poor internet connectivity is particularly detrimental in the digital age, as many tourists rely on online resources for information and navigation. Additionally, cleanliness remains a concern, indicating that maintaining basic standards for hygiene is essential for sustaining tourism. As Setokoe and Ramukumba (2020) suggest, communities must adopt comprehensive strategies that address both infrastructural and environmental challenges to ensure the sustainability of tourism.

In Paryok Falls at Barangay Camp 3, the primary concern is the poor road network (26.7%), while cleanliness (10.7%) ranks as a secondary issue. The disparity between these concerns reflects the importance of accessibility infrastructure in tourism development, which is a common challenge for rural areas. As Suryani et al. (2022) emphasize, improving basic infrastructure like roads can significantly enhance the tourism experience, making destinations more accessible and appealing to a broader range of visitors.

Lastly, Aran Cave, also located in Camp 3, faces issues related to poor road networks (33.3%), lack of billboards (10%), and insufficient convenience stores (10.3%). As with other destinations, the poor road network emerges as the most pressing concern, underscoring the need for improved transportation infrastructure to facilitate easier access for tourists. The relatively low concern regarding billboards and convenience stores suggests that while these factors are important, they are secondary to improving the physical accessibility of the destination.

Overall, the common thread across these tourism destinations is the need for better infrastructure, including cleanliness, signage, road networks, and basic services such as convenience stores and tour guides. These issues align with the findings of Suryani et al. (2022) and Soliman & Abdelmoaty (2021), who note that infrastructure improvements and community participation are critical to overcoming the challenges that rural tourism faces.

Beyond addressing immediate concerns, the broader context of sustainable rural tourism must be considered. Rural tourism, as noted by Mbira (2024), is essential in fostering sustainable development by leveraging natural attractions, culture, and local heritage. However, without proper management and infrastructure, these assets can easily become undermined. Abbasi (2023) emphasizes the necessity for local governments, especially at the barangay level, to take a more active role in integrating tourism development into broader rural growth strategies. This includes developing community-driven management practices, which can help promote a sustainable tourism model that balances environmental, cultural, and economic factors.

Furthermore, the importance of ecotourism cannot be overstated. As Luong (2023) and Jeong et al. (2023) argue, promoting ecotourism involves aligning the expectations of tourists with the natural and cultural values of the destination. This alignment can be achieved through improved destination branding, educational programs, and engagement with local communities to ensure that tourism benefits both visitors and locals. Pongsuppat et al. (2023) highlight that sustainable tourism requires cooperative efforts among stakeholders, including local governments, community members, and private enterprises, to develop and implement creative management practices that promote long-term environmental and cultural preservation.

In summary, the tourism destinations in Tuba, Benguet, offer significant potential for sustainable tourism development, particularly through ecotourism. However, key infrastructure improvements, increased community involvement, and better dissemination of information about the destinations are necessary to overcome the identified challenges. As Suryani et al. (2022) suggest, the success of local tourism projects relies on addressing both physical and financial challenges while fostering community engagement and positive tourist behaviors. The paper recommends an action plan that prioritizes these areas—improving infrastructure, increasing community participation, and implementing sustainable practices—to enhance the overall viability and success of Tuba's ecotourism offerings.

4.0 Conclusion

This study addresses a critical gap in tourism research by moving beyond the formulation of tourism development plans to examine the realities of their implementation in a rural Philippine municipality. While existing literature often focuses on policy design or success stories, few studies investigate the *operational gaps*—such as limited private sector engagement, fragmented public-private collaboration, and underdeveloped infrastructure—that directly affect the effectiveness of tourism plans at the local level. By documenting these gaps in Tuba, Benguet, the study provides empirical evidence of the disconnect between strategic intent and on-the-ground execution, particularly in the context of rural destinations with rich cultural and natural assets but limited institutional capacity.

This work also contributes to filling the knowledge gap on *branding and marketing trust in rural tourism*. Although rural tourism branding is widely recognized as essential, there is a lack of research that links incomplete branding strategies to reduced visitor appeal and weaker economic returns. By showing how insufficient brand identity and promotion hinder Tuba's competitive positioning, the study adds depth to existing discourse on rural destination marketing.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for an institutionalized framework that mandates active private sector participation, capacity-building programs for local stakeholders, and consistent investment in infrastructure, safety, and service delivery. For policy, the results indicate the need to integrate implementation monitoring mechanisms into municipal tourism plans, ensuring that goals are not only documented but also operationalized. For education, the study identifies the demand for specialized training in heritage interpretation, destination marketing, and sustainable tourism management for local actors.

In research terms, this study lays the groundwork for comparative analyses of implementation efficiency between municipalities with varying degrees of stakeholder participation, as well as longitudinal studies that track the effects of targeted infrastructure and branding interventions. By bringing operational realities into sharper focus, it challenges future research to investigate the micro-level factors that influence the success of rural tourism. Ultimately, the study underscores that sustainable tourism growth in rural destinations depends not only on having a strategic plan but on bridging the gap between planning and execution—through integrated stakeholder collaboration, infrastructure readiness, and a clear, authentic tourism brand.

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