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HOW CAN A SMALL DESTINATION BECOME A "RISING STAR" IN THE MODERN COMPETITIVE TOURISM MARKET? EVIDENCE FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Altynbek A. ZHAKUPOV [1], Yerlan KABIYEV [2], Emin ATASOY [3], Marko D. PETROVIĆ [4*], Dobrila LUKIĆ [5], Evren ATIŞ [6], Dariga Meyramovna KHAMITOVA [7]

[1] L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Faculty of Economics, Department of Tourism, Astana, Kazakhstan; altynbekz 1981@gmail.com (A.A.Z.)
[2] Kh. Dosmukhamedov Atyrau University, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Atyrau, Kazakhstan; yerlanustaz@gmail.com (Y.K.)
[3] Uludag University, Faculty of Education, Department of Social Sciences, Bursa, Türkiye; eatasoy@uludag.edu.tr (E.A.)
[4] Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijić", Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, Serbia; m.petrovic@gi.sanu.ac.rs (M.D.P.)
[5] Serbian Geographical Society, Eight Belgrade Grammar School, Belgrade, Serbia; dobriladjerdap@gmail.com (D.L.)
[6] Kastamonu University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Geography, Kastamonu, Türkiye; evrencografya@gmail.com (E.A.)
[7] International University of Tourism and Hospitality, School of Tourism, Turkestan, Kazakhstan; dariga1979@mail.ru (D.M.K.)

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Abstract: This review study aims to analyze how a small island destination, exemplified by Samal in the Davao Gulf (Philippines), can achieve rapid tourism growth and transition into a competitive regional destination. It seeks to identify key drivers and strategies behind its successful development. The research examines the pathways by which a small island destination can transform into a "rising star" in the contemporary tourism market. The research employed a review-based approach combining secondary tourism data from 2015 to 2024 with a detailed case study analysis of Samal Island. The study employed a destination development framework to evaluate the impact of institutional, environmental, and socio-economic factors on growth. The findings indicate that Samal's tourism growth is driven by interconnected elements, including sustainable practices, the utilization of cultural and natural resources, and collaborative governance. These factors collectively enhanced the island's visibility and competitiveness in Southeast Asia's tourism landscape. The study concludes that even small, resource-limited destinations can reposition themselves successfully in regional tourism hierarchies through sustainable management, effective cooperation among stakeholders, and strategic leveraging of local assets. The contribution of this research lies in providing review evidence from the emerging island context of Southeast Asia, illustrating that even modestly resource-endowed destinations can successfully reposition themselves in regional tourism hierarchies when attractive resources and inclusive governance come together.

Keywords: Samal, tourism development, resources, small destination, review analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the key economic branches of the global economy, with the average contribution of almost 10% to the world GDP in 2023 (UN Tourism, 2024). Tourism represents a key sector for the economic development and social cohesion in the Philippines, with its long and multilayered history which ranges from pre-colonial mobility of people, and exchange, over the colonial period and the formation of the first infrastructural basis, to the modern efforts aimed at the internationalization of the offer and sustainable development. According to Lapuz (2023), the historic reconstruction of tourism development in the Philippines points to the process where the mobility patterns, colonial policies, and local community practices shaped the tourism institutions and practices – contrary to the simplified review which connects the beginning of tourism exclusively with the post-war, mass growth. The analyses of historiography point to the existence of early forms of travels and mobility, which were later institutionalized through the state and private development of the tourism offer (Capistrano & Notorio, 2021; Capistrano & Muñoz, 2022). During the last few decades, tourism in the Philippines has changed from predominantly local and regional to the growing acceptance of international markets thanks to the combination of natural resources (attractive beaches, coral reefs, rich biodiversity), cultural heritage, solid selective types of tourism offer (Fabros et al., 2023; Valencia et al., 2022; Notorio et al., 2025) and international promotion strategic policies. However, this growth was also accompanied by challenges – from spatial and sectoral uneven development, over the poor institutional coordination and the issues of environmental degradation, to the academic criticism which advocated decolonization of tourism research and practices in order to better represent local narratives and interests. Such critical literature emphasizes the need for including the local perspectives into policy-making and tourism research (Dela Santa &

* Corresponding author

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Saporsantos, 2016; Gutierrez et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2018). The contemporary state of the sector is characterized by a strong recovery after the 2020–2021 pandemic standstill: statistical indicators and assessments point to the recovery of international arrivals and the income growth from tourism in the period 2022–2024, even though the levels in certain segments are still below the pre-pandemic (2019) trends. The national and international assessments show that the policies of opening borders, promotional campaigns, and the measures aimed at the support to the sectors of hospitality and air traffic significantly contributed to the recovery, but, at the same time, the needs for growth management, income source diversification, and strengthening destinations' resilience to external shock were highlighted (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). The pandemic crisis additionally changed the patterns of travelers' behavior – the importance of health safety was raised, as well as the demand for "closer" and domestic destinations, and the interest for less congested and nature-oriented products, such as eco-tourism and community-based tourism. The studies of post-pandemic tourists' behavior in the Philippines and the region of Southeast Asia point to the generation differences in the readiness to travel, as well as the higher demand for experiential, safe, and locally-based offers. These changes are both an opportunity and a demand for the reform of the destination management model (Fadlurrahman et al., 2025; Santiago et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

The perspectives of tourism development in the Philippines lie in several simultaneous directions. First, the improvement of sustainable and jointly-led models – community-based tourism (CBT) and creative forms of tourism – can enable a greater distribution of benefits, preservation of cultural and natural resources, and more resilient local development. The empirical research and evaluations of pilot-projects in the Philippines not only show the potential of CBT but also point to the need for institutional capacities, clear income mechanisms, and the support in the market positioning (Aquino, 2019; Fernandez-Abila et al., 2024; Gutierrez, 2022; Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2023). Second, the direction toward market diversification and the improvement of connections (e.g. visa-liberalization policy toward certain market sources) represents short-term measures for speeding up the income recovery, where there must be a balance with long-term sustainable planning (Quevedo et al., 2021). Third, the digitalization of services, data on visits, and strategic destination management will be crucial for the optimization of tourist flow and for minimizing the negative effects on sensitive ecosystems (Moreno & Bucoy, 2024). The research on tourism development in the Philippines requires a balanced approach which integrates historical-cultural insights, actual empirical data on tourist performance and behavior (Aquino & Porter, 2022), as well as critical perspectives which insist on local agencies and decolonization of knowledge. Such an approach enables not only the understanding of changes in the scope and structure of tourism, but also creating the policies which encourage inclusive and sustainable development of the sector.

In the Philippines, as well as in other parts of Southeast Asia, a lot of destinations rely on mass coastal tourism (for instance, the islands of Boracay, Bali, Phuket, etc.), which is why these new island destinations are forced to develop strategies of product differentiation and innovative approaches in management in order to be competitive with larger market actors (Cheer et al., 2018). In the last few years, the Island and the City of Samal, located in the Gulf of Davao in the Philippines, have been experiencing a fast development of tourism and they have often been highlighted as examples of a "rising star" destination, since they achieved significant improvements in the number of arrivals, in the income, and reputation. The aim of this paper is to analyze the key factors which have contributed to the competitive rise of Samal and to provide insights into the theoretical evidence on how small destinations can build market visibility and long-term sustainable position.

In order to achieve that, the research tasks will include the following: 1. Analysis of the historical tourism development trend of Samal (2015–2024); 2. Identification of the elements of tourism product differentiation; 3. Assessment of the impact of the improved transport accessibility on the growth in tourist arrivals and stay length; and 4. Formulation of recommendations for the implementation of good practices of Samal in the development of similar island destinations. The theoretical framework is based on the concepts of multivariate analysis of tourism in the observed destination and assessment of tourism advantages and disadvantages (Aquino & Porter, 2022; Dunets et al., 2020; Savanchiyeva et al., 2023), which show that the success of small destinations depends on a blend of comparative geographical analysis, systematic scientific methods, cartographic techniques, and expert evaluation. The previous research emphasizes the key factors of small island destination competitiveness, such as regional advantages, resources, sustainable development, and management.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Case study of the Philippines' city and island of Samal

The sustainable development of tourism is especially important for small island destinations which possess extraordinary natural and cultural values, but which are also facing with limited resources and infrastructure, dependence on seasonality, and vulnerability to climate change (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). One of the representative examples is the island and the city of Samal in the Philippines. Samal is situated in the Gulf of Davao, in the south of the Philippines. The island is located in the Celebes Sea and within the province of Davao del Norte as one of the southernmost islands of the Philippine archipelago, near the southern coast of Mindanao Island (Figure 1). Samal Island has a surface area of 301 km^2, and it was inhabited by more than 120,000 people in 2020. The average arithmetic population density of the island is 395 people/km^2, and it is not one of the most densely populated islands in the Philippines. The entire island of Samal is within the city limits of the same name city (Samal). The city is divided into several districts, such as Babak, Penaplata, and Kaputian, and with additional 46 smaller settlements (Plasabas et al., 2013). Between the large island of Mindanao and Samal lies the narrow and long Pakiputan Strait. The narrowest point of this strait, between Davao City, the capital of Mindanao, and Babac Town on Samal Island, is only 900 meters wide (Nicolas et al., 2024). The largest island settlement is Samal City, which is also called "Island Garden City of Samal" or "IGACOS" (In Tagalog language: Pulong Harding Lungsod ng Samal). The city had a population of 116,638 in 2020, and it is expected that the total population of Samal city will exceed 120,000 in 2025 (Aguinaldo & Gomez, 2023).



Figure 1. The position of Samal Island in the Philippines

The average annual temperature of the city is 30 °C and the average annual rainfall is 1,297 mm. Depending on the specific location and geographical features, the annual rainfall in Samal varies between 1,200 and 1,600 mm, and short-term rains continue throughout the year. It is possible to describe the December–April period as the "dry season" since it receives the least rainfall, while the May–November period can be described as the "humid season" since it receives more rainfall. For the sea tourism purposes, the period between December and April is more convenient for visits. In Samal city, the daytime temperature averages vary between 29 °C and 31 °C throughout the year, while the nighttime temperature averages vary between 22 °C and 24 °C (Table 1). Briefly, there are no major fluctuations or major differences in both temperature and precipitation throughout the year. Before tourism began to flourish, Samal Island's economy relied primarily on coconut cultivation, large-scale agriculture, and fishing, but these industries were generally low-yielding and poverty was widespread. A wide variety of tropical fruit is produced, which is why Samal is also referred to as the "Philippines' Fruit Island". Coconuts, watermelons, avocados, pineapples, grapefruits, apples, bananas, papayas, and mangos are extensively cultivated throughout the island (Aguinaldo & Gomez, 2023).

Table 1. Monthly Average Temperature Changes in the Samal Island (Source: https://www.worldmeteo.info/en/asia/philippines/)

Months	Monthly Daytime Temperature Averages (°C)	Monthly Night Temperature Averages (°C)	Monthly Total Rainfall (mm)	Total Number of Rainy Days
January	29	22	98	16,4
February	30	22	86	14.3
March	30	22	91	16.3
April	30	22	83	18.5
May	31	23	133	25.3
June	31	24	158	25.0
July	30	24	111	23.8
August	30	24	101	21.9
September	30	24	94	20.8
October	30	24	117	24.4
November	30	23	131	24.3
December	30	22	94	18.7
Annual Average	30	23	1,297	249.7

Samal also produces the world's sweetest mango, known as the "Samal Sweet Mango". At least 2,000 hectares of land within the island's borders are planted with mangoes widely exported all around the world (Joaquin et al., 2021). The western coast of Samal Island is more densely populated and economically more developed than the eastern coast of the island. Therefore, most of the tourist facilities are found on the western coast (Fortaleza et al., 2020). To boost economic growth, the Samal Island Tourism Estate (SITE) Project was introduced, aiming to develop high-end resorts and establish the island as a secondary destination linked to Mindanao. However, initial evaluations indicated that the rural population might face significant challenges in keeping pace with rapid tourism expansion unless investments were also made in essential social infrastructure to help local communities adjust (Salman et al., 2024). With more than 2.5 million people living in the nearby city of Davao, the second largest city in the Philippines, the Samal island, one the other hand, recently became one of the main recreation centers of the metropolis. Since thousands of Davao citizens relax on the Samal Island at the weekends, the coastal parts of the island face big pressure by visitors (Dejadena et al., 2015).

Research methods

This review study examines the selected features of Samal, including economy, geography, ecology, and demographics, classifies its tourism benefits and shortcomings, and evaluates the island's tourism potential. The destination was chosen according to numerous factors (Dalagan & Sy, 2023), which distinguished it from other destinations in the Philippines.

The research was performed between January and October 2025, and it relied on the framework of the multivariate analysis of tourism in the observed destination, and tourism advantages and disadvantages were assessed. The secondary sources represent the available data from the Department of Tourism of Philippines (DOT), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Samal Island City Tourism Office, for the analyzed ten-year period (2015–2024). DOT is the most representative state institution which follows the tourism flow at the national level. This study uses a systematic scientific approach, including comparative expert review method, cartographic and geographical presentations (Island Garden City of Samal — Local Tourism Development Plan, 2025). A key aim of the paper is to highlight Samal Island's resources to the academic community and encourage further research. Notably, this is the first comprehensive evaluation of the island's tourism and recreational potential, based on a two-phase study: 1. Analysis of the tourism resources on Samal Island; Examining Samal Island's accommodation capacities. The first phase involves popular tourism attractions, such as tourist parks and entertainment centers, religious centers, beaches, diving centers, historical and cultural places, etc. A detailed overview of the Island's potentials, which were not known to the academic community until now, will be presented (Table 2).

Table 2. Major Natural and Cultural Tourism Attractions of Samal City (Source: Authors, 2025)

Top 30 Natural Tourism Attractions	**Top 30 Cultural Tourism Attractions**
Giant Clam (Taklobo) Sanctuary	Aqua Water Park Samal
Kaputian Beach Park	Bandera Nature Park
Hagimit Falls	Pinta-IX Art Gallery
Sabang Cliff	ISLA Farms Highlands
Secret Blue Lagoon	Dadatan Bat Conservation Park
Canibad Beach	Floating Island Adventure
Limao Lagoon	Playa Azalea Pool
Talicud Mangrove Sanctuary	The Shoreline
Linosutan White Sand Beach	San Jose Mosque
Monfort Bat Sanctuary	St. Ignatius Spirituality Center
Uraya Beach	Japanese Cave House
Timjin's Cave	Virtu Trattoria House N Café
Sanipaan Marine Park	Kembali Samal Island by Filinvest
Pangubatan Forest Park	General Moncado White House
Coral Garden Marine Park	Aurora's Garden Resort
Malipano Islet	The Cliff Samal Oceanfront Resthouse
Quidopong Sandbar	Pearl Farm Beach Resort
Thunder Forest	Garden Breeze Inland Resort
Blue Bird Deck View	Santo Niño Parish Church
Mushroom Reef	Virgen Dolorosa Parish Church
Dayang Beach	Discovery Samal
Dapia Reef	Maxima Aqua Fun
Puting Bato	Mansud Shores
Enong Sinkhole Tidepool	Treasure Land
The Cliff Samal Oceanfront	Cafe Maañag Samal
Tagbaobo Falls	Al - Rahmaa Mosque
Vanishing Island	Virtuquest Samal Resort and Spa
Angel's Cove	Limao Lagoon Park
Cinco Engracia at Punta Pangubatan	Samal Island Park
Alorro Beach	Virtuquest Samal Resort and Spa

First, the reviewed overview will show the most famous attractions, which are key to the development of tourism through tourism attributes that Samal has. Some of them are the following: The City of Interesting Caves, The City of Magnificent Waterfalls, The City with the Puting Bato Hill, The City with the Giant Clam Sanctuary Nature Reserve, The

City with Breathtaking Views, The City with Historical Catholic Churches and Mosques, The City with Scuba Diving Centers, The City with Small Touristic Islands, The City with Historical Monuments, The City with the Talikud Island, The City with Colorful Festivals, The City with Breathtaking Beaches, and The City with the Sabang Cliff. According to the specified tourism attributes, the parameters for the assessment of the observed locations will be identified within each analyzed group, which will be supported by processing the available data from the statistical documents of the local tourism management authorities. After that, the tourism resources, sights, entertainment and recreation infrastructure will be analyzed. The obtained indicators of the evaluation criteria will be put into the unique measurement system. Then the private indicators of tourism-recreational potentials will be calculated: natural conditions and resources, cultural-historic resources, availability of tourism infrastructure, information technology provision of tourism (Jawad & Naz, 2022).

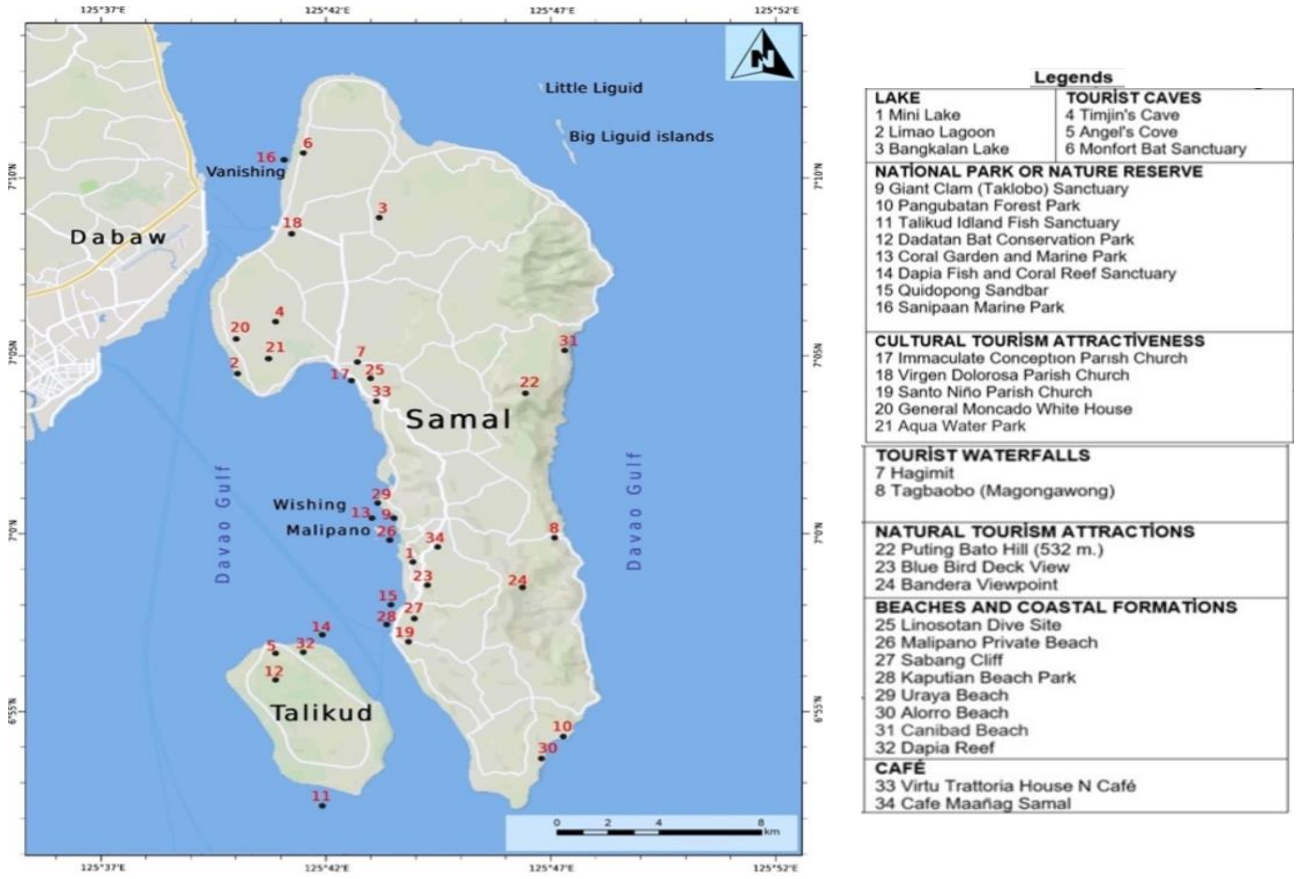


Figure 2. Map of tourist attractions "Island Garden City of Samal" (Source: Authors based on QGIS, 2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the tourism resources of Samal City

In terms of tourism activities, Samal has been one of the fastest growing Philippine cities of the 21st century and it also has the title of the country's largest "resort city". Samal can arguably be considered the only major Philippine city whose primary focus is tourism and recreation. Samal Island, which is only 2 km away from Davao City by ferry, is one of the most important tourist centers for travelers visiting the capital of Mindanao. This tropical island, which stands out with its pristine beaches, lush fruit orchards, and fascinating snorkeling areas, as well as luxury resorts and budget hotels, is ideal for a seaside holiday throughout the whole year. Samal city administrators organize the Samal summer festivals, which last from April to July every year. Festivals, fairs, congresses, competitions, sports and art events organized during this period attract local and foreign tourists to the city and make it possible for them to have fun. Since typhoons or severe storms are rare on the island, Samal can accommodate tourists 365 days a year. Based on this, the study aimed to create a comprehensive map (Figure 2) to present the the resources clearly and concisely. Some of the tourist features which the Garden City of Samal is famous for are its white sandy beaches and plenty of snorkeling areas, a variety of cheap seafood and fruit, quiet resorts and a wide range of accommodation options to suit every budget, fascinating caves and magnificent waterfalls, interesting marine ecosystem and unique nature reserves, colorful festivals and historical religious centers, and breathtaking diving centers and peaceful bays. Samal reveals its true nature through striking contrasts. The city generally portrays a poor rural picture, but on the other hand, it is full of modern and luxurious hotels. It has neglected suburbs and narrow streets, but also luxury villas with pools and magnificent shopping malls. Samal seems to be far from the world and civilization, but it is also only 2 kilometers away from a large and modern metropolitan city like Davao. It has untouched nature, deserted islands, and isolated shores, as well as lively tourism, noisy traffic flow, and numerous tourist facilities. Samal is a city that is both very close and very far from civilization. Those looking for a place even further from

civilization, even more untouched and more peaceful, are recommended going to the Talikud Island (Azucena & Regidor, 2023). There are many natural and cultural tourism attractions in Samal and they are quite diverse (Figure 2). The most popular tourist attractions among the foreign tourists visiting Samal are as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The most popular tourist attractions on the Samal

1. Tourist parks and entertainment centers
"Maxima Aqua Fun", "Peñaplata Freedom Park", "Floating Island Adventure", "Playa Azalea Pool", "Precious Garden of Samal", "Aqua Water Park Samal", "Bandera Nature Park", "Aurora's Garden Resort", „Limao Lagoon Park", "Paradise Island Park and Beach Resort", "Treasure Land", "Sunset Beach Park", "Peñaplata Freedom Park", "Babak Baywalk", "Thunder Forest"
2. Tourist religious centers
"Santo Niño Parish Church", "Virgen Dolorosa Parish Church", "Immaculate Conception Parish Church", "St. Ignatius Spirituality Center", "Al - Rahmaa Mosque", "San Jose Mosque", "AL-Farouq Mosque", "Caliclic Masjid", "Mohammad Sharif Afdal Mosque", "Cogon Al Masjid "Al Azraq (The Blue Mosque)"
3. Tourist beaches
"Kaputian Beach", "Alorro Beach", "Canibad Beach", "Kembali Samal Island by Filinvest", "Samalan Camp And Sea", "Kanaan Beach", "Mansud Shores", "Coral Garden Beach Resort", "La Isla Bonita Talikud Island Beach Resort", "Isla Beach Resort", "Whean Beach Resort", "Dayang Beach", "Linosutan White Sand Beach", "La Concha Beach Resort", "Babu Santa", "Pearl Farm Beach Resort", "Babak Bamboo Beach Resort", "Vista Blanco Beach Resort", "Villa Amparo Garden Beach Resort", "Beach Ni Kapitan", "Uraya Beach Resort", "Virat Beach Resort", "Malipano Private Beach"
4. Tourist sea diving centers
"Coral Garden and Marine Park", "Dapia Fish and Coral Reef Sanctuary", "Kidopong", "Sanipaan Marine Park", "Angel's Cove", "Dapia Reef", "Coral Gardens", "Dizon Wall", "Giant Clam Sanctuary", "Linosotan Dive Site", "Babu Santa Minwall", "Mansud Wall", "Malipano Japanese Wrecks", "Talikud Idland Fish Sanctuary"
5. Tourist nature conservation areas
"Coral Garden Marine Park", "Talicud Mangrove Sanctuary", "Mahal Forest Resort", "Giant Clam Sanctuary", "Pangubatan Forest Park", "Dadatan Bat Conservation Park", "Monfort Bat Sanctuary", "Dapia Fish and Coral Reef Sanctuary", "Sanipaan Marine Park", "Linosotan Dive Site", "Babu Santa Minwall", "Mansud Wall", "Malipano Japanese Wrecks", "Talikud Idland Fish Sanctuary"
6. Tourist panorama spots
"Blue Bird View Deck", "Pacific Heights Viewing Deck", "Bandera Viewpoint", "Tañez View", "View Dekz Samal", "Fernandez Peak", "Cafe Maañag Samal", "Oasis Samal Resort", "Puting Bato Highest Peak", "View Dekz Samal", "El Samara Mount FMS", "ISLA Farms Highlands"
7. Tourist historic and cultural places
"General Moncado White House", "Japanese Cave House", "Ois Or Memorial Flight 541 Shrine", "Sinapān Heritage House", "La Vida Art Cafe", "Pinta-IX Art Gallery"
8. Tourist natural beauties
"Limao Lagoon", "Sabang Cliff", "Angel's Cove", "Coral Gardens", "Dizon Wall", "Quidopong Sandbar", "The Cliff Samal Oceanfront Resthouse", "Secret Blue Lagoon, Balet", "Caga San Jose", "Enong Sinkhole Tidepool", "Hagimit Falls", "Muni Muni Beach Resort Samal", "Aundanao", "Tagbaobo Falls", "Acantilado Aqua Farm & Resort", "Cinco Engracia at Punta Pangubatan", "La Patria Chica", "Nelmar", "Monfort Bat Sanctuary"
9. Tourist cafes, bars, and restaurants
"The Shoreline", "Virtu Trattoria House N Café", "Parola Bar", "Cafe Maañag Samal", "Samal View Cafe", "Nimfa's Secret Garden and Kitchen", "Bella italia", "Farmers V Resto & Grill", "Miami Vyce", "Haribar Lounge", "Morning Catch", "Mags Cafe", "The Limestone Brew", "Zagpa Grill and Restobar", "SIP - The Samal Island Promenade", "A Small Deli", "Kino's Bar", "Garden Breeze Inland Resort", "Kasama Coffee","Aznebo Grill & Restaurant", "Farmers V Resto & Grill", "Venus Resort Resto Bar", "Coco Loco Cafe", "Jardin de Ysabelle – Hobbiton Cafe".

Small islands, waterfalls, caves, beaches, churches and mosques, nature reserves, resorts and diving centers are the major tourist attractions in Samal. Snorkeling, trekking in tropical forests, fishing, exploring caves and waterfalls, watching Talikud coral gardens or cockfights, camping in tents, ecotourism, water sports, and beach tourism are the most popular tourist activities in Samal (Olivar et al., 2023). As a result, the destination has earned a variety of interesting epithets:

The City of Interesting Caves

Since there are about 70 caves on the island of Samal (Asdang & Schneider, 2024), speleologists from all over the world carry out scientific studies in these caves. The "Monfort Bat Sanctuary" cave system, consisting of five open caves and containing 1.8 million bats (Plasabas et al., 2013), is one of the must-see places in Samal. The cave system, situated in the northwest of the island of Samal, has been home to a large colony of Rousette fruit bats since the recorded history. More than 75% of the ceiling and walls of the caves, which are about 75 meters long, are covered with bat colonies. The "Montfort Cave System" or "Monfort Bat Sanctuary" is the largest single colony of this species according to the Guinness World Records (Asdang & Schneider, 2024). In addition to bats, the cave system is home to a variety of other animals, including snakes, lizards, and spiders. In short, this location hosts the largest single concentration of bat species in the world. "Timjin's Cave", situated northwest of the town of Penaplata, is another interesting cave formation on the island of Samal, but this small cave is not very well known to tourists and is therefore not visited very often (Joaquin et al., 2021: 33).

The City of Magnificent Waterfalls

There are 4–5 important tourist waterfalls within the borders of the "Island Garden City of Samal" that can appeal to

curious travelers. Even though these waterfalls cannot easily compete with those situated in Luzon, Mindanao, or Negros Island, they are worth seeing as well. Hagimit, Tagbaobo (Magongawong), and Sampao are the most significant of these tourist waterfalls. The famous Hagimit Waterfall, positioned in the Hagimit Valley in the central part of Samal Island, is one of the most beautiful and most popular natural tourism attractions of Samal Island (Asdang & Schneider, 2024).

The visitors can swim in the refreshing waters of the stream or simply enjoy the beauty of the waterfall from the viewing platforms. The famous Hagimit Waterfall, located southeast of the town of Penaplata, is a popular place for picnic and has plenty of benches and tables for the visitors to use. The sparkling clear waters comprise beautiful natural pools in the Hagimit valley. On sweltering hot days, the locals and children in particular go swimming and cool off in this stream. The "Virtuquest Samal Resort and Spa", "Immaculate Conception Parish Church", "Virtu Trattoria House N Café", "Peñaplata Freedom Park", "Maxima Resort Beach", situated very close to Hagimit Waterfall, are among the most interesting tourist places to visit after visiting this famous waterfall.

Tagbaobo Waterfall, also known as "Magongawong Falls", situated on the Tagbaobo River east of Anonang Town in the southeast of Samal Island, is another famous tourist attraction in Samal. The abundance of large-trunk trees in the area and the mist surrounding the waterfall create a mystical and magical atmosphere. Tagbaobo Waterfall, situated deep in the rainforest of Samal Island, is a picturesque waterfall that flows down from moss-covered rocks, creating a mesmerizing sight. Within walking distance of Tagbaobo Waterfall, places such as "Hgd View Deck", "572 Campsite Lanoy Resort", "Hgd Private Resort", "Katagbaoan Beach Farm", and "Thunder Forest" are other tourist attractions in the area that are worth seeing. There is a small but adorable waterfall called "Sofia Falls" in the southeast of Samal Island, west of Pangubatan town and just north of the "Coco Loco Cafe, Resort & Lounge" hotel. Since it is positioned very close to the Tagbaobo waterfall, it would be a good idea to visit these two waterfalls on the same day.

The City with the Puting Bato Hill

The Puting Bato Peak (532 m) is the highest point on Samal Island and offers breathtaking views of the surrounding areas. Hiking to the top is relatively easy and can be completed in less than an hour. However, the heat can be intense, so it is best to start climbing in the early morning or late afternoon. Once you reach the top, sit down and enjoy the breathtaking views of Davao Gulf and Samal Island. Puting Bato is a popular spot for both locals and tourists; therefore, make sure to visit it as early as possible in order to avoid the crowds. You can choose one of two different trails to this famous peak (Tayapoc or Guilon trail) and marvel at the combination of blue waters and lush vegetation while taking in the fresh air once you reach the highest point.

The City with the Giant Clam Sanctuary Nature Reserve

The "Giant Clam (Taklobo) Sanctuary" or "Giant Clam and Oyster Sanctuary", situated in Barangay Adecor, on the western coast of Samal Island, is a conservation area devoted to the protection and nurturing of giant clams, also known locally as "taklobo" (Plasabas et al., 2013). This colorful sanctuary, which is easily explored through a scuba diving tour, is one of the most important marine sanctuaries on the coast of Samal and also an interesting eco-tourism site. The Giant Clam Sanctuary is currently under the protection of the Davao del Norte State College. This marine area, which is home to colorful fish species and rich flora and fauna, offers fascinating mollusks to watch while snorkeling. This interesting marine sanctuary, positioned just across from the "LYR Beach Resort – Almeja Azul" hotel, is home to over 3,700 giant clams. The "Giant Clam (Taklobo) Sanctuary", occupying a marine area of approximately 14 hectares, is one of the most colorful marine sanctuaries in the Philippines.

The City with Breathtaking Views

There are many locations with fascinating scenery on both Samal Island and Talikud Island with beautiful views from the high peaks. Watching the curves of the seacoast, bays and peninsulas, beaches and forests from afar is among the favorite pastimes of every explorer tourist. "Bandera Viewpoint", "Tañez View", "Blue Bird Deck View", "View Dekz Samal", "Fernandez Peak", "Puting Bato Highest Peak", "El Samara Mount FMS", and "ISLA Farms Highlands", positioned within the borders of Samal City, are among the places with the best sea and island views. "Blue Bird Deck View" is one of the most favorite among visitors. For those who wish to watch the ocean while eating in a quality tourist place, the best choice will definitely be "Cafe Maañag Samal". This modern cafe offers delicious food, desserts, and drinks, as well as a breathtaking view of the nature. From the large balcony of "Cafe Maañag Samal", on clear days, the coast of Mindanao Island and the city of Davao is easily visible with the naked eye. Since the "Blue Bird Deck View" and "Cafe Maañag Samal" are positioned very close, both can be visited on the same day.

The City with Historical Catholic Churches and Mosques

Since the largest religious communities in Samal are Catholic Christians and Muslims, it is expected that the largest number of religious centers are churches and mosques. The first Holy Catholic Mass was held in "Santo Niño Parish" church located on Poblacion beach in Kaputian town on January 15, 1958. On May 30, 1983, St. Nino Chapel constituted a separate congregation and thus separated from the main congregation, the Immaculate Conception. This church, situated among vegetation and very close to the seashore, is one of the largest and oldest churches on the island of Samal. It would be a good idea for tourists visiting Kaputian Beach Park to see the architecture of this church. "Virgen Dolorosa Parish Church", located in the town of Babak on the northwestern coast of Samal Island, is certainly the most magnificent religious center on the island. This church, which is within walking distance from the Babak sea port, attracts visitors with

its modern architecture and peaceful, clean environment. "Immaculate Conception Parish Church", positioned in the town of Penaplata on the northwestern coast of Samal Island, is another significant religious center on the island of Samal. The church, positioned just behind "Peñaplata Freedom Park" area, is one of the favorite places for the Catholic community.

The "Al-Rahmaa Mosque" and "San Jose Mosque" are both the most popular Muslim religious centers in Samal and they are also the mosques with the most interesting architecture. The "Al-Rahmaa Mosque", situated in the village of Caliclic in the northwest of Samal Island stands out with its white, red, and green colors and magnificent appearance. This interesting place located just south of Babak Port is considered to be the largest and most modern mosque in Samal. "San Jose Mosque", found in the town of San Jose in the southwest of Samal Island is another big mosque in Samal. The most important mosques in Samal are "Masjid Darul Iman" located in the northeast of Babak town, "Al-Farouq Mosque", and "Caliclic Masjid" situated in the village of Caliclic, "Mohammad Sharif Afdal Mosque" positioned just east of the village of San Isidro, and the "Cogon Al Masjid "Al Azraq (The Blue Mosque)" located in the south of Talikud Island. It should be noted that, since the Muslim population in Samal is small, there are fewer mosques (Asdang & Schneider, 2024).

The City with Scuba Diving Centers

Samal, which is comprised of many islands, is home to many diving spots with colorful coral reefs, rich marine life, and even shipwrecks from World War II. On the west coast of Talikud Island, the most popular diving spot on the island is 150-hectare "Coral Garden and Marine Park", which is the most popular diving spot among the local and foreign tourists. This marine park area, situated off the coast of the "Coral Garden Beach Resort" hotel, has a shallow reef with depths ranging from 5 to 20 meters, offering a perfect diving experience for divers of all levels. This marine reserve is home to a variety of colorful corals such as horn coral, brain coral, and mushroom coral, as well as a variety of reef fish such as clownfish, angelfish, and butterfly fish. Divers can also explore sea turtles, octopuses, and other fascinating marine creatures here on some days. The crystal-clear water and excellent visibility make it an ideal spot for underwater photography. The 150-hectare wonderland "Coral Garden and Marine Conservation Park" is a true scuba diving paradise, home to over 50% of the Philippines' marine corals, sea grasses, and aquarium fish in one location. Other notable dive sites within the Island Garden City of Samal are "Dapia Fish and Coral Reef Sanctuary", "Angel's Cove", "Quidopong Sandbar", "Sanipaan Marine Park", "Linosotan Dive Site", "Babu Santa Minwall", "Mansud Wall", "Malipano Japanese Wrecks", "Talikud Idland Fish Sanctuary", and "Giant Clam (Taklobo) Sanctuary". The "Linosotan Dive Site" is located off the southern coast of Talikud Island. This marine reserve comes to be known for its vibrant coral gardens, diverse marine life, and underwater rock formations. Divers can explore the spectacular wall dive, which extends to depths of 30 meters, where they can see a variety of fish and other marine life. Linosotan's clear waters make it an ideal site for macro photography enthusiasts, and larger marine animals such as turtles, and reef sharks are occasionally spotted.

The "Dapia Fish and Coral Reef Sanctuary" is positioned off the northern coast of Talikud Island. Dapia is a colorful dive site with a sandy bottom and a shallow coral garden. In the Dapia sanctuary, divers can explore the reefs and encounter a variety of marine life, including clownfish, angelfish, and brood fish. The maximum depth in the Dapia sanctuary is only 10 meters, making it convenient for beginners and snorkelers. "Kidopong", situated between Talikud Island and Samal Island, is a popular dive site that offers a variety of underwater topography, including steep submarine walls, sandy slopes, and colorful coral gardens. Here, divers can explore a variety of marine life, including colorful fish, stingrays, and the occasional sea turtle. The maximum depth of "Kidopong" is 25 meters, making it suitable for divers of all levels.

The City with Small Tourist Islands

There are some small islets in the vicinity of Samal Island which contribute to the overall tourism offer. In the northeast of Samal Island, there are two small, but equally beautiful and interesting islands called Little Cruz (Little Liguid) and Big Cruz (Big Liguid). In the northern parts of Pakiputan Strait and in the northwest of Samal Island are the Arboles Island, Vanishing Island, and Sanipaan Marine Park. In the southwest of Samal Island are Talikud Island, Wiching Island, and Malipano Islands. The "Vanishing Island", "Wishing Island", "Malipano Islet" and "Big Liguid Island" are the most visited of these small coastal islets. It is possible to rent a boat from the Samal Island and visit these islands at a very reasonable price. The Vanishing Island is the first of these small tropical islets that should be visited.

This lovely tropical island is easy to reach because it only takes 5–10 minutes by boat from Barangay Tambo to go to the Vanishing Island. The area of Vanishing Island changes according to the tide. Sometimes the entire island is submerged during high tide, while a long sandy beach appears when the tide recedes. Therefore, the Vanishing Island is also called the "vanishable island" or the "coming and going island". You can easily reach this island by a small boat from the Babak Town at a low price. This interesting island, situated on the northwestern coast of Samal Island, in the Pakiputan Strait and 300–400 meters west of Babak Town, is considered one of the natural wonders of Samal.

The "Wishing Island", situated just southwest of the Giant Clam (Taklobo) Sanctuary marine reserve on the western coast of Samal Island, is another interesting tourist islet within the borders of Samal City. This islet, consisting of large rocks, is a fascinating tourist attraction with its breathtaking beauty and serene atmosphere. Plants and trees sprout from volcanic rocks and wild naturecontribute to a special charm of this small island in the middle of the sea.

This picturesque island, found just northwest of Malipano Islet, is famous for its pristine beaches and clear turquoise waters, and also stands out with its rich variety of living species for snorkeling and clear sea waters. A small, neglected water slide, a concrete-covered nature viewing terrace, and a simple picnic area are the only remarkable human elements on the island. The area of the island is so small that it is not convenient for the construction of either a restaurant or a hotel. It can be said that the Wishing Island is only suitable for daily boat tours, water sports, and picnics.

The “Malipano Islet”, situated just south of the Giant Clam (Taklobo) Sanctuary marine protection area on the western coast of Samal Island, is one of the most adorable, best-kept, cleanest, and most aristocratic coastal islets of Samal City. Long secluded beaches, mangrove forests extending along the island coast, luxury tourist facilities are the first remarkable elements of this island. This islet, situated just west of “Pearl Farm Beach Resort”, the most luxurious hotel of Samal Island, has been transformed into a recreation area for the guests of this hotel. In other words, the tourists staying at “Pearl Farm Beach Resort” Hotel generally visit Malipano Islet by boat tours. Malipano Private Beach situated on Malipano Islet is one of the most private and privileged beaches of Samal City. “Big Liguid Island” and “Little Liguid Island”, positioned off the northeastern coast of Samal Island, are deserted and lonely coastal islets. There is no settlement, no market, or tourist facility on these islands. They are islets left alone in the middle of the sea with long beaches and dense forests. Therefore, foreign tourists almost never come to these islands. Nevertheless, for those in search of peace and quiet, “Big Liguid Island” and “Little Liguid Island” are a perfect escape and a hiding place.

The City with Historical Monuments

The most anticipated and most visited architectural works of Samal Island are undoubtedly the “General Moncado White House”. The “Moncado White House”, found in the northwest of Samar Island and northwest of Penaplata Town, offers tourists a journey through time with its carefully preserved period furniture, artifacts, and memorabilia. This historical building, which offers a concrete glimpse into the lifestyle of the Moncado family and the culture of the Filipino elite, also promises the tourists a journey through Samal’s interesting history and a unique cultural experience.

The City of Talikud Island

Samal, officially known as the “Island Garden City of Samal”, has two large islands: Samal and Talikud. Samal and Talikud, positioned within the provincial borders of Davao del Norte, are like conjoined twins. The name of Talikud Island was derived from the Visayan word “licud” meaning “back” and is geographically located “right behind” or “right on the back” of Samal Island. Talikud Island has an area of approximately 28 km2 and a coastline of approximately 21.6 kilometers. The average elevation of the island above sea level is 95 meters (Asdang & Schneider, 2024).

Talikud Island, situated on the southwest coast of Samal Island, is less developed, less populated, and poorer than Samal. However, it is also quieter, more pristine, more peaceful, cleaner, and more natural than Samal. One will not find the noisy traffic and expensive resorts of Samal, nor the crowded tourist masses and urban pollution on Talikud Island.

The beaches and coastline are much more secluded and quieter, making it an ideal escape and resting place for honeymooners, romantic lovers, and families with children. Talikud Island, which lacks modern tourist facilities, has only four small rural settlements: Santa Cruz, Cogon, Linosutan, and Dadatan. Talikud Island, in comparison with Samal Island, has much fewer hotels, bars, restaurants, and tourist facilities. The main hotels on Talikud Island are: “Talikud Island Mangrove Beach Resort”, “Coral Garden Beach Resort”, “JYP Resort”, “Leticia by the Sea”, “Isla Reta”, “Garden of Eden Santa Cruz Paradise and Beach Hotel Resort”, “Pacifica-Verde Beach Resort”, “Tailkud Beach Resort”, “Pacific's Little Secret”, and “La Isla Bonita Talikud Island Beach Resort”. In reality, the total number of accommodation facilities on the island is not more than 20, and there are no luxurious five-star hotels among them. The island is more convenient for day trips and for camping in tents. However, the majority of tourists who come to Talikud Island visit this lovely island either for snorkeling or scuba diving. Water sports, diving activities, ecotourism, and marine tourism are the most popular types of tourism activities on the island. In planning and developing ecotourism, it is essential to ensure that local residents are well-informed so they can take part actively and constructively in the process (Keogh, 1990).

There are many bays, peninsulas, and beaches on the island of Talikud. Almost all of the beaches are free public beaches. The most popular beaches on the island of Talikud are: “Linosutan White Sand Beach”, “Coral Garden Beach Resort”, “Dayang Beach Resort”, “Isla Cristina Beach Resort”, “Cruz Beach”, “Mansud Shores”, “Linden Beach”, “La Isla Bonita Talikud”, “Whean Beach Resort”, “Pacific Little Secret”, “Angels Cove”, “Isla Reta Beach”, “Babu Santa”, “Vailian Precip Resort”, “Treasure Island Adventure Resort and Vacation Estates”, and “Lupa Surga”. As it is evident, the number of popular tourist beaches on the island is less than 20. The must-see tourist attractions on the Talikud Island are the “Talicud Mangrove Sanctuary”, “Dadatan Cave”, “Baga Caves”, “Coral Garden Beach Resort”, “Whean Beach Resort”, “Angels Cove”, “Linosutan White Sand Beach”, “Dadatan Bat Conservation Park”, and “Century-old Balete Tree”.

Talikud Island, in comparison with Samal Island, has much more interesting, much richer, and much more colorful diving sites. For the scuba diving enthusiasts, “Angel’s Cove”, “Dapia Reef”, “Coral Gardens”, and “Dizon Wall” are among the best diving sites. “La Isla Bonita Talikud Island Beach Resort”, “Whean Beach Resort”, “Dayang Beach”, “Linosutan White Sand Beach”, “Babu Santa”, and “Coral Garden Beach Resort” beaches also offer ideal natural environments for both snorkeling and scuba diving. Sparkling clean and warm sea waters, palm tree shadows, and white sandy beaches are the common natural features of these beaches. For those who wish to go for a swim with dense sea grass, coral gardens, and hundreds of marine creatures, the beaches listed above are the diving sites they are after.

The City with Colorful Festivals

Samal, also known as the "Island of Festivals", is a vibrant tourist destination where various unique activities, events, and festivals are celebrated throughout the year. These festivals are a testament to the rich culture and traditions of the island and offer tourists a chance to take part in the colorful festivities in person. IGACOS Festival held every March 7, Kabasan Festival held in Babak every May, the famous White Nights Festival held in Kaputian, and Hugyaw Madayaw Festival held in August (Olivar et al., 2023), are among the most colorful festivals. Indeed, during the festival periods, both the number of tourists and

the cultural and artistic activities and entertainment organizations on Samal Island tend to increase. IGACOS Festival is also known as "Samal Island Garden City Festival" as well as "Samal Island Garden City Foundation Anniversary". This three-day festival is held on the anniversary of the foundation of Samal City, every March 7. This colorful cultural festival commemorates the declaration of Samal as a city in 1998. The anniversary events include sports events, a business fair, an art workshop, cultural and sports shows, live music concerts, various exhibitions, dance competitions, an agricultural trade fair, a fireworks display, and a beauty pageant called the "Garden City of Samal". This exciting three-day festival also includes events such as sand-sculpture competition, a colorful boat river parade, beach volleyball, and a mountain bike tour (Asdang, & Schneider, 2024). Kabasan Festival, organized in May, is a week-long celebration that highlights the island's bountiful harvest. The Kabasan Festival in Babak is held during the last week of May and includes bikini beauty contests, fireworks, tourism exhibitions, street dances, street parties, and motocross events. In the Sama dialect, "kabasan" means "seashells."

Therefore, the festival was named Kabasan to celebrate the pageantry and splendor of the Island City. More importantly, Kabasan Festival is a celebration of gratitude for the bountiful produce of the sea for the people of Samal. Hugyaw Madayaw festival is organized every August and is one of the most anticipated events on Samal Island. It showcases the island's vibrant culture and heritage through street parades, cultural performances, art exhibitions, and culinary shows. Foreign tourists and visitors can watch the traditional dances, music, and costumes that provide a glimpse into the island's rich cultural fabric. Hugyaw Madayaw Festival is a three-day folk celebration filled with entertainment, games, music, dances, and presentations of the Sama tribe cultural practices, attended by the local and immigrant communities. The beauty pageant featuring folk costumes and folkloric elements is one of the most important events of this festival. Hugyaw Madayaw, organized by the Local Government Units and Municipal Authorities of Samal Island, is one of the most enthusiastic main cultural events on Samal Island. Hugyaw Madayaw Samal Festival is an attempt to sustain and preserve the Sama culture, which is gradually assimilated and on the verge of extinction. Consequently, these festivals on Samal Island are an integral part of the local identity, allowing the visitors to interact with the island's culture, traditions, and community (Olivar et al., 2023). They offer a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere, making Samal Island an even more exciting and memorable travel destination.

The City with Breathtaking Beaches

The beaches on the island of Samal can be divided into two large groups, free and fee-paying, and there are more than 70 beach areas throughout the island. Non-guests are generally charged for the beaches that belong to hotels and they are free only for hotel guests. Some of the private hotel beaches are "Pearl Farm Beach Resort", "Costa Marina Beach Resort", "Bluejaz Beach Resort and Waterpark", "Chema's by The Sea", "Samal Sands & Shores Beach Resort", and "Club Samal Resort". The public beaches that do not belong to any business or accommodation facility within the borders of Samal island are open to everyone and they are free of charge. Some of these free public beaches are: "Dalikyat Beach", "SLYap Beach", "La Concha Beach Resort", "Balet Beach", "Canibad Beach", "Isla Beach Resort", "Kanaan Beach Resort", "Joseph Beach Resort", and "Alorro Beach". In conclusion, whether fee-paying or free, the most peaceful, most beautiful and most popular beaches of Samal island are: "Babak Bamboo Beach Resort", "Vista Blanco Beach Resort", "Villa Amparo Garden Beach Resort", "Kaputian Beach", "Alorro Beach", "Canibad Beach", "Kembali Samal Island by Filinvest", "Kanaan Beach", "Pearl Farm Beach Resort", "Bluejaz Beach Resort and Waterpark", "Isla Beach Resort".

The City with the Sabang Cliff

The Sabang Cliff, found just north of Kaputian Town on the southwestern coast of Samal Island, is one of the most interesting, exciting, and magnificent tourist attractions on the island. For foreign tourists who come here, jumping into the sea from the high and steep cliffs on the Kaputian coast can be scary, but it is also incredibly exciting. When enthusiastic travelers and brave tourists jump into the sea from Sabang Cliff, they will be rewarded with a magnificent natural view and an incredible adrenaline rush. The Sabang Cliff, located just north of Kaputian Beach and Kaputian Port, is undoubtedly one of the best natural adrenaline-rush places on Samal Island.

Accommodation Potential of Samal Island

It will be appropriate to offer some tips about the hotels and beaches on Samal Island. The total length of the coast of Samal Island is 116 kilometers and there are many small coves, beaches, and capes on these coasts. Some of the beaches on the island are free public beaches and some are fee-paying hotel or private beaches. The private beach areas that belong to the "Paradise Island Park & Beach Resort" hotel in the town of Caliclic and the "Pearl Farm Beach Resort" hotel near the town of Adecor are considered the best and best-maintained beaches on Samal Island. Tourists who do not want to compromise on comfort and quality can choose to stay at these hotels. Essentially, the "Pearl Farm Beach Resort" is one of the most luxurious and most expensive accommodation facilities on Samal Island (Table 4).

The accommodation facilities on the island of Samal vary greatly in terms of both function and features, as well as in the prices and the number of stars that the hotels have. The "Maxima Aqua Fun Resort" hotel, situated just north of the town of San Jose, is a good choice for those who love water sports and entertainment. The "Chema's by The Sea" hotel is located just south of the town of Adecor on the west coast of the island of Samal. Nestled among the tropical trees and greenery, this hotel is an ideal choice for those who love romantic holidays and peaceful and quiet environment. For those who love rooms with panoramic sea views and white sandy beaches, the "Hof Gorei Beach Resort" near Caputian is a good alternative. Those who are after a more luxurious hotel can prefer the "Club Samal Resort" or "Lankenua Lodgings Samal Island". Those who wish to stay in a budget and affordable hotel with both beachfront and sea view rooms can stay at the "Red Parrot Inn" near Kaputian or "Publikhaus" boutique hotel within walking distance of "Samal Ferry Terminal".

Table 4. Main High-Price Hotels and Quality Accommodations of Samal Island (Source: Authors, 2025)

LYR Beach Resort - Almeja Azul	Pearl Farm Beach Resort	Mahan Garden Resort
Holiday Oceanview Samal Resort	Cavanico Il Mare Resort	Club Samal Resort
Fernandez Beach & Garden Resort	Camp Holiday Resort	Castle View Resort
Venus Resto Bar and Beach Resort	Q Sands Beach Hotel	Chema's by the Sea
Bluejaz Beach Resort and Waterpark	Precious Garden of Samal	Maxima Beach House
Paradise Island Park and Beach Resort	Bali-Bali Beach Resort	Kalipay sa Baybay
Lankenua Lodgings Samal Island	Castle View Hotel Samal	Secdea Beach Resort
Samal Island Garden Villa-Oakmark BnB	Seascape Inland Resort	Hana Bay Resort
Aundanao Oasis Beach Resort	Hof Gorei Beach Resort	C&C Beach Resort
Extreme Aloha Beach Resort	Villa Amparo Highlands	Lankenua Lodgings
Villa Amparo Garden Beach Resort	Kamayo Beach Resort	Beach House
Virtuquest Samal Resort and Spa	Casas Con Vıstas Resort	Swissfinity Resort
Villa Privé Samal Staycation	Almeja Azul Seaside Resort	Oceanview Residences
Mommy Mia Bed & Breakfast	Kawaii Beach Resort	Publikhaus
Mango Haven Breakfast Club Samal	Les-Angelees Apartment	Club Asiano Resort
Bakhawan Resort and Event Center	Pearl Farm Beach Resort	Q Sands Hotel
Samal Sands & Shores Beach Resort	Sonriza Beach Resort	Costa Azalea
Crusoe Cabins at Costa Azalea	Samal View Hillside Resort	Farmer's Paradise
Cocojul Resort Kubbyan İsland's & Samal Pool Swimming	Samal Ysla Beach Resort	La Celeste Samal

Table 5. Main Low-Cost Hotels and Small Accommodations of Samal Island (Source: Authors, 2025)

Pearly Mac Cabana by the Sea	Balet Beach House,	Gubat Residence
Island Hills Beach Resort For Rent	Kamayo Beach Resort	Hayahay Resort
House of Eve Samal I. Beach Resort	Canibad Point Resort	Kalinawan Resort
Pangubatan Private Beach House	Merlina Marine Resort	Balai sa Samal
Uraya Beach Resort - Olivia Sands	Kaluna Beach House	Isla Betita Resort
Albert's Place Beach Resort	Entroliso Beach Resort	Red Parrot Inn
Oceano Con Vista Highlands	Kostal Beach Resort	Samal Staycation
Punta Del Sol Beach Resort	Steve Garland Resort	La Vida Hostel
La Familia Beach Resort	JS Beach Line Cove	San Juan Beach
Caliclic Beach Resort	Kourtyard Resort Hotel	Belga Place
Island Garden Resort in Pangubatan	Samal Mango Haven	Yanai Resort
Langoy Langoy Beach Resort	Ilihan Beach Resort	Gadz Place
Residencia Mercedita Transient Home	Holy Cross Beach Resort	Balai Rajah Resort
One Greenland Beach Resort	TLSY Beach Front Resort	Sa Tabok Samal
Costa Marina Beach Resort	Jenny's Bed & Breakfast	Rosal Beach House
Golden Bay Beach Resort	Seagrass Beach Resor	Mayumi Beach
Golden Dane Heart Resort	Aundanao Oasis Beach	Island Shore Resort
Merlina Seabreeze Resort	Llanera Private Resort	Pinzgau Chalet
Zariels Private Island Resort	Sea Escape Beach Resort	Kyriedge Garden
Coco Loco Cafe, Resort & Lounge	Tiny Hauz Mini Resort	Tres Esquinas
Blue Rose Beach House Pangubatan	7 Pearls Beach House	Hideaway
Manresa Bay Private Resort	L.A. Family Beach Resort	Beach ni Kap
Samal Punta Elai Resort Hotel	Samal Casino Resort	Moms Haven
Eagle's Nest Beach Resort	Isla Betita Garden Resort	Red Parrot Inn
Pearly Mac Cabana by the Sea	Yestar Garden Resort	Probinsiya ni Inday
Segunda's Cottages on the Rocks	Vafi Hills Bed & Breakfast	Upper Island Ridge
Samal Island Staycation	Maglana Private Resort	St. Michael's Resort
Samal Family Garden Beach Resort	Island French Resort	Babox Island Hotel
Camp Holiday Private Resort 2	Seagrass Beach Resort	St. Michael's Resort
Camp Holiday Resort & Recreation Area	Georgia’s Samal Resort	White House Resort
Alta Vista Beach Resort	Mariecar Beach Resort	Mokz Travelers’ Inn
Balai Rajah Rest House by Monte Cliff	Winter Inn and Cafe Samal	Dorsita Beach Resort
Bluewaters Village and Resort	Florenda Beach Resort	Marex Beach Resort
Greatfields Forest Mountain Resort	Haze Haven Inland Resort	Bali-Bali Beach Resor
Moonstar Mountain Privacy Resort	Hof Gorei Beach Resort	Casa Playa De Ch'II
Uraya Beach Resort - Olivia Sands	Lorelei Beach Resort	Kaputian Beach Park
Isla Betita Garden Resort	Villa Nelda Beach Resort	White Sands Hostel

Those in search of a romantic and peaceful holiday in rooms with waterfall and sea view can stay at the “Virtuquest Samal Resort and Spa” holiday village next to the Hagimit waterfall. The travelers seeking for a high-quality facility surrounded by forests and not by the sea can choose the “Castle View Hotel Samal” hotel (Table 5). Today, Samal Island, which has more than 200 accommodation facilities, is regarded as the country's largest "holiday island city" with its rich tourism diversity, world-class resorts and affordable hotels (Tables 4 and 5). In 2019, before COVID-19, at least 1.9 million

tourists on average visited this tropical city annually (PSA, 2024). In general, the western coasts of Samal Island are busier, more polluted, and some parts are intertwined with port activities and industrial facilities. The eastern coasts of the island are more secluded, cleaner, and quieter. Therefore, it is recommended that those who are after a peaceful holiday should stay in the accommodation facilities found on the eastern coast of the island. There are roughly more than 100 hotels and more than 200 accommodation facilities in operation on Samal Island (Tables 4 and 5). The highest density in the number of accommodation facilities is in the Babak–Penaplata region on the northwestern coast. More than half of the accommodation facilities on Samal Island are situated in this region. Serving at European standards, the "Pearl Farm Beach Resort", "Discovery Samal", and "Club Samal Resort" are among the most luxurious accommodation facilities on the island of Samal.

CONCLUSION

The Garden City of Samal Island attracts foreign tourists with its cheerful colors of the sky, the sun shining all year round, its deserted and clean beaches, the innocence of the villagers, the deep blue and crystal sea, mysterious caves and majestic chalets, friendly and cheerful people, peaceful hidden coves, and affordable holiday opportunities. In the 21st century, tourism has been the fastest growing economic sector of this charming city (Philippine Development Plan, 2023–2028). The touristic facilities and hotels have been mushrooming on the coastal areas of the city and thousands of foreign tourists visit this beautiful tourist place every year. Foreign tourists visiting Samal Island can sunbathe on the magnificent beaches of Alorro Beach Resort or Kaputian Beach Park. They can go diving in the blue waters of Coral Garden Marine Park, explore the interesting plants and animals in Pangubatan Forest Park, swim in the cool waters of Limao Lagoon or Tagbaobo Waterfalls, and watch the sunset from the Sabang Cliff. Visitors to Samal Island should definitely visit the Davao City and Talikud Islands, which are situated nearby. The main positive factors that have designated the rapid development of the tourism sector in the Garden City of Samal Island in the last quarter century are as follows:

- The Garden City of Samal Island is located only 2 km from Davao, the capital of Mindanao and the second largest metropolitan city in the country. It is also close to the island of Mindanao and Davao international airport.
- The island has climate characteristics convenient for beach tourism all year round, as it has high temperatures during all the 12 months.
- In comparison with other parts of the Philippines, natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and tropical cyclones are very scarce in Samal.
- Samal Island is considered one of the safest, most peaceful, and quietest places in the Philippine Republic, with no security or terrorism problems for foreign tourists.
- The Garden City of Samal has numerous natural tourism attractions. For instance, there are about 70 caves, more than 100 beach areas, and more than 10 waterfalls in Samal.
- There are not many problems such as transportation, communication, internet, and infrastructure within the borders of the city.
- The absence of high and rugged terrain throughout the city makes it easier for individual transportation by bicycles or motorcycles.
- The city has numerous hotels and accommodation facilities that are suitable for every budget. For instance, despite its small surface area, there are more than 200 accommodation facilities, guesthouses, tourist villas, and hotels within the borders of Samal Island.

The study shows that small destinations such as Samal can become a "rising star" through a dynamic interaction between natural wealth, socio-cultural characteristics, and economic development within the theory of sustainable tourism. Theoretically, this study contributes to the wider discourse on the development of island tourism by highlighting the fact that the vicinity of urban centers, favorable climate conditions, and social stability could jointly speed up the growth in tourism in peripheral, but ecologically rich destinations. It strengthens the existing theoretical claims on the models of "location advantage" and "destination competitiveness" (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Crouch, 2011), and, at the same time, shows that community-led hospitality and ecological attributes jointly shape the tourist experience and destination identity. From the practical point of view, the findings have significant implications for the local government, space planners, and all the stakeholders in a destination. Fast growing of accommodation capacities and tourism infrastructure highlight the economic potential of Samal as a model for balanced regional tourism development. However, this trend also requires strategic management mechanisms in order to mitigate the environmental degradation and cultural commodification. Making sure that the tourism growth is in accordance with the goals of sustainable tourism – especially through capacity management, environmental protection, and community participation – is of vital importance for preserving natural and cultural assets of the island. Nevertheless, this pathway also emphasizes the need for integrated management mechanisms in order to prevent excessive development, environmental degradation, and cultural commodification. The harmonization of tourism policies with the principles of sustainable development – such as environmental management, inclusive participation of local communities, and capacity management – remains crucial for providing long-term sustainability of the tourism sector of the island (Gössling & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2019).

Despite the comprehensive review of tourism advantages of the Island of Samal, this analysis remains with a limited scope due to the lack of empirical data on tourists' satisfaction, transportation capacity, and the impact on the environment. Moreover, socio-economic implications for the local communities and long-term sustainability results require deeper research through quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The analysis is limited to secondary sources and descriptive assessments, with no primary empirical data collected from tourists, local residents, or other key stakeholders. As a result,

important aspects such as tourists' satisfaction, transportation capacity, environmental impacts, and socio-economic effects on local communities could not be systematically measured or validated. In addition, the study adopts a cross-sectional perspective and does not include longitudinal data that would allow for the assessment of long-term sustainability outcomes of tourism growth. Environmental impacts and community perceptions are addressed conceptually rather than through field-based or quantitative evaluations. Moreover, the findings are context-specific to Samal Island, which limits their broader generalizability to other island destinations. These limitations indicate the need for future research employing mixed-method and longitudinal approaches to better understand the long-term sustainability of tourism development in the island.

Future research should examine the cross section between the tourism growth and sustainability of the Island of Samal by including longitudinal data, studies of visitors' perception, and assessment of the impact on the environment. Comparative studies with other island destinations in Southeast Asia could also enhance the theoretical understanding of tourism resilience of small islands and inform the development of adaptive management frameworks suited for similar contexts. Besides, future related studies should adopt a mixed-method approach which integrates quantitative assessments of the impact on the environment with qualitative analyses of community perception and visitors' experience. Longitudinal studies which examine the sustainability of tourism industry of the Island of Samal would additional shed light on long-term effects of tourism growth.

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