

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ**  
**WITH DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM SECRETARY CHRISTINA GARCIA FRASCO**  
**AND DICT SECRETARY IVAN JOHN UY**  
**May 16, 2023 [12:39 P.M. – 1:02 P.M.]**

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, May 16.

Sa sectoral meeting kanina, tinalakay ang panukalang National Tourism Development Plan. This aims to establish a Philippine Tourism Industry anchored on Filipino culture, heritage and identity, with the goal of transforming the country to be a tourism powerhouse.

To give us more information about this, we are joined by Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and Department of Information and Communications Technology Secretary Ivan Uy. Good morning, Secretary Frasco and Secretary Uy. Hi! Let's start with Secretary Frasco.

**DOT SEC. FRASCO:** Maayong buntag. I am pleased to inform our fellow Filipinos that our President, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., has approved the National Tourism Development Plan for 2023 to 2028.

This NTDP is the result of consultation among the Tourism Coordinating Council, as well as our various tourism stakeholders from our regions all over the Philippines.

The NTDP shall serve as the blueprint and the development framework for the tourism industry for the duration of the Marcos administration.

We're very grateful to our president for articulating very early on in his administration his priority for tourism development, and this has resulted in a convergence among government agencies as far as giving full support to the development of the industry recognizing the losses that have ensued as a result of the pandemic and various calamities.

The NTDP lays down the seven objectives of the Department of Tourism that focus on the essential pillars of development which, in our view, would be able to give the Philippines a fighting chance at becoming a tourism powerhouse. And therefore, these objectives involve not simply the promotion of the Philippines which we will continue domestically and internationally, but also more importantly, addressing the essential issues of tourism development including the development of infrastructure, connectivity, as well as digitalization, the equalization of tourism development and promotion, the enhancement of the overall tourist experience, as well as the strengthening of tourism governance.

As a whole, the NTDP shall provide a guide for our regions as well in the effort of our President to spread countrywide development through tourism. And what our fellow Filipinos can expect, is that mabibigyan po ng pagkakataon iyong ating mga kababayan na magkaroon ng tourism employment sa pamamagitan ng pag-develop natin ng mga tourism circuits and to continue to push for tourism across our regions and provinces.

We're very excited to launch in a few short weeks the Philippine experience which gives our fellow Filipinos an opportunity to experience not just our destinations but also re-introduce them to the

heart and soul of the Filipinos through our festivals, our food and the like. This is just one of the many programs under the Marcos administration that aims to maximize domestic tourism, recognizing its strength to support our economy, as well as to usher in more international tourists.

So we are very thankful to President Marcos for approving the NTDP, and we very much are looking forward to instituting all of the programs and plans under his administration all towards the goal of ensuring that our fellow Filipinos are able to enjoy gainful employment and livelihood as a result of the success of the tourism industry, and to position the Philippines in a more primary role in the ASEAN and the world.

Daghang salamat.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Thank you, Secretary Frasco. And now, we have Secretary Ivan Uy of DICT.

**DICT SEC. UY:** Thank you very much. Well, the DICT's role here is to really support the Department of Tourism in its effort in establishing the Philippines as one of the primary tourist destinations around the world. And one of the challenges really in promoting and establishing that position for the Philippines is issues on digitalization and connectivity.

So Secretary Frasco provided us initially with the list of about 94 tourist destinations that have connectivity challenges. So with that list, in a matter of a few months, we've already put into the program that for the first phase, we will be able to deploy about 46 out of the 94 destinations that will be lightened with free internet connectivity. And under this phase one, it will cover some of the very major sites of tourism which is Baguio, Palawan, Boracay, Cebu, and several other tourism destinations identified as a priority.

So, this is a joint initiative with the Department of Tourism and the Department of Information and Communications Technology in order to ensure that our tourists will have a complete experience in the tourism areas.

As we all very well know, many of the tourists now are also vloggers; they vlog about their experience while they are there experiencing or enjoying the tourism sites. So it's critical that we provide them with the internet connectivity. So while they're there, enjoying those experience, they can actually be also our marketing tool in propagating the message through them, how they're having fun in the Philippines and how they are enjoying the Philippine experience which will be very unique from many other destinations.

Secondly, DICT is also addressing some of the administrative blocks that can occur with respect to pushing our tourism agenda, one of which of is the visa issues. The limited capacity of our foreign consulates in issuing those visas because of physical limitations, whether it's in the space that they can accommodate as well as the people who are processing those visas.

So, together with the Department of Tourism, with the Bureau of Immigration, with the Department of Foreign Affairs, DICT is coming in to help deploy an e-visa system. And we're also cooperating with all of these agencies and looking at private partners in order to provide these platforms in order to deploy the e-visa system. There are many providers already out there that are tried and tested, and they have extensively provided those services to other jurisdictions with respect to e-visa.

So we will be working with those entities, those private sector partners who already have proven capacity in handling that and integrate them with our platform on the e-visa, in the e-travel so that

we have a seamless experience for our tourists who are coming into the country. And this will greatly increase the capacity; our estimate internally is it will increase the capacity by tenfold, multiple of ten. So from, let's say from 600 to 6,000, let's say if these are in the areas where there are challenges with respect to issuance of those e-visas. This is just an initial stage and we will continue to look for ways of improving the digitalization of our infrastructure, as well as connectivity, to support all the different departments of the government. And in this case, the Department of Tourism is one of our foremost agencies that have actually engaged DICT and have very close coordination with DICT in delivering the Philippine experience.

Thank you.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Thank you, Secretary Uy. Now we open the floor to any questions. Cathy Valente of Manila Times.

**CATHERINE VALENTE/MANILA TIMES:** Yes, good afternoon, Secretary Frasco. May 12,000 COVID cases po ang naitala kahapon ng DOH, may factor daw po ba iyong mga revenge travel lalo na ngayong may mga fiestas, festivals? And may plano po ba tayong higitan ulit iyong travel rules because of the increasing number of COVID cases in some provinces?

**DOT SEC. FRASCO:** Tapos na po ang pandemya, sabi po iyan ng World Health Organization. Kaya naman po, while we continue to support the Department of Health's measures as far as ensuring the health and safety of our fellow Filipinos, the direction of the Philippines is forward and that is to ensure that we continue to open up the country to travel and tourism, that is the direction set by our President.

Of course, all the minimum health and safety standards are in place and this is also made sure of as far as compliance with our DOT-accredited establishments.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Okay. Harley Valbuena, DZME.

**HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME:** Hello. Good afternoon po. Secretary Uy, do you think that the SIM registration will be a huge help in the approved National Tourism Development Plan given that this includes digitalization and tourism and especially because we also want to avoid the existing scams in tourism, for example, iyong fake bookings po sa mga hotel and resort and other fraudulent activities?

**DICT SEC. UY:** Well, the SIM card registration definitely will help 'no, although karamihan ng na-identify namin sa mga fake bookings is through the web where there are websites that do that. But definitely with SIM card registration kung iyong scams na iyan are using the SIM cards in order to deceive the public, once they are registered we will now be able to identify the perpetrators and go after the perpetrators.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Katrina Domingo, ABS-CBN.

**KATRINA DOMINGO, ABS-CBN:** Good afternoon, sir. Sir/ma'am, first, how much is the Philippines expected to shell out for the entire Philippine National Tourism Development Plan?

**DOT SEC. FRASCO:** Well, first of all, I'll tell you how much the tourism industry has made for 2022 and that is no less than 1.74 trillion pesos as a composite of domestic visitor receipts as well as foreign visitor receipts and this has also resulted in no less than 5.2 million in employment for our fellow Filipinos.

With regard to the proposition for the National Tourism Development Plan, we have submitted an overall proposed a financial consideration to the president. However, as a result of the discussions earlier which takes into consideration events that will be hosted by the Philippines in the next coming years especially as it relates to MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), we are recalibrating that number and we'll be releasing that once we obtained approval from the president.

**KATRINA DOMINGO, ABS-CBN:** Okay, so no number yet. But can we get more specific as to the timeline of the program? How soon can the DICT rollout the free internet connectivity for all 94 destinations given that the plan spans five years?

**DICT SEC. UY:** For the first 46 it will be already out by next quarter. So, if we're able to deploy that in – we signed the MOA I think three months ago – yes, three months ago, so in six months we will be able to deploy the first half; so, second half most likely by end of the year we'll have the full 100% coverage.

**KATRINA DOMINGO, ABS-CBN:** Thank you po.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Ivan Mayrina, GMA 7.

**IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7:** Secretary Frasco, can we get more details on the National Tourism Development Plan? Ano ho iyong bagong maaasahan sa paraan ng pagpu-promote natin ng Pilipinas bilang isang tourist destination and eventually para gawin siyang tourism powerhouse as you said?

**DOT SEC. FRASCO:** Unang-una po iyong focus natin hindi lamang sa promotions but more importantly product development, because according to global indices that measure tourism successes and challenges among our ASEAN neighbors, the Philippines actually ranks number six vis-à-vis our neighbors in the ASEAN especially in terms of infrastructure, business environment, safety as well as other indices including connectivity. And that is the reason why we have begun to ask the difficult questions and provide solutions to unlocking these roadblocks that are preventing the Philippines from occupying a more primary role in the ASEAN, kasali na po diyan iyong pinaka-basic infrastructure, building more quality roads towards our tourism destinations not just in our key destinations but also our lesser known and emerging destinations taking a look at the capacity of these destinations to handle drainage, sewerage, water treatment and the like since the direction of the Marcos administration is towards sustainable tourism development.

Pangalawa, one of the challenges that the Philippines faces vis-à-vis its neighbors in the ASEAN is really connectivity and that is why, since the beginning of the Marcos administration, we have engaged in intense negotiations with both international and domestic airlines in partnership with the DOTr for the purpose of resuming flights that were halted during the pandemic as well as adding more flights not just into Manila but importantly to our destinations across the country. This is the reason why under the Marcos administration we are very pleased to report that there are now flights for example direct from Clark to Caticlan, Clark to Busuanga in Palawan, there are now connections from Cebu to Baguio and even Cebu to Bangkok. There's even now also a new flight from Manila to Perth in Australia.

Under the National Tourism Development Plan, the focus is to improve the situation of the Philippines as far as the pillars where we rank very low among our neighbors. Digitalization holds

the key as well to tourism development in the country and that is why we appreciate the effort of the DICT in assisting us in the directive of the president to institute the visa reforms to our country.

For example, the top two source markets that we see could really help boost our portfolio in the Philippines are China and India. However, the biggest challenge that they face is that we require visas for them to come into the country. And the present capacity of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the consular offices is very limited. And it's really by way of the institution of the electronic visa as well as the resumption of the group travel, visa on arrival as well as more liberal landing permits from the Bureau of Immigrations as far as cruise tourism is concerned, that we foresee we would be able to fully open up opportunities for the Philippines for our source markets in China and in India.

Notably in 2019, China was able to deliver 1.7 million tourists into the Philippines. However, as of now, China only ranks at number six at less than a hundred thousand, notwithstanding the fact that we have already received over 2 million tourists in the first five months of this year. So, it is by unlocking all of these roadblocks that we would be able to fully develop the tourism industry guided by the National Tourism Development Plan.

Finally, per the directive of our president to give tourist opportunities equally to our regions, cities and municipalities, under the National Tourism Development Plan, we're engaging in a heritage and culture mapping of our regions, our provinces, our cities and municipalities. And this would give opportunities to our local tourism communities to develop their local tourism products and to obtain guidance from the DOT and its attached agencies as far as the marketability of this product to our tourism stakeholders and customers. So, it's really a comprehensive look at the tourism industry and a comprehensive roadmap towards its development.

**IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7:** Follow-up. Is there also going to be a change in our marketing strategy, marketing our product, the Philippines for example, magkakaroon ba tayo ng bagong slogan or are we going to retain "It's more fun in the Philippines" or are we going to offer our best to the world?

**DOT SECRETARY FRASCO:** The main change, first of all, is that the focus of the Department of Tourism will be to highlight the heart and soul of the Filipino that is evident in our culture – our festivals, our food, the local products of our small and medium enterprises, our living cultural heritage, everything that makes us diverse and unique and a proud Filipino people that give us pride of place. We are putting forth the best of the best of the Philippines to the world. Because it cannot be denied that we do give the world our best and while the Department of Tourism has not yet come out with an enhanced tourism slogan as that, as a country brand, I assure you, you'll love it.

**Q:** Walang preview, ma'am?

**IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7:** Baka puwede na nating i-break.

**DOT SECRETARY FRASCO:** There will be in the next few weeks. But we will make sure to engage in consultation with our tourism stakeholders first, as their opinions matter very much to us.

**IVAN MAYRINA / GMA7:** Salamat po. Thank you.

**OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Okay, Allan Francisco PTV4

**ALLAN FRANCISCO/ PTV 4:** Hi ma'am, hi sir. To Secretary Uy, sir, with the extension of this SIM card registration, iyong ibang mga kababayan natin ay nakatatanggap pa rin ng text scams at sabi ninyo po noon expected ito. Can you please elaborate, sir?

**DICT SECRETARY UY:** Yes. During our last presscon 'no, I already warn that once in-extend natin ito, the scammers will use that, take that opportunity to continue and to hasten their scamming method using their respective cellphones dahil, kumbaga, last chance na nila to be able to do that. So, dumami na naman iyong mga text scams, but most of them now have redirected their or re-programmed their approach, panloloko nila asking people like, *"Nag-register na ba kayo ng SIM card ninyo? Kung hindi pa, click this link"* and you go to their site, which is a fake site, and that's where they capture your personal data, which you key in, into those sites. They also have exploited that.

And with respect to e-wallets na purportedly, you will receive a text coming from the e-wallet provider na, *"O kung nag-register na kayo ng SIM card kailangan mag-re-register kayo sa e-wallet ninyo in order to be able to activate it,"* that is not true 'no. Once you register your SIM card, everything is still the same and you are still registered to your e-wallet. So, do not fall for those scams, we're hoping that our kababayans would register quickly so that we can cut this method 'no, this avenue of defrauding our kababayans by using the SIM card, that the last deadline is July 26 and we're hoping that we'd be able to really end all of these scamming via text.

As of May 10, we have already more than ninety-five million SIM cards registered. So, that is a very good number and we expect that in the next few months we will be able to hit our target already. Thank you.

**OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you Secretary Frasco and Secretary Uy for the update for the National Tourism Development Plan and the Development of the e-visa for potential tourists.

Thank you, Malacañang Press Corps. Have a good afternoon everyone.

##

--

*News and Information Bureau - Transcription Section*