

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE  
PRESIDENTIAL NEWS DESK**

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MACROS JR.  
AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE TOURIST REST AREA**  
[Delivered in Saud, Pagudpud in Ilocos Norte | 17 May 2024]

Thank you very much to our Tourism Secretary, Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco.

*[Please, please upo kayo.]*

The Vice Governor, Vice Governor Cecilia Araneta-Marcos; Mayor Raffy Benemerito; ang ating TIEZA Authority COO Mark Lapid; apo nga mayores ken konsehales ken board member, amin-amin, ayayatek nga kailiyak, naimbag nga aldaw yu amin. (mayors at councilors at board members, lahat-lahat, mga minamahal kong kababayan, magandang araw sa inyong lahat) *[applause]*

I am very happy to be here, of course, because we are here inaugurating the first of many planned Tourist Rest Areas and I'm particularly grateful to our Secretary that the first one that she chose to build was here in Pagudpud, here in Ilocos Norte.

And we just look forward to a more, as she was saying, the scope of this program. Huwag niyong isipin --- do not think that this is the only that's going to be built. This will be built... These tourist areas, rest areas will be built in very, very many parts of the country.

This is a very good example of the kind of approach that we have taken in trying to further the progress of the different sectors in government and it is a concept that we have to refer to as a whole-of-government approach.

And that extends to also in other areas, the whole-of-nation approach because we include the private sector, we include all the stakeholders. But it is a perfect example of that because we cannot see this --- we do not see the success of this tourist area, the first one, without the cooperation of the different sectors. Iyan, 'yung DOT, ang TIEZA and, of course, the local government.

So, we have to acknowledge the part that everybody has played to complete and to adorn this much anticipated Tourist Rest Area.

I know that Governor Matt is very disappointed not to have been able to join us here as he has been looking forward to it pero natapat lang to his schedule. Mayroon siyang other important meetings that he had to attend out of town.

But once again, this is part again of a big, big, big program and one of the reasons... If you remember when I was governor here, I was --- it's concentrated on two things. I concentrated number one on agriculture because we took a survey, 73 percent ng Ilocano ang kanilang [pinagkakakitaan] ay agrikultura.

And then I said: Okay agriculture. That is okay. That's basic. We have to attend to that. Then I said, but I want people to make money. I want people na have a good living. And I said, the easiest return is tourism.

And that is why for a very long time Ilocos Norte was the entry point for many, many tourists that were coming from abroad. And we were able to promote that. And eventually, this helped not only the province, but this helped the entire country.

So, now, this facility, such as this will provide basic tourist services, amenities such as an information center to help our tourists navigate the beautiful sites that we offer in Ilocos Norte. We provide clean restrooms, charging stations, a lounge for our travelers to rest and recharge while they are going around the province and going to other destinations that they will go to.

It hosts a *pasalubong* center that features locally-made products, so the products that you will find here in Pagudpud are not the same products that you will find in Palawan, not the same products as you will find in Samar. It will be sourced from the locals.

Para naman, for example, when it comes to the food, our delicacies, they can feel the difference, the cultural differences with all of these different offerings that we can find around the country.

So, this TRA is an important initiative for us as we want to transform the Philippines into the tourism powerhouse in Asia. We are in very stiff competition. Thailand has done an extremely good job in promoting tourism. Korea has done a very, very good job doing that. Indonesia, the same thing. Vietnam, the same thing.

And it is not --- when we say tourism we just don't go... Nagsimula ito when we started --- the first time they started we were... Our program was the Balikbayan program.

And ang ambisyon natin doon one million tourists. That was the ambition, one million tourists can come back. And then kasama na doon 'yung mga overseas Filipinos. Kaya nagkaroon ng balikbayan box dahil hindi tinataxan (tax), hindi tina-tariff 'yun. So, that was the come-on.

Now, we are targeting 10 times that. And we have already --- we have started to approach that but there are many aspects to tourism. It's not just the beautiful beach. It's not just the beautiful rest house or the nice hotels and the resorts that they stay in.

But it is also the ease of which they travel around, the access that we have. So, kasama diyan inaayos natin ang mga regional airports, inaayos natin ang mga pwerto.

So, that dahil alam naman natin Manila Airport is already very congested. So, instead of having to go to Manila, to come to Pagudpud, they will have to go all the way to Manila, and then Manila all the way up to Ilocos Norte for example, as an example.

So, like in Cebu, that you already have this --- you already have that facility. People can travel from abroad directly to Cebu. People can travel --- we will make it so that people will travel from abroad directly to Laoag, directly to Bohol, directly to CDO, directly to Tacloban. All of these other places that we want to promote as tourist destinations.

So, in Ilocos Norte alone, we received more than 3.5 million same-day visitors in 2023 and around 515,000 domestic and foreign tourists stayed for longer in hotels and in resorts.

It shows that we have the attractions; we have the products; and we have the people to make it happen.

I am truly proud to call this land my home as it continues to draw critical acclaim here and abroad.

Our very own Saud Beach was listed as one of the 25 Most Beautiful Beaches in the World by Travel & Leisure, it's a very prestigious award from a magazine that's based in New York, in the United States.

It is also fitting to note that the Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte has been able to received, not one, but two awards—the Best Video for Tourism Promotions and the Best Tourism-Oriented LGU—at the Association of Tourism Officers of the Philippines Pearl Awards 2023.

O si Jeff, nagmamalaki na si Jeff Ortega dito sa kanyang ginawang trabaho.

But these are not only a testament to the beauty, the culture, the attractions, and of course, the hospitality of Ilocos Norte, but also the commitment of our LGUs to develop and to promote tourism in the region.

So, I enjoin everyone to ensure the success of our tourism initiatives [and] make the experiences of our travelers safe, convenient, and memorable.

This is a great opportunity to showcase our world-class destinations like Paoay Church, the [Paoay] Sand Dunes, Malacañang of the North, amongst others. Ito na nga, Saud Beach. All of these places that we know. Hindi pa natin napag-usapan 'yung mga eastern towns. Hindi pa natin napag-usapan 'yung mga nasa bundok.

I was explaining on the way here to the Secretary that we have a town, Adams, which is higher than Baguio and it is pristine and there is availability for river rafting, kayaking around there during the season.

Maganda talaga masyado ang Pilipinas. Kahit saan ka tumingin, maganda. Siguro 'yung mga city lang medyo hindi kasing-ganda.

But once you leave the city, you see the real Philippines. There is no place in the Philippines that's not beautiful. So, 'yan ang puhunan natin. Let's take full advantage of that.

We are now planning to --- here in Region 1, planning to reassess, to promote the various dive destinations naman [in] the provinces such as Pagudpud, Badoc, and Currimaos.

And we could not have a better proponent for that than our Secretary who comes from Cebu, one of the best, if not the best dive destinations in the world. And she herself is a diver so she knows exactly how it's supposed to work.

So, iyan ang ipo-promote pa natin.

So, we encourage the continued engagement of LGUs, [DOT], DENR have also collaborated to safeguard, to conserve our protected areas, particularly the Kalbario–Patapat Natural Park.

To preserve [and] honor the cultural legacy of Ilocos Norte, we are currently developing the Ilocos and Pangasinan Regional Historical Trail.

As we anticipate the influx of tourists in the area, we are building more facilities to accommodate more visitors here in our province.

We started the construction of the Ilocos Norte Transportation Hub in February of this year. Once completed in 2025, we anticipate that the intermodal terminal will ease [city] traffic control [and] connect transportation modes seamlessly.

Not only that, we are now pursuing the development of the Laoag International Airport. The expansion of its runway and rehabilitation of the Passenger Terminal Building will allow the airport to accommodate bigger aircraft and bring in more tourists to this region.

We have released funds for the construction of new bridges and the Pancian Viaduct along Manila North Road. We expect that this project will provide protection to our people traversing that road. *[applause]*

All these projects are geared to expand, not only tourism, but the broader development of the countryside, that follows a strong tourism industry.

I am confident that these exciting developments will become a springboard for [the] further success [of] tourism in Ilocos Norte and the Philippines and from this moment onwards.

Once again, I extend my congratulations and gratitude to DOT, to TIEZA, of course, the local governments of Ilocos Norte, the provincial government, the municipal government of Pagudpud. All of the other line agencies who are involved to bring us to be able to open this Tourist Rest Area today.

And without this cooperation and without the synergy that we are achieving by working together and working together with a single plan in mind, with a single destination in mind for all that we are doing, I believe that we will succeed.

We hope for that continued support for all the tourism programs across the archipelago, and we will show that not only do Filipinos love the Philippines but we can tell our foreign friends, guaranteed, you will love the Philippines. *[applause]*

Let us work together to build a *Bagong Pilipinas* where we give our people the life that they deserve.

Dios t agngina kadakayo amin.

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