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An Emerging New Tourism Destination: Geographic Resources and Tourism Potential of the Province of Masbate (Republic of the Philippines)

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Abstract. The Masbate Province surrounded by the Sibuyan Sea, Visayan Sea and Samar Sea, is located in the central part of the Philippine archipelago and includes 3 large islands (Masbate, Ticao and Burias) and many smaller islands. All the islands within the borders of Masbate Province are just one part of the Luzon Islands Group in terms of physical geography; also, in terms of political geography and administrative geography, they are located within the “Bicol Administrative Region”. In terms of administrative structure, there are 20 districts, 1 city (Masbate City) and 550 Barangays in the Masbate Province. Even though the Masbate Province has rich natural resources and mines, great agricultural and fishing potential, it has so far failed to achieve the desired success in international tourism. In this study, Masbate, Ticao and Burias, which are the largest islands of the Masbate province, are investigated and analyzed separately and both their geographical features, tourism potential and tourism attractiveness of these islands are accounted for. In this article, the main accommodation facilities, major nature reserves, islands and beaches within the borders of Masbate Province, as well as natural and cultural tourism attractions are examined; additionally, the tourism advantages and disadvantages of Masbate Province are addressed. The main purpose of the study is to introduce the tourism resources, cultural riches and natural beauties of the Masbate Province, which actually is not very popular among the international tourists, to the readers, both to popularize the name of the Masbate Province to the global tourism markets and offer new holiday options for the inquisitive tourists.

Keywords: Masbate Province, Tourism Attractions, Republic of Philippines, International Tourism, Philippine Archipelago.

Introduction

Located in the central part of the Philippine archipelago, Masbate Province includes 3 large islands and many small islets. “Masbate”, “Ticao” and “Burias” are the largest islands of Masbate province in terms of both area and population (Figure 1). Deagan, Hamurawon, Rakit Dakit, Magcaraguit, Matabao, Bugtong, Tatus, Bosaan, Napayawan, Nabuktot, Majaba, Carogo, Jintotolo, Tagauayan, GUILITUGAN, Buabuan, Ambulong, Busing, Bagababoy, Yeso, Puro Other important islands are Cagpating, Tatus, Chico and Pobre (Table 1). But among the international tourists, the most popular touristic islands in the province are undoubtedly Sombrero, Tinalisayan, San Miguel, Dapa, Magcaraguit, Balangingi, Tagauayan, Butod and Animasola. The Masbate Province, situated within the borders of the Bicol Region, includes 20 counties, 550 barangs, more than 30 towns and 1 urban settlement (<http://masbate.gov.ph/>).

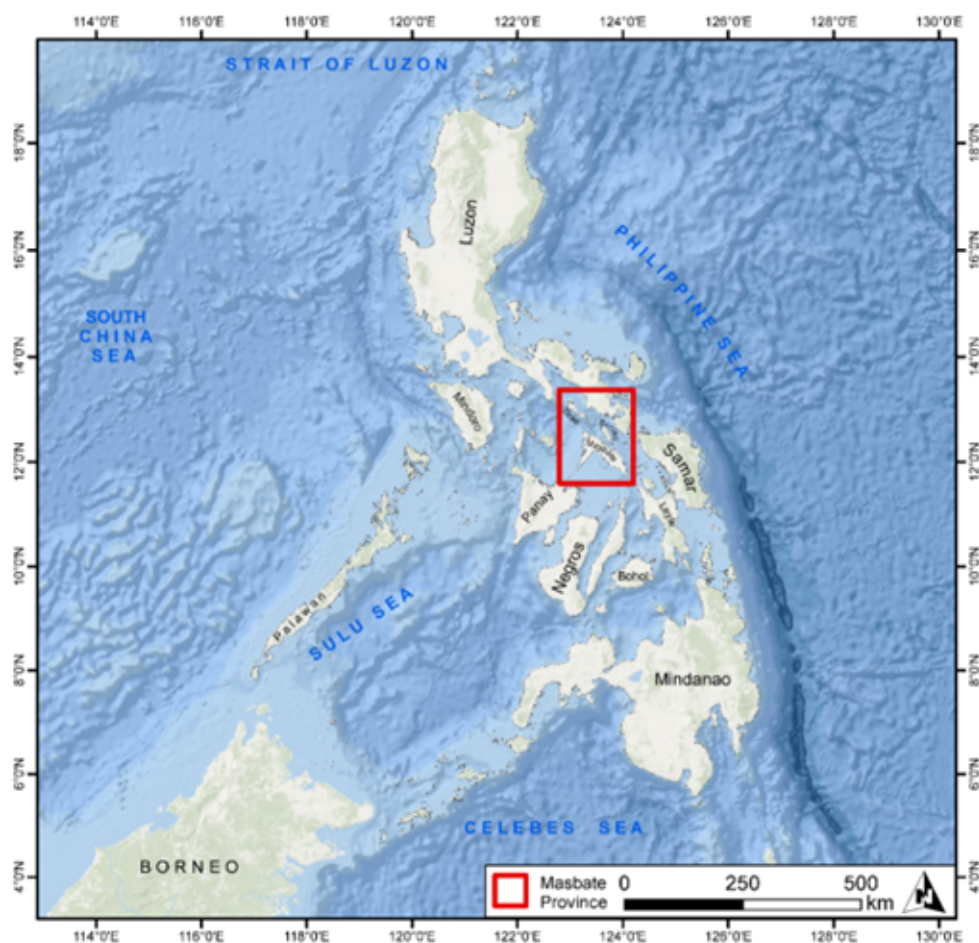


Figure 1. Location Map of the Province of Masbate

(Source: Authors, 2022)

The Masbate Province, situated in the central part of the Philippine archipelago, is composed of 3 large islands and many small islets. “Masbate”, “Ticao” and “Burias” are the largest islands

of the Masbate province in terms of both area and population. Deagan, Hamurawon, Rakit Dakit, Magcaraguit, Matabao, Bugtong, Tatus, Bosaan, Napa yawan, Nabuktot, Majaba, Carogo, Jintotolo, Tagauayan, Guilitugan, Buabuahan, Ambulong, Busing, Bagababoy, Yeso, Puro, Chicopating, Tatus Ca and Pobre situated within the province are the other important islands (Table 1). However, the most popular touristic islands in the province among the international tourists are undoubtedly Sombrero, Tinalisayan, San Miguel, Dapa, Magcaraguit, Balangingi, Tagauayan, Butod and Animasola. The Masbate Province situated within the borders of the Bicol Region, includes 20 districts, 550 barangs, more than 30 towns and 1 urban settlement (<http://masbate.gov.ph/>). The Masbate Province, which has three different coasts, is separated from the island of Luzon by the Ragay Bay in the north and the Burias and Ticao straits in the east. The Masbate Strait separates the islands of Ticao and Masbate. Masbate Province is surrounded by the Visayan Sea to the south, the Samar Sea to the east, and the Sibuyan Sea to the west (Chirikov et. al., 2008). The Masbate Province, adjacent to the provinces of Colonel, Sorsogon, and Camarines, Sur does not have high mountains, great lakes, long streams, and metropolitan cities. Low hills and plateaus, valleys and plains are the most common landforms within the province.

Table 1. Primary Characteristics of the Masbate Province

Group Islands Located: The Luzon Group Islands		The Region: Bicol Region
Surface Area: 4138 km ² Total Population: 908 920 (Year 2020)		Mathematic Location: 12°43' – 13°25' north latitude 123°09' – 124°5' east latitude
The Highest Point: Conical (697 m) The Longest River: Lanang The Largest City: Masbate City The Largest Bay: Asid The Largest Lake: Calero The Largest Province: Milagros		Major Nature Reserves: “Halea Nature Park” “Bongsanglay Natural Park” “Buntod Sandbar and Reef Marine Sanctuary” “Chico Island Wildlife Sanctuary” “Manta Bowl Marine Protected Area”
Number of Barangays Embodied: 550 Number of Municipalities: 20		Arithmetic Population Density: 220 people/km ²
Big Islands: Masbate, Ticao, Burias, Deagan, Hamurawon, Rakit Dakit, Magcaraguit, Matabao, Bugtong, Tatus, Bosaan, Puro, Napayawan, Nabuktot, Majaba, Jintotolo, Yeso, Tagauayan, Busing, Guilitugan, Guinauayan, Paltaban, Balangingi, Buabuahan, Carogo, Chico Island, Ambulong, San Miquel, Bagababoy and Cagpating.		The Largest Settlements: Masbate City, San Pascual, Mobo, Claveria, Monreal, San Jacinto, Batuan, San Fernando, Aroroy, Placer, Esperanza, Baleno, Mandaon, Milargos, Uson, Dimasalang, San Rafael, Palanas, Cataingan, Pio V. Corpuz, Cawayan, Guiom, Palanas, Masbaranon, Cabayungan, Tugbo, Uson, Tigbao, Buenavista, Mintac, Magsalangi and Balud.

(Source: Authors, 2022)

The Masbate Province has rich natural resources and mines. Crop production, fishing, tourism, mining, cattle breeding and poultry farming are the most developed economic

branches of the province. Copra production and gold mining generate enormous income to the province's economy. Food and oil industry, clothing and textile industry, ceramic industry and fish processing, metalworking and handicrafts, forest products and furniture production are also the economic activities in the province. Rice, maize, bananas, tobacco, sugarcane, copra, root crops and coconuts are widely grown on the province's fertile farmland. Masbate is described as a province that sits on a "pot of gold" by the geologists. The province has rich minerals and a wide variety of mineral deposits. The Masbate Province has rich reserves of manganese, copper, silver, iron, chromium, gold, coal, limestone and carbon (<https://www.philatlas.com> ; <http://psa.gov.ph/>).

There has been a rapid population growth in the province's population in the last century. The population of Masbate Province, which was 67 513 in 1918, increased to 211 1132 in 1948, 492 908 in 1970, 599 355 in 1990, 707 668 in 2000 and 908 920 in 2020. (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). Today, the population of Masbate Province alone constitutes 14.94% of the population of the Bicol Region, 1.46% of the population of the Luzon Islands Group, and 0.83% of the population of the Republic of the Philippines. Even though English and Tagalog are the most common languages in the Masbate Province, as in every Philippine province, the local people prefer the local languages for communication among themselves. The Masbateño, Hiligaynon, Cebuano, and Waray languages are the most widespread spoken-vernaculars within the province. 91% of Masbate Province's population is Catholic Christian. The total share of Protestant Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims within the provincial borders is less than 5% of the province's population (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>).

Table 2. Major Administrative and Geographical Features of the Masbate Province (<https://www.philatlas.com/>)

Name of the Province	Population of the District (Year 2020)	Surface Area (km ²)	Population Density (person/km ²)	Number of Barangays Embodied
Aroroy	88 351	440,30	201	41
Baleno	28 855	204,38	141	24
Balud	40 155	231,00	174	32
Batuan	14 610	56,28	260	14
Cataingan	50 623	191,64	264	36
Cawayan	69 265	260,19	266	37
Claveria	42 142	182,98	230	22
Dimasalang	24 909	148,07	168	20
Esperanza	17 534	67,49	260	20
Mandaon	44 122	319,15	138	26
Masbate City	104 522	188,00	556	30
Milagros	57 538	565,30	102	27
Mobo	40 823	143,47	285	29

Monreal	25 164	128,67	196	11
Palanas	27 322	119,53	229	24
Pio V. Corpuz	23 744	89,33	266	18
Placer	56 340	193,03	292	35
San Fernando	21 600	77,50	279	26
San Jacinto	29 686	122,40	243	21
San Pascual	44 449	246,65	180	22
Uson	57 166	163,20	350	35
TOTAL	908 920	4 138	220	550

There are 20 districts, 1 city (the Masbate City) and 550 Barangays in the Masbate Province (Table 2). Milagros (565.30 km²) and Aroroy (440.30 km²) are the districts with the largest surface area of the province. Batuan (56.28 km²), Esperanza (67.49 km²), San Fernando (77.50 km²) and Pio V. Corpuz (89.33 km²) are the districts with the smallest area in the province. As a result, only 2 districts have an area of greater than 400 km² within the province borders and only 4 districts have an area of less than 100 km² (Table 2).

Materials and methods

This research was conducted using the case study method. Data and information obtained from document analysis and semi-structured interviews, as well as field observations, focus group discussion, participant observation, and expert interviews were used. Case studies are defined by many different names in different countries. A case study is one of the types of systematic design that involves steps such as gathering information, organizing, interpreting, and researching the information gathered, and achieving results, just like detailed planning in architecture. Case studies are a way to see what is actually happening in the environment, systematically collect data, analyze it, and draw conclusions. The result is a clear understanding of why things happened the way they did and what to focus on in detail for future investigations. In this study, “embedded single case study design”, in which there are more than one sub-unit of analysis, was used. In the planned research, both illustrative case studies, exploratory case studies and observational case studies were applied together.

This scientific study, which is part of the research program titled “The Republic of the Philippines from the Perspective of Political, Economic and Human Geography and Turkey-Philippines Interaction”, which was accepted by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey in 2020 within the scope of “2219-Overseas Postdoctoral Research Scholarship Program” and conducted by Emin Atasoy is one of its scientific outputs of this program. In the present study, the demographic, geographical, economic and ecological characteristics of the Masbate Province was examined, and both the tourism advantages and disadvantages as well as the tourism resources of the island were attempted to be identified. The author (Emin Atasoy) conducted city surveys and geographical observations on the Masbate Province between 15 January 2023 – 26 January 2023; as a result, he personally examined majority of the tourism

centers on the island. The methodological basis of the study is the methods of a systematic scientific approach, comparative geographical, cartographic and expert assessment. One of the primary aims of this study is to announce the tourism power of this little-known province to the world and to introduce the province's tourism attractions to the inquisitive travelers and readers.

The principle aims of this study are:

● Masbate Province is a geographical location that is not well known to the tourism experts and is not very popular with the international tourists. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to reveal the tourism richness of the province with this scientific study and announce both tourism centers and natural beauties to the whole world.

● To introduce the readers to the geographical features, natural resources and regional differences of the Masbate Province.

● To introduce the readers to the tourism resources, natural beauties and tourism potential of the Masbate Province.

● To discuss the tourism privileges, tourism advantages and tourism disadvantages of the Masbate Province.

● To identify and examine the main natural and cultural tourism attractions of the Masbate Province.

● To create a tourist reference guide for the international tourists visiting the Masbate Province.

● To paint a multidimensional tourism portrait of the Masbate Province and make a scientific presentation of the island from the perspective of tourism geography.



Figure 2. Administrative Map of the Masbate Province

Result and discussion

The following separately examines the largest islands of Masbate province, “Masbate”, “Ticao” and “Burias” and separately explicates both geographical and touristic features of these islands. These three islands have been examined from the perspective of tourism geography under 3 main headings:

- A) General Geographical Characteristics of the Island,
- B) Tourism Potential of the Island,
- C) Major Tourism Attractions of the Island.

General Geographical Characteristics of the Masbate Island

Within the borders of the Republic of the Philippines, there is a district, an airport, an island, a city, a port, and a province by the same name ‘Masbate’. Undoubtedly, the area of Masbate province is much larger than the island of Masbate. It is because, apart from “Masbate”, “Ticao” and “Burias”, there are around 20 other islands within the borders of the province. Located in the central part of the Philippines, the island of Masbate is part of the Luzon Islands Group and is the country's 11th largest island in terms of surface area. The surface area of the Masbate island is 3269 км² and there are 14 districts and 1 city settlement within the borders of the island. Moreover, more than 740,000 people live on the island (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). There is not a single metropolitan city on the island of Masbate, which has an area of approximately 10 times larger than the island of Siquijor, and there is no other city settlement other than the Masbate City. The Masbate Island, which has a central location within the borders of the Philippine Republic, is surrounded by many large islands and has sea transportation connections with many ports due to the heavy passenger/tourist traffic. Thus, it is explicit that the Masbate province maintains sea transport links and regular ferry services for passengers with the islands of Luzon, Cebu, Leyte, Mindanao, Sibuyan and Samar. The most important and busiest port in the Masbate province undoubtedly is the sea port in Masbate City (Alonzo, et al., 2007).

In other words, there are regular ferry services from the sea port in the Masbate City to 8 ports of Luzon island, from 2 ports of Leyte island, from 1 port of Samar island, from 2 ports of Mindanao island, from 1 port of Ticao island, from 2 ports of Cebu island, from 1 port of Bugtong island and from 1 port of Sibuyan island throughout the year (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). It is possible to argue that the transportation links between the islands within the provincial borders are not well developed and are insufficient. Within the province, regular ferries run only between the island of Masbate and the islands of Ticao and Bugtong and they are very inadequate as well. As a whole, the fact that the Masbate Island has maritime transport links with around 10 islands and around 20 ports is undoubtedly a great advantage for the development of tourism activities. Basically, it is explicit that the maritime transport links between the Masbate Province and other provinces are substantial and adequate, but the maritime transport links within the province are weak and inadequate (Alonzo, et al., 2007).

Consequently, since the Masbate Province, which has only one airport, does not have a rail transportation option, the road and sea transportation are the only options for the domestic and international tourists to arrive in Masbate. It should be emphasized that the only transportation option, which is of vital importance both between the islands and the provinces, is the sea transportation connections. The most important and busiest ports found within the borders of the Masbate Province and still operating today are: Pio V. Corpuz, Masbate City, Cawayan, Cataingan and Aroroy ports on the Masbate island; the ports of Claveria and San Pascual on the island of Burias; Lagundi port on Ticao island and Bugtong port on the Bugtong island (Alonzo, et al., 2007).

There are many gulfs, peninsulas, cliffs and atolls on the island of Masbate, which has indented and wavy coasts. Laoc, Nin, Alas, Antabaan and Malibon on the west coast; Mobo, Uson, San Agustin, Masbate, Naro and Cataingan located on the east coast are the largest bays of Masbate island (Chirikov et. al., 2008). There are many streams and rivers on the island of Masbate, but none of them are adequate for river transportation and their length does not exceed 80 kilometers. Most of the rivers on the island are the deep estuaries (Candelaria and Revale, 2010).

In the southern parts of the island, there are streams of the Daraga, Nainday, Guiom, Malburg and Nauco streams, whereas in the northern parts of the island, Lanang, San Isidro, Mataba, Baleno, Malbug, Bogtona, Agman, Casalog, Bangad, Agman, Goangalan, Narangasan, Calumangug, Jangan, Palani, Dayo, Napayawan, Taisan, Pinamangcaan and Manulib. The streams on the island are of vital importance for the people of Masbate in terms of both drinking water supply and agricultural irrigation. Both the Masbate Province and Masbate Island have very few lakes. "Matayum Lagoon", "Calero" and "Mintac Blue Lagoon" are the largest lakes of the Masbate island (Velza et. al., 2022). Calero Lake, situated just east of the town of Uson, is a touristic lake visited by holidaymakers and families having picnics, especially at the weekends.

The Masbate island is bordered by the Sibuyan Sea to the west, the Visayan Sea to the south, and the Samar Sea to the east. Therefore, it is explicit that the island has 3 different coasts. The Gulf of Acid, located in the south of the island, has helped the island to have an inverted "V" shape. The maximum height of the island, devoid of high mountains, does not exceed 700 meters. While the low plateaus, coastal plains, river valleys, hilly lands and plains cover large areas throughout the island, it is clear that the mountainous and rugged lands cover very little area. The highest mountains of the island are: Conical (697 m.), Bagulipat (604 m.), Uac (592 m.), Nabongsuran (484 m.), Banco (433 m.), Manapao (373 m.) and Mabilantack (176 m.) (Chirikov et. al., 2008).



Figure 3. Tourism Map of the Masbate Province (Source: Authors, 2022)

While most of the villages and towns on the island of Burias and Ticao are located on the coast, the Masbate island has the opposite situation because more than 70% of the rural settlements are located inland, away from the sea coast. In terms of tourism and maritime transport activities, Aroroy, Cataingan, Pio V. Corpuz, Placer, Esperanza, Cawayan, Mandaon, Uson, Milargos, Pulanduta, Mobo, Balud and Baleno are the most important and busiest town settlements on the island of Masbate (Chirikov et. al., 2008). The Masbate City, the largest settlement and only city on the island of Masbate, is also the capital of the Masbate province. The Masbate City is the most important and busiest transportation, commerce, culture, education and tourism center of both the island and the entire province. The “Masbate Airport” situated within the boundaries of the Masbate City, is the province's most strategic transportation hub in terms of transportation links between the Philippine islands and international tourism.

Tourism Potential of the Masbate Island

The Masbate island is not one of the most important tourism centers of the Philippines, nor is it one of the most visited or most wondered islands of the country. In fact, even though this

island has a very high tourism potential, it is possible to argue that it has only recently been introduced and promoted in the international tourism markets. The Masbate Island is one of the Philippine islands that has suffered the most vegetation destruction, lost the most natural forests and is most adversely affected by the mining activities. Therefore, erosion, deforestation and mining problems emerge as the environmental problems throughout the island (Candelaria and Revale, 2010). The adverse ecological conditions also negatively impact the tourism activities throughout the island.

Therefore, when compared to the islands such as Negros, Palawan, Bohol and Cebu, the number of beaches, restaurants, hostels and hotels as well as other touristic facilities is much less on the Masbate island. Nevertheless, it should be noted here that Masbate is both the island with the largest surface area, the island visited by the largest number of tourists and the island with the most touristic centers within the borders of the Masbate province. Beaches, caves, historical churches, agricultural farms, waterfalls, nature protection areas, cute little islands, lighthouses, lagoon lakes, long beaches and hidden coves are the most important tourism attractions of the Masbate Island.

Even though there are many beach areas within the borders of the Masbate island, the most popular ones among local and international tourists are: "Pulanduta Backyard Beach", "Karigo Beach Resort", "ACE Palani Garden Beach Resort", "Barangay Palani Beach", "Bernabela Beach Resort", "Puert Verde Beach", "Nailaban Beach Front", "Apar Beach", "Tinigban Beach", "Tinago Park", "Lucky Beach Resort", "Corong Beach Resort", "Pirate Beach", "Punta Beach", "Naome's Beach Resort", "Carandang Beach Resort", "Shining Star Beach Resort", "Hayahay Beach Resort", "Curvada D' Jamon", "Bamboo Groove", "Licuson Beach", "Bituon Beach Resort", "Dora Beach Resort", "Porta Vega Beach", "Bontod Sanbar", "Poctol Beach", "Rosas Beach", "Khokak Beach Resort", "Matayum Lagoon", "Playa de Gregorio Beach", "Dako'ng Baybay Beach", "Talisay Beach Resort", "D'Siblings Beach Resort" and "Cabatibgan Beach Resort". (Table 3).

There are more than 10 historical churches from the Spanish colonial period within the borders of the Masbate island. The "Our Lady of Remedies Parish" situated in the town of Placer, the "St. Roche Parish Church" in the town of Pio V. Corpus, the "Theotokos Orthodox Church" and "Holy Spirit Chapel" located in the town of Cataingan, the "San Antonio de Padua Cathedral" and "Diocese of Masbate Church" located in Masbate City are the most popular and most visited religious centers by the tourists on the Masbate island (Table 3). All in all, Masbate is the most developed island of the province in terms of both tourism resources and tourism potential. In Table 3 presents the tourism attractions that are situated within the borders of the island and that the domestic and international tourists are most interested in visiting.

Table 3. Top 25 Natural and Cultural Tourism Attractions of the Masbate Island

Top 25 Natural Tourism Attractions of the Masbate Island	Top 25 Cultural Tourism Attractions of the Masbate Island
Mintac Blue Lagoon (Cataingan)	Mangrove Forest Park (Masbate City)
Bat-ongan Cave (Mandaon)	San Antonio of Padua Cathedral (Masbate City)
Porta Vega Beach (Dimasalang)	Bugui Point Lighthouse (Aroroy)
Buntod Sandbar and Reef Marine Sanctuary	Rodeo Masbateño Grand Arena (Masbate City)

Palani White Beach (Balud)	Theotokos Orthodox Church (Cataingan)
Pawa Mangrove Park (Masbate City)	D'Siblings Beach Resort (Placer)
Busay De Gracia Falls (Baleno)	Diocese of Masbate Church (Masbate City)
Mount Mayong Payong (Mobo)	Panique Lighthouse Christian Church (Aroroy)
Magcaraguit Island (Dimasalang)	Velarde's Mountain Resort (Balud)
Tagauayan island (Cawayan)	Punta Bugui Lighthouse (Aroroy)
Tinigban Beach (Aroroy)	Mangrovetum Eco Park (Masbate City)
Pulanduta Backyard Beach (Balud)	St. Roche Parish Church (Pio V. Corpus)
Bentongan Creek (Balud)	Our Lady Of Remedies Parish (Placer)
Luacan Water Park (Milagros)	Cabatingan Beach Resort (Cawayan)
Chico Island Wild life Sanctuary	Burdz Berry Garden (Uson)
Jamorawon Pink Beach (Dimasalang)	Winter's Farm Resort (Milagros)
Rosas Beach (Cataingan)	Mt. Moriah Prayer Mountain (Masbate City)
Matayum Lagoon (Cataingan)	Naome's Beach Resort (Baleno)
Balangingi Island (Pio V. Corpus)	The Garden Landscape Park (Cataingan)
Busay de Gabi (Baleno)	Jintotolo Lighthouse (Balud)
Ubo Falls (Masbate City)	Gaisano Capital (Masbate City)
Kristel Beach Resort (Balud)	Magcaraguit Resort (Dimasalang)
Deagan Island (Dimasalang)	Curvada D' Jamon (Masbate City)
Hamurawon Island (Dimasalang)	Acean Sea Front Acenak Haws (Milagros)
Nailaban Beach Front (Mandaon)	Holy Spirit Chapel (Cataingan)

(Source: Authors, 2022)

The geographic distribution of hotels and accommodation facilities in the Masbate Province shows a great imbalance. There are around 150-160 accommodation establishments in the entire province, of which more than 90% are beachfront hotels. More than 80% of the hotels in the province are located on the Masbate Island (Table 4), there are more than 40 accommodations especially in the provincial capital of the Masbate City and its immediate surroundings. While around 35 accommodation facilities are active on the island of Ticao, there are only about 10 accommodation facilities in Burias, which is the poorest island in terms of hotels. Therefore, it is clear that within the borders of the province, Masbate has highest and Burias has the least number of accommodation facilities. There are hardly any four and five- star hotels in the luxury class in Masbate. Low-priced hotels, hostels, apartments, hostels, motels, rental villas, and family businesses are the most common accommodation facilities within the province. The “Treasure Island Hotel”, “Unica Hija Hotel and Resort”, “Carlton-Martin Hotel”, “Bahia Vista Resort”, “Gagay's Hotel & Resort”, “Playa de Gregorio” and “Beatriz Rafaela Resort” are found within the provincial borders can be cited as the examples of a small number of quality accommodation facilities (Table 4). Consequently, the Masbate Province is lacking in the luxury accommodation facilities, nor does it have any modern hospitals and arts centers, multi-purpose sports complexes, theaters and modern cultural centers.

Table 4. Major Accommodations on the Masbate Island

Villa Carillo Beach Resort	Bitlig Beach Resort	Ponce's Resort
Renzales Beach Resort & Restaurant	Camp Elizabeth Resort	D.A. Resort Hotel
D'Siblings Beach Resort	Prolex Beach Resort	Aballe Homes
Abejo Snack Inn & Lodge	Roque Residence	Sitio Salvame
Ramos Beach Resort	Jomajejan Garden	Balud Resort
Riza Olanan Beach Resort	Floresta Sun Rise Hotel	Balud Lodge
Ajam's Logde and Boarding House	DJ Guesthouse Hotel	Vivo 1820
Nancy Ado Boarding House	Coco Beach Resort	Coco View Lagoon
Paraiso de Palani Beach Villas	Winter's Farm Resort	Emily's Place
RL Horizon Beach Resort	Shaira's Beach Resort	D's Lodge
Beatriz Rafaela Resort	Star Beach Resort	Tito A's Place
Bernabela Beach Resort	Morning Sun Tourist Inn	Papa Ed's Beach
Previn Bleu Resort & Cabana	Villa Candelaria Resort	Solis Residence
O' Manor Apartment Hotel	Barrios Beach Resort	Casa Editha
Sol Celeste Beach Resort	Tinay Relano Residence	Meljefson Domingo
Hidden Cove Manoboc Beach	Corong Beach Resort	Uma Koinonia
Jelan Beach & Pool Resort	Naome's Beach Resort	Albhen's Resort
Sea Bliss Bed and Breakfast	Bituon Beach Resort	White's Beach
Chona and Christophe Guesthouse	Umaroy Beach Resort	Ananor Otel
Mt. Moriah Prayer Mountain	Karla Beach Resort	Patio Milagros
Ambak - Tubig sa Macahilao	Bahia Vista Resort	Abela - Padecio
Privado Accomodation And Reservation	Mama's Dorm & Lodge	Rosas Beach
D'HillsView Hotel & Restaurant	Casa de Soledad	El Fujds
D Ark Hotel and Restaurant	Bing Oling Building	Ross Hotel
Panas Bay Infinity Pool Resort	Treasure Island Hotel	Novo Hotel
St. Anthony Hotel & Restaurant	GV Hotel Masbate	JL Hotel
Team Centrum Seamans Hotel	D'bluewave Resort	Road To Glory
Unica Hija Hotel And Resort	Mac John Cattage	Rancher's Hotel
Jimcre Hotel And Restaurant	Playa De Gregorio	Cherish Resort
Rendezvous Hotel And Beach Resort	Sabine's Place Masbate	Baywalk Hotel
7AR Golden Beach Resort	Bambi Pension House	Kendrick Joseph
Greenview Hotel and Restobar	Safe House Residence	Velasco Inn
Boarding House ni Erwin	Chichay Resort Hotel	Circle E Hotel

(Source: Authors, 2022)

Major Touristic Attractions of the Masbate Island

Unquestionably, the most touristic resorts and hotels and the most touristic attraction in the entire Masbate province are situated on the Masbate island. The historical churches and lighthouses, majestic waterfalls and caves, breathtaking beaches and touristic islets, moist mangrove forests and interesting coastal formations, natural wonder lagoon lakes and colorful coral reefs are among the most common touristic attractions on the Masbate island. The following briefly describes the main touristic attractions on the Masbate Island and its surroundings.

● Buntod Sandbar and Reef Marine Sanctuary

Unmistakably, "Buntod Sandbar and Reef Marine Sanctuary" is one of the most beautiful places in the Masbate province. This interesting marine protected area, found between the Masbate and Ticao islands, is located a few kilometers east of the city of Masbate. The marine protected area, situated just north of Mobo Bay, fascinates visitors with its sand islets, white beaches, coral reefs, and breathtaking beaches. This conservation area is easily accessible by a 20-minute boat ride from the pier at the Rendezvous Hotel. The park area has very suitable natural features for those who wish to sunbathe on the beach, swim in the sea, explore the mangrove forests, take a walk on the shallow sea shore or on the beach. In an attempt to preserve this natural miracle for centuries and pass it on to the future generations, the Filipino authorities created a special marine protected area covering a surface area of 250 hectares and placed it under the province protection (Velza et. al., 2022). That is why the "Buntod Sandbar and Reef Marine Sanctuary" is known as the most famous and most beautiful marine sanctuary on the Masbate island. Thousands of tourists visit this marine protected area every year because of its shallow sea coast, long and clean beaches, breathtaking reefs, turquoise clear waters suitable for snorkeling, rich species of wildlife, and geographical proximity to the provincial center (Calumpong, et. al., 2013.).

● Palani White Beach

The "Palani White Beach", located on the southwest coast of the Masbate island, 2-3 kilometers north of the town of Balud, is the island's most popular, beautiful and white sand dunes. The long stretches of the beach are so enchanting and so white that many experts compare it to the famous "White Beach" in Boracay. The natural beach area stretching for about 10 kilometers is tranquil, clean and relatively unspoiled. The gradually deepening sea shore and generally calm waters of the beach area are perfect for swimming. The best part of this beach is that it is located in a calm, tranquil, clean bay with its magnificent sunset view. The fact that the Palani region is far from big cities, that there are no factories and industrial facilities that ruin the environment in the immediate vicinity, and that it is outside of the international mass tourism routes has provided a great advantage to the beach area and the local region. The crystal clear waters of "Palani White Beach" within the borders of Balud district are so tantalizing that one cannot help throwing oneself into the sea. In a solitary cove on the shores of the Visayan Sea, the beach area surrounded by coconut trees offers affordable accommodation to the visitors with several nipa huts. The wide and long white sandy beach is ideal for picnics, sunbathing, swimming as well as beach sports such as beach volleyball and Frisbee. Hotels such as "Star Beach Resort", "Paraiso de Palani Beach Villas", "Shaira's Beach Resort" and "RL Horizon Beach Resort" are active in the region where visitors can stay.

● **Busay De Gracia Falls**

“Busay De Gracia Falls”, situated within the borders of the Baleno district, is one of the mysterious and new touristic places newly discovered in Masbate and not even known by the locals. This majestic waterfall, located northwest of Masbate City and just southeast of the town of Aroroy, has just begun to make a name for itself among the enthusiastic travelers. The waterfall, which is situated on a gently sloping cliff, is a tourist attraction that is difficult to access as it is in a very remote place away from the main roads. 10-15 km away from the waterfall, there is no bakery or market, no pharmacy or restaurant, no hotel or pension around it. The river waters falling from different points has caused the emergence of many small waterfalls and created different terraces and different small natural pools. This waterfall, situated in a deserted area, is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful natural beauties of the Masbate Island.

● **Bat-ongan Cave**

The “Bat-ongan Cave” is one of the most popular and spooky tourist attractions in Masbate. The locals believe that this interesting cave was formed as a result of a meteorite that fell here millions of years ago. However, scientists do not support this assumption. The highest point of the cave, which has an underground river, is around 150 meters. There are many underground passages, many bats and various karst rock formations inside the cave. Up until now, the scientists have managed to discover 7 connection places between the earth and cave systems. The “Bat-ongan Cave”, situated in the northwest of Masbate island within the borders of Mandaon county, is a holy place that devout Christians usually visit during the Holy Week to find solitude, peace and contemplation. However, at the same time, the cave is open to individual visits, student-educational activities, group visits as well as scientific studies.

● **St. Anthony of Padua Cathedral**

This Historic Catholic Church known as “St. Anthony of Padua Cathedral” or “Cathedral-Parish of Saint Anthony of Padua”, is also referred to as the “Masbate Cathedral” among the Masbate people. This famous Catholic Church, located on Quezon street in the Masbate city and built in the Baroque architectural style, was founded in 1578 by the Spanish missionaries. Today, Masbate is both the administrative and religious center of the Roman Catholic Diocese. Even though this historical church, which reflects the Spanish culture and architecture, has undergone several serious renovations and repairs, it has managed to survive for centuries and continues to be one of the touristic symbols of the city of Masbate today. The St. Anthony of Padua Cathedral”, situated west of the city of Masbate and just east of the port of Masbate, is one of the most visited faith centers of both the city, the island and the Masbate province. This historic church is also one of the oldest Catholic Churches in the province of Masbate, as it started operating in 1578.

● **Chico Island Wildlife Sanctuary**

The “Chico Island Wildlife Sanctuary”, officially established on April 23, 2000, is one of the newest nature reserves both in the Masbate province and the Philippines. The Chico Island is a very small island located in the west of Masbate Island, southeast of the Gulf of Acid and northwest of Tagauayan Island. This islet, with a maximum height of only 5 meters above sea level, is home to about 2600 people. The “Chico Island Wildlife Sanctuary”, covering a certain part of this island and situated in the northeastern parts of the island, is a state-protected area

with an area of 7.7 hectares. This small nature reserve, found within the borders of Cawayan district, is of great importance in terms of environmental protection and sustainable ecosystems rather than tourism activities (Yambao et al., 2001). Preserving the rich diversity of plants and trees, as well as protecting the habitats and breeding grounds of migratory birds, is the primary duty of the “Chico Island Wildlife Sanctuary”. The Mangrove forests are the biggest ecological richness of this small nature reserve and the most common tree species in Kulasi, Pagatpat, Saging-saging, Bakawang lalake at babae, Tingal, Api-api and Buta-Buta nature reserve (Marie et. al., 2004; Velza et. al., 2022). The “Chico Island”, which does not have hotels and touristic facilities, is an islet suitable for daily picnics and short sea holidays. This quaint island can be reached by a charter boat from the town of Cawayan and both the migratory bird habitat and the island's mangrove forests can be inspected closely.

General Geographical Features of the Ticao Island

Ticao, situated in the central part of the Philippine archipelago and east of the Sibuyan Sea, is an underdeveloped and sparsely populated island that is not among the major tourist destinations of the Philippines. The Ticao island, which is located in the Luzon Islands Group, is found in the north and east of the Luzon island, the Burias island in the northwest, the Masbate island in the west and south, and the islands of Samar, San Vicente, Capul and Dalupiri in the southeast (Chirikov et. al., 2008). There are two important straits to its west: The Masbate Strait and Ticao Strait. The small islands such as Matabao, Tatus, Magcaraguit, Rakit Dakit, Hamoroan and Deagan, located in the south of the Ticao island, constitute a natural bridge between the island of Masbate and Ticao. To the north of the island of Ticao, there are small but important islands such as Cagpating, Yeso, Puro, Paltaban, Bagababoy and San Miguel. The “Halea Nature Park” and “Bongsanglay Natural Park”, which are visited by thousands of tourists every year, are the most important nature conservation areas of the Ticao island (Calumpong and Cadiz, 2012). The distance of Ticao island, which has a central location in the Philippine archipelago, to some neighboring islands is as follows: Burias island 110 km, Bantayan island 135 km, Sibuyan island 138 km. and Busuanga island 150 km. Undoubtedly, as the closest islands, Masbate and Burias are among the islands that most affect Ticao's economy and transportation connections.

Ticao, the 28th largest island of the Republic of the Philippines, has a population of approximately 100000 people and a surface area of 334 km². The maximum north-south length of the island is 39 km. whereas the east-west width is a maximum of 24 kilometers. The Ticao Strait, located east of the island of Ticao, separates it from the Luzon island (Chirikov et. al., 2008). The Masbate Strait, situated in the west of Ticao island, separates it from the Masbate island. In conclusion, the Ticao island is an underdeveloped island stretching in a north-south direction, sandwiched between the islands of Luzon and Masbate. There are 4 districts within the island borders: San Fernando, Batuan, Monreal and San Jacinto. There are no large lakes and streams on the island, and no hills or mountains higher than 400 meters. Therefore, it is possible to say that plains, flat places and slightly sloping areas are common throughout the island. The Mount Pandan (228 m.), the most popular touristic mountain on the island, is actually a low hill, not a geographical mountain (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). The highest point of the island is an unnamed hill with a height of 386 meters, located northeast of the Togoron village and just south of the Cantorna village. The Danao lake is the only lake on the

Ticao island. There are around 15 short rivers that are not suitable for transportation within the borders of the island. Alisoso, Bagahanglad, Benahagan, Buho, Lajong, Mabini, Macugtong, Pandan, Piña, San Roque, Santa Rosa and Tutuban streams are the examples of the main streams of the Ticao island (Chirikov et. al., 2008).

Tourism Potential of the Ticao Island

Ticao, a calm, clean and peaceful tropical island, offers its visitors economical and quiet holiday opportunities with its crystal clear emerald waters and white sandy beaches. The coral reefs and islets around the Ticao island are abundant in colorful fish, stingrays, hammerhead sharks, great fox sharks and tiger sharks. Therefore, for scuba diving enthusiasts and ecological tourism lovers, Ticao is exactly the calm island they are after. Manta Bowl Shoal and San Miguel island are the most popular spots for scuba diving of Ticao. Furthermore, the tourists coming to the Ticao island should definitely visit the islands of Paborito, Cagpating, Matabao, Tatus, Bagababoy, Burubangkaso and Paltaban, which are situated in close proximity and have magnificent beaches. The tourists visiting Ticao generally come here for sea tourism and especially for diving. The lack of modern urban settlements, large shopping centers and comfortable hotels on the island has hindered the development of mass tourism.

Table 5. Major Accommodations on the Ticao Island

Ticao Tacdugan Beach Lodge	NBM'S Boarding House	Ticao Altamar
Lantau Baie Beach Resort	Altinel Beach Resort	Club de Ticao
Yuson Hotel and Beach Resorts	Orvens Lodging House	Lumonsod Rex
Reddoorz @ Ticao Island Resort	Koko Hauz Lodging Inn	Ticao Lodge
Ticao Lodge & Function Hall	Marceli Beach Resort	Bautista Resort
Binantayanan Beach Resort	Coolis Beach Resort	Serra Lodging
JPS Beach Resort & Convention Center	Pujol Lodging House	Cocohauz
Ula Lozano Lodging House	Barruga Beach Resort	Looc Beach Resort
Zandra’s Beach and Convention Center	Rai Son Private Beach	Ticao Island Resort
Floresta Sun Rise Hotel	S&C Beach Resort	Gibraltar
Villa Teresita	3f Tourist Inn	Grona's Inn

(Source: Authors, 2022)

Even though there are around 35 hotels and accommodation facilities operate on Ticao Island, no 4 or 5 star hotels are available among them (Table 5). Inexpensive hotels and motels, rental villas and hostels, budget family businesses are the most common types of accommodation on the island. Therefore, for those who are looking for an economic holiday, Ticao may be exactly the holiday opportunity they are looking for. The “Ticao Island Resort”, “Villa Teresita”, “Club de Ticao” and “Ticao Altamar” are among the top quality hotels on the island (Table 5).

Historical Catholic churches from the Spanish colonial period are one of the most popular tourist attractions of the island of Ticao. The “Immaculate Conception Parish Church” located in the Batuan town, “San Jacinto Parish Church” located in the San Jacinto town, “Parish of St. Michael the Archangel”, “San Fernando Parish Church” located in the San Fernando town are the most popular and most visited faith centers of the island Ticao (Table 6).

Table 6. Top 15 Natural and Cultural Tourism Attractions of the Ticao Island

Top 15 Natural Tourism Attractions of the Ticao Island	Top 15 Cultural Tourism Attractions of the Ticao Island
Busay Waterfall	San Fernando Parish Church
Bongsalay Natural Park	Immaculate Conception Parish Church (Batuan)
Cagpating Island	Club de Ticao Otel
Binantayan Beach	San Jacinto Water Park
Bongsanglay White Sand Beach	San Jacinto Parish Church
Mababoy Island	Matang Tubig Spring
Halea Island Nature Park	Plaza Anonuevo Park
Catandayagan Falls	Ticao Island Resor
Matabao Island	Casa Fidel - San Jacinto
Burubangkaso Rock Formation	Coolis Beach Resort
San Miguel Island	Burabod Spring
Manta Bowl Marine Protected Area	Spanish Era Cannons and San Jacinto
Altinel Beach	Old Houses in Monreal and San Jacinto
Burubangkaso Beach	Parish of St. Michael the Archangel
Paltaban Island	Looc Beach Resort Otel

(Source: Authors, 2022)

Even though it has a small area, the Ticao island harbors numerous tourist attractions and numerous tourist facilities. “Old Houses in Monreal and San Jacinto”, “Burabod Spring”, “San Jacinto Water Park”, “Spanish Era Cannons and San Jacinto”, “Matang Tubig Gold Spring” and “San Jacinto Water Park” are the most popular culture and tourism attractions the Ticao island (Table 6). The “Bongsanglay White Sand Beach”, “Burubangkaso Rock Formation”, “Busay Waterfall”, “Halea Island Nature Park”, “San Miguel Island”, “Catandayagan Falls” and “Binantayan Beach” are the most popular and most popular examples of natural tourism attractions of Ticao island (Table 6).

Major Touristic Attractions of the Ticao Island

Ticao, located between the “Ticao Strait” and the “Masbate Strait”, is one of the most frequently visited islands by the divers, as it has the richest coasts of the Philippines in terms of marine life diversity. The nature conservation areas, healing water resources, architectural monuments and historical churches from the Spanish period, interesting hydrographic and geomorphological formations, majestic waterfalls, romantic solitary beaches, sea protection zones suitable for

diving sports, touristic islets with breathtaking beauties, on the island of Ticao and nearby They are some of the most common tourism attractions around.

The following briefly describes the main tourist attractions in and around the Ticao Island.

● **Bongsanglay Natural Park**

The “Bongsanglay Natural Park”, situated in the southeast of Ticao island, is located within the borders of the Batuan district. This ecological park, found just south of Bitos Bay and covering an area of 244 hectares, is the most important nature reserve of the Ticao island (De Los Reyes, 2017; Reboton and Candido, 2014). This nature park, situated within the borders of Masbate province, was established as a Forest Reserve on December 29, 1981 in order to protect the mangrove forests and valuable swamp areas on the Ticao island (De Los Reyes, 2017; Calumpong and Cadiz, 2012). The largest natural mangrove forests of the Bikol region and the Ticao island are located within the boundaries of “Bongsanglay Natural Park” and these interesting forests are visited by a great number of tourists every year. On May 31, 2000, this protected area was given the status of "Natural Park". The Bongsanglay Nature Park is home to 36 mangrove species, 3 amphibian species and 11 reptile species (<https://www.7641islands.ph/explore/visiting-bongsanglay-natural-park/>). Therefore, the park area has great ecological and botanical importance. The “Bongsanglay White Sand Beach” and “Rai Son Private Beach”, which are close to the nature park, are the most popular beach areas of the region. There is neither a hotel or restaurant nor a gas station or pharmacy nor a market or residential area around the “Bongsanglay Natural Park” located in this solitary area (De Los Reyes, 2017).

● **Halea Nature Park**

The “Halea Nature Park”, one of the natural jewels of the Ticao Island, fascinates its visitors with its solitary beaches, rich underwater life and stunning natural landscapes. The Nature Park, located on the island of San Miguel, just north of Ticao and Bagababoy Islands, resembles a hidden tropical paradise with its white sandy beaches, colorful karst shapes, untouched nature, and untouched calcareous shores (Reboton and Candido, 2014). The San Miguel island, located just north of Franklin and Bagababoy Islands, is one of the most popular and interesting tourism destinations of the Ticao region with its canoe trips, fishing, hiking and scuba diving opportunities. The “Halea Nature Park” provides natural sanctuary for many sea creatures, including pristine sea waters, sea shores carved from limestone formations, corals of various colors and sizes (Yambao et al., 2001). The enthusiastic tourists who wish to watch hundreds of creatures in the clear and turquoise waters prefer snorkeling to see the rich marine ecosystem more closely. The town of Monreal, situated on the northeastern coast of Ticao Island, is the closest settlement and most convenient point of departure to set off by boat to the parkland. The “Halea Nature Park”, a hidden tropical paradise, offers an ideal ecological environment for those who wish to spend a quiet and peaceful holiday away from the restaurants and hotels, who desire to integrate with nature. The Ticao Strait, a vast body of water that separates the island of Ticao from the Luzon island, is home to the Manta Bowl, a diving site where huge manta rays feeding on plankton can be watched. Whale sharks, hammerhead sharks, and some other shark species are also common in the Ticao Strait.

● **Catandayagan Falls**

The Catandayagan waterfall, which discharges its waters directly into the ocean, is the most important tourist attraction of the Ticao island. Just like the Catandayagan waterfall, only 4-5 waterfalls in the Asian continent discharge their waters directly from the land to the sea from such a high place. Therefore, Catandayagan is both a rare geomorphological formation in nature and one of the rare examples of waterfall types. This breathtaking waterfall is located on the northwest coast of the Ticao island, within the borders of Monreal district and just north of Burubangkaso Beach. Every visitor to the Masbate Province should see this majestic waterfall. This magnificent waterfall, located very close to the "Burubangkaso Islet and Rock Formation" and "Burobangcaso Beach", is one of the most beautiful and highest waterfalls of the Philippines, which depletes its waters directly into the sea from a height of about 15 meters. The natural waterfall pool, where fresh river waters and salty sea waters meet, is ideal for both swimming and massage in the waterfall waters. Undoubtedly the Catandayagan waterfall is the most beautiful and most popular natural tourist attraction of the Ticao island.

● **Matang Tubig Gold Spring**

The "Matang Tubig Gold Spring", located in the northeastern part of the Ticao island within the borders of Monreal county, is the most famous natural water source of the island. This natural spring, located 3-4 km from the town of Montreal in the south, is a popular holiday destination for those who wish to have a picnic, swim or cool off. The stream valley, surrounded by green plants and tropical trees, acts as a unique natural decoration around the spring. The "Matang Tubig Gold Spring" is one of the coolest, most beautiful and healthiest tourism centers of the island of Ticao. The water from the stream is very clean, clear and cold, making it a natural blessing to soothe the tired bodies and souls of visitors on extremely hot and muggy days. Due to the clean and drinkable water, hundreds of local and international tourists visit the region and use the healing water source freely. Next to the stream coming from the mountains, there are waterfalls in the form of steps suitable for swimming. Therefore, both families and children love to have fun and swim in the "Parish of St. Michael the Archangel", "Classroom Points" and "Ticao Island Resort" are some of the major tourism centers that are very close to "Matang Tubig Gold Spring" and should definitely be visited.

● **Bongsanglay White Sand Beach**

The "Bongsanglay White Sand Beach", located at the southeast tip of the Ticao island, is one of the most beautiful and popular beaches on the island. This solitary beach area, located just south of the "Bongsanglay Natural Park", is notable for its quietness and solitude. There is neither a building, nor a grocery store, nor a hotel or bar, nor a settlement around it. A lonely and desolate beach, far from crowded tourist masses and noisy traffic, that even the highway cannot reach. The beach area within the borders of Batuan district fascinates the visitors with its interesting rock formations, clear turquoise sea waters and long sandy beach. The fact that there are no touristic facilities in the vicinity seems to be a great advantage in terms of preserving the naturalness of this beautiful and solitary beach. The islands of Matabao and Tatus, located just a few kilometers south of this beach area, are beautiful tourist attractions that should be visited daily with boat tours.

General Geographical Features of the Burias Island

The Burias island, situated in the Sibuyan Sea and in the Luzon Islands Group, is a medium-sized island located in the central part of the Philippine archipelago. One of the three large islands within the borders of Masbate Province, it is possible to describe Burias as a sparsely populated island with high mountains, great lakes, long streams and no cities. The surface area of Burias island is 435 km² and approximately 87000 people live on the island (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). Burias, 51 km from Ticao island, 92 km from Sibuyan island and 190 km from Bantayan island is a long and narrow island extending in the northwest-southeast direction. San Pascual and Claveria are both the island's largest towns and the island's most important ports. There is a very old and very poor road network on the island, but most of it is unpaved and bumpy roads are only accessible by motorcycle. There is no 24-hour continuous electricity supply on the island. Generally, electricity is only available for 10-12 hours or less each day, and there is no electricity the rest of the time. Therefore, as a precaution against power cuts, each settlement has its own diesel generators to generate electricity. Frequent power and internet cuts are among the factors that negatively affect the tourism activities on the island (Alonzo, et al., 2007). There are two districts within the borders of the Burias island: Claveria and San Pascual. On the island without cities, only the towns of San Pascual and Claveria are the large settlements. All remaining settlements on the island are poor small village settlements. There are 2 towns (San Pascual and Claveria) and more than 50 village settlements on the Burias island. Claveria is located at the southeastern tip of the island, while San Pascual is located at the northwestern tip of the island. More than 80% of the villages within the island borders are located on the coast (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). Fruit production, livestock, corn and copra production, fishing and tourism are the main livelihoods of the islanders. The Burias island is one of the least developed, least invested and poorest islands of the Philippines (Gavino-Gumba, 2010).

Tourism Potential of the Burias Island

Among the three big islands within the borders of Masbate Province, Burias is the one with the least settlements and the least tourist facilities. Burias is also the province's most sparsely populated, poorest and least developed large island in terms of economic potential. Interesting coastal formations, solitary beaches, historical churches, turquoise bays, white beaches and cute little islets are the main tourist attractions that can be visited in the Burias region. "Sombrero Island", "Fish Hook Cove Burias Island", "Tinalisayan Islet and Sandbar", "Dapa Island", "Bantigui Beach", "Animasola Island", "Pinamasingan Gulf" and "Taguilid Front Beach" are the most visited and the most popular natural tourism attractions of the Burias island (Table 7). "San Isidro Church", "San Pascual Municipal Hall", "Iglesia Ni Cristo - Lokal ng San Pascual Church", "Rizal Park", "St Pascal Baylon Church", "Water Spring Park" and "Parish of Saint Pascual Baylon Church" are the most visited and most popular cultural tourism attractions of the Burias island (Table 7). Small touristic islets such as Tinalisayan, Tanguingui, Animasola and Sombrero in the Burias region are among the most preferred touristic centers by the international tourists, both for weekend picnics or diving sports, and for swimming and relaxing by the beach (Table 7). The international tourists visiting the Burias island usually visit at least one of these charming islands, which have unearthly beautiful, clean and solitary beaches.

Table 7. Top 15 Natural and Cultural Tourism Attractions of the Burias Island

Top 15 Natural Tourism Attractions of the Burias Island	Top 15 Cultural Tourism Attractions of the Burias Island
Biton Beach	San Isidro Church
Fish Hook Cove Burias Island	Atlaza Resort
Les Coquillages White Sand Beach	San Pascual East North East Border Claveria
Ambulong Island	San Pascual West South West Border Claveria
Bantigui Beach	Parish of Saint Pascual Baylon Church
Animasola Island	Seventh-day Adventist Church San Rafael
Taguilid Front Beach	San Pascual Public Market
Pulong Dapa Island	Pahowaiian Beach Resort
Pinamasingan Gulf	San Pascual Municipal Hall
Busing Island	Virjen Island Resort
Sombrero Island	Sombrero Island Beach Resort
Tinalisayan Island	Bayanihan-Cueva Avenue
Aurora La Blanca Whitesand Beach	Casa Eduardo
San Isidro Beach	San Pascual Port
Fadeli Beach	FHM Garden Grill and Catering Osmena

(Source: Authors, 2022)

The number of both Catholic churches and other faith centers on the island of Burias is much fewer than on the Masbate island. The “Parish of Saint Pascual Baylon Church”, “Seventh-day Adventist Church San Rafael” and “San Isidro Church” are among the most curious and visited the faith centers by the local and international tourists (Table 7). There are no 4 or 5-star hotels on the Burias island, and there are no luxury accommodation facilities. Modest hostels, small family businesses and budget hotels are predominant throughout the island. The main hotels and accommodation facilities on the Burias island are; the “Pahowaiian Beach Resort”, “Les Coquillages White Sand Beach”, “Aurora La Blanca Whitesand Beach Resort”, “Casa Eduardo”, “Home Sweet Home Burias”, “Mikko's Hotel”, “Sunset View Tourist Inn”, “Atlaza Resort”, “Aping Hotel” and “Bolod San Pascual Masbate”. As is explicit, the number of accommodation facilities on the Burias island is around 10. Let us now explain this more clearly and comprehensibly by making a simple comparison. The Burias island has a surface area of 435 km² and has around 10 accommodation facilities, while Siquijor island has an area of 337 km² and serves the tourism activities with more than 160 accommodation facilities (<https://www.philatlas.com>; <http://psa.gov.ph/>). Even though the area of the Siquijor island is smaller than the Burias island and a large part of the island is covered with mountainous lands and dense forests, the fact that it has 16 times more accommodation facilities than the Burias island demonstrates that the tourism activities in Burias are still in their infancy.

Major Touristic Attractions of Burias Island

Among the 3 big islands in the Masbate Province, Burias is the island with the least population, the least number of districts and the least number of hotels and accommodation facilities. Therefore, when compared to the islands of Ticao and Masbate, it is clear that Burias is the island with the least number of tourism centers and the least developed tourism activities. Small cute tropical islets, wide bays and peninsulas, beaches covered with white sandy beaches, breathtaking coastal formations and architectural works from the Spanish colonial period are among the most common tourist attractions on the Burias island. The following explicates the main tourism attractions on the Burias island and its surroundings.

● Animasola Island

With its white beaches and steep cliffs, the Animasola island is one of the must-see touristic centers in the Burias region. This small islet, located just northeast of Burias island, fascinates the tourists with its sea erosion surfaces, steep cliffs, high stony shores and interesting rock shapes. There are daily tours to the Animasola island by chartered boat from the San Pascual town of the Burias island. There is neither a settlement nor a hotel or restaurant on the island, nor a grocery store or government office. However, the Philippines' most beautiful examples of cliffs, the most striking wave erosion patterns and the most interesting sea cliffs are undoubtedly situated in Animasola. Briefly, even though the Animasola Island is nothing more than a huge natural rock museum carved by the ocean waves, it is worthwhile to visit the island for its breathtaking natural beauty.

● Les Coquillages White Sand Beach

The “Les Coquillages White Sand Beach”, found on the southwest coast of the Burias Island, is one of the most beautiful and popular beaches of the island. This famous beach, situated on the shores of the Sibuyan Sea, within the borders of Barangay San Isidro, in Claveria county, is a secluded, clean, quiet and tranquil resort away from the big hotels and crowded tourist masses. The “Les Coquillages White Sand Beach Resort” adjacent to the beach and “Pahowaiian Beach Resort” located 1-2 kilometers south of the beach area are the only accommodation options in the region. The “Les Coquillages White Sand Beach Resort Hotel” that offers 5 cottages on the shores of the Sibuyan Sea, tries to meet the needs of tourists with limited means. In fact, both the entire beach and this small hotel are run by one family. The long white beaches, clear and clean sea waters, dense rain forests, desolate coasts that have not yet been exposed to concrete and construction are the biggest touristic advantages of the beach. The lack of transportation connections and infrastructure and the almost non-existence of touristic facilities such as restaurants, bars and hotels are the main reasons why the beach area is visited by very few international tourists.

● Tinalisayan Island

Tinalisayan, found in the northwest of Burias island, is located a few kilometers northwest of Busing Island. A miracle of nature with its clear ocean waters and hidden white beaches, Tinalisayan is one of the most impressive and beautiful islands of the Burias region. The long coastal pole, consisting of white sand dunes and nestled meters into the sea, has become the touristic symbol of this island and has inspired hundreds of postcards. The shore pole, which emerges during low tides and consists of white dunes, offers the appearance of a swimming

platform in the middle of the sea and fascinates the visitors. For those looking for romantic holidays, snorkeling and quiet beaches, this mysterious and quaint island is a perfect opportunity. There are no hotels, bars, restaurants, markets or government offices on the island. Furthermore, since there are no accommodation facilities on this desolate island, it is recommended that visitors bring their own food supplies and their own tents.

Conclusion

Masbate, which has failed to attract the attention of the Manila governments, the provincial administrators and major tourism investors until the 21st century, can be described as a poor and sparsely populated province with flat and desolate lands. It is explicit that the basic economic sectors such as trade, industry, construction and transportation within the borders of the province have not highly developed in the 21st century. However, it is common knowledge that this rapidly developing, prospering and developing province in the last quarter century has a huge tourism potential. Since Masbate is a newly developing and prospering province in the 21st century, it is natural for the tourism activities to develop in the islands within the borders of the province. Therefore, it is hoped that the economic development will accelerate and the international tourism revenues will increase with the economic investments to be made in the islands within the borders of the province in the coming years. Therefore, the tourism sector in Masbate is regarded as the "economic savior of the province".

The tranquil and peaceful tropical islands, desolate white sandy beaches, pristine untouched ecosystems and breathtaking natural beauties are the Masbate province's greatest tourism wealth. Fascinating coral reefs and rich marine life diversity have made Masbate one of the Philippines' top diving destinations. The festivals organized in different settlements of the province every year attract the attention of both domestic and international tourists and promote the touristic activity. Therefore, marine tourism, adrenaline tourism, festival tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism and sports tourism are the most common types of tourism in the islands within the borders of the province. As we rush towards the middle of the 21st century, Masbate, with all its tropical innocence, all its unique tourism resources and all its natural beauty, is waiting to be discovered by the international tourists. The following summarizes and examines the main tourism advantages of the Masbate province.

The major tourism advantages of the Masbate province can be summarized as follows:

- The lack of production activities and large industrial facilities that will pollute the environment within the borders of the province can be considered as a great chance for the development of ecological tourism. The Masbate province, which does not have large factories and commercial centers, large thermal power plants and crowded metropolitan cities, will continue to be preferred as a tourism destination as long as it preserves its natural resources and ecosystems. In conclusion, the untouched natural elements, uncontaminated land and sea ecosystems, untouched natural beauties that are not available anywhere else are the most important tourism wealth of the province.

- The islands and coasts within the borders of Masbate province have very appropriate geographical, ecological and climatic features for diving, snorkeling and surfing. The quiet

beaches lined with white beaches, turquoise coves and bays, interesting coastal formations and wave erosion patterns, and colorful coral reefs that are very popular with the divers are the main natural tourism attractions of the province.

● There are around 20 islands within the borders of Masbate province, but about 10 of them can be described as "touristic islets" with intense tourism activities. Since daily boat tours are organized to these tropical islands, they are of great importance in terms of sea tourism and various recreational activities, as well as water and diving sports. In fact, the islets such as Tinalisayan, Busing, San Miguel, Magcaraguit, Sombrero, Animasola and Dapa have breathtaking natural beauties and interesting tourism attractions that are unique not only in the Philippines but also in the entire Asian continent. These small uninhabited tropical islets, therefore, are both the most famous attractions and the greatest touristic wealth of the Masbate province.

● Masbate is a calm, peaceful and safe province where every international tourist can have a holiday with peace of mind, away from the terrorist incidents. The non-existence of security, traffic and terrorism problems in all the islands within the provincial borders, as well as the non-existence of social problems such as extortion, murder, attack and theft are important and positive features for the international tourists coming to the islands.

● The fact that most of the hotels, restaurants, hostels, bars and other touristic facilities within the borders of Masbate province offer cheap services and economical prices is regarded as a positive feature for the tourists. The low-income tourists who do not wish to spend their holidays in expensive accommodation on the neighboring island of Luzon can sometimes choose one of the islands within the provincial borders as a new destination. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the Masbate province has appropriate opportunities for youth tourism, senior tourism as well as family tourism.

● Within the borders of the Masbate province, there are interesting ecosystems and stunning natural beauties not available anywhere else in the Philippines and a significant part of them are found within the borders of nature reserves. Therefore, the nature reserves such as "Halea Nature Park", "Bongsanglay Natural Park", "Manta Bowl Marine Protected Area", "Buntod Sandbar and Reef Marine Sanctuary" and "Chico Island Wildlife Sanctuary" are situated in both terrestrial and marine geographical spaces. It has a great function and significance in terms of the development of tourism activities in the province (Pagunutalan et al., 2004).

● Even though the Masbate province, with its rich natural resources and unique tourism attractions, has already proven itself to be a unique geographical location, it has not been able to promote it to the world and prove it in the global tourism markets. Even though diversity and originality are the biggest tourism trump cards of the islands in this province, it is explicit that the Philippine tourism authorities have not been able to promote this to both the tourism experts and the international tourism markets. One of the main reasons for doing this study and writing this article is to successfully carry out the "global tourism promotion" and "scientific analysis initiative" of this little-known province.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there was no conflict of interest during the study.

Authors' contributions

In this article the contribution of each author, in the work on the article.

– significant contribution to the design of the work, collection, analysis or interpretation of the results of the work of **Emin Atasoy**;

– writing the text and its content, approval of the final version of the article for publication by **Hakan Önal**.

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Дамушы жаңа туристік бағыт:

**Масбате провинциясының географиялық ресурстары мен туристік әлеуеті
(Филиппин Республикасы)**

Аңдатпа. Филиппин архипелагының орталық бөлігінде орналасқан Сибуян, Висаян және Самар теңіздерімен қоршалған Масбате провинциясына 3 үлкен арал (Масбате, Тикао және Буриас) және көптеген шағын аралдар кіреді. Масбате провинциясының құрамындағы барлық аралдар физикалық географиясы орналасуы бойынша Лусон аралдары тобына кіреді; саяси-әкімшілік географиясы жағынан да олар «Бикөл әкімшілік аймағының» ішінде орналасқан.

Әкімшілік құрылымы бойынша Масбате провинциясында 20 аудан, 1 қала (Масбате) және 550 барангай бар. Масбате провинциясының бай табиғи ресурстары мен кен орындары, ауыл шаруашылығы және балық аулау әлеуеті жоғары болғанына қарамастан, халықаралық туризмде әлі де айтарлықтай табысқа жете алмады. Бұл зерттеуде Масбате провинциясының ең үлкен аралдары болып табылатын Масбате, Тикао және Буриас зерттеліп, талданып, олардың географиялық ерекшеліктері, туристік әлеуеті мен аралдардың туристік тартымдылығы да қарастырылған. Мақалада Масбате провинциясындағы негізгі орналастыру орындары, қорықтары, аралдары мен жағажайлары, табиғи және мәдени туристік көрікті жерлері, сондай-ақ, Масбате провинциясындағы туризмнің артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктері талқыланған. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – оқырмандарды шетелдік туристер арасында аса танымалдығы жоқ Масбате провинциясының туристік ресурстарымен, мәдени байлығымен және табиғи сұлулығымен таныстыру, сондай-ақ Масбате провинциясының атын әлемдік туристік нарықта танымал ету және қызығушылық танытатын туристер үшін жаңа демалыс нұсқаларын ұсыну.

Түйін сөздер: Масбате провинциясы, туристік орындар, Филиппин Республикасы, халықаралық туризм, Филиппин архипелагы.

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**Развивающееся новое туристическое направление:
географические ресурсы и туристический потенциал провинции Масбате
(Республика Филиппины)**

Аннотация. Провинция Масбате, окруженная морями Сибуян, Висаян и Самар, расположенная в центральной части Филиппинского архипелага, включает в себя 3 крупных острова (Масбате, Тикао и Буриас) и множество мелких островов. Все острова в пределах провинции Масбате являются лишь частью группы островов Лусон с точки зрения физической географии; также с точки зрения политической и административной географии они расположены в пределах «административного региона Бикол». С точки зрения административного устройства в провинции Масбате насчитывается 20 округов, 1 город (Масбате) и 550 барангаев. Несмотря на то, что провинция Масбате обладает богатыми природными ресурсами и шахтами, большим сельскохозяйственным и рыболовецким потенциалом, ей пока не удалось добиться желаемого успеха в международном туризме. В этом исследовании Масбате, Тикао и Буриас, которые являются крупнейшими островами провинции Масбате, изучаются и анализируются по отдельности, а также учитываются их географические особенности, туристический потенциал и туристическая привлекательность этих островов. В этой статье рассматриваются основные объекты размещения, основные природные заповедники, острова и пляжи в пределах провинции Масбате, а также природные и культурные туристические достопримечательности; кроме того, рассматриваются преимущества и недостатки туризма в провинции Масбате. Основная цель исследования - познакомить читателей с туристическими ресурсами, культурными богатствами

и природными красотами провинции Масбате, которая на самом деле не очень популярна среди иностранных туристов, а также популяризировать название провинции Масбате на мировых туристических рынках и предложить новые варианты отдыха для любознательных туристов.

Ключевые слова: провинция Масбате, туристические достопримечательности, Республика Филиппины, международный туризм, Филиппинский архипелаг.

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