

## **Palawan seen to overtake Boracay as RP's No. 1 tourists destination**

**Bernie Cahiles-Magkilat, Manila Bulletin, June 3, 2008**

PUERTO PRINCESA — Palawan is expected to overtake Boracay in three years as the country's number one tourist destination with Bohol coming in as close second, a tourism stalwart said.

Samie Lim, president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry and tourism champion for the private sector, said this as the Palawan province prepares a master plan that put emphasis for sustainable tourism development.

"In three years, Palawan will overtake Boracay if they have a masterplan. Bohol will come in second," Lim told reporters after delivering a speech on tourism at the 17th Southern Luzon Area Business Conference.

"Palawan offers diversity, he said. Its 1,700 islands have better things to offer than Phuket and Bali. Palawan has better sights to offer," Lim said.

The island province of Palawan has been declared as a natural sanctuary of the world, and for good reason. It is wrapped in a mantle of rainforests, outstanding dive sites, majestic mountains, primeval caves, and pristine beaches. It is surrounded by a coral shelf that abounds with varied and colorful marine life. It boasts of exotic flora and fauna, like the mousedeer and the scaly anteater, that are found nowhere else.

Palawan waters are among the best in the world, not only for diving but also for fishing. A diver's paradise, it has miles of sub-surface coral and rainbow reef walls which surround the coasts and coves teeming with rich marine life.

Among its famous sites are the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Resources, a world heritage site encompassing both Tubbataha atolls and the Jessie

Beazley Reef. The almost 100,000 hectare size park contains roughly 10,000 hectares of coral reef, which lie at the heart of the coral triangle, the center of global marine diversity in the world.

The Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, another natural world heritage site, is believed to be the longest navigable underground river in the world.

Among its significant features is the 8.2 kilometer underground river that flows beneath spectacular karst formations before emptying out into the sea.

The El Nido Marine Reserve in Miniloc, El Nido, occupying an area of 96,000 hectares, is a popular nature spot in the province. It boasts of diverse ecosystems, such as rainforests, mangroves, white sand beaches, coral reefs, and limestone reefs as well as a variety of fishes, like mantaray and the sea cow or "dugong", known as the world's rarest marine mammal. It is now one of the country's premier destinations, blessed with amazing natural scenery, and considered as sanctuary for various forms of wildlife.

Sta. Lourdes Tagbanua, Puerto Princesa City is where Honda Bay can be seen. The bay consists of several islets with shallow reefs, bordering fabulous beaches and small resorts which have become the favorite water sports destination of local and foreign tourists alike.

The province boasts of extraordinary scenic wonders. African animals from Kenya in Africa- giraffes and elands, zebras and gazelles- co-exist with endemic Philippine animals, like the Palawan bearcat, mousedeer and peacock (pheasant), in the Calauit Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Busuanga, considered one of the province's most amazing sites. Another sanctuary found in Rio Tuba Village, Bataraza is the Ursula Island Game Refuge and Bird Sanctuary. This island is a haven for birds that rest and converge two hours before sunset, after a day's flight.

With the immense biodiversity in Palawan, Lim said, it is expected to become a tourist haven in three years.