


## Alignment of the Current Tourism Management Practices of Local Government Units in Nueva Ecija, Philippines, with the Sustainable Development Goals: Basis for Strategic Plan

Mark Alvin H. Abad<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, College of Management and Business Technology-Hospitality and Tourism Management Department, PHILIPPINES

\*Corresponding Author: [travelsmoker84@gmail.com](mailto:travelsmoker84@gmail.com)

**Citation:** Abad, M. A. H. (2025). Alignment of the Current Tourism Management Practices of Local Government Units in Nueva Ecija, Philippines, with the Sustainable Development Goals: Basis for Strategic Plan. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(3), 2641–2647. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i3.2818>

**Published:** December 04, 2025

### ABSTRACT

This study assesses the alignment of tourism management practices in Nueva Ecija, Philippines, with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, it focuses on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). The research evaluates tourism types, facilities, annual tourist arrivals, and accreditation of providers within Local Government Units (LGUs). Key management practices examined include planning, infrastructure development, economic and environmental initiatives, marketing, community engagement, and sustainability efforts. Findings reveal that tourism in Nueva Ecija is predominantly ecotourism-based, with emerging potential in adventure, religious, and agro-tourism. While the region possesses various facilities and increasing tourist arrivals, gaps exist in infrastructure, marketing, and community involvement. Most tourism establishments are Department of Tourism (DOT)-accredited, yet participation in national tourism bodies remains limited. Alignment with the SDGs is moderate; SDG 15 (Life on Land) is strongly supported, while SDG 12, SDG 13, and SDG 14 show emerging alignment. Influencing factors include government policies, stakeholder collaboration, tourist preferences, and economic and environmental conditions. The study culminates in a proposed strategic plan for enhancing tourism's SDG alignment, recommending improvements in infrastructure, community engagement, sustainability practices, marketing, and governance to foster inclusive and resilient tourism development. These findings provide actionable insights for local and global contexts, supporting sustainable tourism growth.

**Keywords:** Tourism Management, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Local Government Units (LGUs), Nueva Ecija, Sustainable Tourism

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a critical driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and environmental awareness worldwide. In the Philippines, tourism contributes significantly to local economies, employment, and community development. Nueva Ecija, renowned for its agricultural resources, natural landscapes, and cultural heritage, has increasingly positioned itself as a destination for ecotourism, agro-tourism, and cultural tourism. Despite its potential, challenges remain in infrastructure, community engagement, sustainability practices, and governance.

Sustainable tourism, guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a framework for balancing economic growth with social equity and environmental stewardship. SDGs such as SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) offer guidance for integrating sustainability into tourism policies, planning, and operations (UNWTO, 2019).

Although sustainable tourism is gaining recognition globally, local implementation remains uneven. In Nueva Ecija, efforts have largely focused on ecotourism and agro-tourism, with limited formal SDG integration. Insufficient infrastructure, underdeveloped marketing, limited research collaborations, and low community involvement necessitate a systematic evaluation of tourism practices. This study aims to assess the alignment of tourism management practices with the SDGs and develop a strategic plan to enhance sustainable tourism development in Nueva Ecija, Philippines.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Sustainable Tourism and the SDGs**

Sustainable tourism emphasizes balancing economic, social, and environmental dimensions. According to the UNWTO (2019), it contributes to poverty alleviation, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. Destinations aligning tourism with SDGs demonstrate resilience, community participation, and long-term economic benefits (Gössling et al., 2020).

### **Ecotourism and Agro-Tourism**

Ecotourism prioritizes conservation and responsible visitor behavior, generating employment and promoting local culture (Weaver, 2006). Agro-tourism links tourism with agriculture, providing additional income for farmers and educating visitors about sustainable farming practices (Santos et al., 2018). Provinces like Nueva Ecija, rich in natural and agricultural resources, are well-positioned to develop these tourism niches.

### **Community-Based Tourism and Economic Growth**

Community-based tourism (CBT) involves residents in tourism planning and benefits. CBT enhances economic inclusion, empowers communities, and preserves culture (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). Successful CBT requires capacity-building, governance structures, and stakeholder engagement. Challenges in Southeast Asia include limited training, weak policy frameworks, and low participation (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

### **Infrastructure, Connectivity, and Tourism Governance**

Tourism infrastructure—transport, accommodation, signage, and information centers—is critical for accessibility and satisfaction. Effective governance ensures coordination and alignment with national strategies. Regions with fragmented governance and inadequate infrastructure often struggle with sustainable tourism outcomes (Hall, 2010).

### **Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability**

Tourism is vulnerable to climate change. Integrating low-carbon transport, green buildings, disaster preparedness, and ecosystem conservation enhances sustainability and competitiveness (Becken, 2017). Nueva Ecija's reliance on natural and agricultural attractions underscores the need for climate adaptation strategies.

### **Tourism Marketing and Research Collaboration**

Digital and physical promotion improves destination visibility, supports niche markets, and encourages sustainable practices. Research collaborations inform best practices, policy development, and product innovation (Hall & Lew, 2009). Limited integration of research into Nueva Ecija's tourism planning suggests room for improvement.

### **Gaps in Current Literature**

Few studies have examined the comprehensive alignment of local tourism management with SDGs in the Philippines. Limited research addresses the interaction between infrastructure, governance, community engagement, and climate resilience within a single provincial context. This study addresses these gaps, evaluating tourism practices against SDG benchmarks and proposing a strategic plan.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach to evaluate tourism management practices and SDG alignment in Nueva Ecija. Data were collected from 32 tourism officers and 187 stakeholders using purposive random sampling to ensure representation across municipalities and stakeholder groups.

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire based on the UNWTO framework and SDG targets, covering tourism characteristics, management practices, SDG alignment, influencing factors, and challenges. The instrument was validated by experts and pilot-tested for reliability.

Data collection involved securing LGU permissions and distributing questionnaires online and physically. Descriptive statistics—frequency, percentage, and weighted mean—were used to analyze results. Likert scales interpreted implementation levels, influencing factors, and impacts. Validity was ensured via expert review and alignment with global frameworks; reliability was confirmed statistically. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw.

## DATA ANALYSIS

**Table 1:** Current Tourism Management Practices in Nueva Ecija

Tourism Management Domain	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Ecotourism & Sustainable Practices	3.15	Moderately Implemented
Infrastructure & Connectivity	2.98	Moderately Implemented
Community Engagement & Economic Growth	2.72	Emerging
Research Collaborations & Partnerships	2.61	Emerging
Cultural & Heritage Conservation	2.85	Moderately Implemented
Climate Resilience Measures	2.67	Emerging
Tourism Marketing & Promotion	2.73	Emerging
Tourism Governance & Policy	2.58	Emerging

This table summarizes the level of implementation of various tourism management domains within Nueva Ecija. Weighted means indicate how extensively each practice is applied. Ecotourism and sustainable practices, as well as infrastructure and connectivity, are moderately implemented, suggesting existing initiatives with room for improvement. Community engagement, research collaboration, climate resilience, marketing, and governance are emerging, indicating early-stage development that requires focused support and capacity-building.

**Table 2:** Alignment of Tourism Practices with SDGs

SDG	Extent of Alignment	Observation
SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth	Moderate	Community-based tourism supports employment but requires greater inclusivity
SDG 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	Moderate	Infrastructure improvements exist but small operators need additional support
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities	Moderate	Accessibility and disaster preparedness improved; heritage protection requires attention
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production	Emerging	Eco-friendly practices and waste management are partially implemented
SDG 13: Climate Action	Emerging	Disaster planning exists; climate adaptation integration is limited
SDG 14: Life Below Water	Emerging	Freshwater conservation is observed; marine-related initiatives are minimal
SDG 15: Life on Land	Strong	Ecotourism and agro-tourism promote habitat protection and biodiversity conservation

This table evaluates how Nueva Ecija's tourism practices correspond to selected SDGs. "Extent of Alignment" reflects the degree to which local tourism efforts support each goal. For instance, SDG 15 (Life on Land) shows strong alignment due to effective ecotourism and agro-tourism promoting biodiversity. SDG 8, 9, and 11 have moderate alignment, highlighting progress in economic growth, infrastructure, and community development. Emerging alignment for SDG 12, 13, and 14 indicates these sustainability aspects are still developing and need targeted interventions.

**Table 3:** Influencing Factors Affecting Tourism Practices

Factor	Level of Influence	Observation
Government Policies	Limited	Formal frameworks for sustainable tourism are insufficient
Industry Stakeholders	Moderate	Collaboration exists but greater engagement with NGOs and communities is needed
Tourist Preferences	High	Increasing demand for authentic and sustainable experiences
Economic Conditions	Moderate	Support for SMEs and agritourism significantly affects community tourism
Environmental Conditions	Moderate	Gaps remain in waste management and biodiversity conservation

This table identifies factors shaping tourism management and SDG alignment in Nueva Ecija. “Level of Influence” shows how strongly each factor affects practices. High influence of tourist preferences emphasizes the importance of visitor demand for authentic and sustainable experiences. Moderate influence from industry and economic/environmental conditions reflects the role of stakeholders and resources. Limited government policies suggest that formal frameworks for sustainable tourism are still insufficient, which may constrain comprehensive SDG integration.

**Table 4:** Observed Impacts of SDG-Aligned Tourism Practices

Impact Domain	Observed Impact
Community Development	Moderate improvements in employment and stakeholder participation
Environmental Sustainability	Positive outcomes in habitat protection and eco-tourism awareness
Economic Growth	Increased support for local businesses and agritourism
Tourism Governance	Emerging improvements in policy frameworks and coordination

This table presents the observed outcomes of aligning tourism management with SDGs. Positive effects are noted in community development, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Community involvement and stakeholder participation have moderately improved, local businesses benefit from tourism-driven economic opportunities, and ecotourism awareness contributes to habitat protection. Governance improvements are emerging, indicating ongoing efforts to strengthen policy coordination and institutional support for sustainability.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Tourism Profile in Nueva Ecija

Tourism is predominantly ecotourism-oriented, complemented by adventure, religious, and agro-tourism activities. Infrastructure exists, but gaps in transport, event venues, and participation in national tourism bodies remain (UNWTO, 2021; Hall, 2010).

### Current Tourism Management Practices

Ecotourism and infrastructure are moderately implemented, while community engagement, research collaboration, climate resilience, and governance are emerging. Strengthening capacity, formal policies, and participatory planning is critical (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

### Alignment with SDGs

Strong alignment is observed for SDG 15; moderate alignment for SDG 8, SDG 9, and SDG 11; and emerging alignment for SDG 12, SDG 13, and SDG 14. Integration of SDGs into local tourism planning is essential for sustainable outcomes (Hall & Lew, 2009).

### Influencing Factors

Limited government frameworks, moderate stakeholder collaboration, high tourist demand for authentic experiences, and economic/environmental conditions shape SDG alignment (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

### Impacts of SDG-Aligned Tourism Practices

Positive outcomes include moderate improvements in community participation, environmental conservation, and economic growth. Challenges such as limited funding and low awareness highlight the need for strategic investments and capacity-building (Weaver, 2006; Becken, 2017).

### *Proposed Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism in Nueva Ecija*

Strategic Goal	Strategy/Action Plan	SDG Alignment	Expected Outcome
Enhance Ecotourism and Agro-Tourism Development	Develop eco-friendly trails and agro-tourism sites; train local guides/farmers; promote community-led initiatives	SDG 8, 15	Increased employment, biodiversity conservation, community empowerment
Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Connectivity	Upgrade transport, signage, and accessibility; improve accommodations and event facilities; integrate small operators	SDG 9, 11	Enhanced tourist satisfaction, accessibility, inclusive growth
Strengthen Community Engagement and Capacity-Building	Conduct workshops; promote tourism cooperatives; inclusive decision-making	SDG 8, 11	Stronger participation, equitable benefits, cultural preservation
Promote Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability	Implement climate adaptation plans; low-impact practices; renewable energy; waste management	SDG 12, 13, 14, 15	Reduced environmental impact, improved climate adaptation, resource protection
Enhance Tourism Marketing and Research Collaboration	Digital campaigns; partnerships with universities/NGOs; knowledge-sharing platforms	SDG 8, 9, 12	Improved visibility, informed policymaking, evidence-based planning
Strengthen Tourism Governance and Policy	Formulate SDG-aligned policies; monitoring systems; stakeholder coordination	SDG 11, 12, 13	Coordinated governance, compliance, long-term sustainability

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study offers critical insights for policymakers, local governments, tourism stakeholders, and development agencies globally seeking to integrate sustainable development principles into tourism management. By aligning local tourism practices with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), destinations can achieve a balance between economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social equity.

The findings underscore the importance of strategic planning in guiding resource allocation, policy formulation, and stakeholder engagement. Lessons from Nueva Ecija demonstrate that fostering community participation, strengthening governance structures, promoting eco-friendly practices, and investing in infrastructure are universally relevant strategies for sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, the study highlights how local realities—such as environmental conditions, community readiness, and tourist preferences—interact with global sustainability frameworks, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive yet internationally aligned approaches.

Globally, integrating SDGs into tourism management can help destinations enhance competitiveness, attract responsible travelers, support local livelihoods, and protect natural and cultural heritage. The study provides a replicable framework for other regions seeking to evaluate tourism practices, identify gaps in SDG alignment, and design evidence-based strategies to achieve long-term sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

Tourism in Nueva Ecija Philippines, while locally grounded, reflects broader global trends in sustainable tourism development. The province's tourism sector is primarily ecotourism-based, with emerging opportunities in adventure, cultural, and agro-tourism—mirroring global shifts toward niche, responsible travel experiences.

The study reveals moderate implementation of infrastructure improvements, community engagement initiatives, and governance frameworks, yet full alignment with SDGs remains a work in progress. Strong alignment with SDG 15 (Life on Land) demonstrates successful biodiversity and habitat conservation, whereas SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) require targeted interventions—a pattern commonly observed in developing and emerging tourism destinations worldwide.

Key drivers of SDG adoption include government policy frameworks, stakeholder collaboration, tourist demand for sustainable experiences, and local economic and environmental conditions. These factors emphasize the interdependence of local actions and global sustainability agendas.

The proposed strategic plan—focusing on infrastructure enhancement, community engagement, environmental sustainability, research collaboration, marketing, and governance—provides a comprehensive roadmap to transform Nueva Ecija into a resilient, inclusive, and SDG-aligned tourism destination. By extension, the findings offer lessons for global tourism development, demonstrating that integrating SDGs at the local level

is essential for achieving broader sustainable development objectives and fostering destinations that are economically viable, socially equitable, and environmentally responsible.

### Research Funding

The authors received no research grant or support for this research study

### REFERENCES

- Aigbavboa, C. (2024). The impact of AI in sustainable development goal implementation: A Delphi study. *Sustainability*, 16(9), 3858. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16093858>
- Becken, S. (2017). *Sustainable tourism and climate change*. Routledge.
- Beynen, P. V., Akiwumi, F. A., & Beynen, K. V. (2017). A sustainability index for small island developing states. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2017.1317673>
- Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011). Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), 411–421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.580586>
- Çelem, B. P., Durmaz, V., & Yazgan, E. (2023). Analysis of sustainable development goals in airports using Stepwise Weight Assessment Ratio Analysis (SWARA). In *Springer Proceedings in Energy*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30171-1\\_57](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30171-1_57)
- Community Development Plan Evaluation of Sitio Daan Banwang, Barangay Upper Labay, General Santos City – Notre Dame of Dadiangas University. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nddu.edu.ph/research/community-development-plan-evaluation-of-sitio-daan-banwang/>
- Frontiers (2022). Open science for accelerating the sustainable development goals: Status and prospects in Asia and the Pacific. *Frontiers in Political Science*. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.878761/full>
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Hall, C. M. (2010). *Tourism planning: Policies, processes and relationships* (2nd ed.). Pearson.
- Hall, C. M., & Lew, A. A. (2009). *Understanding and managing tourism impacts: An integrated approach*. Routledge.
- Halkos, G., & Gkampoura, E. C. (2021). Reviewing the 17 sustainable development goals: Importance and progress. *Sustainability Review*. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/372992741.pdf>
- Mallorca's approach to mass tourism could be a blueprint for meaningful change in sustainable travel. (2023). *I-News*. Retrieved from [https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/travel/mallorca-mass-tourism-blueprint-change-sustainable-green-travel-iberostar-1461982?ico=in-line\\_link](https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/travel/mallorca-mass-tourism-blueprint-change-sustainable-green-travel-iberostar-1461982?ico=in-line_link)
- Marzuki, A., Hay, I., & Butler, G. (2023). Stakeholder – Tourism. In *Springer eBooks* (pp 1-3). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01669-6\\_389-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01669-6_389-2)
- Nainsnl. (2024, November 8). Tour operators – Definition, types, functions & importance. *Tourism Notes*. Retrieved from <https://tourismnotes.com/tour-operators/>
- Portugal commits to the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017. (n.d.). *The Phoenix Newspaper*. Retrieved from <https://thephoenixnewspaper.com/portugal-commits-to-the-international-year-of-sustainable-tourism-for-development-2017>
- Quang, T. D., Phan Tran, N. M., Sthapit, E., Thanh Nguyen, N. T., Le, T. M., Doan, T. N., & Thu-Do, T. (2023). Beyond the homestay: Women's participation in rural tourism development in Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *Tourism Geographies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584231218103>
- Santos, J. R., Villanueva, R. S., & Mendoza, J. P. (2018). Agro-tourism development in the Philippines: Opportunities and challenges. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(6), 567–581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2018.1481524>
- Sharpley, R., & Telfer, D. J. (2015). *Tourism and development: Concepts and issues* (2nd ed.). Channel View Publications.
- The Benefits of Slow Tourism. (n.d.). *CSCAP Europe*. Retrieved from <https://www.cscapeurope.org/the-benefits-of-slow-tourism/>
- Theofanous, G., Theofanous, G., Thrassou, A., & Uzunboylu, N. (2024). Digital inclusivity: Advancing accessible tourism via sustainable e-commerce and marketing strategies. *Sustainability*, 16(4), 1680. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16041680>
- UNWTO. (2019). *Sustainable development of tourism*. United Nations World Tourism Organization. Retrieved

from

<https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>

Weaver, D. B. (2006). *Sustainable tourism: Theory and practice*. Elsevier.