

Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City, Metro Manila

**SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS**

First Regular Session

**HOUSE BILL NO. 3233**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	
<b>RECEIVED</b>	
DATE:	22 AUG 2016
TIME:	4:35 PM
BY:	[Signature]
REGISTRATION UNIT BILLS AND INDEX SERVICE	

---

Introduced by **ENGR. CARLITO S. MARQUEZ**

---

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

This bill seeks to declare The Bakhawan Eco-Park in New Buswang, Kalibo, Aklan as a special ecological tourism zone to help promote and develop the area as a tourist destination and to assist the area generate investments that would provide employment opportunities for local residents, given that the influx of tourists would make the ecotourism zone a significant source of business opportunities while protecting its natural habitat.

Ecotourism pertains to a nature-based, educational experience of the environment. A boost in educational ecotourism aims to strengthen and heighten environmental awareness in tourists by renewing their appreciation and understanding of nature's beauty and diversity. It is defined by the International Ecotourism Society (IES) as responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and perk up the welfare of local people. These destinations are often remote areas,

whether inhabited or uninhabited, and are usually under some kind of environmental protection at the national, international, communal or private level. It denotes education for both tourists and residents of nearby communities as tour operators should formulate and apply a code of conduct for both the traveler and the industry itself to minimize their negative impacts on sensitive environments.

The Philippines is a prime ecotourism destination for nature lovers looking to escape from the stresses of our fast-paced modern society. Ecotourism, as part of a larger tourism campaign of the government, will offer both local and foreign visitors a glimpse of the country's natural beauty while keeping it preserved. Citing Republic Act 9593 or the Tourism Act of 2009, it declares tourism as an indispensable element of the national economy and an industry of national interest and importance. We should look for every opportunity for greater growth and competitive strength serving the globalized world. We must seek creative ways to showcase the country and prove that it is indeed worth visiting and investing in.

*Bakhawan* is a local Visayan term for mangroves. Not remote from the town of Kalibo where thud and thump of the drum for the Ati-Atihan Festival resonates, glimmers the Bakhawan Eco-Park, a sprawling 220-hectare forest of mangroves located at the outskirts of Kalibo. Twenty-six years ago, the whole sphere is a barren coastline and mud flat, totally unshielded from the harsh rudiments of the sea. It has been transformed into a mangrove haven by the *Aklanons*, led by the Kalibo

Save The Mangroves Association (KASAMA), a non-government organization, with the help of the local government of Kalibo and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Today, the place is teeming with life after it is officially opened to the public in April 2008, as a tribute of Akean to the occasion of World Earth Day. The centerpiece of this man-made forest is a 1.3-kilometer bamboo trail that takes visitors deep into the tranquil, unflustered spot. One can easily appreciate the splendor of the mouth of Aklan River that strolls alongside these thousands of mangroves swaying and chirping birds' sound music to the ears that breaks the serenity of this scenic place. In trekking the park, as you saunter on the bamboo trail, marvelously arranged mangrove trees will delight your eyes, the smell of fresh and clean air will permeate your nostril as light wind caresses your skin that will leave a comforting feeling on your being.

Besides the lush mangroves is also home to various species of birds, including migratory ones and marine species. Mudcrabs are also regularly caught here by the locals. *Tamiloks* or woodworms also abound. In fact you can even ask for a demonstration and eat one yourself. Blue that illuminates the color of the sky and color of the sea, green that painted the plants and forest, brown that gives a melancholic effect to the solid ground and yellow, the color of the sun that is the main source of light are the colors of nature that provides an antidote to the gloomy soul of Bakhawan park. This place will never fail to amaze the nature lover out there.

At the end of the shaky wooden bridge at the end of the trail, you can savor the scent of the calm Sibuyan Sea that kisses the blue sky while listening to whispers of the *bakhawan* leaves. The eco-park is a perfect place to take a break from the hustle and bustle of urban life. It is a sanctuary where one could enjoy peacefulness in the arms of Mother Nature.

The successful Mangrove Project proved to be an eco-friendly and sustainable solution to both security during calamities and a source of income and food for the locals. In fact, the project, the organizations, and individuals has received awards in recognition of the town's environmentalism initiatives, the hard work, the ups and downs encountered, and of course, the triumph. Bakhawan Eco-Park & Research Center is truly a vital contribution to the society and sets a benchmark for a greener Philippines. The United Nations' FAO acclaimed this as one of the exemplary forests managed in the whole of Asia and the Pacific.

With its impeccable beauty, the eco-park is an ideal tourist destination. The rich biodiversity truly reflects the beauty of a paradise that our country should be proud of. However, the lack of tourist facilities -- such as lodging houses and retail outlets and round-the-clock public transportation -- hinder the socio-economic and environmental development of the area. These problems, however, can be properly addressed once the eco-park becomes an ecotourism zone which, shall be accorded priority development by the Department of Tourism (DOT).

The beauty of the eco-park shall be pursued in the development and management of the tourism industry in the area such as the integrity of its ecology and environment. The measure will develop and promote responsible, community-based, ecological-cultural tourism as the core management strategy in the development and growth of Bakawhan Eco-Park. While infrastructure, human capital, and tourism products and programs are being developed, the importance of sustaining the biodiversity is a sanctuary and remains a key priority in the development of the place.

The bill shall guarantee that the financial and economic benefits of the tourism industry in the area are equitably shared by, and distributed among, the residents of Barangay Buswang and local residents by giving preference and support to community-and-home-based tourism enterprises, such as micro and small businesses like local inns, lodges and homestays, restaurants, food and fruit stands, arts and craft shops, and similar tourism-oriented industries and businesses. Under the measure, community-based tourism refers to a form of tourism where the local community and its residents have substantial control over and involvement in the development and management of the local tourism industry and a greater proportion of the economic gains remain within the community.

It shall also provide to ensure that the quality of local tourism programs and activities are educational



and enriching for tourists and visitors through orientation, educational and tour programs by local tour operators, non-government organizations (NGOs), local government units (LGUs) and the DOT. Likewise, in order to guarantee the development and promotion of the local tourism industry, the LGU is directed to ensure that the needs of local residents in the area of water supply, food, energy and local construction materials are first secured and met. The DOT, in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Kalibo Save the Mangroves Association, shall assist the Municipality of Kalibo in the formulation of the Municipal Tourism Development Plan for Bakhawan Eco-Park that shall be complemented by a set of guidelines and standards for a responsible community-based ecotourism.

When the bill is enacted into a law, it will mandate the DOT to prepare, in coordination with the local government and other agencies, a development plan involving the construction, installation and maintenance of appropriate faculties and infrastructure which shall enhance tourism in the area.

The development plan, it said, shall ensure the preservation and conservation of the natural beauty and indigenous nature of the area giving consideration to the formulation, development and implementation of programs and strategies that will generate livelihood and employment opportunities for the local inhabitants.

The DOT will likewise be mandated to implement the tourism development plan that will suit the natural

characteristics of the area and shall incorporate the same in the overall development plans and programs for national implementation.

Immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

  
ENGR. CARLITO "Lito" MARQUEZ 

Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City, Metro Manila

**SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS**  
First Regular Session

**HOUSE BILL NO. 3233**

---

Introduced by **ENGR. CARLITO S. MARQUEZ**

---

**AN ACT**  
**DECLARING THE BAKHAWAN ECO PARK IN NEW**  
**BUSWANG, KALIBO, AKLAN AS A RESPONSIBLE,**  
**COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM ZONE, AND**  
**APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

*Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:*

**SECTION 1.** *Creation.* – The Bakhawan Eco Park in New Buswang, Municipality of Kalibo, Province of Aklan, shall be declared as a responsible, community-based special eco-tourism zone.

**SECTION 2.** *Declaration of Policy.* – The State is mandated to promote a tourism industry that is ecologically sustainable, responsible, participative, culturally sensitive, economically viable and equitable for a local community. Towards this end, the Bakhawan Eco Park is hereby declared a special ecotourism zone. It shall be accorded priority development by the Department of Tourism (DOT) and shall be subject to the rules and regulations governing the development of ecotourism zones.



**SECTION 3. Objectives.** – Pursuant to the above declaration of policy, the State shall endeavor to accomplish the following:

- (a) Develop and promote responsible, community-based ecological tourism as the core management strategy in the development of Bakhawan Eco-Park;
- (b) Ensure the conservation of the biodiversity and the preservation of the said eco-park;
- (c) Develop tourism products and programs that will generate employment and livelihood for the local residents and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned, consistent with the preservation and maintenance of the mangrove forest;
- (d) Guarantee that the financial and economic benefits of the tourism industry are equitably shared by, and distributed among the local residents and the non-government organizations (NGOs) concerned, by giving preference and support to community and home-based tourism enterprises, such as micro and small businesses like local inns, lodges and homestays, restaurants, food and fruit stands, and similar tourism oriented industries and businesses;
- (e) Ensure that the quality of local tourism programs and activities are educational and enriching for tourists and visitors through the provision of orientation, educational and tour programs by local tour operators, non-government organizations (NGOs), the Municipality of Kalibo and the DOT; and
- (f) Guarantee that in the development and promotion of the local tourism industry, the LGU of Kalibo shall ensure that the needs of

local residents in the area of water supply, food, energy and local construction materials are first secured and met.

**SECTION 4. *Definition of Terms.*** –As used in this Act:

- (a) *Biodiversity conservation* refers to the practice of preserving the variety of species, habits and ecosystems, and genetic diversity of the place, including *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes which they are a part of;
- (b) *Community-based tourism* refers to a form of tourism where the local community and its residents have substantial control over and involvement in the development and management of the local tourism industry and a greater portion of the economic gains remain within the community;
- (c) *Ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism within a natural area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, cultural and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics, as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the enrichment of host communities and satisfaction of visitors;
- (d) *Homestay* refers to a system of tourist accommodation where a tourist stays with local residents and experiences the day-to-day life of the residents of Barangay New Buswang and Kalibo and the community, in particular, Bakhawan Eco Park;
- (e) *Responsible ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism in which both the tourism

sector and the tourists take responsibility in the protection, respect, and conservation of the natural environment and the local culture and ways of life, and where community participation as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the well-being of the local people in New Buswang and visitors; and

- (f) *Sustainable tourism development* refers to the management of all resources in a way that simultaneously meets the needs of tourists and host municipality; protects the opportunities for the future; fulfills the economic, social, and aesthetic needs; and preserves natural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and a system that supports and perpetuates life.

**SECTION 5. *Scope and Coverage.***- This Act shall cover the boundaries of the 220-hectare mangrove forest or the Bakhawan Eco Park at Barangay New Buswang, Kalibo, Aklan.

The technical boundaries shall be undertaken by the DENR and other agencies for the proper implementation of this Act.

**SECTION 6. *Municipal Tourism Development Plan for Bakhawan Eco Park.***- The DOT, in coordination with the DENR, shall assist the Municipality of Kalibo in the formulation of the Municipal Tourism Development Plan for Bakawhan Eco Park that shall be complemented by a set of guidelines and guidelines for a responsible, community-based ecotourism. The tourism development plan shall ensure the preservation of the eco-park, the identified tourist attraction, and shall include the following components:

- (a) Carrying capacity of the eco-park;

- (b) Specific site assessment;
- (c) Identification of strategic priorities;
- (d) Product development for local income generation;
- (e) Capacity-building for the local community so residents therein can ably manage economically viable and responsible, community-based ecotourism business enterprises;
- (f) Support for the formulation of local production groups and networks, including the marketing and pricing of products; and
- (g) Marketing strategies that reflect the natural, social and environmental integrity of Bakhawan Eco-Park and its local residents.

The process of developing the Tourism Master Plan for Bakhawan Eco Park shall be participatory, from the bottom up, with the framework provided by the DOT, DENR, in consultation with the LGU of Kalibo and Barangay New Buswang.

**SECTION 7.** *Formulation of Guidelines and Standards.*- The concerned Protected Area Management Board of the DENR and the local tourism council, in coordination with the LGU of Kalibo and Barangay New Buswang, shall assist in the formulation of local tourism standards in the context of the environmental protection are integrated in the development of ecotourism plans.

The standards and standards shall:

- (a) Raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure that best practices are followed;
- (b) Ensure optional use of water and energy;
- (c) Reduce waste and pollution through the encouragement and recycling and environmentally-sound waste management disposal schemes, with a principle of taking as

much waste away from the eco-park as possible;

- (d) Prevent vandalism in the facilities of the eco-park; and
- (e) Encourage the use of local produce and services, and support the employment of local people.

**SECTION 8.** *Coordination with National Agencies.-*

The DOT shall closely coordinate with the municipal government of Kalibo, as well as the relevant regional offices of the DENR, DOLE, DPWH, DOTr, DA, DepEd, DTI, DILG, the PNP, the MARINA, and other line agencies of the government in the implementation of this Act.

**SECTION 9.** *Implementing Rules and Regulations.-*

The DOT, the DENR, in consultation with the Municipal Government of Kalibo, concerned government agencies, and stakeholders, within thirty (30) days from the effectivity of this Act, shall promulgate the rules and regulations necessary for the effective implementation of the provisions of this Act.

**SECTION 10.** *Appropriations.* – The Secretary of Tourism shall include in the Department's subsidy program, support for the capital outlay requirements of the said Eco-Park for the preliminary implementation of this Act and enhancement of the facilities of the ecotourism zone which shall be taken from the budget of the Department of Tourism for the current fiscal year.

The budgetary allocations for the succeeding years shall be included in the General Appropriations Act, subject to government audit.

**SECTION 11.** *Separability Clause.* – If, for any reason, any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, other provisions hereof which



are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

**SECTION 12.** *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, proclamation and administrative regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

**SECTION 13.** *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect immediately after its publication in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation or in the Official Gazette.

*Approved.*