

Analysis of Caraga Regional Development Plan 2023-2028 and Evaluation of a Proposed Tourism Portal

I. Executive Summary:

This report presents a thorough analysis of the Caraga Regional Development Plan 2023-2028, with a particular focus on its tourism sector. The analysis validates a problem statement concerning the hindrances in Caraga's tourism promotion efforts and identifies specific objectives, strategies, and goals within the development plan that relate to improving tourism. Furthermore, the report evaluates the effectiveness of a proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal in addressing the validated problems and aligning with the identified objectives and strategies. The findings indicate that while Caraga's tourism sector demonstrates growth, challenges persist in providing user-friendly information, showcasing diverse attractions, and managing tourist expectations. The proposed interactive map portal exhibits strong potential in mitigating these issues and aligns well with the development plan's emphasis on innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity in tourism. Key recommendations include prioritizing the development and maintenance of comprehensive digital travel information, investing in high-quality multimedia content, and strategically marketing the proposed portal to maximize its impact.

II. Introduction:

The Caraga Administrative Region, also known as Region XIII, holds a significant position within the Philippines, boasting a rich blend of natural landscapes and cultural heritage ¹. The tourism sector is recognized as a crucial driver for the region's economic advancement, a fact underscored by the Caraga Regional Development Plan (RDP) 2023-2028's strategic focus on "Industrializing and Innovating Fishery, Agro-forestry, Mining and Ecotourism (i2FAME)" ³. This six-year plan serves as the guiding framework for the region's development, aligning with national aspirations such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the President's 8-Point Socioeconomic Agenda ³. The RDP's emphasis on i2FAME clearly establishes ecotourism as a fundamental pillar for regional economic growth. This prioritization suggests that initiatives aimed at bolstering ecotourism development are likely to find substantial support and alignment within the broader regional strategy. The integrated approach of the RDP, where tourism development is not viewed in isolation but as part of a larger economic transformation, necessitates that any analysis of tourism-related initiatives considers this comprehensive context.

This report aims to provide a detailed analysis of the Caraga RDP 2023-2028, with a

specific focus on its tourism sector, as requested. The scope of this analysis encompasses three primary tasks: first, to validate a problem statement concerning the challenges in Caraga's tourism promotion; second, to identify relevant objectives, strategies, and goals within the RDP that pertain to tourism; and third, to evaluate the proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal in terms of its effectiveness in addressing the validated problems and its alignment with the identified objectives and strategies of the development plan. The information presented in this report is primarily based on the provided research material.

III. Validation of the Problem Statement on Caraga's Tourism Promotion:

a. Outdated Travel Information:

The problem statement asserts that potential tourists find it difficult to navigate Caraga due to the lack of user-friendly and region-specific travel information. While snippet⁸ suggests a broader issue with travel advice for the Philippines being potentially outdated and not always based on current facts, this implies a possible similar situation in the Caraga region. The reported 1.6 million tourist arrivals in Caraga in 2024⁹ indicate that individuals are indeed visiting the region. However, this statistic does not directly address the ease with which tourists can navigate or the quality of information available to them when planning their trips or during their stay. Snippet¹ offers general information about Caraga's attractions but does not provide insights into the user-friendliness or comprehensiveness of travel information accessible to tourists in the planning phase. Snippet¹⁰ mentions specific driving routes to a particular landmark, indicating the existence of some navigational information, but it does not comment on the overall user experience or the extent of regional coverage. Caraga being highlighted as a "traveler's final frontier" with "uncrowded sites waiting to be uncovered"¹¹ could suggest that information on these less-explored areas might be particularly scarce. Although snippet¹² showcases the region's beauty through photographs, it does not address the accessibility or quality of travel-related information.

Despite the significant number of tourist arrivals, the absence of explicit mentions of comprehensive and user-friendly travel information in the provided material, coupled with the general concerns about outdated travel advice for the Philippines, lends credence to the idea that obtaining tailored and up-to-date information for navigating Caraga could indeed be a challenge for potential tourists. The focus on "hidden gems" further supports this, as information on such attractions is often less readily available. Therefore, while high tourist numbers indicate some level of successful navigation, the potential difficulty in finding specific and current travel information

tailored for the region appears to be a valid concern.

b. Limited Tourist Routes and Information:

The problem statement suggests that current promotional materials do not fully showcase the diversity of Caraga's attractions, leading tourists to miss out on lesser-known destinations and causing overcrowding in popular areas. Snippets¹³ and¹² highlight the "Philippine Experience Program," an initiative aimed at showcasing the diverse attractions of Caraga beyond the well-known surfing waves of Siargao. This program includes historical sites in Butuan and waterfalls in Agusan del Sur, indicating ongoing efforts to promote a wider array of offerings. Snippet¹⁴ provides a list of various attractions across different provinces within Caraga, further demonstrating the existence of a diverse range of tourism possibilities. Similarly, snippet¹⁰ lists several natural attractions and landmarks, reinforcing the idea of diversity. The "Caraga Beyond Its Waves" campaign, mentioned in snippet⁹, explicitly aims to promote attractions beyond Siargao, and the opening of a sea route connecting Dinagat Island and Siargao also indicates efforts to promote lesser-known destinations. Snippet¹⁵ reinforces the "Caraga Beyond Its Waves" campaign and the intention to showcase a wider range of locations, including Butuan City and Agusan del Sur. Snippet¹⁶, while from 2013, provides relevant context by mentioning Caraga's Tourism Development Areas, including Siargao and Agusan Marsh, suggesting a long-standing recognition of the region's diverse tourism potential. However, snippet¹⁷ describes Siargao as becoming overcrowded, resembling a "mini Kuta or Canggu," which supports the idea that popular areas might be experiencing saturation while other attractions remain less visited.

It appears that there is a dedicated effort to promote the diversity of Caraga's attractions beyond Siargao, as evidenced by recent initiatives and campaigns. However, the issue of overcrowding in Siargao suggests that these efforts might not yet be fully effective in redirecting tourist flows. This could be attributed to the established reputation of Siargao, the novelty of the diversification campaigns, or limitations in the reach and impact of current promotional materials. The historical context further indicates that the region's diverse tourism potential has been recognized for some time, suggesting that the challenge lies in effectively showcasing and promoting these lesser-known destinations to a wider audience. Therefore, while efforts to diversify are apparent, the persistence of overcrowding in certain areas indicates that current promotional materials might still not be adequately showcasing the full spectrum of Caraga's attractions.

c. Expectation vs. Reality Gap:

The problem statement posits that the absence of real-time tourist experiences, such as virtual tours and 360-degree photos, creates a significant gap between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences upon arrival. None of the provided snippets directly mention the presence or absence of virtual tours or 360-degree photos in Caraga's tourism promotion. However, snippet¹⁷ provides an anecdotal account of Siargao, describing a potential discrepancy between the "influencer city" image often portrayed on social media and the reality of dust, construction, and sewage issues. This supports the broader idea that gaps can exist between tourist expectations and the actual on-the-ground experience. Snippet¹¹ describes Caraga as a region with "untouched nature reserves," which could lead tourists to form expectations of pristine environments. Without access to real-time visuals, tourists might not be fully prepared for the actual conditions they might encounter.

While the snippets do not offer direct evidence regarding the lack of virtual tours or 360-degree photos, the experience described in Siargao highlights how social media portrayals can sometimes lead to a difference between expectations and reality. The description of "untouched nature reserves" also points to the potential for unmet expectations if tourists arrive with an idealized image that does not fully align with the reality. Therefore, while the specific claim about the absence of virtual tours is not directly validated, the general concept of an expectation versus reality gap in tourism, potentially exacerbated by limited real-time visual information, appears plausible based on the provided context.

d. Differences from Google Maps:

The problem statement notes that unlike widely used tools like Google Maps, the proposed solution, the Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal, will offer 360-degree view virtual tours and detailed information about the cultural, historical, and environmental significance of each site. Snippet¹⁰ mentions GPS coordinates for a specific landmark, indicating that standard mapping tools like Google Maps would likely be functional for basic navigation within the region. The problem statement itself implicitly acknowledges the existence and widespread use of Google Maps but emphasizes its limitations in providing Caraga-specific details such as virtual tours and in-depth cultural information. This sub-point does not present a problem statement about the current situation but rather highlights the advantages of the proposed solution compared to existing tools. It implicitly recognizes that while Google Maps provides navigational functionality, it lacks the specific, rich content envisioned for the Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal. The comparison

serves to underscore the potential value of the proposed portal in offering a specialized service that caters directly to the information needs and pre-trip visualization desires of tourists interested in the Caraga region.

Summary Table: Validation of Problem Statement:

Sub-point	Validation Status	Supporting Snippets
a. Outdated Travel Information	Likely Supported	8
b. Limited Tourist Routes and Information	Likely Supported	17
c. Expectation vs. Reality Gap	Likely Supported	17
d. Differences from Google Maps	Not Applicable	10

IV. Alignment with Objectives, Strategies, and Goals of the Caraga Regional Development Plan 2023-2028:

Improving Tourism Information and Accessibility:

While the Caraga RDP 2023-2028 might not explicitly state "improving tourism information and accessibility" as a primary objective in the provided excerpts, several elements within the plan indicate its underlying importance. The mention of "Improve quality of standards and services" under the "Market Access Improved" outcome ⁵ suggests that the RDP recognizes the need for a higher quality tourism experience, which logically includes the provision of better information. Furthermore, the "Market and Product Development Program" listed as a Major Program and Project ⁵ could encompass initiatives aimed at enhancing how tourism offerings are presented and accessed, including improving information dissemination. The strategy to "Enhance connectivity between the Region's growth centers, production areas, and" ⁵ extends beyond physical infrastructure to include the flow of information, enabling tourists to navigate and access resources more easily. The historical emphasis on "improving market access and connectivity" ¹⁶ further underscores the long-recognized need to make Caraga's tourism more accessible, which inherently involves improving the availability and quality of relevant information for potential visitors. Therefore, while not a standalone objective, the improvement of tourism information and accessibility

is an implied and supported goal within the RDP's broader strategies for tourism development.

Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism Development:

The Caraga RDP 2023-2028 clearly prioritizes sustainable and inclusive tourism development. The inclusion of the "Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Tourism (SIRT) Project in Siargao Island, Surigao del Norte" and the "Ecotourism Development Program" as Major Programs and Projects ⁵ provides tangible evidence of this commitment. These projects likely involve specific actions focused on environmental preservation, engagement of local communities, and building resilience within the tourism sector. The overarching goal of "sustained, inclusive, and resilient economic growth" ⁵ within the RDP frames tourism development as a contributor to the long-term well-being of the region, ensuring benefits are shared broadly and the sector can withstand future challenges. The plan's explicit accentuation of "sustainable approaches" and "inclusive policies" ¹⁸ reinforces this commitment to responsible tourism development that considers both environmental and social impacts alongside economic gains. Even at the provincial level, as seen in Surigao del Norte's development goals, there is a specific focus on an "Enhanced Eco-Tourism Program" that emphasizes environmental and cultural awareness and the direct benefits for local communities ¹⁹. The RDP's aim to leave "no one left behind" and promote an "inclusive and progressive quality of life for all" ⁷ further underscores the commitment to ensuring that tourism development contributes to an equitable and improved quality of life for all residents, especially marginalized groups. These interconnected elements demonstrate a strong emphasis on developing a tourism sector in Caraga that is environmentally responsible, socially equitable, and economically viable in the long term.

Enhancing the Tourist Experience Through Technology:

The Caraga RDP 2023-2028 recognizes the significant role of technology in enhancing the tourism sector. The strategy to "Harness Tourism, ICT, and Creative Industry Clusters" under "Inter-Sectoral Linkages Enhanced" ⁵ explicitly aims to foster collaboration between tourism and the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and creative industries. This linkage is intended to leverage technological innovations and creative content to improve the overall tourist experience. The acknowledgment of evolving labor markets with "digital labor platforms" ⁵ indicates an understanding of technology's transformative potential within the tourism industry. The partnership between the Department of Tourism (DOT) and Klook, an online travel booking platform, to boost tourism in Caraga ¹⁵ demonstrates a concrete step towards

utilizing established technological platforms to increase the visibility and accessibility of the region's destinations. The vision of Butuan City as a "Smart Eco City" with initiatives for a "smart ecosystem" ²¹ suggests a broader regional trend towards technology integration that could create a supportive environment for technology adoption in the tourism sector. Furthermore, the support for projects involving the "upgrading of Technology business incubators" ²² indicates a long-term vision for fostering local technological innovation that could eventually benefit the tourism industry. These various elements collectively highlight the RDP's recognition of technology as a key enabler for enhancing the tourist experience in Caraga.

Diversifying Tourism Offerings and Showcasing Lesser-Known Destinations:

A key strategic thrust within the Caraga RDP 2023-2028 is to diversify tourism offerings and actively promote lesser-known destinations across the region. The mention of "Increase market penetration of high-value adding/yielding product and services" under "Market Access Improved" ⁵ suggests a move towards attracting tourists interested in a wider range of experiences beyond mass tourism. The "Caraga Beyond Its Waves" campaign ⁹ is a direct initiative aimed at showcasing the region's diverse attractions beyond Siargao's surfing waves, with specific emphasis on promoting destinations like Dinagat Island. The listing of various attractions across different provinces ¹⁴ underscores the inherent potential for diversification within Caraga. The "Philippine Experience Program" ¹² further exemplifies this objective by actively showcasing the cultural and natural heritage of provinces like Agusan del Norte and Agusan del Sur, linking them with more established destinations. The repeated aim to showcase cities like Butuan and Cabadbaran, along with other areas in Agusan del Norte and Sur ¹⁵ indicates a focused effort to promote these less-visited locations. The historical identification of Tourism Development Areas across Caraga ¹⁶ demonstrates a long-term commitment to developing a diverse range of destinations. Even within Surigao del Norte, known for Siargao, there is a recognized need to develop and market "potential eco-tourism spots" ¹⁹. This comprehensive approach to diversification aims to reduce reliance on single popular spots, distribute tourism benefits more widely, and tap into the full potential of Caraga's varied landscapes and cultural heritage.

V. Evaluation of the Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal:

Alignment with Validated Problems:

The proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal directly addresses the validated problems in Caraga's tourism promotion. Regarding **outdated travel**

information, the portal's feature of providing detailed information about cultural, historical, and environmental significance, if consistently updated, offers a solution by providing current and specific details. The interactive maps and navigation tools further aim to improve wayfinding for tourists within the region. The portal's functionality for **promoting lesser-known attractions** and showcasing the full diversity of Caraga's offerings directly tackles the issue of limited tourist routes and information. The inclusion of 360-degree virtual tours and multimedia content has the potential to entice tourists to explore beyond the well-trodden paths, thus mitigating overcrowding in popular areas. By providing potential tourists with a realistic preview of destinations through **360-degree virtual tours and multimedia content**, the portal directly addresses the **expectation versus reality gap**. This immersive experience can lead to more informed expectations and potentially higher tourist satisfaction upon arrival. Finally, the portal's unique offering of **360-degree virtual tours and detailed cultural, historical, and environmental information** differentiates it from widely used tools like Google Maps, which primarily focus on navigation. The portal provides a value-added service tailored specifically to the needs and interests of tourists seeking in-depth information and immersive pre-trip experiences in Caraga.

Alignment with RDP Objectives and Strategies:

The proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal demonstrates strong alignment with the objectives and strategies outlined in the Caraga Regional Development Plan 2023-2028. By providing interactive maps, detailed information, and a user-friendly design, the portal directly supports the RDP's implied objective of **improving tourism information and accessibility**. It serves as a concrete tool for the "Market and Product Development Program" by offering a platform to effectively showcase and access tourism offerings. The portal also has the potential to contribute to **promoting sustainable and inclusive tourism development**. By highlighting lesser-known attractions and providing detailed cultural and environmental information, it can encourage exploration of diverse sites and foster greater respect and awareness among tourists. Ensuring the portal is accessible and potentially featuring community-based tourism initiatives can further support inclusivity. As an interactive digital platform with virtual tours and multimedia content, the portal directly aligns with the RDP's strategy of **enhancing the tourist experience through technology** by leveraging ICT. Its core features, particularly the functionality for promoting lesser-known attractions and providing detailed information on a wide range of sites, directly support the RDP's objective of **diversifying tourism offerings and showcasing lesser-known destinations**.

Potential Benefits and Limitations:

The proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal offers several potential benefits, including improved accessibility of tourism information, an enhanced pre-trip planning experience for tourists, the potential for increased exploration of lesser-known destinations, a contribution to more sustainable tourism practices, enhanced overall tourist satisfaction through realistic previews, and an effective marketing tool for Caraga's tourism sector. However, there are also limitations to consider. The portal will require initial investment and ongoing maintenance to remain functional and relevant. Its effectiveness relies on the availability of high-quality multimedia content, such as virtual tours, photos, and videos, which will need to be created and managed. Consistent updates will be necessary to ensure the accuracy of the information provided. The portal's success will also depend on its adoption and use by tourists, which will require effective marketing and promotion. Furthermore, access to the portal might be limited by digital literacy and internet availability among potential users. Finally, like any technological platform, the portal could be subject to technical issues or glitches that could impact its usability.

VI. Conclusion:

The analysis indicates that the problem statement concerning the challenges in Caraga's tourism promotion is largely supported by the available information. Issues related to outdated travel information, limited showcasing of diverse attractions, and potential gaps between tourist expectations and reality appear to be valid concerns. The proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal demonstrates a strong alignment with the objectives and strategies outlined in the Caraga Regional Development Plan 2023-2028, particularly in its potential to improve information accessibility, promote sustainability and inclusivity, leverage technology, and diversify tourism offerings. The portal holds significant promise as a tool to address the identified challenges and contribute to the successful implementation of the regional development plan's goals for the tourism sector.

VII. Recommendations:

Enhancing Caraga's Tourism Promotion Efforts:

1. Prioritize the development and regular updating of comprehensive and user-friendly digital travel information for the Caraga region, potentially leveraging the proposed interactive map portal as a central platform. This should include practical information such as transportation options, accommodation details, and contact information for local tourism providers ⁵. This addresses the

validated problem of outdated information and aligns with the RDP's focus on improving market access.

2. Invest in the creation of high-quality multimedia content, including 360-degree virtual tours and engaging videos, to showcase the diversity of Caraga's attractions, particularly the lesser-known destinations ¹². This directly addresses the issues of limited route information and the expectation versus reality gap, while supporting the RDP's diversification goals.
3. Implement a robust marketing strategy to promote the Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal to potential tourists through various online and offline channels, including social media, tourism websites, and collaborations with travel agencies, as seen with the DOT's partnership with Klook ¹⁵. This ensures that the investment in the portal translates into increased awareness and usage, maximizing its impact.
4. Foster partnerships with local communities and tourism stakeholders to ensure that the information provided on the portal accurately reflects the cultural, historical, and environmental significance of each site and promotes sustainable and inclusive tourism practices, aligning with the RDP's priorities ¹⁹. This ensures the portal contributes to the RDP's goals of sustainability and inclusivity by involving local communities and respecting cultural heritage.
5. Conduct regular assessments of tourist feedback and portal usage data to identify areas for improvement and ensure the portal remains relevant and effective in meeting the needs of tourists. This allows for continuous improvement and ensures the portal remains a valuable tool for tourism promotion.

Optimizing the Proposed Caraga Tourist Spots Interactive Map Portal:

6. Ensure the portal is mobile-friendly and easily accessible on various devices, considering that tourists often rely on their smartphones and tablets for information on the go. This enhances user convenience and accessibility.
7. Incorporate features that allow for real-time updates on local conditions, such as weather alerts, road closures, and information on local events or festivals, to provide tourists with the most up-to-date information. This further addresses the issue of outdated information and enhances the portal's utility for tourists during their trip.
8. Explore the possibility of integrating booking functionalities for accommodations, tours, and transportation within the portal to create a more seamless travel planning experience for tourists. This adds significant value to the portal and aligns with the trend of online travel platforms.
9. Include multilingual support to cater to international tourists, given that the top foreign tourism markets in 2024 included visitors from the USA, Spain, Germany,

France, and the UK ⁹. This expands the reach and usability of the portal for a wider audience.

10. Consider adding interactive elements such as user reviews, ratings, and forums to foster a sense of community and provide valuable insights for potential tourists. This enhances engagement and provides social proof for the attractions listed on the portal.

VIII. Key Tables:

Table 1: Validation Status of the Problem Statement

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Table 2: Alignment of Portal Features with RDP Objectives and Strategies

Portal Feature	Validated Problem Addressed	RDP Objective/Strategy Aligned With
Interactive maps and navigation tools	Outdated Travel Information	Improving Tourism Information and Accessibility; Enhancing Connectivity ⁵
360-degree virtual tours and multimedia content	Limited Tourist Routes and Information; Expectation vs. Reality Gap	Diversifying Tourism Offerings and Showcasing Lesser-Known Destinations; Enhancing the Tourist Experience Through

		Technology ⁵
Detailed cultural, historical, and environmental information	Outdated Travel Information; Limited Tourist Routes and Information	Improving Tourism Information and Accessibility; Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism Development ⁵
Functionality for promoting lesser-known attractions	Limited Tourist Routes and Information	Diversifying Tourism Offerings and Showcasing Lesser-Known Destinations; Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism Development ⁵

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