**Love the Philippines draws widespread support**

MANILA, Philippines — Widespread support has poured in for the country’s freshly-released enhanced tourism campaign, Love the Philippines.

News5 reported that social listening tool Sprinklr recorded 59.1 million approval emotions from the public and a combined 28.9 million smile, happy, and appreciation emotions on the Love the Philippines campaign in the last 24 hours as of 4:50PM of Thursday (June 29).

Former Senator and Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Richard GORDON, the brains behind the successful “WOW PHILIPPINES campaign, manifested his support, saying that he found the enhanced campaign “instantly appealing”.

In a report, he said that Love the Philippines is “catchy and easy to recall”, adding that the phrase also “provides a double-meaning call for Filipinos to love the country more than just its physical wonders but also the people’s good traits. He said it is also a statement of appreciation for the Philippines experienced by tourists.”

United States Ambassador to the Philippines Marykay L. Carlson also expressed her support to Love the Philippines through a tweet, manifesting her personal love for the Philippines since she came here as diplomat.

“Almost one year since I arrived and I already have lots of reasons to #LoveThePhilippines—the food, the culture, and definitely the people,” she said.

National government officials have also conveyed their support to the enhanced tourism campaign.

“I love it!”, Senate President Juan Miguel “Migz” Zubiri was quoted by a news report, complimenting the branding campaign as “clear and concise”.

Posting “Love the Philippines” on her Instagram, Senator Loren Legarda said that there are countless ways to love about the country and expressed her full support to the newly launched campaign.

Former Senate President Pro Tempore and now House Deputy Speaker Ralph G. Recto, who described the Philippines as a destination like “garden of roses”, also aired his support through a statement.

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. As a travel destination, Philippines is a garden of roses. I support the DOT’s new campaign,” the House Deputy Speaker enthused.

Meanwhile, Senator Grace Poe recognized the efforts of the DOT to lure more tourists to visit the Philippines. Senator Francis “Chiz” Escudero encouraged the public to “support it instead of criticizing it outright”.

Tourism achievements in numbers

Half into this year, the DOT has already recorded 2.67 million international visitor arrivals as of June 29, 2023, 2.44 million of these are foreigners. This year, the Department is targeting a baseline of 4.8 million international tourist arrivals.

South Koreans remain the top source of foreign markets with 665,757 travelers to the Philippines, followed by the United States (509,526), Australia (128,232), Japan (127,139), and Canada (123,439).

In 2022, the industry contributed 6.2 percent to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) having churned in PHP1.87 trillion in tourism revenues.

DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco expressed her gratitude to the public and to all officials who have given widespread support for Love the Philippines.

In a television interview addressing the question of some whether Love the Philippines is a “demand” from tourists, the DOT chief said that love is not demanded as it is a natural thing that must emanate from the heart.

On the aspect of tourism, by reflecting the bountiful assets of the Philippines—from its natural wonders to its heritage, traditions, and culture–into Secretary Frasco said she has high hopes that the campaign will reawaken love for the country.

“You cannot “demand” love. It is a natural thing that must emanate from your heart. “Love the Philippines” goes to the heart of every Filipino that loves their country. You can no more force one person to love their country in the same way that you cannot force them to love themselves, or somebody else. It is a natural feeling that must come from your heart. And we truly believe that in reflecting our love of country in our new tourism tagline, we would be able to reawaken in our fellow Filipinos their own love of country,” she said.

Further, Secretary Frasco said that the tagline is also the Philippines’ “love letter to the world”, giving international tourists an opportunity to discover and know more about the Philippines, beyond the promotions and stories done in the past primarily focused on fun, reiterating that there is so much more that the Philippines can offer from its heritage, culture, history, food, experiences, and especially the love and warmth of the Filipino people.

In a separate online interview with Facts First with Christian Esguerra, veteran advertising executive Matec Villanueva shared the same observation.

“From the ground up, the first question is always: sino ba ang kinakausap ko? Who is my target audience? The target audience mo, in this case as I understand, would be foreign tourists kasi ang tiningnan din pala nila is yung kalaban in the regions,” Villanueva said.

“So, what they are trying to do is that they are trying to encapsulate that message to something that is inspiring, something that is catchy. Therefore, they come up with what we call the big idea. But the big idea is actually based on a consumer insight or your target insight,” she added.

To Secretary Frasco, the launch of “Love the Philippines” was based on the demands of the industry after the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. This, as what was once a global health emergency has changed travelers’ motivations, preferences, and behavior, leading to what is now referred to as “the changed traveler.”

The advertising executive also realized this in the enhanced tourism campaign.

“Tatlong taon tayong nakalockdown. Iba ang turista before the pandemic. Iba ang turista ng after the pandemic. Nag-iba ‘yung pananaw nila kasi before the pandemic, people are already traveling, enjoying, and then suddenly you can’t move for three years,” Villanueva said.

Building love as a concept

Love the Philippines as a concept, Secretary Frasco said, was conceived with careful consideration of the results of extensive market research and studies.

According to market research released by Euromonitor, one of the world’s leading independent providers of strategic market research, travelers are seeking new and authentic real-world experiences, which means immersing in other cultures, seeking curated experiences that are unique or out of the ordinary.

Further, travelers want to find a connection to love, and the word “love” has always been primarily associated with the Philippines. Based on Brandwatch, one of the world’s most trusted social media monitoring and analytics applications, the word “love” is frequently mentioned in high volume globally with total mentions of 140.4K (previously 92.24K) and a reach of 91.21M (previously 59.72M).

The enhanced tourism campaign, Secretary Frasco said, was designed to highlight more of what there is to love about the Philippines.

“What food do they love? What destination do they love? What experience do they love in the Philippines? It’s also an opportunity for our foreign friends from all over the world to discover so much more beyond the surface that we have scratched in how we have marketed the Philippines thus far,” Secretary Frasco said.

In an interview, Villanueva also said: “In this age of communication, ang advertising ngayon is always based on research because access to information, access to data. Now apparently, the group who did this, even the group (who conceptualized) the It’s More Fun in the Philippines had data supporting them when they came out with It’s More Fun in the Philippines. Apparently, DOT says tourists who came to the Philippines, the feeling when they came here, nag-exceed ang expectations nila. They were happy with what they experienced kasi nga tourism is an experiential thing. When they took a deep dive sa mga social media, into the internet, nakita nila na ang expression ng tao ng satisfaction o yung exceeding expectations wasn’t fun, it was love,” she emphasized.

“The verbalization of the enjoyment was love,” she added.

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