

Collaboration with resort owners and the community – A leading advantage in the fight against tourists drowning in the Philippines

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The Archipelagic Philippines – the summer capital of the world, known for its rich natural resources, biodiversity and smiling people – has 7,100 numerous islands and a total coastline of about 36,289 km (22,549 mi) with many bays, gulfs and inlets where tourists (foreign and local) flock for vacation and feel the waters for recreation.

Tourists would enjoy the different aquatic experiences every time. Unfortunately to some, exposure to the different water environments resulted in their injury or death because of drowning.

Initial efforts for drowning surveillance showed that 35 out of 49 drowning deaths in year 2009–2010 were tourists in resort pools and beaches. Out of the 35 occurrences, 45.71% are local tourists while 54.29% involved foreigners. The magnitude comes in varied age groups categorically those 5–14 years old children at 14.29%, 15–35 years age grouper at 68.57%, and those above 35 years old are rated at 17.14%. On gender, majority were males at 68.86% while females got only 37.14%.

A tripartite collaboration between resort owners, local government units and Philippine Life Saving Society was started in 2009 in Boracay Island to pilot the formulation of initiatives in the prevention of tourists drowning in the Philippines. The approach includes the cooperative planning and implementation of drowning prevention strategies for the community, the creation of in-house water safety training facility at various resorts and the introduction of best practices to focus on lifeguarding and risk management operation based on the standards recommended by the International Life Saving (ILS) and the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (RLSSA).

The threefold collaboration is a key equipper in developing the attitudes of the people, in and out of any resort, to participate and be able to contribute in the realization of a drown-free coastal and resort community. In addition, the trust would also effectively teach resort personnel and civilians within the community certain techniques in the scanning of potential danger aside from their adeptness in water safety and lifesaving. In that way, the risk of drowning can be addressed preventively.

The scheme will be replicated in other high-density tourism communities such as that in Cebu, Palawan Island, Siargao Island, La Union and Calamba Resorts. It is hoped that in 2015, a significant reduction of tourists drowning in the Philippines is achieved.

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