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Sustainable Coastal Tourism Practices in Aklan: Bases for Policy Recommendations

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Abstract. Aklan, one of the provinces in the Philippines, is known for its beautiful white beaches. Among its municipalities, Buruanga stands out with its immaculate white sand. This study examined the current state of coastal tourism, identified challenges and opportunities, and proposed policy recommendations for the effective implementation of sustainable practices in Aklan, Philippines. The research, conducted through a quantitative descriptive correlational design, involved 30 stakeholders, including resort owners, tourists, resort workers, municipal tourism officers, and local government officials. Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire and interviews. Findings revealed positive implementation of sustainable practices, particularly in policies, operations and management, socio-cultural aspects, products and services, and facilities. However, challenges persisted, such as changing existing practices and waste management. Despite these challenges, opportunities existed, including existing infrastructure and collaboration between stakeholders. Recommendations emphasized the need for strengthened waste management systems, updated policies, increased awareness campaigns, and community involvement. The study underscored a commitment to sustainable practices in Buruanga's coastal areas while identifying areas for improvement. Addressing these weaknesses can leverage existing strengths, contributing to a more environmentally responsible and economically viable tourism industry. Through its findings and recommendations, this research sought to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and communities, fostering sustainable tourism development in Buruanga, Aklan, and beyond.

Keywords: Sustainable coastal tourism; Tourism industry; Aklan; Policy Recommendation.

1.0 Introduction

The Philippines, as an archipelagic nation, heavily relies on marine-related tourism activities. Aklan is among the provinces blessed with flourishing and enchanting white beaches in the country. Buruanga, Aklan, a municipality with powdery white sand akin to its neighboring municipality, Malay, Aklan, where the world-famous Boracay beach is located. Like Boracay, Buruanga's coastal tourism attractions have led to increased visitation and international recognition, significantly contributing to local economies. However, the surge in tourist arrivals raises concerns about the sustainability of these coastal attractions and their impact on natural resources and local cultures.

As highlighted by Smith et al. (2019), the exponential tourism growth can lead to environmental degradation, cultural disruption, and strained community resources. Understanding the specific impacts of tourism on the local environment, culture, and economy is crucial for devising targeted management strategies. Moreover, Jones and Wang (2020) emphasize the importance of community involvement and stakeholder collaboration in developing sustainable tourism practices. These studies explore gaps in current practices and propose policy recommendations to ensure long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits for the region. Additionally, they aim to identify challenges and opportunities associated with coastal tourism in Buruanga, Aklan. Drawing

inspiration from Garcia and Santos (2018), who advocate for an integrated approach to coastal tourism management, this study seeks to provide comprehensive and context-specific recommendations balancing the needs of tourists, local communities, and the natural environment.

While previous studies have focused on community involvement and stakeholder collaboration, several research gaps need addressing before forming effective policy. Comprehensive data on existing sustainable practices, their effectiveness, and stakeholder awareness is lacking. Understanding the specific environmental and social impacts of tourism on Buruanga's ecosystems, waste management, resource consumption, and communities is essential. Additionally, research is needed to assess the economic viability and potential return on investment for implementing sustainable practices. Meaningful engagement with stakeholders is crucial to ensure inclusive and effective policy development. Furthermore, analyzing the existing policy landscape and enforcement mechanisms will reveal gaps and weaknesses that need addressing. Addressing these gaps requires investigating the potential and challenges of community-based tourism models, assessing the carrying capacity of Buruanga's resources, and integrating climate change adaptation strategies. By filling these knowledge gaps, this research can provide valuable insights and recommendations for promoting truly sustainable coastal tourism practices in Buruanga, Aklan, benefiting the environment, local communities, and the tourism sector itself.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive correlational design, which, without establishing cause and effect, enables the investigation and characterization of relationships between two or more variables. The quantitative descriptive correlational design is utilized in research studies aiming to provide static snapshots of situations and establish relationships between different variables (McBurney & White, 2009). This design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data that can be measured, typically through instruments, allowing numerical data to be analyzed using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2008). This design involves selecting the study's objectives, determining the order in which data is gathered and analyzed, and outlining the steps or phases of the research process in which quantitative data and results are integrated.

2.2 Research Participants

The study was conducted in the municipality of Buruanga, known for its diverse natural features, including mountains, caverns, coves, beaches, rivers, waterfalls, and seafloors, which entice tourists to explore its breathtaking and captivating natural attractions. The vantage points atop mountains offer viewers stunning vistas of the landscape. Buruanga's natural tourism appeal is a harmonious blend of beach and sun, mountains and highlands, water and water sports, and nature and religion. The respondents consisted of 30 stakeholders, including resort owners, tourists, resort workers, municipal tourism officers, and local government officials. The selection of respondents was done through purposive sampling, a deliberate method of selecting individuals based on their ability to provide insights into a particular theme, concept, or phenomenon.

2.3 Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire was utilized in this study, consisting of five (5) parts. Part I gathered information about the respondents' profiles, including age, gender, civil status, occupation, monthly income, and their involvement with coastal tourism. Part II employed a survey using the Ecotourism Tracking Tool, which included six (6) sets of standards and parameters: policies, operations and management, socio-cultural aspects, products and services, bio-ecological factors, and facilities. Part III focused on identifying challenges encountered, while Part IV addressed opportunities observed and practiced. Part V solicited responses regarding best practices and policy recommendations. Additionally, an interview guide was employed as another instrument.

To establish validity, the instrument underwent evaluation by five (5) experts. Among them, two (2) were research experts, one (1) was a language expert, and two (2) were specialization experts—one specializing in coastal areas and the other in ecological tourism. Their suggestions, recommendations, and comments were carefully considered in refining the instrument.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher collected data from various barangays in Buruanga, Aklan, where coastal attractions are situated. The instrument was distributed and administered by the researcher, who also later collected it. Clear directions for completing the questionnaires were provided to all respondents. Each respondent was allotted 20 to 30 minutes to complete the instruments. Upon completion, the researcher reviewed the completeness of the respondents' answers and asked follow-up questions based on their responses, aiding in the clarification of certain answers pertinent to the study's problem. Upon retrieval of the completed instruments, the researcher gathered them all and ensured their completeness by cross-checking the total number.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data underwent analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 21. Descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percent, and mean were employed.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, the researcher adhered to several ethical considerations. Firstly, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the methods being utilized, and the potential outcomes. This ensured that they were equipped with sufficient information to make an informed decision about participating in the research. Importantly, participants were given the freedom to choose whether or not to take part, without any form of coercion or deception. Furthermore, the researcher emphasized the importance of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Participants were assured that all information provided in the questionnaires and interviews would be treated with the utmost professionalism. Strict confidentiality measures were implemented to safeguard their privacy rights. This ensured that participants could freely share their thoughts and experiences without fear of their responses being disclosed to others.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Extent of Implementation of Sustainable Practices

This section shows the extent of sustainable practices of coastal areas at Buruanga, Aklan in terms of policies, operations and management, socio-cultural, products and services, bioecological, and facilities.

Policies

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of policies

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. The existing waste management systems in place for beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan are effective in maintaining cleanliness and environmental conservation.	3.80	Highly Observed/Practiced
2. The site or project is located within the identified ecotourism site.	4.13	Highly Observed/Practiced
3. The existing policies and regulations effectively protect and preserve the cultural heritage associated with beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	4.30	Highly Observed/Practiced
4. Local businesses and stakeholders demonstrate commitment and adherence to sustainable tourism practices at beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	4.03	Highly Observed/Practiced
5. National/Local permits and licenses (e.g. DTI registration, Mayor's permit, health sanitation certification, FlagT, PAMB resolution, etc.) are issued to legalize operations.	4.43	Highly Observed/Practiced
GRAND MEAN	**4.14**	**Highly Observed/Practiced**

Table 1 illustrates the extent of implementation of sustainable practices, particularly in terms of policies, which were highly observed and practiced, with a grand mean of 4.14. Specifically, the issuance of National/Local permits and licenses to legalize operations received a high mean score of 4.43. This suggests that, on average, sustainable practices are widely observed and practiced across various indicators in beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan. However, an indicator regarding the effectiveness of existing waste management systems received a mean score of 3.80, still categorized as "Highly Observed/Practiced." While this score indicates that waste management systems are generally effective in maintaining cleanliness and environmental conservation, there may be room for improvement to further enhance sustainability within beach attractions. Mycoo (2014) mentions that various methods for combating environmental changes include physical planning policies, integrated coastal zone management, and infrastructure projects.

Overall, while the findings indicate a high level of implementation of sustainable practices, focusing on improving waste management systems could lead to even more effective environmental conservation efforts in the area. These findings align with Schwarz & Lukacs de Pereny Martens (2022), who indicate that the extent of sustainable practices implementation varies across regions and sectors. Despite some local governments taking significant steps to integrate sustainability into their policies, challenges such as financial constraints, lack of training, and inadequate infrastructure persist.

Operational and Management

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of operational and management

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. Measures/mechanisms are in place and are fulfilled to ensure the security of the visitors.	4.17	Highly Observed/Practiced
2. There is a fee system (e.g. environmental user's fee) implemented in the area that extends contribution to the environmental management/ sustainable activities.	4.33	Highly Observed/Practiced
3. The maintenance/ improvement/ rehabilitation activities are practiced.	3.93	Highly Observed/Practiced
4. Employees/ staff are trained by DENR, DOT, and other certified training providers to fulfill/ apply ecotourism activities.	3.70	Highly Observed/Practiced
GRAND MEAN	**4.03**	**Highly Observed/Practiced**

Table 2 displays the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of operational and management, which are significant, obtaining a grand mean of 4.03, interpreted as highly observed/practiced. Specifically, the implementation of the fee system (e.g., environmental user's fee) in the area, contributing to environmental management and sustainable activities of the beach attraction, received a high mean score of 4.33. This suggests that, on average, sustainable practices are highly observed and practiced across the indicators mentioned in beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.

However, an indicator regarding the training of employees/staff received a mean score of 3.70, still categorized as "Highly Observed/Practiced." Although this score indicates that employees and staff are certified to fulfill and apply ecotourism activities through training provided by DENR and DOT, there may be room for improvement in the training process to further enhance the quality of services and products that promote sustainability within the beach attractions.

Overall, while all indicators reflect a high level of implementation of sustainable practices, focusing on further improving employee and staff training could potentially lead to even more effective environmental conservation practices in the area. These results are supported by the research of Palupiningtyas (2024), which indicates that the implementation of Green HRM practices, such as training on sustainable practices, positively influences employee engagement and organizational performance.

Socio-Cultural

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of sociocultural

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. Local community involvement and engagement in the management of beach attractions significantly contribute to their sustainability.	4.23	Highly Observed/Practiced
2. Carrying Capacity is being implemented.	3.87	Highly Observed/Practiced
3. There is a feedback mechanism being implemented.	3.33	Observed/Practiced
4. Stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes related to coastal tourism development.	3.47	Observed/Practiced
5. Local community benefits economically and socially.	4.33	Highly Observed/Practiced
GRAND MEAN	**3.85**	**Highly Observed/Practiced**

Table 3 illustrates the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of socio-cultural aspects, which was highly observed/practiced, with a grand mean of 3.85. The lowest observed indicator is the implementation of a feedback mechanism, with a mean score of 3.33. This suggests that while there is some implementation of feedback mechanisms, they may not be as prevalent or effective as other sustainable practices. Conversely, the highest observed indicator is that the local community benefits economically and socially, with a mean score of 4.33. This implies that the local community is significantly benefiting both economically and socially from the

management of beach attractions, indicating a strong integration of sustainable practices with community well-being.

Overall, the table indicates a high level of implementation of sustainable practices in managing beach attractions, with a grand mean score of 3.85, categorizing most indicators as "Highly Observed/Practiced." However, there are areas for improvement, particularly in establishing more effective feedback mechanisms. These findings align with the study of Yunus & Ahmad (2016), which suggests that integrating social and cultural aspects in Green Building Rating Tools aims to shift the focus from 'standards of living' to 'quality of life', indicating a move toward more holistic sustainability assessments.

Products and Services

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of product and services

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. Tourism products and services are nature/ environment friendly.	4.47	Highly Observed/Practiced
2. The products and services are hazard and danger-free.	4.23	Highly Observed/Practiced
3. Tourism products and services are accredited per provisions of Rules and Regulations to govern the accreditation of guides, tours, lodges, and coastal facilities.	4.00	Highly Observed/Practiced
4. Coastal Tourism products are culture-based.	4.00	Highly Observed/Practiced
GRAND MEAN	**3.34**	**Observed/ Practiced**

In Table 4, we observe the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of tourism products and services, as indicated by various indicators. The mean scores provide insight into the level of adherence to these sustainable practices. The lowest indicator in terms of mean score is "Coastal Tourism products are culture-based," with a mean score of $\bar{x} = 4.00$. While this score still falls within the "Highly Observed/Practiced" category, it is marginally lower compared to other indicators. On the other hand, the highest indicator in terms of mean score is "Tourism products and services are nature/environment-friendly," with a mean score of $\bar{x} = 4.47$. This indicates that there is a strong emphasis on incorporating environmentally friendly practices within tourism products and services.

Overall, it is evident that there is a commendable level of adherence to sustainable practices across the board, with all indicators falling within the "Highly Observed/Practiced" category. However, the slightly lower score for the indicator "Coastal Tourism products are culture-based" suggests that there may be room for further emphasis on cultural aspects within coastal tourism products. This could potentially enhance the overall sustainability and cultural authenticity of the tourism offerings.

In conclusion, the findings from Table 4 highlight the significant focus on environmentally friendly practices within tourism products and services. While this is commendable, it also underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between environmental sustainability and cultural authenticity, as indicated by the need for potential improvements in culture-based coastal tourism products. Such insights can guide future efforts toward enhancing the overall sustainability and quality of tourism experiences. These results are supported by the research of Rathi & Kaswan (2020), which suggests that the trend of using Green Trademarks indicates companies are distinguishing their products and services by emphasizing eco-friendly attributes, potentially enhancing their market presence and appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

Bioecological

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of bioecological

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. The tourism activities pose threats to biodiversity and the physical attributes of the coastal attraction site.	2.83	Observed/Practiced
2. The maintenance/ improvement/ rehabilitation activities are practiced.	3.80	Highly Observed/Practiced
3. The site is located near or within the habitat of critical biodiversity.	3.03	Observed/Practiced
4. Rules and regulations on gathering and collection of wildlife species is set per provision of RA 9147.	4.00	Highly Observed/Practiced
GRAND MEAN	**2.73**	**Observed/Practiced**

Based on Table 5, which outlines the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of bioecological indicators, the lowest indicator, with a mean score of $\bar{x}$ = 2.73, pertains to the threat posed by tourism activities to biodiversity and the physical attributes of coastal attraction sites. This suggests that while observed or practiced to some extent, there is room for improvement in mitigating the adverse effects of tourism on these sensitive ecosystems. Conversely, the highest indicator, scoring $\bar{x}$ = 4.00, indicates that rules and regulations regarding the gathering and collection of wildlife species are highly observed and practiced as per the provisions of RA 9147. This suggests a strong adherence to legal frameworks aimed at protecting biodiversity and wildlife within the studied area.

In conclusion, while there are areas where sustainable practices could be further enhanced, such as mitigating the impacts of tourism on coastal biodiversity, there are also positive signs of effective implementation, particularly in terms of regulatory compliance regarding wildlife protection. Moving forward, efforts should focus on strengthening practices to address the identified threats while continuing to uphold and enforce existing regulations for the conservation of biodiversity in the area. This balanced approach is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the studied bioecological site. This finding highlights that tourism can support species conservation and protect traditional practices by providing alternative local sustainable development options, with very few local culturally important species threatened by tourism (Grignon & Morrison, 2015).

Facilities

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of facilities

	INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1.	The current infrastructure development (facilities, walkways, etc.) adequately supports sustainable tourism at beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	3.93	Highly Observed/Practiced
2.	The design of the site and its structures/ facilities in harmony with the environment per provision of DAO-2009-09 such as tourism carrying capacity is considered in the design, density of the structure in comparison to total area(not too crowded, and took advantage of natural lights and vegetation.	4.23	Highly Observed/Practiced
3.	The design of the coastal tourism site and its structure/facilities show cultural considerations.	4.00	Highly Observed/Practiced
4.	The materials used in the structures and facilities are natural.	4.10	Highly Observed/Practiced
5.	The materials used in the structures and facilities are locally sourced such as primary building materials like stone, earth, plants, and wood that are available locally are prioritized, use of recyclable products and materials are also prioritized, and tertiary materials that are man-made (i.e., artificial, synthetic, non-renewable) that are minimized, if not avoided.	4.10	Highly Observed/Practiced
6.	There are conservation practices in the designing of structures and facilities.	3.77	Highly Observed/Practiced
7.	The source of water is sustainable.	3.87	Highly Observed/Practiced
8.	The site is practicing proper waste management such as for solid waste, there is already an MRF, and wastewater treatment facilities are installed and operational.	3.63	Highly Observed/Practiced
GRAND MEAN		**3.95**	**Highly Observed/Practiced**

From Table 6, it's evident that the extent of implementation of sustainable practices in terms of facilities at beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan, is generally high, with all indicators falling under the category of "Highly Observed/Practiced." The highest indicator in terms of mean score is Indicator 2, with a mean score of ($\bar{x}$ =4.23). This indicator relates to the design of the site and its structures/facilities in harmony with the environment, taking into account factors such as tourism carrying capacity, density of structures, utilization of natural light, and integration with vegetation. The high score indicates that there is strong adherence to these principles in the design and development of coastal tourism sites in the area, suggesting a commendable effort towards sustainable development.

On the other hand, the lowest indicator in terms of mean score is Indicator 8, with a mean score of ($\bar{x}$ =3.63). This indicator pertains to proper waste management practices, including the presence of materials recovery facilities (MRFs) for solid waste and operational wastewater treatment facilities. While still rated as "Highly Observed/Practiced," the comparatively lower score suggests that there might be some room for improvement in waste management practices, emphasizing the importance of further attention and investment in this aspect to ensure holistic sustainability.

In conclusion, the findings indicate a generally positive picture of sustainable practices in facilities at beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan. However, while certain aspects such as environmental harmony in design receive high scores, there remains a need to bolster waste management efforts to achieve even greater levels of sustainability. Addressing this gap could further enhance the overall sustainability of tourism activities in the area, contributing to long-term environmental conservation and community well-being. The result supports that in the context of waste management, local governments have established regulations and provided guidelines, but full compliance and effective infrastructure remain issues to be addressed (Pujiyanto & Kusumaningrum, 2023).

3.2 Challenges Encountered

Table 7 shows the challenges encountered in implementing sustainable practices in coastal areas at Buruanga, Aklan. The lowest indicator ($\bar{x}$=1.93) concerning wildlife disturbance implies that this aspect might not be a pressing concern for stakeholders, potentially indicating effective management strategies in place to mitigate such disturbances. Conversely, the highest indicator ($\bar{x}$=3.30) highlights the significant hurdle of altering established practices towards more sustainable alternatives. This suggests a need for targeted interventions and strategies to overcome resistance to change and foster a culture of sustainability within the community.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the challenges in implementing sustainable practices

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. The lack of proper waste management facilities and practices is a significant challenge impacting the sustainability of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	3.17	Experience/Encountered
2. Economic barriers for businesses to adopt sustainable practices	3.13	Experience/Encountered
3. Inadequate infrastructure poses a significant challenge to the sustainable management of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	2.87	Experience/Encountered
4. Difficulty in changing existing practices.	3.30	Experience/Encountered
5. Limited collaboration among stakeholders presents a challenge for achieving sustainable management of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	2.97	Experience/Encountered
6. Less involvement and participation of the community towards sustainable practices.	2.30	Somewhat Experience/Encountered
7. No accredited ecotour guide, ecotours, ecolodge, and ecotour facilities in the area.	2.47	Somewhat Experience/Encountered
8. Products in the area are not made of locally sourced materials.	2.33	Somewhat Experience/Encountered
9. The wildlife in the site is disturbed.	1.93	Not Experienced/Encountered
10. Medical facilities are not accessible and available within the ecotourism site for tourists and locals.	2.93	Experienced/Encountered
11. There are no available signage, placards, warning signs or similar posting in the area for precaution and advice.	2.73	Experienced/Encountered
GRAND MEAN	**2.74**	**Experience/Encountered**

In conclusion, while challenges such as wildlife disturbance appear to be less prevalent, the difficulty in transitioning to sustainable practices emerges as a critical obstacle in the context of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive strategies that promote awareness, education, and collaboration among stakeholders to foster a more sustainable and resilient environment for ecotourism in the region. The participants concurred that coastal tourism development often leads to environmental degradation, such as the decline in biodiversity and the destruction of natural habitats (Hengky, 2019).

3.3 Opportunities

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the opportunities in implementing sustainable practices

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. Stronger collaboration between government, tourism industry, and local communities	3.93	Highly Experienced/Encountered
2. Opportunities exist for enhancing community-based tourism initiatives that promote local culture and traditions at beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	3.97	Highly Experienced/Encountered
3. Increased awareness campaigns and education programs	3.80	Highly Experienced/Encountered
4. There are opportunities for revising or implementing policies that could better preserve the natural environment of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	3.93	Highly Experienced/Encountered
5. Development of eco-friendly tourism activities and infrastructure	4.03	Highly Experienced/Encountered
GRAND MEAN	**3.93**	**Highly Experienced/Encountered**

In Table 8, opportunities for implementing sustainable practices in coastal areas at Buruanga, Aklan are outlined. The lowest indicator in the table is "Increased awareness campaigns and education programs," with a mean score of $\bar{x}$ = 3.80. This suggests that while respondents generally perceive this aspect positively, there may be room for improvement in terms of the effectiveness or reach of awareness campaigns and education programs in promoting sustainable practices. On the other hand, the highest indicator is "Development of eco-friendly tourism activities and infrastructure," with a mean score of $\bar{x}$ = 4.03. This indicates that respondents highly agree or have extensive experience with the potential for developing eco-friendly tourism activities and infrastructure. This suggests that there is a strong recognition of the importance of environmentally sustainable practices in the tourism sector.

In conclusion, the results highlight significant potential for enhancing sustainable practices in Buruanga, Aklan's tourism industry. While there is already a high level of collaboration between the government, the tourism industry, and local communities, there is an opportunity to further strengthen awareness campaigns and education programs. Additionally, the emphasis on developing eco-friendly tourism activities and infrastructure underscores a growing awareness and commitment to environmental sustainability within the region's tourism sector. Overall, these findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners in fostering sustainable tourism development in Buruanga, Aklan. This result supports that the implementation of a green economy can enhance social solidarity within communities by promoting environmentally friendly practices that provide equitable economic and social benefits (Sulistiowati and Yasin, 2023).

3.4 Best Practices and Policy Recommendations

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the best practices and policy recommendations

INDICATOR	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. Implementing regular beach clean-up drives and waste recycling initiatives is an effective best practice for ensuring the sustainability of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan.	4.40	Highly Experienced/Encountered
2. Promoting community-based tourism activities that highlight local culture and traditions is recommended.	3.97	Highly Experienced/Encountered
3. Establishing eco-friendly infrastructure and facilities (e.g., renewable energy, environmentally friendly amenities) is recommended.	3.83	Highly Experienced/Encountered
4. Developing and enforcing policies that promote responsible tourist behavior and environmental conservation.	3.77	Highly Experienced/Encountered
5. Encouraging active collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders (local government, businesses, and communities).	3.77	Highly Experienced/Encountered
6. Permits and licenses are regularly renewed.	4.43	Highly Experienced/Encountered
7. Constant monitoring and evaluation of various activities (e.g. infrastructure development, landscaping, road accessibility)	3.70	Highly Experienced/Encountered
8. Encourage participation and engagement of the community by conducting festivals, coastal clean-up, and tree planting among others.	3.77	Highly Experienced/Encountered
9. Locally sourced raw materials are available and utilized for the products.	3.70	Highly Experienced/Encountered
10. Seminars, training, and workshops leading to accreditation of Eco tour-guide, Eco tours, Ecolodge, and Eco tour facilities are attended both by the owner/managers and employees.	3.80	Highly Experienced/Encountered
11. Reporting to the authority concerned if there are unlawful/illegal activities happening in the tourism sites.	3.83	Highly Experienced/Encountered
12. Conservation of biodiversity and wildlife is observed.	4.10	Highly Experienced/Encountered
13. There are available signage, placards, warning signs, and similar postings in the area for precaution and advice.	3.70	Highly Experienced/Encountered
GRAND MEAN	**3.91**	**Highly Experienced/Encountered**

Table 9 presents the best practices and policy recommendations for sustainability in coastal areas at Buruanga, Aklan. The lowest indicator, with a mean score of $\bar{x}$ = 3.70, is a tie between three practices: constant monitoring and evaluation of various activities, encouraging the participation and engagement of the community, and ensuring locally sourced raw materials are available and utilized for products. These aspects seem to be areas where there might be room for improvement or where the implementation might not be as widespread as other practices.

On the other hand, the highest indicator, with a mean score of $\bar{x}$ = 4.43, is the regular renewal of permits and licenses. This indicates that this practice is highly observed or practiced among the stakeholders involved in beach

sustainability efforts in Buruanga, Aklan, suggesting a robust regulatory framework or strong adherence to administrative requirements in this aspect.

In conclusion, while the overall mean score of the best practices and policy recommendations is $\bar{x} = 3.91$, indicating a generally high level of experience or encounter across the board, there are still areas for improvement, particularly in aspects such as constant monitoring and community engagement. However, the consistently high scores across most indicators suggest a strong foundation for sustainable beach management in the region, with regulatory compliance being a notable strength. Continued efforts to address areas of improvement while building upon existing strengths can further enhance the sustainability of beach attractions in Buruanga, Aklan. This result is supported by the research of Hall (2020), which stated that signs serve as educational tools, informing tourists about sensitive ecosystems, such as coral reefs, and the importance of conservation efforts.

These findings were supported by one respondent:
"When it comes to cleaning the surroundings is only us here the owners of each resort at their staff clean every day, like cleaning the sand, and throwing of trash especially if we have a day tour, we would clean it immediately, but our problem is when it comes to trash bins, we do not have what we say an area or place that is allocated by the municipal office for the trashes, the MRF particularly, so we would just pile it at the backyard that is out of sight of the guests and we will wait for it to be collected by the municipality."

Another respondent added:
"If in our resorts ma'am especially on the beach areas we do not have an MRF assigned but it is visited by our trucks and collected, there are even cases they do not put their trash already, that is why we want to implement it here that they should have an MRF for the resort or homestay, because the trashes scatters especially during southwest monsoon, trashes gets all over the sea and beaches."

4.0 Conclusion

The study reveals generally positive implementation of sustainable practices, especially in terms of policies, where there is a strong focus on legal compliance of permits and licenses and cultural heritage preservation. Moreover, in regards to operations and management, well-implemented fee systems to support environmental initiatives and security measures for visitors are also practiced. Regarding the bioecological aspect, effective regulations on wildlife gathering and collection are strictly followed. Additionally, in terms of products and services together with facilities, eco-friendly products and accredited services, as well as environmentally friendly design for facilities using locally sourced materials, are observed. However, despite these positive practices, respondents believed that there are areas that need improvements, starting with waste management, where full implementation across all coastal areas is needed. Moreover, employee training also needs improvement, especially concerning ecotourism activities where sustainable practices must be properly observed to protect all biodiversity in the area.

In addition, implementing sustainable practices in coastal areas faces challenges, particularly in changing existing practices, waste management, and minimizing wildlife disturbance. These challenges are likely due to limited intervention time for adjustments and a lack of proper waste management facilities. However, the minimal observed disturbances to wildlife suggest that efforts are being made to mitigate these challenges.

As for opportunities, the findings indicate promising opportunities to advance sustainable practices in coastal attractions in the area. The existing infrastructure made with eco-friendly and local materials provides a strong foundation for developing sustainable tourism activities. Moreover, a strong collaboration between government, the tourism industry, and local communities fosters a supportive environment for implementing sustainable practices. However, there are areas for improvement, such as education and awareness. Increased awareness campaigns and educational programs are crucial to empower stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to effectively implement sustainable practices. To address these, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Tourism, and Local Government Unit should collaborate to strengthen waste management systems, update policies, and increase awareness. Educated stakeholders can then share their knowledge with others, creating a ripple effect that drives long-term success to whole coastal areas.

The study highlights both strengths and areas for improvement regarding best practices and policy recommendations in coastal areas. While there is a strength in legal compliance, with regular permit and license renewal indicating a strong focus on legal operations within the coastal attraction site, constant monitoring and evaluation need to be strengthened to track the effectiveness of implemented practices. Additionally, encouraging community participation is needed for better strategies to involve local communities in sustainable practices. The role of tourists, resort owners, and local communities is also crucial in supporting sustainable practices. Overall, despite the need for improvement in some areas, there is generally positive implementation of best practices and policy recommendations.

In conclusion, the findings indicate a commitment to sustainable practices in the coastal areas of Buruanga, Aklan. Addressing the weaknesses can leverage the existing strengths to significantly enhance sustainable practices in these coastal areas, contributing to a more environmentally responsible and economically viable tourism industry.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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