

Co-existence of Nature and Humans: Towards the 21st Century (5)

Part 5: Ecotourism on Bohol Island, the Philippines

Bohol is an island of some 4,100km² (the tenth largest in the Philippines) with a population of one million, located to the east of the popular tourist destination Cebu. The main industry of Bohol is agriculture, which is mainly conducted for domestic consumption on Bohol, and the island hosts no other active industries. According to some surveys, the average annual income of the farmers of Bohol is 30,000-40,000 pesos (about 100,000 yen) per household. Half (or up to 70%) of their income is spent on food, making their Engel's co-efficient rating very high. Until February 1999 there was a direct flight connection from Manila to Bohol, but at present this route is closed due to some problems relating to lease contracts of aircraft. Now the island can be reached only by a high-speed ferry from Cebu Island (approx. 1.5 hours distant).

The capital of the state of Bohol is Tagbilaran with a population of 60,000-70,000, and there are two big supermarkets, which sell various goods including foodstuffs, clothes, toys and other everyday items. The invitation to participate in a mass-consumption society can be felt even here. The main means of public transport are minibuses converted from light trucks, jeepneys, tricycles (a type of motorbike taxi with a sort of sidecar attached to carry passengers), but recently the number of cars has increased and there are now some normal car taxis with air-conditioning.

Also found on the island of Bohol are the wonders of nature; the beautiful sea in which one can enjoy scuba diving, appreciating corals and tropical fish; magnificent scenery consisting of rows of over 1,000 cone-shaped peaks called the Chocolate Hills; the Tarsier which is the smallest primate in the world; and stalactite caves etc. Recently there has been a movement to develop ecotourism on this island by using such rich natural resources as tourist attractions. As described above, farming is the only cash income source for Bohol, and ecotourism is drawing attention as a potentially new source of income. At the same time, seeing the island's nature as an important resource, some people have started environment conservation activities in order to utilize the resources in a sustainable manner. Even if gaining potential alternative income sources may be their direct motive, it is praiseworthy that such a natural resource conservation movement has started within the local community. However, at present their 'ecotourism' consists simply of showing existing natural tourism resources to tourists. For further development of ecotourism it is necessary to train instructors who can guide the tourists in meaningful ways.

The neighboring island of Cebu is crowded, with a number of expensive hotels and golf courses for tourists. Outside Cebu City are mostly poor farm villages. On the island of Bohol there seems to be a sort of sense of competition with Cebu Island, and thus Bohol may have a good basis to develop its own tourism, while learning and stressing its distinction from its neighbor's 'destructive tourism development'.



The image display of natural resources of Bohol as tourist attractions



The rare primate species: the Tarsier