

# Linking Peripheral Coastal Areas with a Tourism Hub: Tourism Gateways for Cagsao, Calabanga and Itangon, Bula in Camarines Sur, Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

Ecotourism destinations are vibrant zones that offers a tourist diverse landscapes and culture in fusion with nature. These areas are however, peripheral and often inaccessible. This study explores the proposal of linking two peripheral communities, Cagsao and Itangon into a regional tourism hub where its tourism assets may contribute to sustainable tourism and local development. With field surveys, key informant interviews and spatial analysis, the study identified, described and assessed the communities' tourism potential. Integral to the research work is the definition of the connectivity and linkage of the tourism sites with a tourism hub. A community-based tourism strategy is recommended by the study as channel to link these peripheral tourism sites with a tourism hub or gateway. The linkage with the tourism gateway and the communities is mutually beneficial; the tourism hub to diversify visitor experience and the peripheral communities with access to the mainstream tourism market. This connectivity would lead to an enhanced regional tourism value and uplift local livelihoods. With such collaborative arrangement and investment, the future of Cagsao and Itangon as thriving coastal tourism destinations is confidently assured.

**Keywords:** *Ecotourism Potential; Peripheral Communities; Tourism Gateway*

## INTRODUCTION

Camarines Sur, Philippines, is rich in coastal areas with strong eco-tourism potential. These vibrant zones boast diverse landscapes, ecosystems, and a culture deeply intertwined with nature—often remote, unspoiled, and ideal for nature adventurers. However, limited access constrains their development. Linking these destinations to a tourism hub offers promise, but requires a deep contextual understanding of these peripheral areas to unlock opportunities.

The understanding of these peripheries however, should not simply be in terms of terms of geography, referring to areas situated on the outer edges or remote parts of a region. Brown and Hall (2000) emphasize that this spatial aspect is only one component of a broader definition. To fully grasp the concept of peripherality, one must also consider political, social, and economic factors. Economically, these areas are frequently underdeveloped and face the decline of traditional industries, particularly agriculture. Socially, they are prone to challenges that stem from their economic and political marginalization (Botterill, et.al. 2000).

The connectivity or linkage of these peripheral tourism destinations with a

central tourism hub or a gateway is a strategic approach. Pearce in 2002 emphasizes that an understanding of core-periphery relationships in tourism often is an underlying context of connectivity and linkage. What is of essence is the context or setting of these peripheral areas relative to a tourism hub. The answer would be the basis for a framework of linkage and relationship with a tourism hub that would be sustainable.

The linkage framework may involve varied considerations. According to Swarbrooke (1999) tourism should be sustainable: “a kind of tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future tourism depends, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community”.

Given such challenge to sustainable tourism and tourism linkage, this study aims to set forth a development framework that attempts to bring these peripheral tourist destinations to the hub of development. Interestingly, this “critical link” is shared with the vision of the Metro Naga Development Council (MNDC) to essentially utilize the community’s ecology and natural resources to “bring balanced development with the peripheral communities similarly enjoying the benefits of tourism”. With Naga City as the hub of tourism and the peripheries as the tourist destination, a development framework of linking the peripheries to the hub is of practical essence. Peripheral areas when linked effectively to central hubs, can diversify the visitor experience and stimulate local economies (Pearce, 2002). Simply, tourism is a strategy for development (Suansri,2003).

MNDC believes that this will essentially boost local development, enhance and diversify visitor experience, and distribute economic benefits to the peripheries. There are many novel strategies at developing that critical link. The linking strategies may include themed itineraries, transport connectivity, community-based tourism, digital promotion, among others. But what

is basic tourism should be nature-based. Nature-based tourism as synonymous with ecotourism should at a minimum possess two aspects: environmental conservation and improvement of social as well as economic conditions in the local community (Lopez, 2025; Ardoin and Bowers, 2023; Probstl, 2013).

The case of Itangon and Cagsao provides a deep dive at what it has to offer as a tourism destination and what will be the strategic framework of integration or linkage with a tourism hub.

### **Objectives**

The study aimed to develop a framework towards establishing a link between a tourism hub and the peripheral communities

Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Identify and describe the potential ecotourism sites in the two coastal communities that are the subject for this study;
2. Assess the potential of ecotourism sites of the two coastal communities
3. Develop an integration and linkage mechanism of these 2 coastal communities with a tourism hub

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Tourism and Sustainable Tourism**

Tourism continues to be among the fastest growing industries in the world despite global economic adversity. Tourism involves the travelling to and staying in places outside usual environment for leisure, business, and other purposes (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). It is widely acknowledged that tourism is an industry that contributes significantly to economic development. Amid these great contributions, however, there are downsides of tourism that have recently come into focus. This has resulted to the emergence of sustainable tourism that is profitable, yet does not destroy natural resources and improves on the well-being of the people in a community. According to Swarbrooke (1999), sustainable tourism is: “A kind of tourism which is economically

viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community". The key principles of sustainable tourism include preserving resources, maintaining biodiversity, ensuring equity, and protecting cultural heritage.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) outlined that sustainable tourism should: 1.) Make optimal use of environmental resources, 2.) Respect the sociocultural authenticity of host communities, and 3.) Ensure viable, long-term WTO & UNEP, (2005). The main focus of sustainable tourism is to strike a balance between the host (local community), the guest (visitors) and the environment (Page, et al. 2006).

This paradigm aligns with sustainable development where needs of the future generations are not compromised (World Commission on Development and Environment 1987). Sustainable tourism also reinforces economic, social, and environmental sustainability as agreed at global summits in Rio (1992) and Johannesburg (2002), and to include promotion of responsible resource use, ensuring equity, and enhancing conservation.

### **Community-based tourism**

Community-based tourism is defined in many ways. Brohman cited by Vasiliu in 2012 describes CBT as one that "enhances local participation and promotes the economic, social and cultural well-being of the popular majority". Suansri (2003) defined the five principal aspects of CBT as economics, social, cultural, political, and environmental. CBT is primarily perceived to raise or augment the income of the locals; raise the quality of life, promote community pride, and build the community management organizations; and develop their respect for other cultures and must foster cultural exchange.

Community-based tourism (CBT) gives tourists a unique experience to see and feel the everyday working lives of the local and

indigenous people. It is a concept that involves local residents in the management of some tourism projects to help minimize poverty and enhance peoples' quality of life. Community-based tourism is a management mechanism that intends to aid the lives of local and indigenous residents while protecting their environment (Pearce,1992). As travelers discover local habitats and wildlife, and celebrates and respects traditional cultures, rituals and wisdom. Eventually, the community becomes aware of the commercial and social value placed on their natural and cultural heritage through tourism, and this will foster community-based conservation of these resources ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)).

Buyinza, M. and Acobo, J.T. (2009) indicated that the economic benefits of CBT are in the form of livelihood or employment opportunities such as local tourist guidance, and income generation from handcraft and entertainment industry. Despite the benefits however, CBT faces challenges such as limited infrastructure, fluctuating tourist demand, and the need for continuous capacity building. Salazar (2012) warns that without sustained institutional support; community motivation may wane. The Siruma project addressed this by integrating mentorship and adaptive planning into its framework (Lopez & Palis, 2020).

### **Tourism Gateway**

Peripheral communities with tourism attractions are often constrained to accept tourists. Brown and Hall (2000), emphasizes that this spatial aspect is only one component of a broader definition of peripherality. Peripherality involves political, social, and economic factors. Economically, these areas are frequently underdeveloped and face the decline of traditional industries, particularly agriculture. Socially, they are prone to challenges that stem from their economic and political marginalization (Botterill, et.al. 2000).

The connectivity of these tourism attractions to a tourism circuit contributes to the

wholistic development of the community. Pearce in 2002 suggests that an understanding of core-periphery relationships in tourism as an underlying context of connectivity and linkage. Peripheral areas need to be linked or connected with a tourism hub or a travel gateway. Zurick (1992) defines a travel gateway as an intervening or staging area that facilitates tourism flows from the metropolitan areas or hubs. These are transfer points which have direct links to channel the flow of tourists.

Gateways are key facilitators of access to tourism destinations. Yang and Smith (2024) determined that environmental assets—such as historic trails, scenic viewpoints, proximity to national parks, and campsites—are strongly correlated tourism demand. This insight offers a strategic framework for investing in tourism assets that align with market preferences. On the other hand, the receptivity of gateway communities plays pivotal role in the success of tourism destinations. Perren et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of considering local residents' sentiments toward tourism and the management of protected areas (PAs). Their study highlights that community support or opposition can significantly influence the viability of designating a locality as a gateway.

In South Africa, Meyer (2004) identified Cape Town as the primary gateway to the Stellenbosch tourism area. However, this gateway faced infrastructure challenges. To address these issues, the Stellenbosch Development Plan (2002–2006) designated Spier as a mini-hub. Spier now offers attractions, lodging, visitor information, and serves as a transfer point from larger buses to smaller ones—effectively easing access to the destination.

Zurich (1992) proposes a model that is grounded in core-periphery tourism theory: an adventure travel spatial-linkage model, which maps the hierarchical structure of travel gateways connecting remote, subsistence-based tourism sites to the global

tourism economy. Raveendran et al. (2025) further argued that while tourism is a powerful economic driver, the industry must confront critical challenges. A tourism model that safeguards both heritage and the environment, promotes shared prosperity and sustainable development is considered a best option.

Collectively, these studies provide a conceptual foundation for understanding gateway dynamics, which can inform the development of tourism access strategies for destinations such as Cagsao and Itangon.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

The study used the Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR requires the active involvement of both researchers and community members in identifying issues, initiating context-specific interventions, and reflecting on outcomes to inform subsequent cycles of inquiry and action (Kindon et al., 2007). This is further supported by the University of Reading (2023) which states that PAR is not only about investigating the local issues but it is about finding solutions/actions to the issues that are being investigated. O'Brien (1998) highlights PAR's applicability not only in addressing concrete problems but also in exploratory research where situations are ambiguous and undefined.

To operationalize PAR in this study, a combination of data collection methods was used. In the identification and description of the potential sites secondary data review and focused group discussions (FGD) were employed. The assessment of the potential of the sites was also done through an FGD session with locals using 5 indicators: distinctiveness, drawing power, amenities, accessibility, and safety and security (Sciortino and Venturella, 2022; Al Mamun, A., & Mitra, S. (2012).

The local level assessment was followed by an expert panel assessment composed of the Municipal Tourism Officer, representatives of the Department of Tourism and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the private sector. The expert

panel assessment is designed to provide a multidisciplinary insight, contextual sensitivity, and credibility and objectivity (Sciortino and Venturella, 2022; Al Mamun and Mitra, 2012).

A 4-point Likert scale was used with 1-not accepted, 2-fairly accepted, 3 moderately accepted and 4-highly accepted to assess the potential. A composite score based from the locals and expert panel rating determined the ranks of the sites. A rank of 1 means high potential.

## RESULT

### Describing and Understanding Itangon and Cagsao as Ecotourism Destinations

Itangon and Cagsao are both coastal villages with fishing and farming as a major preoccupation of the community. Both exhibit nature with its extensive beaches and clear seawater that reflects the blue sky. These sites are part of the coastlines of Camarines Sur and are considered as potential targets of tourism “development”. With the current trends in ecotourism, these areas fit very well into the “must visit” categories of ecotourism destinations. These areas are however, fragile, remote and peripheral.

Cagsao and Itangon are rich in diverse flora and fauna, making them appealing to ecotourists. Both are part of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and Conservation Priority Areas (CPAs). Itangon, in Bula, belongs to the Ragay Gulf KBA and Ragay-Ticao-Burias CPA, prioritized for reef fishes, corals, mollusks, and mangroves. Cagsao, in Calabanga, is within the Caramoan-Isarog CPA, noted for terrestrial mammals (Conservation International, 2008).

### Itangon, Bula by the Gulf of Ragay

One of the best sites identified in Bula, Camarines Sur is Itangon. It is a coastal barangay 17 kilometers from the poblacion. It is a scenic village facing Ragay Gulf, famous for its black-pebbled beach, coral reefs, seagrass, caves, rock formations and seafood. The people of barangay Itangon are friendly and accommodating. Village elders retell old time stories and how the name Itangon came about. The name actually came from the word Itangol meaning “sitting on a lap of a person”.

Itangon boasts a pristine coastal ecosystem ideal for swimming, boating, and fishing. Its shores feature white pebbles, a fine sand cove to the north, and a black pebble cove to the south. Limestone tidal caves and vibrant coral reefs—locally named “Bago-dila” (tongue shaped) and “Masetera” (garden pot shaped)—add to its charm. Mangroves thrive in the northern part, enriching its ecotourism appeal.

Itangon is one of the 33 barangays of the town of Bula, located at the southwestern tip of the municipality. The estimated 2025 population of the barangay is 1,874 with annual growth rate of 0.38% (<https://www.philatlas.com/luzon/r05/camarines-sur/bula/itangon.html>). The barangay thrives with hills for forest products, coconuts, and bananas, and the lowlands for rice and corn production, and the coastal ecosystem that offers fishing and marine products. About 70% of the locals are fishermen. The average monthly income is about PhP 4,000.

Tourism potential of Cagsao, Calabanga and Itangon, Bula

The tourism potentials in Itangon is a combination of pristine natural and unique social destinations and events as described in Table 1.

**Table 1. Tourism Potentials in Itangon**

Category	Tourism Potential	Local Description
Natural sites	Masetera	It is a unique rock formation shaped like a flower pot located in the middle of the sea
	BagoDila	Another unique rock formation which, according ro the locals, is shaped like a tongue which means “dila” in the Filipino and in the Bicol dialect. The experts, however, relates it more to a

		sleeping crocodile.
	White beach	The beach with fine sand of gray to white color.
	Coral Reefs	Colorful coral reefs which abound near Masetera and very ideal for snorkeling.
	Black Pebbles	A beach of consistently small black pebbles from the beach and down under the sea.
	Caves	Two tidal caves beautifully embedded in the rock formations of Ngarangara and boundary of Itangon and Hamoraon.
	Springs/Camping sites	Scenic sites located in Ngarangara and Rawiswhere tourists can stay instead of the homestay accommodation.
	Hills	Natural green sights at the backdrop of the blue sea.
Tourism Products		
	Novelty products like bamboo fans, hats, and wall décor	Souvenir items that can be sold for sale to tourists made out of indigenous products like bamboo, wood shave, buri midribs.
	Kwitis and hot air balloon	Unique products for special occasions made by an old couple.
	Bukayo, tabrilya, Sangkaka, native food products, (kakanin), dried fish, bagoong	Food products made and sold by the locals. Appeals to tourists who are passionate on local foods.
Tourism Activities	Fiesta celebration -Banca race -carabao race -field demo -street dance	Activities in the month of October to highlight the Fiesta celebration in honor of their Feast Saint, St. Raphael of Archangel.
	Demo on making dried fish	An activity of the fisherfolks particularly the wives. This is an attraction that educates the tourists on dried fish making and at the same time satisfies their gastronomic craving for homemade dried fish.
	Religious activities like Flores de Mayo/Santacruzán, pasyon and Cenaculo, cantora sa dotoc, fluvial procession of St. Raphael	Annual activities that depict the religious tradition in Itangon particularly during Holy Week, May Festival, and barangay fiesta.
	folk dance	A traditional, colorful, and graceful performance of the locals.
	story telling	A favorite past time of few old locals in Itangon. They narrate old tales to the children which is basically a good experience in CBT.

### Cagsao, Calabanga by San Miguel Bay

One of the best coastal sites identified for tourism in Calabanga is Cagsao. Cagsao is located at the northernmost tip of the Municipality of Calabanga. It has an extensive coast facing San Miguel Bay to its north. The town proper of Calabanga is 12 kilometers to its southwest, and the City of Naga is about 20 kilometers to its south. It is said that Cagsao originated from the word “nagcocorasaw-cosaw na mga sira” or fish whirling in the mangrove area and while during low tide, the fishes left in the mangrove area whirl as local folk catch or collect them.

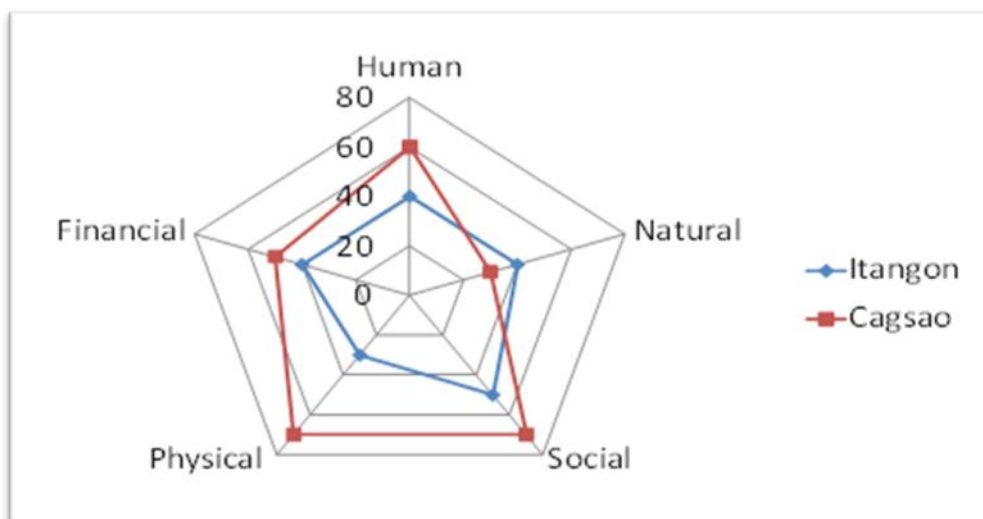
The 2020 population of Cagsao is 1,893 with an annual growth rate of 3.16% between 2015 to 2020.

(<https://www.philatlas.com/luzon/r05/camarines-sur/calabanga/cagsao.html>). The average household size is 5. Fishing and coconut farming is the main source of livelihood. The FGD session revealed that about 90% the average monthly income is about Php 5,000.

Cagsao offers a unique blend of nature and culture, with mangrove forests, beaches, and vibrant religious festivals. Its annual fiesta features a fluvial procession, boat racing, and kayaking—celebrating the rich fish harvest from San Miguel Bay. The community’s cultural values and natural assets create a distinctive eco-tourism experience rooted in the harmony of nature and tradition.

**Table 2. Tourism Potentials in Cagsao**

Category	Tourism Potential	Local Description
Natural sites	Mangrove plantation	Established in 2009, the mangrove plantation spans over five hectares along the tidal flats of Cagsao, a coastal village vulnerable to storm surges and flooding. It is a remarkable example of community-led environmental resilience and coastal protection.
	Kawit Island	A laddle shaped island fronting the Cagsao beach Ideal for island hopping.
Cultural Sites	Station of the cross	It is situated at an elevated land at the back of the barangay Chapel which is along the main road of Cagsao. Visitors frequent the Station of the Cross particularly during Holy Week.
	Museum	A one storey building which houses the history of Cagsao crafted on the wall, and creative art works like murals, paintings, sculptures. A “must see” to understand the life in Cagsao.
Products	Food product: Cagbalao	Bicol express branded by the locals as “Cagbalao” which stands for Cagsao and Balaw. Balaware the small shrimps or krill which abound in the Ragay Gulf.
	Small boats made by children & other novelties	The art work of the children in Cagsao which draws the attention of tourists. Small boats with the name of tourist are perfect souvenirs. Other novelty items for souvenirs include wall decors, frames, and others.
	Corsage made from indigenous materials	Corsage out of indigenous products in the community will be used as welcome gift to tourists.
Activities	Marine fluvial procession	Procession in the sea during the barangay Fiesta.
	Boat festival during fiesta	Boat racing activity during fiesta.
	Mangrove planting	Classified as an educational tourism. A regular planting activity of students, groups, and organizations along thecoastal area of Cagsao devoted to mangroves.



**Figure 1. Asset Pentagon of Itangon and Cagsao, 2024**

The asset pentagon highlights differing resource strengths in Itangon and Cagsao. Cagsao has stronger social, physical, and human assets, with better road access and active NGO and academic presence. In contrast, Itangon’s limited accessibility hinders social and human capital growth,

though it excels in natural capital. These differences call for tailored ecotourism development strategies for each community (Figure 1). The study of Yang and Smith (2024) revealed the environmental assets (historic trails, viewpoints, proximity to national parks, and campsites specifically)

are highly and significantly correlated with outdoor recreation and tourism demand. This implies that in this present study, the physical assets of Cagsao and Itangon can guide the Local Government Unit and the Department of Tourism to strategically invest in their existing tourism assets that will align with market demands.

### ***Local and Expert Panel Assessment of the Potential of Ecotourism Sites in Cagsao and Itangon***

The criteria for the assessment of the tourism attractions were based on the Key Criteria for Tourism Site Evaluation Matrix (TSEM) of the Department of Tourism. These are: Uniqueness and Natural Beauty, Historical/Cultural Value, Accessibility, Basic Utilities, On-site Facilities, Quality of Surroundings, Ownership, and Other Factors, these criteria were modified to include the Distinctiveness of the Site, Drawing power, Amenities, Accessibility, and Safety and Security.

#### **Itangon**

The assessment of the locals and expert panel shows that among the tourism sites, at rank 1 are the two caves situated in BagoDila and Ngarangara. At rank 2.5 are Masetera and the two springs which are the potential camping sites. At rank 4.5 are BagoDila and the black pebbled beach. All of these were interpreted with an adjectival rating of Moderately Accepted. It should be noted among assessment parameters amenities has the lowest score at 4 in the Likert scale. This manifests that obviously Itangon is still unexplored and that there are very limited tourism facilities (Table 1).

#### **Cagsao**

In Cagsao, the locals and the expert panel assessment have placed the museum at rank 1 followed by station of the cross and the mangrove plantation at ranks 2 and 3, respectively. All of which have an adjectival rating of Highly Accepted. This ranking

and acceptability show the blend of culture and nature as the drawing power of these sites in Cagsao (Table 2).

In summary, both sites have their own competitive edge. Indeed, the sites have its own unique natural asset that works in fusion with the cultural landscape; a positive feature of a potential ecotourism destination. The expert panel have high scores on the distinctiveness of the tourism sites indicating the high potential for a convincing attraction of an ecotourist. The accessibility of Itangon, however poses a challenge as its transport infrastructure is not well developed. The linkage of this peripheral tourism destination with a tourism hub may be able overcome these limitations.

### ***The framework towards establishing a link between a tourism hub and the peripheral communities***

#### **Tourism gateways: Local proposals of linkage**

The FGD sessions with local chief executives, the local leaders and the expert panel recognized the need for these local tourist destination sites to be part of the pattern of linkage with tourism hub. This is further supported Metro Naga Development Council's (MNDC) identification of tourism circuits with local itineraries for tourists. This makes the preconditions clear. It should be recognized however, that ecotourism and adventure travel pose challenges on access, connectivity and linkage. Access in terms of availability of infrastructure to hasten travel, communications and media access; and policy and strategies to link with the tourism hub are critically vital. In Itangon and Cagsao, these factors are limiting in varying degrees. While these destination sites offer what an ecotourism enthusiast seeks: pristine environment, unique culture, and a remotely isolated area, the fact still remains that it is not connected. It is not connected or linked to a hub or a "travel gateway".

**Table 1. Assessment of the locals and expert panel on tourism sites in Itangon.**

TOURISM SITES	DISTINCTIVE-NESS OF SITE		DRAWING POWER		AMENITIES		ACCESSIBILITY		SAFETY & SECURITY		WM	RANK
	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.		
Masetera	4 ////////////////////	3	3	3	1	1	3	2	3	1	2.4	2.5
Bagodila	3	3	3	3	1	1	3	2	3	1	2.3	4.5
White beach	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	1.4	7
Coral reefs	2	3	4	4	1	1	2	2	2	1	2.2	6
Black pebbled beach	3	4	2	4	1	1	2	2	3	1	2.3	4.5
Potential camping sites- (2 burabod/springs-Rawis and Ngarangara)	3	3	4	4	1	1	2	2	3	1	2.4	2.5
Caves in Bagodila, and the boundary of Hamoraon, Ngarangara)	4	4	4	4	1	1	2	2	3	1	2.6	1
Hills	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8

**Legend: 3.26-4.00 –Highly accepted**  
**2.26-3.25 – Moderately accepted**  
**1.76-2.25- Fairly accepted**

**Table 2. Assessment of the locals and expert panel on tourism sites in Cagsao**

TOURISM SITES	DISTINCTIVENESS OF SITE		DRAWING POWER		AMENITIES		ACCESSIBILITY		SAFETY & SECURITY		WM	RANK
	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.	Locals	E.P.		
Mangrove plantation	3	3	4	3	2	2	3	4	3	4	3.1	3
Station of the cross	3	3	3	4	3	2	4	4	4	4	3.4	2
Museum	3	4 3	4	4 3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3.7	1
Kawit island	4	1	4	1	2	1	4	4	3	4	2.8	4

**Legend: 3.26-4.00 –Highly accepted**  
**2.26-3.25 – Moderately accepted**  
**1.76-2.25- Fairly accepted**  
**1.00-1.75 – Not accepted**

The linkage with a travel gateway should be viewed through two lenses: attributes-based, focusing on unique tourist features, and structural, emphasizing functional ties to core areas (Pearce, 2002). Essentially, Cagsao and Itangon need to be linked with a travel gateway based on its attributes and appeal in terms of structural ties. Zurick in 1992 defines a travel gateway as an intervening or staging area located along the hierarchy of tourism flows from the tourism generating areas (metropolitan areas or hubs). These are transfer points which have

direct links to channel the flow of tourists. In the spatial hierarchy of the tourism flows, several gateways may exist. The country's national capital may be the national gateway, while the nearest metropolitan area or city could be the regional gateway and the nearby town as the local gateway. What is essential is that these areas are where travel contacts are made, travel itineraries and programs are planned and travel provisions are supplied. It seems the gateway schema fits well with Cagsao and Itangon.

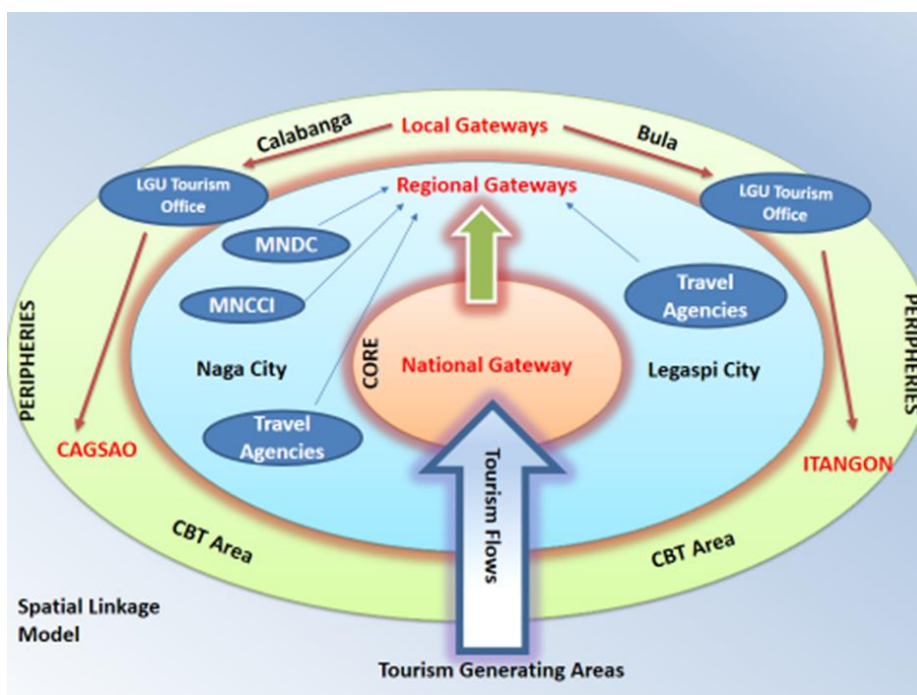


Figure 2. Spatial Hierarchy Linkage Model for Cagsao and Itangon adopted and modified from Zurick (1992)

Given the conditions, Figure 2 proposes a spatial local model that links Cagsao and Itangon to a hierarchy of gateways. Traditionally, the national capital Manila is the national gateway which funnels the tourism flows to the peripheral regions of adventure and ecotourism. These peripheral regions may be linked through Naga City and Legaspi City acting as regional gateways. Currently, these regional gateways have advanced tourism circuits and support structures catering to a varied flow of tourists. Naga City has institutional systems such as the MNDC exploring the development of alternative tourism circuits

and itineraries. Likewise, the Metro Naga Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MNCCI) providing the necessary private sector support and partnership in the tourism industry. Legaspi City on the other end considers tourism as a major industry, its support systems may more advanced and complex. These regional gateways have gained expertise and may be engaged to expand its geographical coverage to the frontier of the periphery destinations. The municipalities of Bula and Calabanga while fairly developed may require re-tooling to function as a local gateway for Cagsao and Itangon. This is critical as the

local gateway functions as a “travel link” to the mainstream tourism flows in the regional gateways. It is likewise an “intervening and staging area” that connects the peripheral adventure region to the tourists (Zurick, 1992). The Local Government Units LGU plays a pivotal role in this aspect. As part of the tourism programs, the local tourism offices should act as a “cultural broker” (Richter, 1989) that promotes the destination in varied media with the spatial attributes of remoteness, aesthetic landscapes, unique cultural traditions, etc. Central to the phenomenon of the adventure and ecotourism destination is the “fashioning” of the destination in terms of “authenticity” in the adventure brochure (Zurick, 1992). Such modalities are designed to take a slice of the tourism flows in the gateways.

In most aspects, the local governments as the frontier link to the ecotourism site should provide the necessary platform to encourage local business to provision local tourism in terms of the requirements of the adventure traveler and the ecotourist. It should likewise provide the modality such as transport and road networks, and support mechanism to link with the regional gateway. The local governments should assist these sites in setting the travel link and strategies through: (1) the development of themed tour itineraries aligned with Naga City’s tourism events and festivals, (2) offer tour packages from Naga City with bus or van transport convenience, (3) include the sites in Naga City’s tourism experience through the City’s digital promotions, and (4) enhance community tourism with trainings to host homestays, and guided eco-tours. Among other things, it is important that a close working relationship be developed and sustained with Naga City as the tourism gateway and Cagsao-Itangon as the peripheral tourist destinations.

The formulation of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) plans for Cagsao and Itangon are start up points toward developing the spatial linkage with the

gateways. The linkage should be based on its attributes, appeal and structural ties.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cagsao and Itangon is an ecotourist dream destination - rich in diverse flora and fauna, unique black-pebbled beaches and a culture that works in fusion with the cultural landscape; a positive feature of a potential ecotourism destination. The locals and the expert panel have high scores on the distinctiveness of the tourism sites indicating the high potential for a convincing attraction of an ecotourist. Accessibility however, poses a challenge as transport infrastructure is not well developed. The linkage of this peripheral tourism destination with a tourism hub may be able overcome these limitations.

Linking Itangon and Cagsao to a central tourism hub such as Naga City presents a strategic opportunity to unlock their ecotourism potential. Naga City with its developed tourism capacity can very well serve as a gateway or staging area. The linkage with Naga City and Itangon-Cagsao is mutually beneficial; Naga City to diversify visitor experience and the peripheral communities with access to the mainstream tourism market. By leveraging the peripheral communities’ strengths—pristine ecosystem and vibrant culture, a well-integrated framework can promote inclusive, sustainable tourism. This linkage not only enhances visitor experience but also fosters conservation, local livelihoods, and cultural preservation across both communities. These are essential points where the crafting of CBT plans for the peripheral areas should focus on.

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