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THE BIG TOURISM SUCCESS OF A SMALL ISLAND IN THE REPUBLIC  
OF THE PHILIPPINES: THE CASE OF SIARGAO

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Abstract

Siargao, which is commonly recognized as the surfing capital of the Philippines, has been chosen as one of the best holiday islands in the world by the tourism experts. Siargao, located in the southeast of the Republic of the Philippines and northeast of the island of Mindanao, is one of the most popular sea tourism destinations of the country, situated within the borders of Surigao del Norte Province. In terms of administrative management, Siargao has 9 districts and 132 barangays, as well as 48 small islands in its immediate vicinity. In this study, on the one hand, the geographical location, administrative structure and general geographical features of the island of Siargao were addressed, on the other hand, popular tourism centers, natural and cultural tourism attractions and tourism potential were investigated. Moreover, both the main tourism advantages and the main tourism disadvantages of the Siargao island were dealt with in the study. Siargao's biggest tourism advantage, despite possessing a very small area, is that it has a great recreation and tourism diversity thanks to its geographical, cultural and ecological diversity and that it has breathtaking natural beauties that are not available anywhere else in the world. The main purpose of this study is both to introduce the tourism potential and natural beauties of this small Philippine island to the readers and offer new holiday options for the inquisitive tourists.

**Key words:** Siargao Island, Republic of Philippines, Tourism, Philippine Archipelago

ФИЛИППИН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДАҒЫ КІШКЕНТАЙ АРАЛДЫҢ  
ҮЛКЕН ТУРИСТІК ЖЕТІСТІГІ: СИАРГАО ЖАҒДАЙЫ

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Андапта

Филиппиндегі серфинг астанасы ретінде танылған Сиаргаоны туризм мамандары әлемдегі ең жақсы демалыс аралдарының бірі ретінде таңдады. Филиппин Республикасының оңтүстік-шығысында және Минданао аралының солтүстік-шығысында орналасқан Суригао-дель-Норте провинциясында орналасқан елдегі ең танымал теңіз туризмінің бірі. Әкімшілік басқару тұрғысынан Сиаргаода 9 аудан және 132 барангай, сондай-ақ жақын жерде 48 шағын арал бар. Бұл зерттеу, бір жағынан, Сиаргао аралының географиялық орналасуын, әкімшілік құрылымын және жалпы географиялық ерекшеліктерін қарастырды, екінші жағынан, танымал туристік орталықтарды, табиғи және мәдени туристік орындарды және туристік әлеуетті зерттеді. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу Сиаргао аралының негізгі туристік артықшылықтарын да, негізгі

туристік кемшіліктерін де қарастырды. Сиаргаоның ең үлкен туристік артықшылығы, оның өте кішкентай алаңына қарамастан, оның географиялық, мәдени және экологиялық әртүрлілігінің арқасында демалыс пен туризмнің алуан түрлілігі бар, сонымен қатар ол әлемнің басқа жерлерінде кездеспейтін керемет табиғи сұлулыққа ие. Бұл зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты-оқырмандарды осы кішкентай Филиппин аралының туристік әлеуеті мен табиғи сұлулығымен таныстыру және қызығушылық танытатын туристер үшін жаңа демалыс нұсқаларын ұсыну.

**Кілт сөздер:** Сиаргао аралы, Филиппин Республикасы, туризм, Филиппин архипелагы.

## БОЛЬШОЙ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИЙ УСПЕХ МАЛЕНЬКОГО ОСТРОВА В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ ФИЛИППИНЫ: КЕЙС СИАРГАО

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### Аннотация

Сиаргао, который общепризнанно считается столицей серфинга на Филиппинах, был выбран экспертами по туризму в качестве одного из лучших островов для отдыха в мире. Сиаргао, расположенный на юго-востоке Республики Филиппины и северо-востоке острова Минданао, является одним из самых популярных направлений морского туризма в стране, расположенным в пределах провинции Суригао-дель-Норте. С точки зрения административного управления, Сиаргао имеет 9 районов и 132 барангая, а также 48 небольших островов в непосредственной близости. В этом исследовании, с одной стороны, рассматривались географическое положение, административная структура и общие географические особенности острова Сиаргао, с другой стороны, изучались популярные туристические центры, природные и культурные туристические достопримечательности, туристический потенциал. Кроме того, в исследовании рассматривались как основные туристические преимущества, так и основные туристические недостатки острова Сиаргао. Самое большое туристическое преимущество Сиаргао, несмотря на его очень маленькую площадь, заключается в том, что он имеет большое разнообразие отдыха и туризма благодаря своему географическому, культурному и экологическому разнообразию, а также в том, что он обладает захватывающими природными красотами, которых нет больше нигде в мире. Основная цель этого исследования — познакомить читателей с туристическим потенциалом и природными красотами этого небольшого филиппинского острова и предложить новые варианты отдыха для любознательных туристов.

**Ключевые слова:** остров Сиаргао, Республика Филиппины, туризм, филиппинский архипелаг.

### Introduction

Siargao island, situated in the Mindanao group of islands and 800 km southeast of Manila, is considered a small island with an area of 437 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of approximately 110 000 people. Siargao, located within the borders of Surigao del Norte Province, is commonly recognized as the surfing capital of the Philippines and was named “Asia's Best Island” in the “Conde Nast Travelers Readers” awards in 2021. Siargao island, found in the southwest of the Philippines Sea and 196 kilometers southeast of the city of Tacloban, likened to a “teardrop” shape by some experts [1].

In terms of administrative structure, there are 20 districts, one special status city and 335 barangays within the borders of the province of Northern Surigao (Surigao del Norte). Of these 20 districts in Surigao del Norte Province, 9 are situated within the borders of Siargao (Table 1). As a consequence, in terms of administrative governance, Siargao consists of 9 districts and “Socorro District” located on the island of Bucas Grande is the only district located outside the

borders of the island of Siargao. In Table 1, the main geographical and demographic characteristics of the districts covered by Siargao are presented. As a matter of fact, as an administrative structure, Siargao includes 9 districts and 132 barangays, as well as 48 small islands in its immediate vicinity. Therefore, the island of Siargao and the Siargao Administrative Unit are two different concepts that should not be confused. For instance, the area of Siargao island is 416 km<sup>2</sup> while the area of Siargao Administrative Unit is 622 km<sup>2</sup> because it covers 48 more islands. There are also medium-sized islands within the administrative borders of Siargao, such as East Bucas Grande, Middle Bucas Grande, Megancub, Tona, Poneas, Bucas Grande, Binoscogan, Dumayog, Laonan, and Kangbangyo: There are also small islets such as Dahican, San Benito, Taytay, Abanay, Pagbasayan, Halian, Guyam, Naked, Janoyoy, Daco, Abanay, Kangkangon, Casulian, Monte and Bancuyo (Serrona and Camarin, 2022).

Table 1: Major Administrative and Geographical Features of the SiargaoProvince [2]

Name of the Town	Population of the Town (Year 2020)	Surface Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population Density (person/km <sup>2</sup> )	Number of Barangays Embodied
Burgos	4 185	19,2	220	6
Pilar	10 374	77,1	130	15
Dapa	29 006	91,9	320	29
Del Carmen	20 127	151,7	130	20
General Luna	22 853	41,3	550	19
San Benito	5 663	45,6	120	6
San Isidro	8 519	42,0	200	12
Santa Monica	9 423	39,2	240	11
Socorro	25 942	114,4	230	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>136 092</b>	<b>622,4</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>132</b>

The most populous districts of Siargao administrative unit are General Luna, Socorro, and Dapa (all three districts have more than 22 000 inhabitants), while the smallest districts in terms of population are San Benito and Burgos (both have less than 6,000 inhabitants).). In fact, Dapa and General Luna constitute the most populated and lively tourist centers on the island of Siargao. The largest districts of Siargao in terms of size are Del Carmen (151.7 km<sup>2</sup>) and Socorro (114.4 km<sup>2</sup>), while the smallest district is Burgos (19.2 km<sup>2</sup>) (Table 1). In other words, there are only two districts with an area of more than 100 km<sup>2</sup> and only one district with an area of less than 20 km<sup>2</sup> on the island. Both the spatial distribution of the settlements and the population on the island of Siargao, density demonstrate an uneven geographical distribution. Very densely populated districts such as Dapa and General Luna and very sparsely populated districts such as San Benito and Pilar lie side by side. The Siargao administrative unit covers a total of 132 barangays. Among the districts, while Barangay Dapa (29) covers the largest area and Burgos (6) and San Benito (6) have the smallest one (Table 1).

As a mathematical location, the island of Siargao is located between 9°45' – 10°05' north latitudes and 125°53' – 126°11' 1' east longitudes. In other words, Siargao is one of the Philippine islands with the closest geographical position to the equator line and is situated at the same latitude as Sri Lanka and the same longitude as the Republic of South Korea. The island, located on the southwest coast of the Philippine Sea, is separated from the Bucas Islands

by the Dapa Strait from the south and from Dinagat Island to the west by the Dinagat Strait. On the island of Siargao, situated on the southeast of Leyte and Dinagat and northeast of Bucas Grande and the island of Mindanao, there is no mountain mass exceeding 200 meters in height. The height of the low hills generally does not exceed 150 meters. Baliluko hill (158 meters) just found in the west of Burgos town is the highest point of the island [3]. Unlike the Philippine islands dominated by mountainous terrain such as Mindoro, Negros, and Mindanao, Siargao has little or no high and rugged terrain. There are neither active nor extinct volcanoes nor any rugged highlands on the island. Wide plains, fertile plains, meandering stream valleys, extensive coconut plantations, rugged seashores, numerous wetlands and mangrove forests are the most common geographic features on the island. In fact, Siargao Island is one of the islands with the largest wetland and mangrove forest lands in the Southern Philippines. For instance, the mangrove forests in the “Del Carmen Mangrove Sanctuary” area cover 4871 hectares and constitute the largest contiguous mangrove forest land in the Republic of the Philippines [4].

The length of the Siargao island in the north-south direction is approximately 35 kilometers, and its width in the east-west direction is approximately 30 kilometers. Therefore, the foreign tourists can get about the entire island in just one day with a rental car or motorcycle. The easiest way to reach this island is by air transportation. There are direct flights to this adorable island from the cities of Manila and Cebu. Therefore, it is quite easy to reach the island with a flight that does not exceed 1-1.5 hours. To the east of Del Carmen city is the island's only airport, "Siargao Airport". There are regular ferry services between the Dapa port and the port of Surigao City on the island of Mindanao. There are also ferry connections between the city of Socorro on the island of Bucas Grande and the city of Dapa throughout the year. For this reason, the tourists visiting the island of Siargao have the opportunity to visit the Mindanao or Bucas Grande islands by sea transportation [5].

Table 2: Main Characteristics of the Siargao Island (Source: Authors, 2022)

<b>Group Islands Located:</b> Mindanao Islands	<b>Total Population:</b> 110150
<b>The Province:</b> Surigao del Norte	<b>Arithmetic Population Density:</b> 252 person/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Surface Area:</b> 437 km <sup>2</sup>	<b>The Largest Town:</b> General Luna
<b>Number of Towns Embodied:</b> 8	<b>Number of Barangays Embodied:</b> 118
<b>The Highest Point:</b> Baliluko (158 m.)	<b>Important Settlements:</b> San Benito, Burgos, Dapa, Pilar, Santa Monica, San Isidro, Del Carmen and General Luna.
<b>The Longest River:</b> Maasin <b>The Largest Lake:</b> Baban Lagoon <b>Mathematical Location:</b> 9°45' – 10°05' north latitudes 125°53' – 126°11' east longitudes	<b>Major Nature Reserves:</b> “Pilar Eco-Park” “Paghungawan Marsh” “Del Carmen Mangrove Sanctuary” “Danjug Cave Nature Park”

The total coastline length of the island of Siargao, which can be toured in one day, is only 171 kilometers [6]. The western coast of Siargao island is very indented and contains many coves, capes, gulfs and peninsulas. The western shores are sparsely populated, often covered with mangrove forests and contain large and small islets. Poneas, Laonan, Kangbangyo, Megancub, Dahican, San Benito, Tona, Taytay, Binoscogan, Abanay and Pagbasayan are the largest of the islands off the west coast. The famous tourist destinations like Sugba Lagoon, Sinapyahan and Pamomoan Beach are situated on the Kangbangyo island. The westernmost

landmass within the Siargao administrative unit is the island of Halian (under the authority of Del Carmen district), located between Siargao and Dinagat Islands. On the southeast coast of the island of Siargao, there are no other islands apart from Guyam, Naked, Janoyoy and Daco. It is clearly seen that both the number of islands and mangrove forest areas are less on the east coast of Siargao island, facing the Pacific Ocean, than on the west coast. Olin, Blue Cathedral and Marapanas, east of the settlements of Libertad and Santa Fe, are the only examples of small islets off the east coast of Siargao. To the south of the island of Siargao are found the islands such as Abanay, East Bucas Grande, Middle Bucas Grande, Casulian, Monte, Bancuyo and Bucas Grande. Briefly, it is possible to say that there are around 50 small islands in the immediate vicinity of the island of Siargao. The islands which are close to the Siargao island and most frequently visited by foreign tourists are: Bucas Grande, Dahican, Megancub, Berdi, Kangbangyo, Poneas, Casulian, Daco, Guyam, Naked, Laonan and East Bucas Grande [7, pp. 1-2].

The Naked Island is a small island of dunes west of Daco Island and south of the town of Union. On this lonely and desolate island in the middle of the sea, there is not a single building, tree or facility of any kind. This small island with its white beaches always attracts tourists who love romantic and quiet holidays. Pansukian island, on the other hand, is one of the islets that foreign tourists fancy the most with boat trips. Pansukian, which is very similar to the island of Naked and consists of a long dune hill, is also called "The Bare Island" because it is desolate and quiet, devoid of vegetation and settlements.

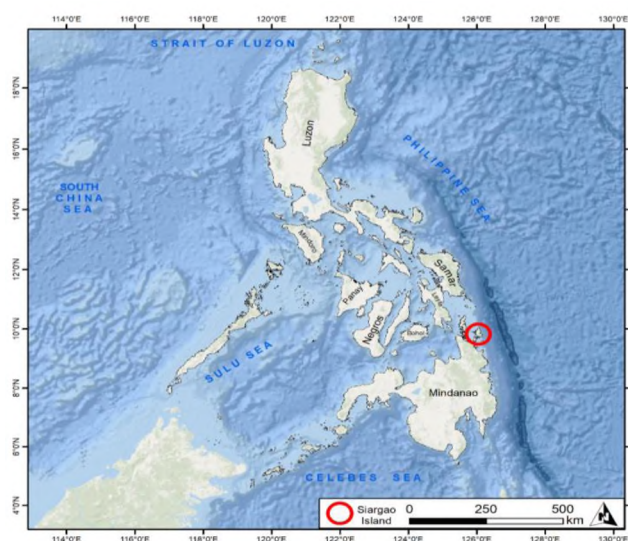


Figure 1. Location Map of the Siargao Island (Source: Authors, 2022)

There are no urban settlements on the island of Siargao, just as there are no major shopping malls, rail transport, large industrial facilities and five-star luxury hotels. Town-looking San Benito, Dapa, Pilar, Santa Monica, San Isidro, Del Carmen and General Luna are the largest settlements on the island of Siargao. Furthermore, the centers such as Santa Fe, Libertad, Baybay, Burgos, Alegria, Tangbo, Rizal, Tambacan, Union, Nueva Campo, Bitoon, San Juan, Esperanza, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Datu, Caridad, Malinao, Roxas and Garcia are the most important rural settlements centers of the island of Siargao. Dapa and General Luna are both the largest and most popular settlements on the island, as well as the most economically developed districts. The highest density of hotels and touristic facilities on the island is available

in the General Luna region [8, p. 3]. The total population of the island exceeds 110,000 and there are about 252 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The northern and central parts of the island and the western parts are sporadically populated, while the southern and eastern coasts are densely populated. The inland areas where the tropical rainforests are concentrated and gently sloping hilly areas away from the coast are the most uninhabited areas of the island.

The Siargao island, situated in the Philippine Sea, has a humid tropical climate. In general, this tropical island is both very hot and very humid and rainy all year round. Siargao's average annual temperature is 29°C, giving the island a total of 1237 mm precipitation per year. The average humidity of the island is 78% humidity and there are only 86 days without rainfall a year. On the island of Siargao, the hottest month is May with 30°C and the coldest month is January with 27°C. Monthly average temperatures generally vary between 26°C and 32°C in May. Monthly temperature averages generally vary between 24°C and 29°C in January. In summary, all monthly average temperatures are above 24°C and there are very small changes in temperature values throughout the year. The lowest precipitation on the island is in the period of April - August, the highest precipitation is in the period of November - March. However, since it receives a certain amount of precipitation each month, it is possible to argue that there is no dry season on the island. In May, the least precipitation (37 mm.) falls on the island, whereas in January the highest precipitation falls (272 mm.). Those who plan to come to the island of Siargao for a sea vacation should not visit the island, especially during the November - January period, because the most precipitation falls during this period and the probability of tropical storms is at its highest. As a result, geographical proximity to the equatorial belt, as well as winds and ocean currents from the Pacific Ocean are the factors that greatly affect the climate of Siargao island.

Majority of the island of Siargao is covered with either tropical forests, wet plains, karstic lands or gently sloping hilly areas. There are many bays, beaches, lagoons and mangrove forests on the shores of the island. The coral reefs that surround the island protect the shores of Siargao to a certain extent from the harsh and high Pacific waves. Litalit is situated on the west coast of the island and Pilar Bay is found on the east coast. Apart from the Dapa, Maasin and San Isidro rivers, there are not many important rivers on the island. River tours are organized along the Maasin river at very affordable prices. Foreign tourists who wish to discover the natural beauties, interesting animals and tropical forests of the island are extensively interested in these tours. Even though there are no large lakes within the borders of Siargao, small lagoon lakes are common. "Morens Jungle Lagoon", "Maliko Hidden Lagoon", "Baban Lagoon" and "Sugba Lagoon" are the largest lagoon lakes on the island in terms of surface area and the most popular in terms of tourism. Foreign tourists generally do canoeing, swimming and water sports in these lakes [7, p.6-7].

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This scientific study, which is part of the research program titled "The Republic of the Philippines from the Perspective of Political, Economic and Human Geography and Turkey-Philippines Interaction", which was accepted by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey in 2020 within the scope of "2219-Overseas Postdoctoral Research Scholarship Program" and conducted by Emin Atasoy is one of its scientific outputs of this program. In the present study, the demographic, economic, geographical, economic and ecological characteristics of the Siargao island was examined, and both the tourism advantages and disadvantages as well as the tourism resources of the island were attempted to be identified. In parallel with this purpose, Prof. Emin Atasoy made land surveys, city surveys and geographical observations on the Siargao island between 03-09 December 2022; as a result, he

personally examined majority of the tourism centers on the island. The methodological basis of the study is the methods of a systematic scientific approach, comparative geographical, cartographic and expert assessment. One of the primary objectives of this study is to proclaim the great tourism power of this small island to the world and promote the island in terms of international tourism.

The principle aims of this study are:

- To introduce the readers to the geographical features, natural resources and regional differences of the island of Siargao.
- To introduce the readers to the tourism resources, natural beauties and tourism potential of the island of Siargao.
- To discuss the tourism privileges, tourism advantages and tourism disadvantages of the island of Siargao.
- To identify and examine the main natural and cultural tourism attractions of the island of Siargao.
- To create a tourist reference guide for foreign tourists visiting the island of Siargao.
- To paint a multidimensional tourism portrait of the island of Siargao and make a scientific presentation of the island from the perspective of tourism geography.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Tourism Potential of the Siargao Island

Siargao, which is one of the most popular destinations for the global surf enthusiasts, has gradually been on its way to become one of the most sought after destinations in the world. This little tropical paradise, with first-class high waves, desolate white sand islets, turquoise hidden lagoon lakes, mysterious caves, breathtaking mangrove forest lands and coconut plantations, is a candidate to be the tourism showcase of the Philippines [9, pp.6-7; 10, pp. 335-338]. "Conde Nast Traveler", one of the world's most famous travel magazines, chose Siargao as the most beautiful island in the world in 2018, and since then all flights to the tiny teardrop-shaped island and international attention have been constantly increasing [11, pp.85-91].



Figure 2. Tourism Map of the Siargao Island (Source: Authors, 2022)

Siargao, referred to as the "Surfing Capital of the Philippines", is one of the easternmost islands of the Philippines and is under the influence of strong winds from the Pacific Ocean and strong ocean currents. The island, where the winds always blow, is one of the most popular



places for surfers [12, pp. 275-280]. Due to the very strong tide on the coast of Siargao, there is a big difference of 30-60 meters between the swell and recession of sea waters. The tourists who go on a beach holiday on the beach need to adjust themselves according to these tidal currents. Moreover, the Great Philippine Trench (10 540 m), one of the deepest ocean trenches on our planet, is situated just in the east of the island. High waves coming from this ocean trench hit the coral reefs and the shores of Siargao with all their strength, pouring thousands of tons of ocean water onto the small island every year and every day [13, p.5].

Every year, at the end of September, the competition called the “Siargao Cup” are held on the shores of Siargao within the framework of the World Surfing Cup, which is why the world's best surfers come and visit the island. The August-September period, when strong winds and high waves are abundant, is the most suitable one for the professional surfers on the shores of Siargao. The March-April period is more convenient for the inexperienced sportspersons who wish to learn how to surf [12, pp. 282-285]. As a matter of fact, March-April is the most convenient period for the sea tourism as it is the driest period with the least rainfall on the island of Siargao. During this period, it is more convenient for sea sportspersons, vacationers and travelers as there is less sea waves, less humidity and less rain in the air. The November-February period is not preferred both by the surf masters and tourists as it is cooler, rainier and windier. Therefore, the Siargao island is not highly recommended to be visited except the March-October period.

“Cloud 9” is undoubtedly the most important global tourism showcase of the island of Siargao in the 21st century. The “Cloud 9” surf area, located on the southeast coast of the island of Siargao, just north of the city of General Luna, was accidentally discovered by Australian tourists in the 1980s, became prominent internationally in the 1990s and has been one of the most popular surf centers in the world in the 21st century [14, pp. 361-365]. The most famous surfing areas in and around the Siargao island today are: “Cloud 9”, “Jacking Horses”, “Giwan”, “Quicksilver”, “Pacifico”, “Tuason Point”, “Thaiti”, “Pansukian Island”, “Rock Island” and “Dako Island”. In conclusion, thousands of surf enthusiasts from all over the world flock to the hotels on the east coast of the island of Siargao during the August-October period, regenerating the island's economy. This is why, according to sports and tourism experts, the island of Siargao is famous as the surfing capital of the Philippines [14, pp. 366-371]. Siargao is not only famous for its natural beauties, diving sites and surf centers, but also for its desolate and clean beaches. “White Beach or General Luna”, “Magpupungko White Beach”, “Doot Beach”, “Alegria Beach” and “Pacifico Beach” are the most popular beaches of the Siargao island (<https://nashaplaneta.net/asia/philippines/siargao-ostrov>)).

The Del Carmen region, found on the western coast of the island of Siargao, with an area of 4871 hectares, is one of the largest mangrove forest areas in the Philippines. The extensive mangrove forests of the state-protected Del Carmen region are also home to the Indo-Pacific saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus Porosus*). Those who enjoy wildlife and deserted beaches can leave the island of Siargao for the neighboring islands or the Del Carmen region. For instance, a boat can be hired and sailed easily from Siargao island to Kangbangyo island on the west coast. The Abito beach, Sinapyahan beach, Hidden Paradise and Pamomoan Beach are the must-see places on Kangbangyo island. However, undoubtedly the most beautiful place on the island is the Sugba Lagoon lake. The Sugba Lagoon, connected to the sea by a narrow strait, is one of the most romantic, cleanest and cutest lagoon lakes in the Philippines. This lake, surrounded by lush forests and covered with clear turquoise waters, fascinates its visitors [11, pp. 90-95].



There are various types of beaches on the island of Siargao; free public beaches, hotel beaches, privately owned beaches and paid luxury beaches. There are more than 150 beaches within the borders of the island and on the neighboring islets. It is possible to state that these beaches are suitable for sea tourism for 365 days, since the average monthly temperature on the island does not fall below 20 °C throughout the year. The major popular beaches in the Siargao region are: “Banday Beach Resort”, “Rsk Beach and Accommodation”, “Secret Beach Siargao”, “Camp Olli”, “Union Beach – Dapa”, “Comahig Beach Resort”, “Malinao Paradise”, “Doot Beach”, “Coco Beach”, “Dedon Island Siargao”, “Beach Potato”, “Jade Star Beach Resort”, “Daluyong Beach Resort”, “Cherinicole Siargao Resort”, “Magpopongko White Beach”, “Tigasao Beach”, “Himaya South”, “Himaya North”, “The Rock Pacifico”, “Tia's Beach Resort”, “Isla Marajaw Beach”, “Alegria Beach”, “Denaville Resort”, “Sucano's Resort”, “Santa Monica Beach”, “White Sand Beach Resort”, “Casa Desideria”, “Sucano's Resort”, “Hidden Paradise”, “Sinapyahan Beach”, “Abito Beach”, “White Beach”, “Pamomoan Beach” and “Kawhagan Beach”. On the island of Siargao, mostly cliff-covered beaches surrounded by the coral formations are common and there are only few beaches with wide sandbanks. Therefore, the tourists visiting the island of Siargao prefer beaches on the islands of Naked, Kambangyo, Guyam or Dako for more secluded and comfortable beaches [10, pp.341-344].

The caves and waterfalls are another tourist attraction of the Siargao island. The Tayangban cave and Hagukan cave, which are visited by thousands of tourists every year, are among the most interesting karstic formations of the island. The Taktak waterfall, located in the northwest of the island and north of the city of Santa Monica, is one of the most famous natural formations on the island of Siargao. This waterfall, situated in the middle of lush tropical forests, has created a natural pool and tourists can go swimming in this pool. There are grocery stores, restaurants and picnic areas around the waterfall. The Santa Monica Catholic Church, found very close to Taktak waterfall, is one of the cultural tourism attractions that can be visited on the island with its interesting architecture. Therefore, the tourists who visit the waterfall often visit this church as well. The Siargao Wakepark, located just west of General Luna town, is the island's most popular spot for water sports. The sports persons and tourists both organize competitions and find the opportunity to have fun in the artificial pools surrounded by the tropical forests.

The beaches of Magpupungko, which are famous for its cliffs and clean ocean waters, are one of the most beautiful and popular places on the island for swimming and diving. The Magpupungko Lagoon Lake, located on these shores, is one of the most interesting and beautiful lake formations in the Philippines. The tourists visiting the lake should definitely visit and enjoy the Magpopongko White Beach, famous for its long white beaches. It is one of the most beautiful beaches on the island of Siargao and is likened to Borocay for its long white sandy beach. The tourists who wish to see the interesting plant and animal species in pristine tropical forests should definitely visit the Pilar Eco-Park. The parkland, situated very close to the Magpupungko lagoon lake and the city of Pilar, is one of the most stunning and pristine nature reserves on the island of Siargao. Adrenaline enthusiasts and venturous travelers can visit the “Paghungawan Marsh” nature reserve, which is the natural habitat of Philippine crocodiles. This nature reserve, which is filled with swamps, tropical forests and wetlands, is undoubtedly one of the most interesting places on the island of Siargao [10, pp.334-338; 15, p.6].

The tourists visiting the island of Siargao usually do not leave without taking a boat tour in the San Miguel or the Maasin valley. Maasin, which is the longest and most beautiful river

on the island, is a very adorable and very uninhabited tourist spot covered with the coconut trees and tropical plants. The foreign tourists can visit the villages on the valley shores, rice fields, coconut plantations, the Catholic churches and village schools, mingle with the islanders and closely monitor the living conditions of the local people. They can join the river tours with boats that can be rented at affordable prices, jump from the trees and cliffs into the stream, taste the Filipino dishes at a local restaurant and cool off by swimming in the cool waters of the stream. The rope swing hanging from the palm tree on the river Maasin is one of the most popular tourist symbols of the Siargao island. Especially the foreign tourists take many souvenir photos on this rope swing and have fun jumping from the swing into the cool waters of the river (<https://www.nopostcode.com/maasin-river-palm-tree-rope-swing-siargao/>). Those who join the boat tour in the Maasin valley can participate in many more touristic activities in the region. For instance, they can have a delicious coffee at Marajow Café and Grills, visit the Santísima Trinidad church, chat with younger students at Maasin Elementary School, take a photo at tourist attractions like the Coconut Selfie or Coconut Paradise, or swim in the cool waters of the Bito Cold Spring.

There are many bars, cafes, hotels and restaurants on the island of Siargao. Therefore, the tourists visiting the island should try the local culinary culture and personally test the food quality of the master chefs. Restaurants serving Latin American dishes, Philippine national dishes, seafood, and Italian-Spanish dishes are the most popular and common on the island. “Shaka Siargao”, “CEV Ceviche & Kinilaw”, “La Carindaria”, “Kalinaw Resort Restaurant”, “BLISS Restaurant”, “Kawayan Siargao Resort Restaurant”, “Azute Restaurant”, “C” ATCH Restaurant”, “Viento Del Mar” Restaurant”, “Bravo Restaurant”, “Kermit Siargao” and “Mama's Grill” are the most popular restaurants on the island. Even though Siargao is not one of the best diving destinations in the Philippines, it does have interesting dive sites for the visiting tourists and sportspersons. Compared to the islands of Mindoro, Busuanga or Coron, there are fewer diving centers on the island of Siargao. “Blue Cathedral”, “Guyam Island”, “Dako Island”, “Seeco Reef”, “Antokon” and “Shark Point” are the most popular diving centers of the Siargao island [7, p.3].

The tourists visiting the island of Siargao usually also visit the nearby island of Bucas Grande by boat. In fact, with its untouched forests, turquoise coves, famous lagoon lakes and unique nature reserves, Bucas Grande is one of the most environmentally friendly, best preserved and most beautiful islands of the Philippines. Administratively, the island, which is within the borders of the municipality of Socorro, composes part of the province of Surigao del Norte. The island of Bucas Grande has an area of 128 km<sup>2</sup> and has only 25942 people according to the 2020 Census. This island, where tropical forests cover a large area, is both very sparsely populated and contains very few settlements. Compared to the island of Siargao, the island of Bucas Grande is more untouched, uninhabited, less popular and also lagged behind in terms of tourism infrastructure. With its lagoon lakes, natural limestone caves, pristine rainforests, high cliffs, interesting rock formations, numerous beaches and bays, Bucas Grande has unique natural tourism attractions. “Sohoton Cove National Park”, “Crystal and Bolitas Cave”, “Kapihan Nature and Adventure Park”, “Tiktikan Lagoon”, “Green Lagoon”, “Sohoton Cove”, “Magkukuob Cave”, “Socorro Swimming Pool”, “Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish” and “Sohoton Jellyfish Sanctuary” are among the most popular touristic places to be visited on the Bucas Grande island.

More than 70% of the territory of the island of Bucas Grande, which is covered with large forested lands, has neither population, roads nor settlements. Therefore, there are not many touristic places and accommodation facilities on this sparsely populated island. “Sohoton Island

Paradise Resort”, “Sohoton Bay Resort”, “Tiktikan Lagoon Cottages”, “Sifai Cottage”, “Serenity Oceanside Guest House”, “Czareille Native Garden Inn”, “Elena Hostel & Hostel Cafe”, “Garden Eco- Park Resort”, “Isla Bucas Grande Resort” and “Hidden Island Resort” are among the most popular accommodation facilities on the island of Bucas Grande. For those who seek a little higher quality and desire a romantic holiday, “Club Tara Resort” is exactly the tropical paradise they are after. This three-star hotel, set in a stunningly beautiful natural setting, is a must-see tourist attraction with its turquoise waters, dense rainforest, hidden coves and breathtaking tropical views [16].

The main types of tourism applicable in the Siargao region in the 21st century are as follows: Health tourism, marine tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, farm tourism, cultural tourism, cave tourism, underwater diving tourism, river tourism and botanical tourism. Furthermore, the geographical, cultural and ecological diversity in Siargao has led to the diversification of recreational activities. Therefore, there are many different activities in the region such as sea and freshwater fishing, mountaineering, paragliding, bird watching (ornithology), wildlife watching, rafting, canoeing, sea surfing, bicycle tours, river tours, camping, trekking and sportive diving. recreation and sportive activities can be implemented(<https://www.pinoyadventurista.com/2020/03/things-to-do-in-siargao-itinerary-philippines-travel-guide.html>).

### **CONCLUSION**

With the coconut plantations and protected mangrove lands, hidden coves and white beaches, majestic waterfalls and hidden caves, blue lagoons and uninhabited small islets, pristine rainforest and rich underwater world, the island of Siargao is fast becoming one of the most popular islands in the Philippines. The fact that the island was discovered lately by the global travelers and opened to tourism lately is actually its greatest luck. There are no luxury hotels, expensive restaurants, flashy resorts and crowded beaches on this adorable island. One of the indisputable advantages of having a holiday in Siargao is that the island is not yet crowded and its natural ecosystems are not yet polluted. In other words, it is an environmentally friendly, quiet and peaceful island that has not yet been invaded by hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists and its natural resources have not been destroyed yet. Siargao can also be defined as a tropical paradise where there is no industrialization and heavy road traffic, deep ecological problems have not yet emerged, ugly concrete has not become widespread on the coasts, terrorist incidents and ethnic conflicts are not present [9, 10,13]. It is no coincidence that in 2019, “Conde Nast Traveler” magazine named Siargao “the best holiday island in the world” among 500,000 islands.

To summarize, unlike the other Philippine islands, there are 6 tourism advantages of the Siargao region that stand out:

1. Even though it has a very small area, thanks to its geographical and ecological diversity, the island has a great variety of recreation and tourism, and breathtaking natural beauties that cannot be seen anywhere else in the country.
2. It is a serene and peaceful island that has not yet been invaded by thousands of foreign tourists and has not yet experienced the devastating ecological effects of mass tourism.
3. The friendly, helpful and hospitable local people of this tropical island have unique folklore and cultural traditions.
4. It has unpolluted ecosystems and peaceful touristic centers where crowded metropolitan cities and large industrial - commercial centers are not located, without deep ecological problems.

5. It is a tranquil, peaceful and safe island where terrorism and clashes do not happen; murders and forced tourist abductions are not experienced.

6. Due to its very small surface area, it is a compact, easily navigable island, free of traffic jams and easily accessible from anywhere.

It is possible to say that the biggest disadvantages of the Siargao region in terms of tourism are that it is disconnected from the major tourism markets, it is far from the capital Manila and it is not sufficiently included in mass tourism markets and international tour packages. However, Siargao has largely succeeded in turning its disadvantages into advantages. Undoubtedly, one of the biggest tourism advantages of the island of Siargao today is that despite its small area, it has the opportunity to offer a wide variety of touristic activities and hundreds of touristic facilities are available on the island. In other words, foreign tourists visiting this charming island will surely find a suitable sporting activity, a cultural activity or a recreational activity (<https://guidetothephilippines.ph/>).

Which tourist profile should people explore the Siargao region? Sports enthusiasts who wish to spend time diving, fishing, canoeing or surfing; the sea lovers who wish to sunbathe on quiet and clean beaches; the adrenaline junkies who wish to explore coral reefs, lagoon lakes, mangrove fields and majestic waterfalls; the travelers who wish to closely watch interesting creatures in rainforests, lakes and seas; the inquisitive tourists who wish to explore the cuisine, art, folklore and cultural traditions of the local people should definitely visit the Siargao region.

Siargao is hardly a suitable destination for the capricious tourists who seek comfort and luxury or have high expectations. This adorable little island is more appealing to the curious travelers who can appreciate and feel the simplicity and beauty of nature; who respect the humble life and traditions of the people; who are able to turn a blind eye to the problems and touristic disruptions in daily life; and who consume less and be content with less, and to those tourists with an adventure-loving spirit. Siargao is not the right holiday option for those who are accustomed to a luxurious life, who do not want to integrate with crowded poor masses and who seek the wealth, coziness and comfort of their home on holiday. However, for the nature lovers who want to backpack freely, the travelers in search of budget holidays, the adventure-loving sports and adrenalin junkies, Siargao is exactly the holiday option they are after.

Siargao isn't just about beauty and it doesn't just offer positive lives and experiences. Like every touristic place, Siargao has some social, economic, cultural, ecological and tourism problems. The main problems and tourism disadvantages of the Siargao island can be summarized as follows:

- On the island of Siargao, there is hardly any nightlife and bars, cafes, nightclubs and discos that are open until late hours. As more surfers come to the island, “early to bed and early to rise” has become an unwritten rule of the island. Therefore, for those who love musical entertainment and nightlife, Siargao is not the right option.

- Since there are not many bank branches, exchange offices and ATMs on the island, it is necessary to exchange money and buy enough Philippine Pesos before coming to Siargao. The fact that there are almost no car rental companies, modern cinemas and theaters, modern hospitals and pharmacy, large sports centers and modern shopping centers throughout the island is a major drawback for the foreign tourists.

- The problem of sewage, clean drinking water and quality hospitals, which is experienced in a large part of the Philippines, is also experienced here. The problem of slow internet and power cuts seen in most of the country is also common on this island. Even in town centers, internet and power cuts can be experienced frequently in every season and every month. Therefore, the foreign tourists should be prepared for such surprises.

- There are no modern transportation options, railroad options and wide highways on the island. Transportation connections between the island settlements are mostly provided by minibuses and motorcycles and by narrow asphalted village roads. Therefore, for the tourists who want to tour the island, renting a motorcycle is the best option.

- Natural disasters are common in Siargao as they cause serious problems throughout the country. Throughout the island, sometimes strong winds, tropical storms and heavy rains are experienced during the July - February period. Therefore, before travelling to the island, it is essential to think well about the time of visit and climate negativities and to plan accordingly. The tourists who will visit the island should buy their flight and ferry tickets early and make early hotel reservations in order to avoid surprises.

- As there is no modern cinema, theater and opera house on the island, and there is no multifunctional modern polyclinic or a large sports complex either. Therefore, those who seek the opportunities and luxury living standards of the industrialized countries should know in advance that their expectations cannot be met on this island. Since the Philippines is a developing country, serious infrastructure failures, transportation problems, unplanned settlements, power cuts and the images of poverty on the streets are also ordinary everyday sights on the island of Siargao.

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