

## Developing more trainers on ecotourism

**E**cotourism has become a buzzword, not only in the leisure and travel industry, but also among policymakers and development planners in many countries. This was the general observation of participants in the APO training course for Trainers on Planning and Management of Ecotourism held in Subic Bay, the Philippines, 15–24 June 2011, attended by 23 participants from 13 countries and three international experts from the Netherlands, Japan, and Thailand.



*Training participants visited the Pawikan Conservation Center in Morong Bataan, a community-based conservation initiative to protect and propagate green turtles, which is attracting an increasing number of tourists. Photo APO/ J. Bernardo.*

During the course, participants focused on clarifying the concept of “ecotourism,” various principles involved, and tools for planning and management of a sustainable, inclusive ecotourism program. The essential principles of ecotourism are: 1) preservation of natural resources and biodiversity; 2) generation of resources for financing conservation efforts; 3) contribution to the local economy; 4) promotion of partnerships and welfare in the community; and 5) education of visitors and the local community. Case studies and country-specific experiences in Asia, Africa, and Latin America demonstrated how the benefits of ecotourism can lead to the improved welfare of local communities, preservation of biodiversity, and sustainable operations of SMEs with business activities linked to ecotourism. It was noted that SMEs are involved in both upstream and downstream ecotourism activities, such as those providing transportation, food, accommodation, and souvenir items to tourists. Both inbound and outbound tour operators are often SMEs. The profits from all these enterprises ultimately contribute to increased tax revenues for the state.

Dr. Mina Gabor, former Philippine Tourism Secretary and President of the International School of Sustainable Tourism in Subic Bay, who assisted the APO in the training course, succinctly explained that, “Ecotourism, when properly planned and implemented, is a win-win situation for all stakeholders. It becomes a very good model for sustainable, inclusive development, especially for developing countries in Asia.” *Contributed by J.C. Bernardo/APO Agriculture Department.* 