

Analysis of Urban Ecotourism Management Strategies among Southeast Asian Nations

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Abstract—Urban ecotourism offers a sustainable solution to mitigate the environmental and socio economic challenges of rapid urbanization in Southeast Asia. This study analyzes urban ecotourism practices, challenges, and management strategies in countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malavsia, with a focus on their adaptability to the Philippine context. Results reveal diverse approaches, including Singapore's innovative green infrastructure, Thailand's community-driven conservation efforts, and Malaysia's urban biodiversity programs, which successfully balance development and sustainability. However, challenges such as weak policy implementation, resource limitations, and urban sprawl persist across the region. Discussions emphasize the importance of collaborative governance, community engagement, and technological integration to enhance ecotourism effectiveness. Recommendations for the Philippines include adopting best practices from regional successes, such as public-private partnerships, community empowerment, and smart technologies, to promote ecological conservation, socio-economic growth, and sustainable urban development. This study provides a comprehensive framework for integrating urban ecotourism into urban planning strategies across Southeast Asia.

Keywords—Biodiversity conservation, collaborative governance, community empowerment, ecological restoration, sustainable tourism, urban planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban ecotourism addresses the growing challenges posed by rapid urbanization, including biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and socio-economic gaps. By integrating ecological conservation with tourism, it fosters sustainable urban development, promotes environmental education, and supports local economies. Southeast Asian cities such as Bangkok, Jakarta, and Singapore exemplify diverse urban ecotourism strategies that balance development with sustainability (Ong & Smith, 2021; Adriani, 2013).

These cities employ various approaches, from communitydriven conservation efforts to technology-enabled green infrastructure projects. Urban ecotourism initiatives like Indonesia's mangrove conservation programs and Malaysia's biodiversity corridors demonstrate the dual benefits of ecological preservation and socio-economic development (Blanton et al., 2024). However, weak policy implementation, stakeholder misalignment, and urban sprawl often undermine these efforts (Yanfeng, 2018). By fostering biodiversity within agricultural landscapes, these communities mitigate the risks associated with pests, diseases and climate variability, while simultaneously safeguarding genetic resources vital for crop adaptation and food security in the face of changing environmental conditions (Nagal, 2025).

This study aims to analyse urban ecotourism management strategies among Southeast Asian nations to identify best practices, assess their effectiveness, and propose actionable frameworks for sustainable urban development.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a multi-method qualitative approach to explore governance, community engagement, and funding mechanisms in urban ecotourism, and their corresponding socio-economic and ecological impacts.

A. Literature Review

A systematic literature review was first conducted to collect insights from a range of sources including peerreviewed journals, government reports, and industry publications. The review was limited to freely accessible published materials, which yielded a moderate but sufficient number of relevant articles. These sources provided a foundational understanding of existing practices and challenges in urban ecotourism governance and sustainability.

B. Comparative Case Study Analysis

Following the literature review, a comparative case study analysis was conducted to assess urban ecotourism initiatives across selected cities. Evaluation criteria included policy frameworks, governance models, conservation outcomes, and levels of community engagement (Travero et al., 2025). These cases were chosen based on their relevance to urban ecotourism and the availability of documented practices and results.

C. Secondary Data Analysis

To complement the case study findings, secondary data analysis was employed. This involved gathering data from existing tourism statistics, urban development reports, and sustainability indices. Key metrics analyzed included visitor numbers, revenue generation, biodiversity conservation outcomes, and community participation rates, offering a quantitative dimension to the study.

D. Framework Development

Finally, the insights drawn from the literature and case studies were synthesized to develop a conceptual framework for effective urban ecotourism management. This framework aims to highlight best practices and provide a structured approach to guiding future ecotourism initiatives in urban



contexts, with particular attention to integrated governance, inclusive community involvement, and sustainable financing mechanisms.

The insights gathered from the systematic literature review, comparative case study analysis, and secondary data analysis were synthesized to develop a set of best practices and management frameworks suitable for urban ecotourism (Fig. 1). This integrative phase focused on identifying common themes and successful strategies implemented across Southeast Asian nations. Based on these insights, a conceptual or operational framework was crafted to guide urban ecotourism management, incorporating key dimensions such governance structures. community as involvement. sustainability objectives, and financing mechanisms. Particular attention was given to the framework's adaptability to diverse urban contexts, its scalability for broader implementation, and its alignment with existing policies and institutional capacities.



Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

The culmination of the research process was the development of actionable policy recommendations and a localized adaptation strategy for the Philippine context. Informed by the synthesized findings, the study proposes a range of policy reforms and institutional arrangements designed to enhance urban ecotourism governance in the country. Additionally, it outlines community-based initiatives and sustainable funding models that are responsive to local socio-economic and environmental conditions. The study also offers practical guidelines for the implementation, monitoring, and ongoing improvement of urban ecotourism programs, ensuring that they are not only effective but also inclusive and sustainable over the long term.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Urban ecotourism practices in Southeast Asia demonstrate a dynamic interplay of innovative strategies, challenges, and opportunities that contribute to achieving sustainability goals. The following paragraphs provide an in-depth analysis of the methodologies and findings in relation to each objective, with supporting references drawn from the research articles included in the dataset.

A. Current Urban Ecotourism Practices in Southeast Asia and their Effectiveness

Urban ecotourism practices across Southeast Asia are characterized by diverse strategies aimed at harmonizing urban development with ecological sustainability (Table I). In Singapore, initiatives like Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park exemplify the integration of ecological conservation and urban planning, resulting in improved biodiversity and enhanced visitor experiences (An et al., 2020). Similarly, Thailand's Bang Kachao, often referred to as the "Green Lung of Bangkok, "emphasizes community-led conservation efforts to preserve green spaces while fostering socio economic growth through eco-friendly tourism (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003).

In Indonesia, programs such as mangrove conservation in Jakarta highlight how urban ecotourism can address critical environmental issues like coastal erosion while engaging local communities in conservation activities (Blanton et al., 2024). The success of these initiatives underscores the importance of community participation, innovative infrastructure, and policy support in achieving sustainability goals.

B. Key Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Ecotourism Strategies

Southeast Asian nations confront a complex array of challenges in the implementation of urban ecotourism strategies, many of which stem from structural limitations in governance, financing, and urban planning. A recurring barrier is the inadequacy of coherent and enforceable policy frameworks, which often results in fragmented or inconsistent approaches to urban environmental management. In Indonesia, for example, weak institutional enforcement and chronic resource constraints have significantly hindered the long-term viability of urban ecotourism projects. The lack of coordination among agencies and insufficient financial investment impedes the development of sustainable infrastructure and environmental monitoring systems, limiting both ecological protection and visitor experience (Adriani & Rosyidie, 2013).

Malaysia faces its own set of obstacles, particularly in the realms of stakeholder engagement and land-use conflicts. Rapid urbanization has intensified environmental degradation and placed immense pressure on green spaces, while weak inter-agency collaboration has led to disjointed ecotourism efforts. The absence of robust participatory mechanisms often results in the marginalization of local voices, which ownership diminishes community and the overall effectiveness of ecotourism programs (Masud et al., 2017). Urban sprawl further complicates the landscape, as it restricts the availability of ecologically viable spaces within city environments.

Nonetheless, these challenges coexist with promising opportunities that can reshape the urban ecotourism landscape in the region. Public-private partnerships have emerged as a viable solution to bridge financial and technical gaps, offering a pathway for sustainable development through shared responsibilities. Technological innovations—such as smart city applications, GIS-based planning, and green infrastructure—have enabled cities like Singapore to integrate



ecological priorities into urban design. Singapore's use of intelligent systems for biodiversity mapping and green connectivity illustrates how technological leadership can elevate both ecological outcomes and tourism appeal (An et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, community-driven approaches remain a cornerstone of sustainable ecotourism. In Thailand, grassroots involvement in urban conservation—particularly through local cooperatives and educational initiatives—has fostered a sense of environmental stewardship and cultural continuity. These efforts not only enhance the authenticity of ecotourism experiences but also empower local populations to play an active role in environmental governance (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003).

Taken together, these case examples underscore a dual reality: while urban ecotourism in Southeast Asia is constrained by systemic weaknesses, there exists substantial potential for transformation. By capitalizing on cross-sector collaboration, innovation, and local engagement, urban ecotourism can evolve into a powerful engine for inclusive economic growth and ecological sustainability across the region.

C. Southeast Asian Nations' Management on Urban Ecotourism Practices and Challenges

The management of urban ecotourism across Southeast Asia exhibits significant diversity, shaped by each country's unique socio-economic structures, governance capacities, and environmental priorities. In Singapore, ecotourism is underpinned by strong institutional frameworks and strategic integration of biodiversity conservation into urban planning and national policy agendas. This top-down, technocratic approach has enabled the city-state to develop highly organized and sustainable ecotourism initiatives that align ecological goals with economic development, ensuring both ecological integrity and visitor satisfaction (An et al., 2020).

In contrast, Indonesia presents a more decentralized and community-reliant model of ecotourism management. Given the limitations in centralized support and uneven governance capacities across its archipelago, local communities often assume a pivotal role in initiating and sustaining urban ecotourism efforts. This bottom-up strategy underscores the resilience, adaptability, and agency of grassroots actors in conserving urban ecosystems, despite systemic constraints. It also illustrates how local knowledge, cultural values, and community solidarity become critical assets in the absence of robust state intervention (Blanton et al., 2024).

Malaysia, meanwhile, adopts a hybrid model that blends governmental support with community-based initiatives. The country has made notable progress in promoting urban biodiversity and sustainable tourism through co-managed programs such as community-based ecotourism (CBET) in marine protected areas (Table II). These efforts not only foster environmental stewardship among local populations but also mitigate challenges such as stakeholder conflicts and resource scarcity through participatory governance and inclusive planning processes (Masud et al., 2017). The Malaysian experience highlights the importance of building institutional linkages between state actors and civil society to strengthen urban ecotourism outcomes.

Collectively, these national case studies illustrate that successful urban ecotourism management in Southeast Asia is contingent upon a collaborative, multi-layered governance approach. Whether through state-led initiatives, grassroots participation, or integrated models, the effectiveness of urban ecotourism depends on the alignment of ecological objectives with social inclusion, institutional coherence, and adaptive governance mechanisms tailored to specific local contexts.

Seq. No.	Author/s	Urban Ecotourism Practices	Country	Challenges in Implementing Ecotourism Strategies	Opportunities in Implementing Ecotourism Strategies
1	Aryantie et al., (2023)	Development of ecotourism attractions, environmental education, community engagement	Indonesia (Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara)	Limited awareness, regulatory challenges, resource constraints	Increased community involvement, potential for economic benefits, biodiversity conservation
2	Liu and Chamaratana (2024)	Community-based practices, stakeholder involvement	Thailand	Inadequate policy implementation, environmental degradation	Enhanced biodiversity conservation, increased local community participation
3	Kontogeorgopoulos (2003)	Small-scale, personalized tours; educational components	Thailand, Bali	High tourist concentrations; environmental degradation	Proximity to natural resources; educational potential
4	De Leon and Kim (2017)	Urban protected area management	Philippines	Governance challenges, stakeholder perceptions	Enhancing community engagement, promoting biodiversity
5	Hornoiu, (2016).	Community resilience through ecotourism	ASEAN countries	Climate change impacts, resource management	Building local capacity, promoting sustainable practices
6	Adriani (2013)	Development of environmentally sound tourism areas, community participation, education on conservation	Indonesia	Traffic congestion, air pollution, community resistance, limited resources	Increased local income, community engagement, preservation of natural areas
7	Sarkar (2016)	Promotion of natural parks, forest reserves, and wildlife viewing; use of social media for awareness	Malaysia	Urban development pressures, lack of awareness, and potential environmental degradation	Increased awareness through social media, community engagement, and educational opportunities

TABLE I. Challenges and Opportunities in Ecotourism Strategies Implementation

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Seq. No.	Author/s	Urban Ecotourism Practices	Country	Effectiveness in Achieving Sustainability Goals	Effectiveness in Managing Practices and Challenges
1	Sarkar (2016)	Promotion of natural parks, forest reserves, and wildlife viewing; use of social media for awareness	Malaysia	High potential for promoting conservation and responsible tourism practices	Effective use of social media for information dissemination and decision-making support
2	Wong (2024)	Integration of urban wildlife, biophilic design, community engagement	Singapore	Promotes biodiversity, enhances quality of life, supports ecological balance	Facilitates stakeholder collaboration, addresses human- wildlife conflicts, informs policy development
3	Mirsanjari et al. (2012)	Promoting environmental responsibility, local economic vitality, cultural diversity	Iran, Malaysia	High potential for sustainable urban development	Effective management of eco and green spaces, addressing challenges in urban settings
4	Masud et al. (2016)	Community involvement in conservation, training for local tourism, integration of public and private sectors	Malaysia	Enhances environmental awareness, promotes sustainable practices	Addresses socio-economic issues, improves local engagement in ecotourism
5	Ong and Smith (2021)	Not explicitly detailed; focuses on urban tourism dynamics	Bangkok, Jakarta	Potential for positive economic, social, and environmental impacts	Need for proactive municipal planning and management; strategic policy formulation
6	Blanton et al. (2024)	Not explicitly detailed in the provided text	Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam	Supports community-based mangrove restoration	Enhances community engagement through co-management
7	Andari and Setiyorini, H. (2016)	Eco-tourism development, community participation, local resource utilization	Indonesia	Enhances environmental awareness, supports local economies	Encourages active participation, fosters community pride and ownership
8	An et al. (2020)	Restoration of natural habitats, biodiversity enhancement, ecological education, community participation	Singapore	Promotes biodiversity, restores natural ecosystems, enhances community awareness and engagement	Effective management through ecological education, community participation, and sustainable practices, but requires ongoing monitoring and adaptation
9	Chan et al. (2015)	Not explicitly mentioned in the provided text	Philippines	Contributes to GDP growth, tourism marketing effectiveness	Requires better governance and management strategies

TABLE II.	Effectiveness i	n Management	and Achieving	Sustainability	Goals
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D. Proposed Practices and Framework for Urban Ecotourism Management

Based on the findings, several best practices and frameworks can be proposed to improve urban ecotourism management in Southeast Asia. Collaborative governance, which integrates the efforts of governments, NGOs, and local communities, emerges as a critical success factor. For example, Singapore's alignment of urban development policies with ecological goals demonstrates the importance of cohesive planning and policy integration (An et al., 2020).

Urban ecotourism management requires a structured framework to effectively balance environmental sustainability with urban development. The following key components offer a cohesive and actionable framework:

Key Components

1. Policy Integration: Align ecotourism with urban development policies to ensure cohesive planning. Aligning ecotourism with urban development policies ensures that ecological preservation and tourism objectives are harmonized with urban planning. Successful examples in Southeast Asia demonstrate how integrated policies lead to sustainable outcomes. For instance, Singapore's urban biodiversity strategies are embedded within its broader urban development plans, enabling projects like Gardens by the Bay and Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park to flourish as multifunctional green spaces (An et al., 2020). By incorporating ecotourism into zoning laws, infrastructure projects, and environmental regulations, cities can create a cohesive roadmap that minimizes conflicts between conservation and urbanization. For the Philippines, adopting a unified framework that aligns ecotourism objectives with national urban development plans is critical to achieving sustainability.

2. Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging stakeholders, including governments, private sectors, and local communities, is essential for the success and sustainability of urban ecotourism projects. Collaborative governance models, such as Malaysia's participatory management in urban biodiversity programs, highlight the importance of shared decision-making and responsibilities (Masud et al., 2017). Stakeholder engagement ensures that diverse perspectives and expertise are incorporated into planning and implementation, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability. For urban ecotourism in the Philippines, establishing platforms for regular dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders can address challenges like fragmented policymaking and resource allocation, ensuring that projects are inclusive and community driven.

3. Sustainable Funding Models: Urban ecotourism projects often require significant financial investment, making sustainable funding mechanisms critical to their longevity. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) offer an effective solution, as evidenced by Thailand's success in leveraging private investments for ecotourism infrastructure in projects like Bang Kachao (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). Grants and international funding from organizations focused on biodiversity and climate resilience can also supplement local resources. For the Philippines, implementing PPPs and exploring alternative funding sources, such as carbon credits or ecotourism taxes, can ensure a steady flow of financial support for project development and maintenance while reducing the strain on public budgets.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems is vital to measure the ecological, social, and economic impacts of urban ecotourism. Metrics such as biodiversity indices, visitor satisfaction surveys, and revenue generation statistics provide insights into a project's effectiveness and areas for improvement. Singapore's use of smart technologies for real-time ecosystem monitoring is a leading example of how data-driven approaches can enhance decision-making and project management (Yanfeng, 2018). In the Philippines, integrating

similar technologies and establishing periodic reviews of ecotourism initiatives can help ensure that projects remain adaptive, relevant, and aligned with sustainability goals.

Community empowerment and capacity building are equally vital. Thailand's community driven initiatives in Bang Kachao highlight how local stakeholder engagement can lead to sustainable ecotourism practices and improved socioeconomic outcomes (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). Moreover, leveraging innovative technologies, such as Singapore's smart infrastructure, can enhance the effectiveness of urban ecotourism while addressing challenges like urban sprawl and environmental degradation (Yanfeng, 2018).

By adopting these best practices, Southeast Asian nations can develop scalable frameworks that balance urbanization with ecological preservation, contributing to the broader goals of sustainable development and climate resilience.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban ecotourism in Southeast Asia showcases diverse strategies for balancing urbanization with ecological conservation. By analyzing these practices, this study highlights the potential for sustainable urban development through effective governance, community engagement, and innovative infrastructure. Adapting these strategies to the Philippine context offers a pathway to address urban challenges and enhance socio-economic and environmental resilience.

Urban ecotourism in the Philippines can benefit from strategies observed in other Southeast Asian nations. Collaborative governance models, as seen in Singapore, should be adopted to ensure inclusive planning and management. Partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector are essential to addressing resource constraints and ensuring continuity in ecotourism programs. Additionally, infrastructure investments, inspired by Thailand's green spaces like Bang Kachao, should focus on creating eco-tourism hubs in urban areas such as Metro Manila. Green zones along rivers and parks can offer both ecological and recreational value.

To enhance local involvement, the Philippines can draw from Malaysia's success in community-driven ecotourism. Empowering communities to take active roles in planning and managing ecotourism projects will ensure long-term viability and local ownership. Moreover, integrating smart technologies for biodiversity monitoring, visitor management, and data collection will improve operational efficiency and environmental outcomes, as demonstrated by Singapore's innovative urban ecology projects.

Urban ecotourism is a growing field with immense potential for contributing to sustainable development. For future studies related to this paper, it is recommended to:

1. Encourage Comprehensive Studies on Urban Ecotourism Across Southeast Asia

There is a pressing need for more in-depth research on urban ecotourism in Southeast Asia, particularly in nations with limited representation in academic and policy literature. Countries like Laos, Myanmar, and Brunei, which have unique ecological and urban contexts, often lack documented case studies or analyses. Expanding the research scope to include these underrepresented regions will provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in urban ecotourism across Southeast Asia. Such studies can also identify region specific practices that enrich the global body of knowledge on urban sustainability.

2. Enhance Capacity-Building Initiatives for Local Stakeholders

Capacity building is critical to equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed for effective urban ecotourism management. Training programs should target local government officials, community leaders, and privatesector stakeholders, focusing on areas such as ecological restoration, sustainable tourism practices, and policy implementation. By fostering technical expertise and leadership, capacity-building initiatives can empower local actors to take ownership of ecotourism projects and align them with broader sustainability goals. Malaysia's success in community-based ecotourism demonstrates the value of such efforts (Masud et al., 2017).

3. Develop Unified Frameworks Aligning National Goals with Local Implementation

Urban ecotourism projects require frameworks that integrate national-level strategies with local needs and capabilities. A unified approach ensures consistency in policy application, minimizes conflicts between stakeholders, and promotes cohesive development. Future studies should explore frameworks that align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), particularly Goals 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 15 (Life on Land). By embedding urban ecotourism initiatives within these global objectives, countries can enhance their contributions to sustainable urban development while fostering international collaboration.

4. Foster Public Awareness and Educational Campaigns

Public awareness and education are essential for building support for urban ecotourism initiatives. Future studies should investigate the most effective methods for engaging citizens,



such as community workshops, eco-tour campaigns, and digital media strategies. By increasing public understanding of the ecological and socio-economic benefits of urban ecotourism, stakeholders can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and encourage active participation. Singapore's educational efforts in biodiversity conservation through ecotourism projects provide a valuable model for fostering community engagement (An et al., 2020).

Finally, fostering public awareness and educational campaigns about the value of urban ecotourism can build support and participation from citizens, further ensuring the success and sustainability of these initiatives.

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