

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3120



Introduced by Representative JB BERNOS

AN ACT
DECLARING THE PROVINCE OF ABRA AS A PRIORITY TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT AREA, MANDATING THE INTEGRATED PROMOTION,
PROTECTION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS NATURAL AND
CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Tourism remains one of the Philippines' most promising engines for inclusive and sustainable development. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the tourism industry contributed 6.2% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022, a significant rebound after the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted travel and hospitality sectors. As the country continues to recover, rural and heritage-based tourism provides a unique opportunity to stimulate local economies, especially in historically underserved regions like the Province of Abra.

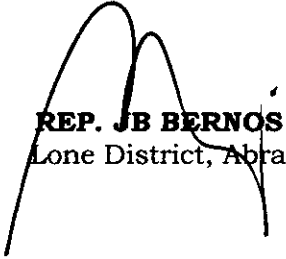
Abra, situated in the Cordillera Administrative Region, is endowed with breathtaking natural landscapes, vibrant indigenous cultures, and heritage sites of both local and national significance. Attractions such as Kaparkan Falls, the St. Catherine of Alexandria Church, and the historic Tangadan Tunnel are increasingly gaining attention among eco-tourists and heritage travelers. The province is also home to centuries-old Tingguian cultural traditions, weaving and bamboo crafts, and the Kawayan Festival, which celebrates the province's deep connection to its environment and cultural identity.

However, despite this rich potential, Abra remains largely excluded from mainstream tourism circuits. The lack of integrated planning, limited access to tourism infrastructure, and the absence of cultural preservation mechanisms have hindered the province from unlocking the full socio-economic benefits that tourism can offer. Many of Abra's rural communities continue to grapple with poverty, outmigration, and underemployment—challenges that a vibrant, community-based tourism industry could directly address.

This bill seeks to declare Abra as a priority tourism development area and institutionalize a comprehensive framework for the sustainable, inclusive, and culturally rooted development of its tourism sector. The proposed measure will also institutionalize and promote flagship events like the Kawayan Festival, which showcases Abra's identity as a leading bamboo-producing province and highlights the role of local culture in tourism and economic development. By linking culture, nature, and community participation, this bill envisions a resilient tourism economy that generates jobs, uplifts local artisans and farmers, empowers indigenous peoples and women, and fosters pride in Abra's heritage and identity.

Tourism, when done right, does more than attract visitors—it creates livelihoods, strengthens communities, and preserves legacies. This bill provides the policy and programmatic foundation for Abra to harness tourism as a driver of inclusive progress and rural transformation.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



REP. JB BERNOS
Lone District, Abra

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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. Title. This Act shall be known as the "***Abra Tourism and Cultural Heritage Development Act.***"

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote inclusive, culturally rooted, and environmentally sustainable tourism. The Province of Abra shall be recognized as a priority tourism development area, given its rich cultural heritage, natural attractions, and potential to generate employment and local economic growth.

SEC. 3. Abra as a Tourism and Cultural Heritage Area. The Province of Abra is hereby declared as a Tourism and Cultural Heritage Area. Pursuant thereto, the development of its tourism sites and the protection of its cultural heritage shall be prioritized by the Department of Tourism (DOT) in coordination with other relevant national government agencies, and shall be subject to the rules and regulations.

SEC. 4. Coverage. This Act shall apply to tourism and cultural heritage sites in the Province of Abra, within the following categories:

- (a) Ecotourism sites;
- (b) Historical infrastructure;

- (c) Ancestral homes of prominent people;
- (d) Religious buildings and shrines;
- (e) Local festivals and celebrations;
- (f) Local industries of noteworthy cultural and economic significance; and
- (g) Indigenous Tingguian cultural sites and practices.

SEC. 5. Abra Tourism Development Framework. The Department of Tourism (DOT), in coordination with the Provincial Government of Abra, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and other stakeholders, shall formulate a 10-year Tourism and Heritage Development Framework Plan for the province. The framework shall:

- (a) Identify tourism development zones within Abra;
- (b) Establish guidelines for ecotourism, heritage conservation, and cultural protection;
- (c) Assess and evaluate the potential impact of the development to the environmental safety and well-being of the tourism and cultural heritage zones, communities, and enterprises;
- (d) Provide technical and financial assistance to the communities within the site;
- (e) Promote sustainable infrastructure and visitor management;
- (f) Institutionalize the annual Kawayan Festival as a flagship cultural event; and
- (g) Perform other functions as may be necessary to carry out the objectives of this Act.

SEC. 6. Cultural Mapping and Preservation. The NCCA and the Provincial Government of Abra shall undertake a comprehensive cultural mapping project, identifying sites, practices, and artifacts of historical and cultural value. A digital and printed cultural map of Abra shall be produced and maintained.

SEC. 7. Infrastructure and Capacity Support. The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) shall prioritize road access to tourism zones. The DOT and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) shall provide training, accreditation, and support to local tour guides, homestays, cooperatives, and MSMEs engaged in tourism-related enterprises.

SEC. 8. Funding. The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current budget of the DOT, NCCA, and other concerned agencies. Thereafter, such amounts as may be necessary shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. Furthermore, the Provincial Government of Abra shall provide counterpart funding for the implementation of this Act.

SEC. 9. Implementing Rules and Regulations. Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOT, in coordination with the Provincial Government of Abra, the NCCA, DTI, DPWH, and other relevant agencies, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations (IRR).

SEC. 10. Separability Clause. If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remainder shall not be affected thereby.

SEC. 11 Repealing Clause. All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules, and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 12. Effectivity. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,