ICTC International Cultural Tourism Committee

ICOMOS International Scientific Committees on Cultural Tourism (ICTC)
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SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
IFUGAO RICE TERRACES WORLD HERITAGE SITE
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INTRODUCTION
Members of the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee (ICTC) were warmly received during a visit to the Ifugao Rice Terraces World Heritage Site in November 2012. Local community members met the ICTC team with hospitality and a sincere eagerness to share the beauty and history of the region and learn from each other about cultural heritage tourism experiences. The committee worked together to develop a report as an outcome of the visit. While it is an official ICOMOS ICTC report, agreed and approved by the Bureau and ICTC membership, it is not one commissioned by ICOMOS.

The fourteen members of the ICTC and guests who visited Ifugao greatly appreciated learning about the agricultural practices and community traditions of the centuries-old rice terraces as a landscape of outstanding universal value. The rice terraces of Ifugao, nominated to the World Heritage List in 1995, are one of the first agricultural landscapes to be inscribed as such on the list. They are comprised of the Nagacadan terrace cluster in the municipality of Kiangan, the Hungduan terrace cluster, the central Mayoyao terrace cluster, the Bangaan terrace cluster in the municipality of Banaue, and the Batad terrace cluster of the municipality of Banaue.

Committee members came away impressed by the resources of the region, both cultural and natural. The landscape is very beautiful, consisting of high mountains covered by luxurious tropical vegetation and rice terraces stepping down along their flanks to the valley. The committee felt strongly that the health of the ecosystem must be a priority in all management considerations: maintenance of the forest ecosystem is essential to the long-term sustainability of the rice terraces and the way of life.

There was agreement that the potential for combining heritage tourism with conservation of the resources is high, and that local administrators have identified and are addressing many of the challenges. The need exists for continued action to ensure that resources and local communities are prepared to handle an increasing level of tourism.

While the committee saw only two of the five terrace clusters included in the World Heritage designation, it is clear that the resources are much more extensive than what we saw and that the challenges and opportunities are great. The committee clearly understood that rice growing is the critical focus of the World Heritage designation and that it is essential that it continue to be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.
The committee members appreciated meeting with Congressman Baguilat, Jr. during our visit to Vigan, and Governor Balitang, Mayor Bumangbang of Hungduan, Engineer Carmelita Buyuccan, and Planner Maribelle Dulnuan-Bimohya in Ifugao. These leaders showed great commitment to planning and management of the rice terraces for both conservation and tourism development. The committee members also met with local farmers and with numerous citizens of the region during informal encounters. There were many productive discussions about sustainable development, agricultural tourism, restoration and conservation of the terraces, economic development, and regulatory frameworks to support and manage tourism development.

The committee members are grateful to the teachers at Tungngod Elementary School for inviting us to view the children’s performance of traditional dances and the chanting of the Hudhud narrative, it was a highlight of our visit. We also wish to thank the farmers in Hungduan for inviting us to visit their agricultural workshop. There is great pride in the region shown by its citizens, which is one of its strongest assets.

CHALLENGES
The main problems involve numerous interwoven factors which, collectively, contribute to the challenges of the region. They include,

1. Integrating the economic, environmental, community/social, and heritage components;

2. Rural depopulation, which is causing changes to the traditional way of life and the customs upon which heritage preservation and perpetuation of the culture depends; and,

3. Changes to traditional land use and development patterns, urban development, transportation pressures, building practices and materials that negatively affect the environment, natural setting, and heritage.
The health of the Ifugao and its listing as a World Heritage site are dependent on the appropriate balance of a holistic system of factors: environmental, community/social, economic, and heritage. Science suggests that no one factor will lead to the collapse of the ecosystem, but each contributes to the health and welfare of the region. If one element is in crisis and creating a strain on the balance of the system, all areas will suffer. Therefore, the strategies of the Rice Terraces Master Plan must continue to take a holistic approach to balancing the systems at work in the region for the good of the whole, rather than one or two aspects.

Depopulation and abandonment of the traditional way of life are another two of the most serious concerns. This is intensified by the region’s isolated location and the difficulty of the work, low wages, and the high cost of terrace maintenance. Younger workers are leaving and seeking life in cities, and the local population is being reduced primarily to the oldest and youngest members of society.

In addition, new development is greatly affecting the character of the region. Due to limited development regulations, architectural guidelines, site protection laws, and limited enforcement, the quality of the built environment and natural landscape is declining. This is affecting the larger towns as well as the villages and rural areas. Traditionally, buildings were made of wood or fiber, and while some of the old wooden houses still remain, and are in good condition, many of them are crumbling (with some notable exceptions such as the house of the anthropologist Otley Beyer). New construction is typically concrete and shows little compatibility with traditional design, building form, context, or the natural setting. The new materials are generally not suited to the climate, and many new buildings are being built on unstable hillsides or areas within abandoned terraces, contributing to unsightly sprawl.

Environmental management is also an issue with pollution from traffic, construction debris, open drainage of wastewater, and trash. Visual pollution detracts from the beauty of the region and there are many opportunities for educational and employment programs that could improve the situation. Public health could also be improved though water, wastewater, and solid waste improvement.
Farming the terraces is dependent on the active participation of residents in traditional activities, based on an intricate system of customs, rituals, and societal rules formed around solidarity, community sharing, and a spiritual relationship with the natural environment. This system relies on a world-view of respect of nature, its forces, and taboos, and it is very important that these traditions continue to be honored and passed down through generations.

The cultural landscape of the rice terraces has developed over many centuries. Local knowledge has been transferred from grandparents and parents to children and grandchildren, and the terraces are today a significant and important collective heritage for humanity. The challenges for Ifugao today are not unlike that of other agricultural regions where the young generation of farmers has inherited the knowledge of their ancestors, but is not financially secure enough to continue the tradition of farming in the face of more lucrative endeavors.

Local politicians and governmental leaders have a major responsibility in providing an economic framework for the young farmers: the farmers have to be paid for the jobs they are doing for this important world heritage resource. Tourism can be a compounding problem for the active cultivation of the rice fields if farmers are tempted to take valuable time away from farming to earn ‘easier’ money in the tourism business. Tourism organizations and the government at all levels need to acknowledge that they have a responsibility in this situation. The material landscape will not survive long if farmers have to spend time serving people in tourism.

Tourism also brings significant challenges to the historic way of life as new behaviors and social norms are introduced into the area. Young people are especially influenced by the novelty of outside influences and the possibilities of different lifestyles outside the region. Measures to promote economic opportunity in the region for young people to provide continuity with the local heritage are essential. Community-based tourism, agritourism, and heritage tourism offer opportunities for employment, education, revenue sharing, and long-term economic viability. Monitoring the impact of the development of cultural and heritage tourism on the communities and on the authenticity of the sites is of utmost importance.
The Role of the UNESCO Scientific Advisory Committee: International Cultural Tourism Committee (ICTC)

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Scientific Committee of ICTC pursues objectives to promote responsible tourism and sustainable management practices of natural and cultural heritage areas as an advisory committee to UNESCO and other governmental and non-governmental organizations. Members of the committee meet annually to share information, promote research, and support advocacy on topics related to education, interpretation, site conservation, and responsible management practices.

The recommendations of the ICOMOS ICTC presented to the citizens of Ifugao are intended to offer an outside perspective and thoughtful guidance that may be useful to community members and decision-makers. These suggestions are not directives, knowing that local community members are the true experts in the practices that have supported a way of life in the area for hundreds of years. We respectfully come to you with ideas and recommendations for practices that have been found to be successful or useful in other areas of the world and hope they might provide insight and useful ideas for the management of the Ifugao region.

Strictly speaking, ICOMOS is the Advisory Body to UNESCO on Cultural Heritage, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the parallel Advisory Body to UNESCO for Natural Heritage. The ICOMOS Executive Committee chose an International Scientific Committee to represent them, as is the case with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism program, where ICTC has been chosen as the ICOMOS representative on the Steering Group. Our role, as an ISC, in writing a report with worldwide expertise, is to provide an objective analysis of conditions and opportunities, which can be used as a benchmark for the next Management Plan 2013, especially since an increase in tourism is envisioned.
SUMMARY: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the tour to Ifugao, ICTC committee members were sent a copy of the 2003 Rice Terraces Master Plan. Most of the committee members’ observations were reflected in the Master Plan, particularly the importance of maintaining the traditional cultural practices and preserving the knowledge base for future generations. In light of this, the ICTC members offer a series of recommendations, many of which reinforce current efforts in Ifugao, followed by a concluding statement.

1. MASTER PLANNING VISION AND STRATEGIES:

- Continue to support the Cultural Regulatory Board with the specific planning strategies outlined in the Rice Terraces Master Plan to reflect new challenges and opportunities.
- Continue to implement programs that support developing the knowledge database and the transfer of knowledge, capacity building, training, and education.
- Pay special attention to maintaining the links between tangible and intangible expressions of the Ifugao heritage, reinforcing guidelines to ensure their coordinated protection and management in context of the recognition by UNESCO.
- Coordinate management to ensure the continuity of the Ifugao heritage and consider that new approaches are particularly needed in the scholarship of heritage conservation and management theory. The Rice Terraces will be known not only as an exceptional heritage area, but also as a region important for its pioneering work in the field of heritage protection and management.
- Promote the special character of the region, enhancing those values and characteristics that make it unique and contribute to its ‘sense of place.’ This will attract a large number of visitors to the region precisely because of the opportunities to see such a place like no other.
• Engage local communities in educating and sensitizing tourists to the importance and value of the heritage, so that the visitors understand and feel a welcome sense of ownership in supporting its management.

2. TRADITIONAL LAND USE PATTERNS AND VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

• Adopt land use and design guidelines for renovation and new construction that promotes development that is respectful and compatible with the landscape (for example, zoning, building form, type of materials, style and height, etc.).
• Implement assistance programs for land owners to encourage them to follow the guidelines, such as financial incentives, technical assistance, shared labor, and low-cost maintenance and materials.
• Encourage property owners to preserve structures still in use and study the qualities of the traditional land use and vernacular architecture in order to develop new ways of building, taking into consideration historic practices, local materials, construction techniques, durability, respect of the landscape, and the needs of future generations.
• Design buildings carefully to be in context with the size and scale of traditional structures and the natural features of the mountains and valleys. Several massive concrete residential structures were noted perched on steep slopes overhanging valleys. It is important to evaluate the potential for landslides and slippage when approving these types of construction.
• Direct special attention to reuse and rehabilitation of old wooden structures, improvement of recent concrete construction and the creation of new structures, with direction to use traditional materials whenever possible which could develop jobs related to the ecological management of forest resources.

3. TRADITIONAL FARMING PRACTICES AND LOCAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

• The Ifugao Rice Terraces demonstrate a complex web of agricultural activities supported by traditional practices. The rice terrace farmers working individually and in cooperation are the principal stewards of the World Heritage Rice Terraces. The role of the farmers is essential to maintaining the rice terraces and their heritage. Specific measures should be taken to sustain farmers, especially encouraging younger generations to continue in agricultural activities.
• Ensure that farmers receive economic benefit from the tourism activities related to their heritage. Not only is economic support essential, but visitors and society, in general, must recognize their essential role as the guardians of this heritage.

• Include stories and historical accounts of the Ifugao farmers in tourism information that explains their role as those who have a multi-functional place in food production, environmental protection, land management, and the maintenance of their society and culture. Note that they, for all these reasons, deserve special recognition, which reinforces their identity, and supports the training of young people in this essential activity.

• We encourage farmers to continue to grow rice and other crops employing traditional practices and beliefs, with additional support from the Ifugao Region and the communities. The crops currently include rice of various traditional types started from saved seed, sweet potatoes, fern fronds, and other herb and vegetables crops.

• Education on changing environmental conditions, biodiversity, and technology are also important, such as the workshop being held during our visit. Continued education and expanding knowledge of both traditional and modern methods is particularly valuable.

• Another way farmers and communities can be assisted is through the creation of a micro-business of packaging, labeling, and selling quantities authentic World Heritage Rice Terraces rice to tourists at a premium price. Packages must be sealed and labeled in accordance with international customs requirements. A modest investment would support local label and packaging production, bringing dollars directly to communities and rice growers.

• Fitting out homes and traditional rice storage structures in the region for home-stays and agricultural work-stays is another way to bring tourist dollars to communities.
Another issue that arose for the farming community in the area of basic community support services was the time and effort it takes to get children to school. A solution may be for the province or municipality to support a school delivery and pick-up service, allowing parents more time for education, farming, and other activities.

4. PLANNING FOR CULTURAL TOURISM AND HERITAGE TOURISM MARKETS

- Develop a clear understanding of the expectations of cultural tourists so that the communities can provide the appropriate level of services and experiences to meet those expectations. This means providing memorable experiences and services distinctly related to the production of rice on the Ifugao Rice Terraces. Tourists can experience these things only in this unique part of the world.
- Capitalize upon and promote the World Heritage label, which is a significant benefit to the Philippines, the Ifugao region, and the product. The local people are very conscious of it, but the promotion of the label is very limited in the media, tourism offices, hotels, and at the sites. The promotion and marketing should be a national effort. One can see informational panels at the museums, and in some small towns, as well as on the Rice Terraces, but there should be a countrywide effort to develop a special design and advertising campaign of World Heritage sites and monuments in the Philippines.
- Develop a modern, visitors’ center that offers a full range of centralized visitor services. This includes education and interpretive programs, lodging, tour opportunities, activities, and centralized booking and fees. This assures quality control of the visitor experience, training and management of guides, a unified front presenting the story, and equitable revenue sharing.
Promote the high variability of the agricultural landscape forms and seasonal differences to tourists to show the various opportunities and develop tourism niches focused on experiences. For example, it is important that tourist promotion does not exclusively focus on the beauty of the landscape in April-May, but stresses its values during the whole year. This will help to balance seasonal tourist demand and encourage repeat visits to the place in different seasons in order to know the changes that occur in this landscape.

Tourists want to experience authenticity. The interest in cultural tourism is increasing on a global scale, as is community-based and heritage tourism. These tourists appreciate local culture and want to see and experience the place and the people. They want local small hotels and home-stay opportunities, local foods, and opportunities to experience local music, dance, crafts, and art. Small-scale tourism efforts to bring money into local economies tied directly to Rice Terrace farmers and farm communities can be pursued.

Offer only those things than can be sustainably delivered by the local communities and their infrastructure. [Our marvelous rocky ride to the Hungduan rice terraces on the top of the jeepneys exemplifies this point of a memorable experience, and the wonderful lunches with rice wine and rice dishes provided great opportunities to experience local cuisine].

The production of textiles using European-influenced looms is oriented toward products that the local people and the regular tourist can afford, which is a very positive accomplishment, but it could be also interesting to encourage or revive the traditional weaving techniques (backstrap loom, and use of native materials such as bark fiber) to preserve those traditional skills and transmit the knowledge. These could also support the sense of identity and pride of the local communities.

As with any agricultural landscape, the Rice Terraces demand a relaxed pace with opportunities for observation and study in order to be understood in all its dimensions and meanings, bringing an excellent opportunity to connect Ifugao with the very successful “slow movements” that advocate new, creative, and responsible ways of tourism enjoyment. To properly enjoy a place visitors need to not only contemplate it and walk around it, but to touch it, smell it, feel it, and taste it. The diversity of new and creative approaches to tourism in this regard are significant, such as traditional farming practices, organic products and gastronomy, crafts, and ‘being in nature’.

Develop educational camps and summer training programs in agricultural and traditional culture, open-days, photo and video contests, school trips, and packages of active tourism that enable
children and tourists to enjoy the cycles of nature and to have a direct experience of the landscape by participating in its activities and sharing its value.

- The territorial dimension of the shared heritage calls for a diversity of interpretive opportunities that communicate the stories of this unique landscape, including prehistoric, historic, and modern history (for example, it is very interesting to learn of the Million Dollar Hill story of WW II). Municipalities and communities can work together as a network rather than independent agencies, ensuring that they expand the reach of visitors in the whole area.

- Tourism represents a unique opportunity to bring a new life to a wide diversity of vernacular buildings of the landscape, especially taking into account the special interest of tourists for staying in authentic, special, and heritage-related places, such as home-stays and farm-stays, inns, and camping, and not solely in globalised facilities available in other tourists destinations.

- Determine appropriate zones for tourists to visit and provide areas where host communities can choose to limit or discourage visitation. This practice, known as setting aside a “front-country sacrifice zone,” directs tourists to areas that are designed to sustain high visitor numbers and accommodate traffic and other impacts, and protects sensitive areas. It also allows host communities to set boundaries and regulate the number of visitors and their activities, in order not to be overtaken by visitors and end up as a living history museum.

- These actions need to be encompassed in the 'brand' or image of Ifugao - a brand that people in the Philippines and around the world identify with quality, authenticity, and sustainability.
5. REVENUE GENERATION

- The provincial government may wish to consider ways to introduce a tourist “tax” or visitor fee similar to the local “bed tax” charged in some U.S. states, where the money raised is specifically earmarked for communal maintenance and conservation of the rice terraces.

- Another possible revenue generating tax is a ‘real estate transfer tax’ levied on the sale of property. As the area faces development pressure and land becomes more valuable, this tax provides a mechanism for local government to pay for services and infrastructure.

- A consistent pricing policy between the various sites is essential. One ticket for each site, without multiple charges for entries, taxes, and the like will allow the tourist to enjoy the sites better without feeling that they are being overcharged. A single entry ticket could actually produce more income than multiple smaller charges all along the tourists’ way. Equitable distribution of the funds collected with the single ticket to farmers, local governments, NGOs, support funds will also be an essential component of the system if it is going to work.

- Fee structures that allow locals open access is important in maintaining a sense of ownership for locals. School groups should be encouraged to take advantage of education at the sites and given priority, with local community members determining appropriate activities in particular areas.

- Consideration for small-scale, high-end eco-lodges and retreat facilities should be considered since they often generate a large return on investment to the community while maintaining a smaller footprint and lower impacts on the area.

- Education and market analysis of the range of tourists’ needs, from internet cafes and inexpensive services, to high-end experiences for luxury travelers, will help local business owners develop appropriate goods and services to meet the needs of visitors and ensure a positive experience.
6. INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORTATION, AND ROAD CONSTRUCTION

- The local transportation system appears to have all the pieces in place to create a unified transportation network to service the Rice Terraces. ICTC members suggest that communities limit the number of tourist and private vehicles that can access the sites due to the extreme limitations on parking and road capacity. Using tricycles or Jeepneys as the primary means of access, ensures that only locals who understand the challenging road conditions and where and how to park vehicles, would be best.
- Businesses, communities and regional government should work on a unified system of signage to direct tourists to the various hotels or home-stay locations, points of interests, government and emergency services, transportation, and visitor services such as central business districts, picnic areas, and comfort rooms.
- The overall infrastructure problems of wastewater, solid waste management, water quality and distribution, and drainage linked to road systems and construction, as well as electricity, are important to address. Here, as elsewhere in the Philippines, the electricity distribution system should be treated for ecological, safety, and aesthetic reasons. This requires coordination between national, regional, local, public, and private levels.
- Current roadway widening and paving projects will improve transportation overall in the future, but are currently having serious negative environmental impacts and causing landslides, erosion, and water pollution. Careful roadway engineering, design, planning, and construction that anticipates and addresses potential impacts will have more positive, well-integrated outcomes.
- In the villages, better sidewalks and crossing areas for pedestrians would encourage more interaction by tourists with locals and local shops, and promote safety.
7. **SUSTAINABILITY** and **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

- Introduce a public relations educational campaign to generate awareness of the importance of the ecological integrity of the region and the importance of the rice terraces in generating food security for the region, as well as nationally. Introduce a Heritage Conservation Visitor Fee or other form of fee, specifically for terrace preservation or other designated conservation program.
- Provide a ‘Welcome’ packet that promotes conservation concepts and encourages active participation. Give visitors a reusable water bottle and a hand-woven fiber bag, banning plastic bags and bottles. Encourage visitors to recycle, reduce litter, and “Leave No Trace” of their visit. Welcome tourists with an emphasis on the interwoven values of the region.
- Provide conservation work projects for Filipino youth, tourists, and NGOs to spend volunteer time on reconstruction and maintenance of the terraces.
- Continue to introduce ecological sustainability concepts in schools, to farmers, and in public education programs for locals and visitors alike.
CONCLUSION
The Ifugao World Heritage site is a magnificent example of indigenous terrace farming where the integrity remains largely intact, but not without challenges. In addition to the natural and agricultural landscapes that create such outstanding universal value are the intangible elements of the rich history, traditions, rituals, arts, and knowledge that have been passed down through many generations.

The natural landscape is stunning, and aside from the basic infrastructure and environmental challenges typical of many rural areas, this special region offers incredible cultural heritage tourism opportunities.

The key elements to development of successful tourism will be to maintain a strong vision of the types of activities that are appropriate in Ifugao and will not diminish its character, and continue to provide leadership, education, funding, and commitment to those activities that will safeguard Ifugao’s special resources. Funding is often the most difficult component to obtain, but the government has demonstrated commitment to the area, and the World Heritage designation brings significant international attention and credibility to the region. There are many activities that local leaders can continue to embark upon with education, training, community-building, and promotion of a philosophy of value in being a World Heritage site.

Safeguarding the traditional customs, knowledge, wisdom, and spirit of the people is the greatest step toward protecting the region and providing a destination of value to visitors. The additional steps are being addressed as time and funding allows, and there is great potential for the future of cultural heritage tourism in Ifugao.
ICTC Site Visit Committee Members and Guests

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Black and White Photographs on Display, Banaue Internet Café
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