

Pacquiao says Street View will help Philippine tourism

By Oliver Teves
The Associated Press

MANILA, The Philippines — Filipino boxing icon Manny Pacquiao and tourism officials say images of the Philippine capital and the country's main tourist spots on Google's Street View could help attract more visitors to the country.

Google country marketing manager Ryan Morales said the Philippines became the 69th country included in Google's Street View with its launch in Manila.

The images captured over six months last year include panoramic views of street scenes in 37 cities and 35 historic and heritage sites, including Pacquiao's southern hometown where he began his career as one of the world's most popular boxers.

Rocked by insurrections and poor infrastructure, the Philippines struggles to bolster tourism, lagging behind neighboring Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.

Pacquiao said the images include his old neighborhood in Sarangani province, which he represents as a congressman, General Santos City, the country's tuna capital, and the city hall where he used to sell bread to



earn money when he was a young boy from a dirt-poor family.

He said the Google project will support "our goal of making the Philippines a top tourist destination in Asia."

Thickening haze dampens swing of Singapore festivities

By Annabelle Liang
The Associated Press

SINGAPORE — A thickening, smoky haze cast a shadow over festivities in Singapore as Muslims headed to mosques to celebrate the culmination of the annual hajj pilgrimage and Chinese readied for a traditional harvest festival.

As many Singaporeans stayed at home for the public holiday, the three-hour Pollutant Standards Index (PSI), which measures air pollution in the country, hit 313, the highest level this year. The haze has been blowing in from neighboring Indonesia, where forests are being burned to clear the land for farming, causing the annual problem for the region.

Although there are no official air quality descriptors affiliated with the three-hour index, a reading of these levels on a 24-hour index would mean that air quality is in the "very unhealthy" range, according to the National Environment Agency.

High-rise buildings surrounding Masjid Hajjah Fatimah, a mosque in an area historically associated with the island nation's Malay community, were barely visible through the veil of smog.

While some faithful were seen covering their mouths to block out the haze, none wore masks as prayers conducted inside the mosque required them to wash their faces.

Mustafa Muhamad, 61, said the bad air quality caused some of his friends to say prayers to mark the Eid-al-Adha, or festival of sacrifice, at home instead. From a group of 40 usually seen at each of the day's five prayer sessions, the number had dwindled to around 20, he added.

"The haze is very bad, there are less people in the mosque this year. Coming to the mosque to pray used to be very nice because we would mingle around after," the teacher explained.

At the nearby Sultan Mosque, tourists wearing masks



ACRID AIR. Tourists are silhouetted against Singapore's popular tourist destination, Sentosa, seen through the haze in the background. A thickening, smoky haze cast a shadow over festivities in Singapore, as Muslims headed to mosques to celebrate the culmination of the annual hajj pilgrimage and Chinese readied for a traditional harvest festival.

(AP Photo/Wong Maye-E)

were taking pictures of its iconic facade.

Preparations for the Chinese mid-autumn festival, when farmers traditionally celebrate their harvest, were in full swing.

One such celebration featured giant lantern sets, nightly cultural performances, and a food street.

"My son is very sensitive to dust and has lung issues, so I'm limiting his outdoor time," said Esther Au Yong, 34, a freelance editor.

Indonesia's environment and forestry ministry said the licenses of four Indonesian plantation companies were suspended or revoked for clearing land illegally and sparking forest fires.

Some 27 companies are being investigated in connection with the forest fires, Indonesian authorities said, while 140 individuals are being questioned. A Singapore-listed company is among those under investigation.

TAPPING INTO TOURISM. Filipino boxing icon Manny Pacquiao gestures as he talks about Manila's Jose Rizal monument during a speech in support of Philippine tourism in suburban Pasay, south of Manila, the Philippines. Pacquiao and tourism officials say images of the Philippine capital and the country's main tourist spots on Google's Street View could help attract more visitors to the country. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

In jest, he said he may "need a rematch with (Floyd) Mayweather" to raise money to bring more visitors to Sarangani but that the images will do that for him. Pacquiao lost to Mayweather in May in boxing's richest fight.

"I do not need to give away plane tickets and spend a lot of money to showcase the beauty of our province," he said with a broad smile. Pacquiao is known to spend large amounts to bring along a huge entourage to watch his fights.

Domingo Ramon Enerio III, the chief operating officer of the Tourism Promotions Board, said tourism is a "feel-good industry" which contributed \$6 billion to the Philippine economy last year.

The government statistics agency has reported that tourism contributed 7.8 percent to the economy last year.

Enerio said the government is confident the Philippines will surpass 5 million visitors for the first time this year.

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