

Strategies and Problems in the Promotion of Taal as a Culture and Religious Destination

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Date Received: July 25, 2014; Date Revised: November 5, 2014

Abstract - Taal as a Culture heritage has been discovered as an important marketing tool to attract those travelers with special interest in heritage and arts. Taal reigns as one of the most culturally preserved sites of the country's four-century Spanish and forty year American colonial eras. It conforms to the old town layout combining municipal, hall, school, church and market. Taal heritage town is a fine example of a sustainable development as well as responsible and ethical promotion of culture tourism in the Philippines.

The study aimed to determine the strategies and problems in the promotion of Taal as a Culture and Religious Destination. More specifically, it identifies the current number of tourists visiting Taal, to determine the best promotional strategy in promoting taal and to identify the problems encountered by the tourists of Taal.

The descriptive method was used in order to determine the needed information. A modified questionnaire was constructed to obtain the data for the study. The researchers conclude that the commonly visited tourist attraction in Taal were Escuela Pia, White House and Basilica of St. Martins of Tours. Based on the survey, the respondents agreed that historical sites were considered the most effective promotional strategies used in Taal. Lastly, the respondents for this research agreed that presence of beggars was the common problem encountered by the tourists.

Keywords: *Tourism, Culture, Batangas, Religious Destination*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has grown into one of the world's industries and has thus also become increasingly important. Over the years, the Philippine tourism industry has been playing a key role in promoting mutual understanding among nations, and as an instrument of national and economic development (Vizconde & Felicen, 2012). Tourism means more jobs for the people and improvement of their standard of living (Buted, Ylagan & Mendoza, 2014).

It is essentially about people and places. The group of people leaves, visit and pass through, the other groups who make their trip possible. The highest purpose of tourism is to become better acquainted with people in other places and countries because this furthers the understanding and appreciation that builds a better world for all. International travel also involves the exchange of knowledge and ideas another worthy objective.

This study focused on Taal, which stand out among the towns of the country. Boasting of numerous well-preserved historical landmarks and cultural treasures dating back from the Pre-Spanish colonial period, the place is visited with natural attraction like the oldest stone structures and ancestral homes and its magnificent churches. This town had been chosen by the researchers as the subject of investigation to assess the potentials of Taal as a tourist destination and in so doing, to assess the areas where improvement may be implemented and to recommend what may be taken to achieve the development and improvement. Taal is worth studying and reviewing. It is here where the justification of this study centers.

Taal is a very nice town, tidier than other places in The Philippines. It hosts the largest Basilica in Asia and it is well worth a visit, religious or not. The outside has obviously a very little maintenance over the hundreds of years but inside is absolutely wonderful.

People's interest in traveling to culture/heritage destination has increased recently and is expected to continue. This trend is evident in the rise of the volume of travelers who seek adventure, culture, history, archeology, and interaction with local people. The hosting of events is often developed because of the tourism and economic opportunities' addition to social and cultural benefits (Magpantay et al., 2014). Pilgrim churches contribute to tourism in terms of social and economic aspect while they strongly agree in terms of cultural aspect (De Castro, 2014).

Religious or faith-based tourism, however, is not only about pilgrimages. Faith-based travel may take place for life cycle events, for missionary work or humanitarian interest projects and for religious conventions and conclaves. There is a great number of people who seek spiritual aspects to their vacations. Economically speaking, cultural tourism industry in Taal and Maragondon contributes to the local community by improving their standard of living (Bancoro, 2014). Tourism has social, economic, environmental, cultural, heritage and arts effects on the Municipality of Taal, Batangas. The level of financial support from the government and waste management and disposal concern are the problems encountered in preserving heritage tourism in Taal (Aguda, 2013).

The most interesting part of going around Taal town proper is having to see the heritage houses that allow tourists to travel back in time as their unique exquisiteness from the olden days was preserved for the present generation to catch a glimpse of. Some of these heritage houses were turned into museums, others into galleries; a couple of them were transformed into gift shops. But in general, these heritage houses serve as concrete proofs of the rich cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the succeeding one.

Cultural tourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry because there is a trend toward an increased specialization among tourists. This trend is evident in the rise in the volume of tourists who seek adventure, culture, history, archaeology and interaction with local people. The expectancy-disconfirmation theory provided a conceptual framework for this study. The expectancy-disconfirmation theory holds that consumers first form expectations of products or service performance prior to purchasing or use. Subsequently, purchasing and use convey to the consumer beliefs about the actual or perceived performance of the product(s) or service(s). The consumer then compares the perceived performance to prior expectations.

Consumer satisfaction is seen as the outcome of this comparison.

Promotional strategies and tactics are very important to any business field. Strategies are long term plans, over all campaigns to achieve a certain strategic goal. Tactics on the other hand, are all about the short term, they are tools to achieve short term goals. They are part of the overall marketing strategy.

This research was conducted as the researchers believe that this can help in the promotion of Taal as culture and religious destination. Further, through this study the research may gain insights that can help them in the practice of their future career as travel and tourism practitioners.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to determine the strategies and problems of Taal as a culture and religious destination. The research identified the current number of tourists visiting Taal, to determine the best promotional strategy.

III. METHODS

Research Design

This study used the descriptive method of research. This kind of research also deals with the present existing condition and data gathering. The descriptive method was used in order to determine the needed information about the most frequently visited tourist attraction in Taal, Batangas.

The particular design that the researchers utilized in this study is the survey research design. In survey research design, participants answer questions administered through interviews or questionnaires. After the participants answered the questions, researchers described the responses given. In order for the survey to be both reliable and valid, the researchers made sure that the questions are clear and are easy to comprehend.

Participants

The study has a total of 100 respondents from the different tourist in Taal. The respondents were chosen randomly to assure equity. Tourists of Taal were the most reliable source of what influenced them or lured them to visit Taal. As the result of the study, eighty are the local tourist, six respondents were foreigners and fourteen respondents were residing in Taal.

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of the respondents' profile.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile

Profile	f	%
Tourist		
Local	80	80.00
Foreign	6	6.00
Resident	14	14.00
Gender		
Male	56	56.00
Female	44	44.00
Frequency of Visit		
2 – 3	31	31.00
4 – 5	37	37.00
6 and above	32	32.00

Instruments

A modified questionnaire was used to obtain the data for this study. The questionnaire was devised to gather information for the research. It is consisted of constructed questions to answer specific questions. The questionnaire is divided into three (3) parts.

Part I is composed of the number of tourists visiting Taal. Part II is composed of the promotional strategies that Taal used to attract tourist. The Part III of the questionnaire is composed of the problems that tourist encountered in visiting Taal. The questionnaires are answerable by rating the attractions in Taal as (1)-Highest and (10)-Lowest, 2.50 – 3.00 = Very Effective (VE); 1.50 – 2.49 = Effective (E); 1.00 – 1.49 = Less Effective (LE); 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree (A); 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree (D); 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree (SD).

The data gathered were recorded, organized, analyzed and interpreted in view of the objectives set in the study.

Procedures

The data for this research were collected using survey questionnaire. The survey was created using suitable questions modified from a related research and individual questions formed by the researcher. The survey was comprised of 3 parts of questions, which were related to the participant's perception regarding Taal, Batangas. The researchers assured confidentiality of their survey sheets since the identities are not important. The researchers also understood that people's consciousness may also affect their honesty and effectiveness in answering the survey, and so, the researchers gave people the option of being anonymous.

Participants were given time to respond and then the researchers collected the surveys the day it was given.

Data Analysis

All data gathered were tallied and interpreted using different tools. Frequency distribution was used to identify the number of tourists visited Taal and weighted mean was used to determine the problems encountered by the tourists who visited Taal

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Tourist Attraction

Indicators	Mean Rank	Rank
1. White house	2.83	2
2. Galleria Taal	3.73	8
3. San Guillermo Parish Church	3.97	12
4. Taal Park	3.79	8
5. Escuela Pia	4.31	1
6. Sta. Lucia Well	4.41	14
7. Dona Marcela Agoncillo Museum	4.24	13
8. Our Lady of Caysasay Shrine	3.42	4
9. San Lorenzo Ruiz Steps	3.51	6
10. Basilica of St. Martins of Tours	2.86	3
11. Bagumbayan & Balisong Chapels	3.80	8
12. Ambon-Ambon Falls	3.86	10
13. Villa Tortuga	4.05	12
14. Ilagan Ancestral House	3.44	5
15. Leon Apacible Historical Landmark	3.66	11

The top three highest chosen tourist attractions are Escuela Pia, White house and Basilica of St. Martins of Tours. Having the mean rank of 4.31 for the first is Escuela Pia, 2.83 for the White House and 2.86 for Basilica of St. Martins of Tours, While the lowest three chosen tourist attractions are Sta Lucia Well, Dona Marcela and Agoncillo Museum.

Based on the results, the top three highest chosen tourist attractions are also the most known tourist destinations visited in Taal. While the top three lowest are most likely the less-known destinations visited in Taal. In addition to that, having these results clearly show that Taal is really a culture and religious tourist destination.

Escuela Pia, the Taal town plaza located in front of the Basilica of St. Martin de Tours, is a centuries-old Spanish building that used to be an educational institute during the Spanish period. Basilica of St. Martin de tours is the biggest catholic Basilica Church in the far

east. These highest visited places in Taal is the most visited places by the tourists because of its being well preserved sites. Sta Lucia Well and Dona Marcella Agoncillo Museum are the least places that tourists not visit the most because of its lack of promotional strategies.

According to Ariola (2000), she stated that tourism is known as the fastest growing sector in our country today. With those attractions, tourist will be attracted to visit Taal because it is one of the places that preserve heritage sites.

Table 3. Promotional Strategies

Strategies	WM	VI	Rank
1. Festivals	2.75	VE	2
2. Facebook, Google, etc.	2.34	E	9
3. Picturesque Sceneries	2.51	VE	7.5
4. Native Products	2.55	VE	5
5. Pilgrimage	2.62	VE	3
6. Historical Sites	2.85	VE	1
7. Delicacies	2.51	VE	7.5
8. Water Sports	2.15	E	10
9. Ancestral Homes	2.61	VE	4
10. Batangueno Heroes	2.52	VE	6
Composite Mean	2.54	VE	

As seen from the table, the over – all assessment of the respondents on the promotional strategies used was very effective with a composite mean of 2.54. Resulting that weighted mean, it only indicates that it is assessed as very effective.

It was observed that the common promotional strategies used were historical sites with weighted mean score of 2.85. This indicates that Taal is known for its historical places and the reason why it is visited. It was followed by festivals, pilgrimage and ancestral homes for the next rank. In which why tourists secondary consider visiting Taal.

Our lady of Caysasay and Basilica of St. Martin de tours are the most pilgrimage places in Taal, where in students and aged are mostly the visitors.

However, facebook, Google and other social networking sites and water sports got the lowest mean score of 2.34 and 2.15 respectively. Alarmingly, having this scores indicate that those areas must be worked upon. This shows that Taal is not yet in the modern way of advertising their destination.

Based from the review of literature, according to an article of McGonelle (2011), he stated that social media is developing into a standard practice

for communications and rather than avoiding it, businesses should actively take steps to engage these online audiences. These correlates to the finding of the study in which it is the least promotional strategy among the rest of the given strategies, therefore, as Taal being a historical heritage town in which the respondents answered clearly indicates that this may also mean that Taal still lacks modernization in regards to their promotional tactics in promoting their city.

According to the study of Deepak Tendon, promotional strategies should be designed as per the nature of the services to be promoted. The advertisers should seek a narrative approach to communicate the service experience rather than a logical, argumentative approach. With that being stated, the table shows that these tourist attractions are ranked based on the most chosen ones. With this gathering, it can now be easily located and analyzed which places are successfully being visited and also the places in need of further improvements. Thus, with this gathering it is now known which is the top chosen and least chosen tourist attraction in Taal

Table 4. Common Problems Encountered by the Tourists of Taal

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
1. High prices of places to stay	2.79	Agree	3
2. Lack of information to tourist destinations	2.64	Agree	9.5
3. Lack of picturesque sceneries	2.64	Agree	9.5
4. Price of foods / Delicacies of Place	2.75	Agree	5.5
5. Poor security in public places	2.75	Agree	5.5
6. Easy access to public vehicles / Roads	2.76	Agree	4
7. Presence of Beggars	2.82	Agree	1
8. Absence of Travel/Tour guide	2.65	Agree	8
9. Polluted Places	2.73	Agree	7
10. Hospitality of locals / Community People	2.81	Agree	2
Composite Mean	2.73	Agree	

Based from the table above, these are the problems being encountered by the tourists of Taal. First is the presence of beggars with the weighted mean of 2.82. While for the lowest rank as the 9.5th tied are between

the lack of information about tourist destinations and the lack of picturesque sceneries.

The top three problems are presence of beggars, hospitality of locals / community people, and high prices of places to stay. Specifically, because of the presence of the beggars in the area of Taal, this become the number one problem being experienced by the tourists. The next problem is the hospitality of locals or community people of Taal that concerns the residents of Taal and the way they accept their tourist visitors. Also resulting to the third ranking problem is the high prices of places to stay. Nowadays places to stay in such as hotels, motels etc are really expensive because of a lot of aspects such as the facilities and specially the dates of usage.

Like in Taal Imperial Hotel and Resort in Brgy. Tulo, Diversion Road, they offer good service but have a rate of 3,000 per night with the room of deluxed king bed while Taal Vista Hotel is more expensive because their room rate is 4,000 per night. They also have this dormitory with the range of 6,000 and above.

With the composite mean of 2.73 all the indicators or such the problems given are agreed by the respondents. This means that the tourists of Taal really encounter all the problems given.

This result is true in the presence of beggars as one of the problems in Taal. Those beggars come from different areas of Batangas and are going to Taal because they know that there is a massive flow of tourists in place.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The commonly visited tourist attractions in Taal were Escuela Pia, White House and Basilica of St. Martins of Tours. Historical Sites were considered the most effective promotional strategies used in Taal. Presence of Beggars was the common problem encountered by the tourists of Taal. The Municipality of Taal may continually preserve Taal's historical sites. The Department of Tourism of Taal may provide a sustainable program to promote Taal through its historical and pilgrimage sites. CITHM may also support existing activities promoting Taal as tourist destination. Future researchers may conduct similar study but using other variables. It is a great opportunity for the students to have curriculum which is supported by activities which are in the forms of actual

experiences outside the classroom that could provide better learning and understanding of the difference between principles and practice (Laguador & Chavez, 2013). Studying other historical sites in Batangas would provide strong historical background and awareness for the students whose interest is to develop tourism landmarks.

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