

Religious Tourism in Batangas, Philippines

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Abstract – *This study assessed religious tourism in Batangas, Philippines on the following aspects: historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions. The assessments made were also subjected to tests of differences when the respondents are grouped as to either residents or tourists and according to their age, sex, educational attainment and employment. Results show that both tourists and residents generally concurred on all religious tourism indicators presented to them for assessment, although there were also few indicators that had lower mean assessments than the others. While the differences on the assessments made by the different groups of respondents were not statistically significant, the slight differences are still noticeable. In particular, residents had somewhat more favourable assessment than the tourists, older respondents more than the younger, males more than the females, those with higher education more than those with lower education, and government employees more than those who are not in government service. These slight but still noticeable differences, together with religious tourism indicators having lower mean assessments than the others, can serve as bases for making proposals on how to further enrich the religious tourism in Batangas.*

Keywords – *cultural heritage tourism, customs and traditions, historical significance, holiness and spirituality, religious tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Among the many reasons or motivations for people to travel is religion or spirituality. Major tourism destinations in the world have developed largely due to their connections to sacred people, places and events [1]. It was estimated recently that there are six hundred million national and international religious and spiritual tours in the world, around half of which took place in Asia. The region of the world with the largest number of tourists and travellers for religious events for both international and domestic tourism is Asia and the Pacific, which is blessed with religious sites and forms the hub of pilgrim centres and religious festivities [2].

The daily lives of Asians are greatly influenced by religion. In Southeast Asia, the four major religions in terms of the number of followers, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, all play significant roles in the society. Religious tourism in the region is closely related to these beliefs [3].

Religious tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism [4]. It is an ancient phenomenon that received considerable attention recently [5]. It is a growing sector in tourism, as more niche markets are developing when tourists need something to meet their specific wants. Religious or spiritual tourism definitely has growth potential since people are now seeking solitude and deeper meaning for life [6]. They see tourist travel as an effective means to find their true selves [7].

The sustainable development of religious tourism is the key to safeguarding the vast cultural heritage of a region [8]. With this, a lot of churches, cathedrals, shrines and temples will not fall into oblivion, keeping the grandeur that they have in the past [4]. Furthermore, local communities often take pride in their culture and religion and want to share their enthusiasm with tourists [9]. Their involvement is very important in protecting and preserving the religious or cultural sites, events and pilgrimages that form the base of religious tourism [10].

Religious tourism, however, is not easy to define. In the tourism literature, it is often categorized in different ways by different authors, with religious tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural tourism, cultural heritage tourism and spiritual tourism often used interchangeably [6]. Cultural tourism and religious tourism, in particular, although can be defined differently are always linked with one another as religion is a part of culture [4]. Moreover, spiritual tourism can be broadly defined to include tourism that is motivated fully or partly by values, especially religious tourism. It is a vehicle for change for the better and can lead to peace if properly guided by codes of ethics and conduct that are sourced from religions and socio-cultural values derived from religions [11].

Nevertheless, religious tourism can be defined as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms or the products they induce like art, culture, traditions, and architecture. Two aspects of religious tourism can also be distinguished: (1) the faith of a tourist, who has a spiritual attachment to the destination in line with his religious belief, and (2) the new spiritual experience of a tourist, belonging to another belief or a different religion and for whom the destination and the religious practices have the dimension of novelty. Religious tourism can also be categorized as follows: pilgrimages; missionary travels; fellowship vacations; faith-based cruising; crusades, conventions and rallies; retreats; monastery visits and guest-stays; faith-based camps; and religious tourist attraction visits [12].

Nowadays, there are thousands of different holy places around the world which have enough attractions to develop and provide movements among the population. A sacred place has a different meaning for each group of people depending on the aim of each tour [4]. Several studies on these religious tourism destinations, in particular, and on religious or spiritual tourism, in general, have been and are being done in all parts of the world where religious sites and festivities are present.

In Batangas, Philippines, some of the most recent studies related to religious tourism are a study on church tourism [13], which determined the contribution of churches in terms of social, cultural and economic aspects, and identified the problems encountered in promoting church tourism; a study on cultural heritage tourism [14], which determined and analyzed the socio-cultural aspects of heritage tourism

that attracts tourists and travellers to visit Taal Heritage Town; a study that identified and assessed the frequently visited cultural sites in Batangas and Cavite [15]; and a study that determined the strategies used in the promotion of Taal as a culture and religious tourism destination and some problems experienced by the tourists [16].

The present study is a modest addition to the existing cultural and religious tourism studies in Batangas. The major variables used in the study are historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions. Historical significance is the process used to evaluate what was significant about selected events, people and developments in the past [17]. Historical significance of religious tourism, in this study, generally refers to how significant is religious tourism in terms of history. More particular, it demonstrates the contributions of Batangas religious sites to the development of the history and culture of the people of Batangas. It is important to assess this historical significance since one reason why people travel is to visit historic religious sites as opportunities for authentic cultural and educational experiences.

The presence of some sort of holiness and spirituality is, of course, an important aspect of a religious tourism destination. Holiness is the process of making every aspect of normal human life into an expression of God's values and spirituality is the consciousness that the physical existence can be an expression of fundamental values and of God's presence in human lives. Holiness exists in consequence of spiritual consciousness [18]. To experience the religious customs and traditions of the people is another important factor in wanting to join a religious travel to a particular place. This is especially true when paying a visit to the Philippines since the Philippine culture is very rich in customs and traditions, which reflect the complexity of the history of the Philippines through the combination of cultures of foreign influences [19]. The same is true when visiting Batangas, which is known to be centre of the Tagalog culture and also used to be the heart of Roman Catholicism in Southern Luzon during the Spanish Colonial Period.

This study also involves the use of some respondents' profile as grouping variables in the tests of differences. These profile variables are *age*, *sex*, *education* and *employment*. The respondents were also grouped as to either residents or tourists. It is important to determine the assessment by both

residents and tourists since sustainable religious tourism calls for the active participation of community residents and the worthy contributions of the tourists. The community within or near religious sites should be a better place to live in and a better place to visit. Further, the respondents were also grouped as to their age, sex, education and employment to determine which sector should be tapped for some religious tourism programs for sustainable development and which needs to be pushed harder or convinced for more involvement.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to assess the religious tourism in Batangas in terms of its historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions. It also aimed to see if there is significant difference on the assessments made by disaggregated respondents. The null hypothesis is as follows: there is no significant difference among the assessments on religious tourism when the respondents are grouped as to either residents or tourists and according to their age, sex, education and employment. The findings are expected to direct a proposal for further enrichment of religious tourism in Batangas.

METHODS

This study is a descriptive type of research that utilizes survey approach. The data gathering instrument used was a survey questionnaire that determines the characteristics of respondents as either resident or tourist and their age, sex, educational attainment and employment; and the assessments they made with regards to historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions of religious tourism in Batangas using a four-point Likert scale. Faculty researchers and industry experts in the field of tourism management took part in the validation process for the questionnaire. Thirty respondents participated on a trial run for the validated questionnaire and the reliability analysis resulted to a reliability coefficient or Cronbach’s alpha of .8599.

The actual survey had 240 residents of Batangas and 100 tourists as respondents. Two religious sites from each of the four districts of Batangas were purposively selected in order to have representation from the whole province. Twenty-five respondent-tourists in each of the four districts and 30 respondent-

residents from each of the eight religious sites were randomly selected. Respondents were courteously approached and informed about the purpose of the survey and assure them the confidentiality of their responses before they were given the questionnaire. Tourists and residents below 18 years old (the minority age in the Philippines) were not included in the survey. The questionnaire was immediately retrieved after the respondent completed answering it.

The data gathered were analyzed using the SPSS. The mean responses were interpreted using the following scale: 1.00 to 1.49 – Strongly Disagree; 1.50 to 2.49 – Disagree; 2.50 to 3.49 – Agree; and 3.50 to 4.00 – Strongly Agree. Independent samples t-test was used to determine significant differences between the responses of residents and tourists and of males and females. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine significant differences among the responses when grouped according to age, education and employment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents as whether they are residents or tourists and in terms of their age, sex, education and employment. As can be seen in the table, majority of respondents are female and most are on their youth, graduated from college, and not currently employed. The fact that many respondents are still college undergraduates, already in working age, but most are not currently employed or are self-employed implies that there is a need for sustainable industries like tourism establishments that may help them improve their standards of living.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Profile

Profile	f	%
<i>Group</i>		
Residents	240	70.6
Tourists	100	29.4
<i>Age</i>		
18 – 29	115	33.8
30 – 39	94	27.6
40 – 49	75	22.1
50 – 59	28	8.2
60 – above	28	8.2
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	112	32.9
Female	228	67.1

Table 1 (cont.) Distribution of Respondents by Profile

Profile	f	%
<i>Education</i>		
Elementary	40	11.8
High School	104	30.6
Technical-Vocational	79	23.2
College	106	31.2
Masters	11	3.2
<i>Employment</i>		
Government or Public Sector	56	16.5
Private Sector	51	15.0
Self Employed	107	31.5
Not Currently Employed	126	37.0
Total	340	100.0

Table 2 presents the assessment of the respondents on the historical significance of religious tourism in Batangas. Results show that residents and tourists have almost the same assessments on the historical significance of Batangas religious tourism except for the item the religious site illustrates the colourful past of Batangas, where the residents have a higher mean

assessment than the tourists. Both groups of respondents generally agree to all statements or indicators and both have the lowest assessment on the item the religious site exhibits some extraordinary history of Batangas. Since the residents know their history very well than the tourists, it is not surprising that they have higher mean assessments than those of tourists in most indicators. Nevertheless, the differences on assessments are very minimal which implies that the residents have shown their visitors the historical significance of religious tourism in Batangas as how they know it also. This similarity of assessments is a sign of excellent tourists-community interactions that is needed for sustainable religious tourism.

Table 3 presents the assessment of the respondents on the holiness and spirituality of religious tourism in Batangas. Results show that residents and tourists have generally the same assessments on the indicators presented regarding holiness and spirituality.

Table 2. Historical Significance of Religious Tourism in Batangas

Historical Significance	Mean	
	Residents	Tourists
1. The religious site exemplifies the cultural politics, economics, social and historical heritage of Batangas.	3.43	3.48
2. The religious site illustrates the colourful past of Batangas.	3.43	3.33
3. The religious site has unique marker that tells the story of the people of Batangas.	3.42	3.41
4. The religious site has that character interest or value as being part of the development of Batangas.	3.42	3.39
5. The religious site sets as pride of Batangas.	3.43	3.37
6. The religious site exhibits some extraordinary history of Batangas.	3.24	3.27
7. The religious site contributes to the understanding of Batangas' history.	3.38	3.35
8. Awareness of the rich history of the religious site greatly benefits the community in terms of tourism.	3.40	3.36
Overall Mean	3.39	3.37

Table 3. Holiness and Spirituality of Religious Tourism in Batangas

Holiness and Spirituality	Mean	
	Residents	Tourists
1. The people are fond of joining religious tours in Batangas.	3.40	3.41
2. The people are attached to their religious values and norms.	3.35	3.33
3. People who seek spiritual aspects to their travel often go to Batangas.	3.30	3.24
4. Churches and religious sites in Batangas are prominently visited during Lenten season.	3.45	3.39
5. The past occurrence of <i>miraculous shower of rose petals</i> in Mt. Carmel Church in Batangas attracts many tourists to make annual pilgrimage to the shrine.	3.41	3.27
6. People near churches or religious sites in Batangas have strong religious beliefs.	3.15	3.04
7. Religious tourism in Batangas offers a chance to increase the spirituality of both residents and tourists.	3.20	3.14
8. People go on religious journeys in Batangas to feel closer to what they believe.	3.28	3.31
Overall Mean	3.32	3.27

However, the residents have higher mean assessments than the tourists, especially in the item people near churches or religious sites in Batangas have strong religious beliefs, in which both groups have the lowest assessment among the eight indicators. Even so, both groups of respondents generally agree to all statements given.

Residents have higher mean assessments than the tourist in most indicators simply because they are more aware of their own religious beliefs, events and activities. However, the differences on assessments are minimal which implies that the holiness and spirituality of the community is very evident to the tourists. This is a good indication that religious tourism in Batangas can be sustainably developed since the people are preserving their religious ideals and are willing to share them to their visitors.

Table 4. Customs and Traditions of Religious Tourism in Batangas

Customs and Traditions	Mean	
	Residents	Tourists
1. The customs and traditions of the churches of Batangas are somewhat different from others.	3.35	3.28
2. Fiestas in Batangas to honor the saints attract tourists from nearby places.	3.39	3.27
3. The customs and traditions of the church help the tourists and the people to be aware of their culture.	3.32	3.28
4. <i>Panata</i> or devotion to the Virgin Mary and the saints causes tourists to visit a religious site.	3.41	3.42
5. The unique traditions attract tourists.	3.37	3.45
6. The more knowledge about the customs and traditions of a place, the more it becomes popular.	3.32	3.33
7. Religious customs and traditions are important to the next generation for them to make or practice sustainable tourism.	3.36	3.24
8. Active participation of the community in religious practices makes religious tourism more sustainable.	3.33	3.20
Overall Mean	3.36	3.31

Table 4 presents the assessment of the respondents on the customs and traditions of religious tourism in Batangas. Results show that both residents and tourists generally agree to all statements presented and have almost the same assessments on customs and traditions. However, the residents have higher mean assessment than the tourists on the item active participation of the community in religious practices makes tourism more sustainable while the tourists have higher mean assessment than the residents on the item the unique traditions attract the tourists, where they have also the highest assessment among the eight indicators. The residents have their highest assessment on the item “*panata*” or devotion to the Virgin Mary and the saints causes tourists to visit a religious site.

Residents have also higher mean assessments than the tourists in most indicators because they know and understand Batangas religious customs and traditions better than the tourists while the tourists have higher mean assessment on the indicator: the unique traditions attract tourists for an apparent reason. The findings further indicate that the customs and traditions in Batangas can attract people with similar or different culture to visit religious sites in Batangas that may lead to sustainable religious tourism.

Table 5. Differences between the Assessments by Residents and Tourists

Variables	Residents	Tourist	t	p
Historical Significance	3.39	3.37	.608	.544*
Holiness and Spirituality	3.32	3.27	1.373	.171*
Customs and Traditions	3.36	3.31	1.361	.175*
Overall	3.36	3.32	1.392	.165*

Legend: *NS – Not Significant

Table 5 further shows that, at .05 level of significance, there is no significant difference between the assessments of residents and tourists on religious tourism in Batangas in terms of historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions. This is indicated by the p-values that are all higher than .05. Hence, this study fails to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference on the assessment of religious tourism when the respondents are grouped as to either residents or tourists.

Equivalently saying, the assessments of residents and tourists on religious tourism in Batangas are

statistically the same. Though such is the case, it can still be seen that the residents have quite higher mean assessments than the tourists in all aspects and in overall. As mentioned earlier, residents have higher mean assessments than the tourists because they are actually in a better position to assess their own history, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions. Nevertheless, the differences are very minimal, hence not significant, which implies that what community residents have had been evident to or had been shared with the tourists during their visits to the religious sites. These circumstances are good indications of sustainable religious tourism in Batangas.

Table 6. Differences among the Assessments by Different Age Groups

Variables	Age	Mean	F	p
Historical Significance	18 – 29	3.35	.706	.588*
	30 – 39	3.40		
	40 – 49	3.40		
	50 – 59	3.46		
	60 and above	3.42		
Holiness and Spirituality	18 – 29	3.28	.767	.547*
	30 – 39	3.28		
	40 – 49	3.32		
	50 – 59	3.33		
	60 and above	3.38		
Customs and Traditions	18 – 29	3.33	.178	.949*
	30 – 39	3.34		
	40 – 49	3.35		
	50 – 59	3.32		
	60 and above	3.38		
Overall	18 – 29	3.32	.561	.691*
	30 – 39	3.34		
	40 – 49	3.36		
	50 – 59	3.37		
	60 and above	3.39		

Legend: *Not Significant

Table 6 shows the mean assessments per age group and the results of one-way ANOVA for each aspect of religious tourism when the respondents are grouped according to age. As seen in the table, the p-values are all higher than .05. This means that, at .05 level of significance, the mean difference among the different age groups is not significant and that the responses of the different age groups are almost the same. Though the assessments are statistically the same, it can be seen also that older respondents have still a little

higher assessment than the younger respondents in overall and in the aspects of historical significance and holiness and spirituality.

Table 7. Differences between the Assessments by Gender

Variables	Sex	Mean	t	P
Historical Significance	M	3.39	-.047	.963*
	F	3.39		
Holiness and Spirituality	M	3.30	-.049	.961*
	F	3.30		
Customs and Traditions	M	3.36	.665	.507*
	F	3.33		
Overall	M	3.35	.219	.827*
	F	3.34		

Legend: * Not Significant

Table 7 shows the mean assessments of males and females and the results of independent samples t-test for each aspect of religious tourism when the respondents are sex-disaggregated. As seen in the table, the p-values are all higher than .05. This means that, at .05 level of significance, the mean difference between the assessments of males and females is not significant and that the responses of the two groups of respondents are the same or almost the same. Though the assessments are considered statistically equal, the male respondents have a little higher assessment than the female respondents in overall and in the aspect of customs and traditions.

Table 8. Differences among the Assessments by Different Groups according to Educational Attainment

Variables	Education	Mean	F	p
Historical Significance	Elementary	3.41	.935	.444*
	High School	3.34		
	Tech.-Voc.	3.38		
	College	3.43		
	Masters	3.45		
Holiness and Spirituality	Elementary	3.28	.976	.421*
	High School	3.25		
	Tech.-Voc.	3.31		
	College	3.34		
	Masters	3.33		
Customs and Traditions	Elementary	3.31	.482	.749*
	High School	3.32		
	Tech.-Voc.	3.38		
	College	3.35		
	Masters	3.39		
Overall	Elementary	3.34	.939	.442*
	High School	3.30		
	Tech.-Voc.	3.36		
	College	3.37		
	Masters	3.39		

Legend: *Not Significant

Table 8 shows the mean assessments per education group and the results of one-way ANOVA for each aspect of religious tourism when the respondents are grouped according to education. As seen in the table, the p-values are all higher than .05. This means that, at .05 level of significance, the mean difference among the education-categorized groups is not significant and that the responses of the said groups are almost the same. Though the assessments are statistically similar, it can be seen also that respondents with higher education have basically higher assessment than those respondents with lower educational attainment.

Table 9. Differences among the Assessments by Different Groups according to Employment

Variables	Employment	Mean	F	p
Historical Significance	Government	3.43	.515	.672*
	Private	3.39		
	Self	3.36		
	None	3.40		
Holiness and Spirituality	Government	3.39	2.052	.106*
	Private	3.25		
	Self	3.31		
	None	3.28		
Customs and Traditions	Government	3.40	1.503	.214*
	Private	3.39		
	Self	3.34		
	None	3.30		
Overall	Government	3.40	1.133	.336*
	Private	3.34		
	Self	3.33		
	None	3.33		

Legend: *Not Significant

Table 9 shows the mean assessments per employment group and the results of one-way ANOVA for each aspect of religious tourism when the respondents are grouped according to employment. As seen in the table, the p-values are all higher than .05. This means that, at .05 level of significance, the mean difference among the different groups of respondents categorized according to employment is not significant and that the responses of the different groups are almost the same. Though the assessments of the different groups are statistically the same, it can be seen that those respondents employed by the government have still a higher assessment than the other three groups in all aspects and in overall.

The following indicators of religious tourism in Batangas have lower mean assessments as compared to others: as regards historical significance – (1) The religious site exhibits some extraordinary history of Batangas; on the aspect of holiness and spirituality –

(2) People near churches or religious sites in Batangas have strong religious beliefs; (3) Religious tourism in Batangas offers a chance to increase the spirituality of both residents and tourists; and regarding customs and traditions – (4) Active participation of the community in religious practices makes religious tourism more sustainable.

Enhancing these indicators with lower mean assessments can further enrich the religious tourism in Batangas. For instance, more visual materials may be displayed in religious sites to give emphasis on the role of churches and religious sites in the exceptional development and history of Batangas. Religious cultural activities like the subli dance and other unique rites in Batangas may also be regularly performed in the sites. Religious site managers may also consider the offering of spiritual retreats to both tourists and residents. Lastly, the role of community members should always be given emphasis to make religious tourism a sustainable joint undertaking by the church, the government and the people.

Moreover, results on the differences of assessments may also serve as guide on how to improve religious tourism in Batangas. Although the different groups of respondents do not differ so much on their assessment, considerable attention can still be given on somewhat lower assessments made by tourists as compared to residents, by younger people as compared to older people, by females as compared to males, by those with lower education as compared to those with higher education, and by those respondents who are not in government as compared to those who are in the government service. Religious site managers and staff should address the concerns of each of these sectors for a better religious tourism services.

CONCLUSIONS

Both the residents of the nearby religious site and the tourists expressed their agreement on all indicators of religious tourism in Batangas presented to them for assessment. Nevertheless, on historical significance, the highest mean assessment made by residents and tourist was on the religious site exemplifies the cultural politics, economics, social and historical heritage of Batangas while the lowest was on the religious site exhibits some extraordinary history of Batangas.

As regards holiness and spirituality, the highest mean assessment made by the residents was on

Churches and religious sites in Batangas are prominently visited during Lenten season while the highest for tourists was on the people are fond of joining religious tours in Batangas. Residents and tourists had their lowest assessment on people near churches or religious sites in Batangas have strong religious beliefs.

Regarding customs and traditions, the highest assessment made by residents was on “panata” or devotion to the Virgin Mary and the saints causes tourists to visit a religious site while the tourists had their highest on the unique traditions attract tourists. The residents had their lowest on the more knowledge about the customs and traditions of a place, the more it becomes popular while the tourists had their lowest on active participation of the community in religious practices makes religious tourism more sustainable.

Given the fact that in all indicators and in all aspects of religious tourism in Batangas, namely historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions, the mean assessments of both residents and tourists are favourably higher, said results indicate that the religious sites under survey had well-established religious tourism in terms of the stated variables. The similarity of assessments of residents and tourists further implies that the appropriate use of religious sites is very evident and there is an excellent tourists-community interactions and sharing of religious history, events, beliefs, activities, customs and traditions. This will lead towards successful and sustainable religious tourism development in Batangas.

Furthermore, the assessments on religious tourism in all aspects of the different groups of respondents do not vary significantly. Although the assessments are statistically the same as the results of tests of differences revealed, comparison of mean assessment per group shows that younger people had lower assessment than the older people, females had lower assessment than males, those with lower education had also lower assessment than those with higher education, and non-government people had lower assessment than the government employees. These slight differences and the lower mean assessments can serve as basis for some proposals to be made for more enrichment of religious tourism in Batangas.

However, the inferences drawn from this study are subject to some limitations. The attribute variables chosen could be a limitation since there may be other aspects that are equally important but were not

included in the present study. The cross sectional data obtained from the survey may be challenged as well, since longitudinal data may be more appropriate. Nevertheless, such limitations can suggest directions for further studies on religious tourism in Batangas and in other areas. For instance, future researchers may consider the economic value of religious tourism, environmental concerns, carrying capacity of religious sites, management of sites, satisfaction of tourists, and some other important factors.

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