STATUS OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN LIPA CITY: INPUTS TO AN ENHANCED TOURISM PROGRAM

KARLA ANGELA C. LAJARCA
Master in International Hospitality Management

Abstract

Tourist attractions, both man-made and natural, are the core components of a region's tourism product. Without attractions there is no need for other tourism services. The study aimed to suggest strategies to enhance tourism programs in Lipa City, more specifically, to identify tourist attractions commonly visited in Lipa City; to describe the services offered by the identified commonly visited tourist attractions; to discuss problems encountered by the tourists and government officers in visiting destinations in the development of their attractions; and to propose strategies to empower Lipa City local tourism industry. This study utilized descriptive method of research. The guests of tourist attractions, residents, and selected government officials of Lipa City were included in the accomplishment of this study. This study revealed that Orders of the Friars Minor Capucchin, Casa de Segunda, The Farm at San Benito and Mt. Malayarat Golf and Country Club are the commonly visited tourist attractions in Lipa City. On the other hand, provisions for souvenir shops, visible tour guides and additional function halls for the services, facilities and amenities to offer by the commonly visited tourist attractions. However, the respondents cited that transportation is the primary problem encountered by the tourists in visiting the places, while financial constraints is mentioned to be the major possible problem of the government in developing tourists attractions in Lipa City.

Keywords: Tourism, Attraction, Lipa City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The desire for travel maybe considered a basic human impulse. From pilgrims and warriors of old to modern explorers and even men in uniform, people rarely pass up the opportunity to visit new places; it has always been a major incentive to sign up for undertaking. Tourists are temporary visitors staying at least twenty hours in the place visited whose purpose is not for employment but for leisure, business, family, mission or meeting. It is an important human activity with cultural, natu-

ral, and recreational significance (Libosada, 2010). It is an important vehicle for attaining global peace. Travel to other countries maybe the best option for anyone who wants to explore the world and experience other cultures, but relatively few people especially in a Third World country like Philippines, can afford it. What many fail to acknowledge is that touring one's own country is not only more affordable; it can also provide new fascinating experiences that could equal if not surpass those one expects to find in another land.

Most commentators agree that attractions provide the core elements for the development of the tourism product of a destination . Several authors have supported the notion that attractions are the primary reason for the existence of the tourism system (Kusen, 2010). Benckedorff (2011) wisely appends his definition by indicating that good scenery would not be considered as an attraction, but that a named scenic lookout does satisfy the definition.

Attractions serve two key functions in the tourism system: they stimulate interest in travel to a destination and they provide visitor satisfaction. At a more holistic level, tourist attractions play an increasingly vital role in triggering opportunities for regional employment and economic growth (Lansangan, 2013). Movahed (2010) highlights that with some creativity; almost anything can be transformed into a tourist attraction, from traditional castles and natural environments to less congenial settings like sewers and slums. Dodds (2009) suggests that "attractions are the places and people which are the objects of the gaze of tourists." In contrast to these broad interpretations, several researchers have adopted a more systematic approach in defining tourist attractions.

The Philippines is one of the most visited countries in the whole world. Because of its beautiful sceneries and hospitable people, many tourists prefer to visit Philippines. It has a world class beaches that constantly increase level of tourist arrivals. An abundance of attractions possessed by a destination could give competitive advantage to the destination. A pilgrim's paradise and an ideal tourist destination, Lipa (Lungsod ng Lipa), is a city located in the province of Batangas, Philippines. It is the famed Little Rome of the Philippines and the seat of the Archdiocese. Lipa City is a major recreational, religious, commercial, industrial and educational center in central Batangas province. Despite Lipa's state of progress and commercialization, the city still preserves its religious and cultural traditions. The city was known for its breezy and invigorating climate through all out of the year with exceptions of typhoon occurrence.

The Lipa City Tourism Council's – non government organizations perform most of the function of the tourism office in the city and primary

aim is to promote the different tourism attractions and events in the city of Lipa.It also manages Museo de Lipa – a repository of the city's colourful and rich history. The Council may formulate policies, develop plans, enforce tourism standards, laws, rules and regulations; but it does not have the power to implement it.

The researcher developed the criteria for selecting tourist attractions in Lipa City according to their tourist arrival and popularity given by the Provincial Tourism Office and Lipa City Tourism Council.

As a responsible citizen of Lipa City, the researcher realized the need of a sound policy on tourism. Moreover, programs that will boost the tourism industry, for the local community to be acquainted and prosper also with the growing demand for well-qualified Tourism will help also the Local Government Officials as they can use the results as guide in initiating Tourism Development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to suggest strategies to enhance tourism programs in Lipa City. More specifically, aimed to identify tourist attractions commonly visited in Lipa City; to describe the services offered by the identified commonly visited tourist attractions; to discuss problems encountered by the respondents in visiting destinations and to identify possible problems encountered by the government officials in the development of their attractions; and to propose strategies to empower Lipa City local tourism industry

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized descriptive method of research wherein the research design is valuable in providing facts since it may provide to identify tourist attractions commonly visited (Shields, 2013) in Lipa City.

Participants

The guests of tourist attractions, residents, and selected government officials of Lipa City were included in the accomplishment of this study. There were a total of 60 respondents; composed of 10 selected residents of Lipa City, 10 local government employees and non-government organizations employees, and 40 who were purposively chosen from each attraction. This research was used the convenience sampling technique.

Instrument

The researcher used the self- made questionnaire which was utilized in gathering the needed information and data. Prior to actual writing of questionnaire, the researcher browsed books and other sources of information assemble the needed items placed in each section of this instrument.

The questionnaire has four parts: Part I contains the famous attractions in Lipa City as a result of a survey, Part II includes the services offered by the commonly visited tourist attractions and Part III – A the concerns or the problems encountered by the respondents in visiting the places. Part III – B includes the possible problems encountered by the government officials in the development of their attractions. A four – point likert scale was used ranging from Never to Always for the commonly visited attractions, and problems encountered no provisions to very adequate for services facilities and amenities offered.

To validate these sections, the researcher first used the content validation. This validation includes distribution of the draft of the questionnaire to knowledgeable people such as research instructor and hotel industry experts so as to gather suggestions for the improvement of the questionnaire. It was then presented to the research adviser for further consultation and changes. After this, a pre-testing of the questionnaires to respondents was conducted in which the result was subjected to Chronbach test. The value of 0.50 for the alpha was laid down such that when the alpha value will be greater than 0.50, then the internal validity will be interpreted as Very Adequate and Always.

Procedure

The researcher began with some simple procedures that created a friendlier environment to conduct the data collection. Before the researcher personally disseminated the questionnaire to the actual respondents, permission to distribute the copies was sought from the adviser and establishment's owner. The respondents were encouraged to supply information in such a way that their version of events of a given situation is expressed in terms of their understanding. After the respondents had filled-out the questionnaires, the researcher personally retrieved all the copies.

Data Analysis

All data gathered were tallied and interpreted using descriptive statistics. This includes Frequency Distribution and Weighted Mean which were used according to the objectives of the study. The obtained data were also supported using PASW version 18 to further analyzed the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table presents on the next page the pilgrim churches and obtained composite mean 2.60 and verbally interpreted as Often Visited.

Table 1.1 Commonly visited Tourist Attractions in Lipa City in terms of Pilgrim Churches (N=60)

Pilgrim Churches	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Metropolitan Cathedral of San Sebastian	1.98	Sometimes	4
2. Order of Friars Minor Capuchin	3.20	Often	1
3. Carmelite Monastery Chapel	2.62	Often	2
4. Divino Amor Redemtorist Church	2.60	Often	3
Composite Mean	**2.60**	**Often**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50 – 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

Among the attractions cited, Order of Friars Minor Capuchin ranked first with mean score of 3.20. It has been observed that most of the Lipenios and other tourists attend the holy celebration and so called "healing mass" held every 23rd of the month. They believe that once they attend and complete the nine healing mass, the prayers will be answered.

It was followed by Carmelite Monastery Chapel and Divino Amor Redemptorist Church. On the other hand, it was revealed that Metropolitan Cathedral of San Sebastian was the least visited due to bustling streets, crowded, people attempting to steal valuable items which resulted to the lost of belongings. Although this environment is "sacred place", modern times thieves preferred to go to these places where people are busy doing prayers and devotions, and if they are late in the mass, they will be seated behind causing them not to concentrate because of the noise and lack of more parking space.

Based on the research conducted by Ramos (2010), religion was found to be a factor linked to the supply of tourism, and religious place can be well known as tourist attractions. It is recognized by different scholars that such churches are visited for different personal reasons which have nothing to do with the religion directly.

In an article published in the Manila Bulletin (October, 2008), it was affirmed that religious tourism is a "growing prospective" in the lo-

cal tourism industry. Even the Department of Tourism (DOT) mentioned that even tourism stakeholders have growing awareness of activities like pilgrimages, spas, shopping and heritage tours.

The Table 1.2 reveals the different historical attractions commonly visited which obtained composite mean 3.25 and verbally interpreted as Often Visited.

Table 1.2. Commonly Visited Tourist Attractions in Lipa City in terms of Historical Attractions (N=60)

Historical Attractions	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Casa de Segunda (Luz-Katigbak Ancestral House)	3.52	Always	1
2. Luz Librea Ancestral House	3.48	Often	2
3. Museo de Lipa	3.38	Often	3
Composite Mean	**3.25**	**Often**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50– 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

It shows that Casa de Segunda (Luz-Katigbak Ancestral House) is in the highest rank with the weighted mean of 3.52. According to the respondents (photographer, models and students), they visit the place because it is perfect for their photo shoots and always part of their day tour in Lipa City. Pre- nuptials and garden weddings are usually held in this place while Museo de Lipa ranked as least visited with the mean score of 3.38 through verbally interpreted as also Often Visited. Although it is boring to go with, it is also a part of the day tour of the students coming from the different schools.

Based on the research conducted by Bello (2011), historical aspects are built into business and carried forward strategically through the plan and related tourism program. Inclusion of the responsibility to care of the historical assets in a business plan needs a clear not be strategies and achievement of its goals visitors are more likely to be satisfy by participating in tour or visiting an attraction that is actively working.

Historical places are very important in life. They hold the history with them that can be conveyed to the future generations, we can study the history better with the help of such monuments. We can also learn about lifestyle, culture, religion and traditions of the past.

Table 1.3 presents commonly visited tourist attractions in Lipa City in terms of man- made attractions obtained composite mean 2.99

and verbally interpreted as often.

Table 1.3. Commonly visited Tourist Attractions in Lipa City in terms of Man- Made Attractions (N=60)

Man- Made Attraction	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Bluroze Farms Parks and Wildlife	3.10	Often	4
2.The Farm at San Benito	3.20	Often	1.5
3. Mt. Malarayat Golf and Country Club	3.20	Often	1.5
4. Summit Point Golf and Country Club	3.12	Often	3
5. El Grande Resort	2.32	Sometimes	5
Composite Mean	**2.99**	**Often**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50 – 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

The Farm at San Benito and Mt. Malayarat Golf and Country Club both ranked as 1.5 and verbally interpreted as often Visited. According to the respondent who is a club member of Mt. Malayarat Golf and Country Club, a visitor or guest can have everything inside; dining, relaxing, enjoying and exercise. The suite attractions are intimate and refined with creature comforts to match from idyllic golf resort and lifestyle. Designed in contemporary Filipino motifs, the accommodations are available in studio, one or two bedroom ideal for a weekend escape or an even longer vacation from the hustle and bustle of the city.

On the other hand, according to the respondents from The Farm at San Benito, theirs differ from other attractions because all their suites are villas drawing inspiration from the abundant natural surroundings, each revealing in its own spacious garden which provides personal sanctuary after a hard days nurturing. Refreshing natural views complement remarkable architectural detailing to create a feeling of both elegance and comfort. This is not a typical farm where animals are raised, the food which levels health consciousness, and what is cultivated is change in outlook. It is a realization that regaining or improving health is possible. It is best for relaxation for family and peers. It is close to nature so every age can enjoy.

El Grande Hotel and Resort was the least in the rank with the weighted mean of 2.32 and verbally interpreted as sometimes in Lipa City, mostly the same with any other resorts in Lipa City with cheaper entrance fee. They have a so called wave pool but it is open only twice a day. The respondents find the resort as one of the nicest place to relax

and unwind. Tourist can choose from three different pools.

Man made attractions are interesting features and structures built or created by man. The phenomenal growth has attracted the attention of scholars from all walks of life that have devoted many hours to understanding the factors underlying such growth.

Table 2.1 presents the services, facilities and amenities offered by the commonly visited cultural tourist attractions which obtained a composite mean 2.01 verbally interpreted as Inadequate.

Table 2.1. Services, Facilities and Amenities Offered by the Commonly Visited Pilgrim Churches (N=60)

Commonly Visited Pilgrim	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Provides several religious images and medals of saints	1.80	Inadequate	6
2. Provides pilgrimages for devotee	1.87	Inadequate	5
3. Souvenir shops	2.27	Inadequate	1
4. Blessed sacrament	1.93	Inadequate	4
5. Public restroom	1.98	Inadequate	3
6. Ample parking space	2.18	Inadequate	2
Composite Mean	**2.01**	**Inadequate**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Very adequate; 2.50 – 3.49 = Adequate; 1.50 – 2.49 = Inadequate; 1.00 – 1.49 = Very inadequate

The souvenir shops ranked as first with the weighted mean as 2.27 and verbally interpreted as inadequate. Although the shops are present in pilgrim churches; respondents cannot recognize where they are located. They mentioned also that there is inadequate ample parking space as evident by weighted mean 2.18.

Providing several religious images and medals of saints ranked as the least service with the weighted mean of 1.80. Although again, from some pilgrim churches sites these are present, according to the respondents, they are not much aware what the medals of saints are.

According to Yusi (2011), managing tourist attractions requires a proficient management in producing services and facilities to meet the needs and exceeds guest expectations. The author also pointed out that the standard services established depends on the type of service require to that level. It is important to meet the needs of the guest to also determine the level of service they are offering.

People seek higher quality of service and amenities. The outcomes maybe beneficial both for residents and visitors, but the framework identifies potential source of conflict. Besides, tourists who visit an area on a regular basis often form an emotional attachment to it, may be property, "second – home" in the area, either as a holiday home, or for either old age/retirement from active life.

Table 2.2 presents the services, facilities and amenities offered by the commonly visited historical tourist attractions which obtained composite mean 2.06 and verbally interpreted as inadequate.

Tour guide ranked as the first with the weighted mean of 2.23 while brochure and pamphlets ranks as the least with the weighted mean of 1.95 verbally interpreted as Inadequate.

Table 2.2. Services, Facilities and Amenities Offered by the Commonly Visited Historical Attractions (N=60)

Commonly Visited Historical Attractions	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Public Restrooms	2.00	Inadequate	2
2. Brochure and pamphlets	1.95	Inadequate	3
3. Tour Guide	2.23	Inadequate	1
Composite Mean	**2.99**	**Often**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Very adequate; 2.50 – 3.49 = Adequate; 1.50 – 2.49 = Inadequate; 1.00 – 1.49 = Very inadequate

According to respondents, they have their own tour guide whenever if they visit the place. In Museo de Lipa, staff only acts as a guide inside the museo. Mean while brochure and pamphlets needs updating, incomplete and is not computerized yet.

Table 2.3 presents the services, facilities and amenities offered by the commonly visited man – made tourist attractions and obtained composite mean 2.23 and verbally interpreted as inadequate.

Table 2.3. Services, Facilities and Amenities Offered by the Commonly Visited Man-Made Attractions (N=60)

Commonly Visited Man-Made Attractions	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Food Establishment (A la carte dining)	1.72	Inadequate	7.5
2 Accommodation	2.03	Inadequate	6
3 Cottage room	2.27	Inadequate	3.5
4 Function Halls	3.08	Very Adequate	1
5 Ample Parking Space	2.68	Very Adequate	2
6 Retail Shops (crafts and souvenirs)	2.27	Inadequate	3.5
7 Personal Services (spa, massages)	2.10	Inadequate	5
8 Recreational Facilities (swimming pool, basketball court)	1.72	Inadequate	7.5
Composite Mean	**2.23**	**Inadequate**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Very adequate; 2.50 – 3.49 = Adequate; 1.50 – 2.49 = Inadequate; 1.00 – 1.49 = Very inadequate

Function halls ranked first with the weighted mean of 3.08. The respondents mentioned that there were very adequate function halls offered by the tourist attractions while the ample parking spaces ranked as second with a weighted mean of 2.68, also verbally interpreted as Very Adequate.

With regards to the services, facilities and amenities offered by the commonly visited attractions, mostly mentioned the function halls and ample parking space. It is a place used for relaxation, and celebration of special event, and accommodate for instance. They used it as a means to increase both profits and guest satisfaction. They had a quality and relaxed ambiance which are very important as that is what appeal to the guest in the first place.

While food establishment and recreational facilities ranked the least offered by the attractions with the weighted mean of 7.5, according to the respondents, although it is existing and they are aware that it is available, they are not satisfied and there is a room for improvement. Food establishments inside the place are expensive especially in the farm at San Benito however very unusual from others.

Providing high level of service is now the norm throughout almost all sectors of commerce: hotel, restaurants and other tourism pri-

vate sector which work for customer satisfaction. The service they render is almost important for the existing business undertaking. It plays a vital role in the success of a business.

The respondents are looking forward for more development and improvement on some facilities that exist.

Table 3.1 reveals the problems encountered by respondents in visiting the places with composite mean 2.12 and verbally interpreted as sometimes encountered.

Table 3.1. Problems Encountered by the Respondents in Visiting the Places (N=60)

Problems Encountered	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Proper waste disposal	2.45	Sometimes	2
2. Medical facilities in case of emergency	2.25	Sometimes	4
3. Disfigure of historical attractions	2.22	Sometimes	5
4. Preservation	2.30	Sometimes	3
5. Cleanliness	2.17	Sometimes	6
6. Safety and Security	1.40	Never	10
7. Price Range (Value for money)	2.07	Sometimes	7
8. Transportation	2.47	Sometimes	1
9. Level of Service (knowledge & awareness)	1.90	Sometimes	9
10. Atmosphere (decoration, ambiance, attitude of staff)	1.95	Sometimes	8
Composite Mean	**2.12**	**Sometimes**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50 – 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

All items cited were rated sometimes encountered problems with the services rendered by the different attractions in Lipa City.

It can be noted that the respondents mentioned that transportation is one of the major problems in visiting the place. Although it is rated sometimes encountered, there is a need for provisions and room for development. Transportation got the highest rank of 2.47. For the tourists is better to have their own car for the easy access to the destination. Although there are different modes of transportation it was expensive and quite far from city. Proper waste disposal ranked as the second with the weighted mean of 2.45. Though there is a program implemented by the

government regarding waste management but it is not practiced properly by the residents and tourism private sector.

Safety and security revealed to the least problem encountered by the respondents in visiting the place with the weighted mean of 1.40, which means that Lipa city attractions are safe to visit.

Problems have always been part of the business and operation and it is important that one should know how the problems arise to be able to find the solution (De Torre, 2007).

Table 3.2 presents possible problems encountered by the government officials in the development of their attractions with composite mean 1.97 and verbally interpreted as sometimes encountered.

Table 3.2. Possible Problems Encountered by the Government Officials in the Development of their Attractions (N=60)

Problems Encountered	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Lack of consistent promotional strategies for tourist	2.12	Sometimes	3
2. Inaccessibility of transportation and communication	1.70	Sometimes	9
3. Financial Constraints	2.27	Sometimes	1
4. Environmental Problem	2.00	Sometimes	5.5
5. Customer relation on the tourist	2.05	Sometimes	4
6. Protection and animal welfare	1.80	Sometimes	8
7. Waste management and waste disposal	2.00	Sometimes	5.5
8. Political problems	2.18	Sometimes	2
9. Peace and order situation	1.98	Sometimes	7
10. Services, facilities and amenities offered	1.62	Sometimes	10
Composite Mean	**1.97**	**Sometimes**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50 – 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

Financial Constraint got the highest weighted mean of 2.27 and verbally interpreted as a problem sometimes encountered.

According to Lipa City Tourism Council which performs most of the function of Tourism Office, being not part of the Local government unit results to financial limitations. They had workshops leading to the

creation of Tourism plan but most of these did not push through. There is a need for the local government and tourism private sector entities to be coordinated. These two groups must work together in order to speed up the progress of Lipa City in terms of tourism development.

Political problems ranked as second as respondents are experiencing political crisis with the weighted mean of 2.18, also verbally interpreted as sometimes experienced. Some politicians are not aware to the development of tourism industry in the city. On the other hand, services, facilities and amenities offered ranked as the least with the weighted mean of 1.62. This is due to improvements, and maintenance are the tourism private sectors initiative.

4. Proposed Strategies to Empower Lipa City Local Tourism Industry.

The top three major problems encountered by the tourists in visiting tourist attractions are transportation, waste disposal, and preservation of the attraction.The local government officials must create an easy access on how the tourist can reach the destination developing road and having more promotions and trademark so that people can easily locate it. Waste disposal is another problem encountered; residents should always recycle things like those biodegradable materials. In this manner, they are not only saving money but also contribute to the cleanliness of their places. Effective laws regarding waste disposal management for the maintenance and preservation of the place. Preservation of the place is considered another problem encountered. Some of the tourist cannot avoid vandalism in the buildings which is not proper. Preservation and protection is very important for future generations. That the department of tourism and natural resources should support the tourist attraction owners and people around in preservation of the places. In return, the residents, tourist attractions owners should support the law to resolve those problems.

Local government officials also mentioned that a financial constraint is one of the major problem encountered by the government in developing their tourist attractions. In one's progress, it needs allotment of budget in order for an efficient development and constant maintenance. A political issue is cited as another problem by the government. During the interview to the newly appointed tourism officer, the councilor in-charge in tourism development is not aware how beautiful and how important is tourism in the city. Every time the administration changes they do not agree how the previous administration handles the tourism plans. Another problem again is lack of consistent promotion and strategies. Promotion and strategies are own initiatives of the establishments due to the financial constraints of the local government. Although they

can help it advertised it is not always updated.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commonly visited tourist attractions in Lipa City are Order of the Friars Minor Capuchin, Casa de Segunda, and The Farm at san Benito and Mount Malarayat Golf and Country Club. The tourist attractions have inadequate souvenir shops, tour guides and function halls. Safety and security has never been a problem in visiting these places for tourist; however, financial constraints and political issues are encountered by the local government officials. The researcher proposed strategies to empower Lipa City local tourism industry.

Local Government Unit should give much attention to the tourist attractions in Lipa City. Budget may be alloted to empower the tourism industry in the city. Tourist attractions establishment owners may further improve their services, and facilities through the utilization of the proposed tourism program.

Tourist may give importance to tourist attractions for future generations. Similar studies should be conducted to assess the needs for cooperation between the Local government unit and tourism private sector

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