

Religious Tourism Visitors' Motivational Factors and Experiences in the Philippines

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Abstract:

Religious tourism is one of the categories of the field that is the focus of interest. This study investigated religious tourism visitors' motivational factors and experiences in visiting religious sites in the Philippines. Descriptive-correlational research design and a stratified sampling via snowball method were utilized among 385 domestic and foreign tourists in the Philippines for the past five years through a structured questionnaire. Frequency, mean, standard deviation, Wilcoxon rank-sum test, Kruskal Wallis test, Dunn's pairwise comparison, and Spearman Rho were employed as statistical treatments. The results showed that religious motivational factors vary according to religion, country of residence, and type of tourist. In contrast, religious tourism experience registered a difference in average monthly income, religion, country of residence, and type of tourist. A strong positive relationship between the religious tourism visitors' motivational factors and religious tourism experiences has been proven.

Keywords: Religious Tourism; Tourism Visitors; Motivational Factors; Tourism Experiences; Philippines

1. Introduction

Religious tourism, one of the most prevailing factors in motivating people to travel, and religiously enthused travel, is presently evolving as a key tourism sector (World Tourism Organization, 2014; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). It is a type of tourism in which individuals of devotion travel alone or in groups for religious or spiritual reasons to search for meaning (Jongmeewasin, 2016). According to Blackwell (2007), this form of tourism covers all types of travel inspired by spirituality wherein a route is a holy place. In its most basic form, religious tourism is a collection of religious destinations and related services that are visited for both profane and religious purposes.

Religious tourism has been socially and culturally characterized as a discursive practice and a shift in personal credibility. Subsequently, this concept asserts a behavioral skill for influencing an individual's persuasive situation, which needs social and sacred items desired for piety and philosophical existence (Kurmanaliyeva et al., 2014). It is for this reason that many sacred sites in the world were developed to be tourist destinations (Asi et al., 2015; Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Based on Egresi's (2012) account, religion always has and will remain to be a key driving force behind travel. Many secular visitors visit these locations for reasons other than religion, such as historical, cultural, or architectural causes, people travel to the Philippines to see the beautiful architecture typically seen in churches. As a country with a large Catholic population, most of the religious sites in the Philippines are associated with it. The Baroque architectural design in Catholic Churches is an important

aspect of Filipino Culture and is a popular tourist destination. Some have been added to the UNESCO World Heritage list (Fernando, 2020).

Many scholars and experts have become interested in religious tourism (Drule et al, Chis, 2012), and the number of studies involving religious, or faith tourism has expanded dramatically over the years. However, they remain relatively few compared to other forms of tourism (Kamenidou & Vourou, 2013; Poria et al., 2003). This is true, particularly in the Philippines where very little research was conducted on the subject. It is in this context that this research was conducted. This study will provide academicians with an overview of what motivates religious tourists and how these impact their religious tourism experiences thus adding to the body of knowledge. The results of the study will also serve as bases for tourism professionals to improve the country's tourism marketing strategies, which will have a great impact on the economy.

The main objective of this research was to investigate the motivational factors and experiences of religious tourism visitors in the Philippines. This research pursued the following specific objectives: 1) To identify the demographic profile of respondents in terms of Age, Sex, Civil Status, Occupation, Monthly Income, Religion, Country of Residence, Type of Tourist, and Religious Sites Visited; 2) To describe the respondents' religious tourism motivational factors; 3) To describe the respondents' religious tourism experience.; 4) To establish significant differences in the respondent's religious tourism motivational factors across their profiles; 5) To establish significant differences in the respondent's religious tourism experience across their profiles; 6) To establish a significant relationship between the respondents' religious tourism motivational factors and their experiences. The following null hypotheses were established: Ho1) There is no significant difference in the respondent's religious tourism motivational factors across their profiles; Ho2) There is no significant difference in the respondent's religious tourism experience across their profiles; Ho3) There is no significant relationship between the religious tourism motivational factors and their religious tourism experiences.

This study was based on the Push and Pull Theory introduced by Dann in 1977. Dann (1997) categorizes the motivations that drive tourists and travelers to visit specific destinations as either push or pull factors. Push motivations are internal factors that drive individuals to seek new experiences, adventure or escape from their daily routine. Conversely, pull motivations are external factors that attract people to a particular destination or tourism activity including the destination and natural beauty, culture, history, or unique features such as food, music, or architecture. The research was likewise anchored on Pearce's (2005) Travel Career Pattern (TCP) Theory which is an extended version of the Travel Career Ladder Theory (TCL). The TCP dilutes the premise of the TCL that travel motivations present themselves in gradation as it was based on Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, as it places travel motivations in a more dynamic, multi-level structure than TCL (Lee and Pearce, 2002; Pearce, 2005). The essential premise of the TCL model is that with changes in travel experience, tourists will exhibit different motivations (Pearce, 2005). This study sought to explain that the determinants that may influence religious travelers to visit sacred sites are based on their internal and external motivations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is aimed at visitors who travel to different nations to visit religious centers to fulfill their religious convictions. A province's historical and cultural background would be an important center of religious tourism and a starting point for travelers to learn about the rich religious history and culture

(Ozcan et al., 2019). Travel activities such as visits to Christian art and architecture sites, Christian thematic areas, Christian conferences and meetings (occasionally assorted with various tourist activities), Christian dramatic presentations, and Christian volunteer tourism are included in religious tourism. According to Balomenou et al. (2015), religious tourism is a distinct type of travel conveying people's desire to relocate from their current home to a sacred location. Religious travelers are looking for a spiritual connection, to fulfill a promise, or to attend religious events. As with the study of Rinschede (1992) and Vukonic, (2002), Religious Tourism is a type of tourism in which participants are motivated by religious beliefs, either partially or entirely

2.2. Religious Tourism Motivational Factors

It has been identified that while religion is the most important motivation for pilgrims, there are some secondary outcomes either during the travel or at the destination that may arise (Swatos, 2006; Vukonic, 1998 as cited in Egresi, 2012). As an example, the primary motivation for pilgrims going to Rome is to visit St. Peter's cathedral and other such religious objectives and perform religious rituals; however, once in Rome they may also choose to visit non-religious objectives and even go shopping (Swatos, 2006 as cited in Egresi, 2012). It has been further stated that many cultural tourists include religious monuments among the objectives they visit. However, their interest in those monuments is cultural, historical, or architectural/artistic rather than religious (Richards and Fernandes, 2007 as cited in Egresi, 2012). Nolan and Nolan (1992) reported that nonbeliever tourists who visit religious sites are commonly unaware of the spiritual connotations of the place. Visitors are primarily motivated by a desire for self-actualization, or the desire to improve themselves (Drule et al., 2012). Božic et al. (2016) revealed in their study a substantial preference for religious grounds for visiting the sacred site over secular motives. Antunes et al. (2017) provided a better knowledge of modern pilgrims, demonstrating that spiritual factors, a desire for new experiences, an outdoor experience, and cultural reasons are the primary motivations for pilgrims.

2.3. Religious Tourism Experiences

Tourists' experiences differ depending on their religion, which can be elucidated utilizing such recognized experience variables. Further, religious tourism experiences impact overall tourist satisfaction (Albayrak et al., 2018). Experiences represent the essence and central facet of the tourism industry (Kim & So, 2022; Tussyadiah, 2014; Williams, 2006 as cited in Hosany et al, 2022). Various authors posit that tourists seek authentic, rewarding, meaningful, multisensory, and transformative experiences when visiting places (Buzova et al., 2020; Chirakranont & Sakdiyakorn, 2022; Kirillova et al., 2017; Spielmann et al., 2018 as cited in Hosany et al., 2022). Rebuya et al. (2020) explained that religious motivational aspects of tourists to the destination were substantially more prevalent than liberal motivations, which are also imitated in their experiences. This implies that spiritual tourists are driven by their religious desires, such as the fulfillment of personal faith and the gratification of theological desire (faith and practice). Considering the relevance and prevalence of religious tourism worldwide, research on religious visitors' experiences is relatively limited. (Albayrak et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

This paper utilized a descriptive-correlational research design with the Philippines as the locale, with it being a highly religious country, where many religious sites in different regions are well-known tourist spots. Based on the average number of foreign and domestic travelers in the Philippines for the past five years of 42,131,821 (Department of Tourism, 2017), using the Raosoft Calculator, a total of 385 foreign and domestic travelers for sample sizes was utilized. Only domestic and foreign tourists who have visited

religious sites in the Philippines for the past five years and whose age ranges from 18 years to 75 years old were qualified to participate in this study. The study adopted a structured questionnaire from the study of Irimias et al. (2016) that covered the religious tourists' motivational factors and of Rebuya et al. (2020) for the assessment of the religious visitors' experiences. It employed a six-point Likert scale to specify the degree of agreement of the respondents to the motivational factors and their religious tourism experiences. To ensure instrument reliability, Cronbach's alpha of the construct Religious Motivational Factors is 0.9268, while Religious Tourism Experience, is 0.9678, both excellent ratings.

The study was conducted from 2021 to 2022 during the pandemic period thus the use of the Snowball Sampling method. Initially, the questionnaire was floated via an online survey using Google Forms to both local and foreign colleagues and friends using their email addresses which they likewise shared with others. A physical form was also distributed to complete the sample size through the participants of an international conference held in Clark last April 2022 with delegates coming from different regions of the country. The researcher demonstrated conformance to the regulations and guidelines set forth by the University's Ethics Review Committee. The statistical treatment used in the study included frequency, mean and standard deviation. For the test of difference, the Wilcoxon rank-sum test and Kruskal Wallis test as well as Dunn's pairwise comparison were utilized, while for the test of relationship, Spearman's Rho correlation was used.

4. Results and Discussions

The respondents generally agreed with most of the religious tourism motivational factors presented in this study. However, they expressed strongly that they are also interested in visiting non-religious sites as well. It can be gleaned that respondents are motivated in visiting both religious and non-religious sites. This is ably supported by Božic et al. (2016) who explained that religious tourism visitors are not motivated by purely religious purposes but also aimed at educational, historical, and cultural and follow trends in tourism.

The respondents' love, respect, and closeness to God, appreciation of the historical and cultural value of the destination as well as the hospitality accorded to them by the residents, support how strongly they feel about their religious tourism experience. The respondents are highly affected religiously when visiting religious sites, maybe because most of them are Catholics and want enlightenment and blessings. These results are congruent with some studies such as offering their respect to God (Božic et al., 2016) and eventually, their principal quest for certainty, enlightenment, or a sincere experience with the heavenly (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). However, Egresi (2012) explains that not everyone who visits holy sites is a "pious traveler." Many secular visitors visit these locations for reasons other than religion, but because of historical, cultural, or architectural causes.

A significant difference in the religious tourism motivational factors among different religions, countries of residence, and types of tourists was also established. Domestic tourists have higher motivational scores compared with foreign tourists. Most of the regional tourists have more affinity for the religious destinations visited as they can easily relate to their historical and cultural background. Asi et al. (2015) explained that residents have higher scores than tourists in assessing religious tourism in Batangas regarding its historical significance, holiness, and spirituality. Roman Catholics have higher motivational scores compared with Protestants. Moreover, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Islam, and Buddhism significantly differ from other religions, with these religions having higher scores. This may be due to Roman Catholic practices such as visits to different religious sites to show respect to the Divine and their

faith in the Saints while non-Catholic visitors visit due to secular reasons. No significant difference in religious tourism motivational factors exists across age, sex, civil status, occupation, and average monthly income. This was contrary to the output of Irimias et al. (2016) which showed a difference in the characteristics and behavior of young among senior and young Hungarians in visiting religious sites. This may be attributed to the predominantly Filipino and Roman Catholic respondents and their early exposure to the different devotional practices and historical values of the different sacred sites within their localities and other regions, thus, the motivations of younger age in visiting holy places may not differ with the seniors. Moreover, Abbate and Di Nuovo (2013) concluded that men's motivation is primarily driven by a desire for discovery, while women's motivation is driven by a desire for sociability.

In terms of tourism experience, a significant difference exists across average monthly income, religion, country of residence, and type of tourists. Philippine residents have higher tourism experience scores compared with those from other countries, and domestic tourists have higher tourism experience scores compared with foreign tourists. Those with income of Php20,000 to Php35,000, Php35,001 to Php50,000, and below Php20,000 to no income have a significant difference in tourism experience from those that have a monthly income of Php65,001 and above, with the highest income having the lowest tourism experience score. This may be because the lower-income class visits these holy places to pray for alleviation from their social status and medical alternative through their faith in the saints' divine intervention for their healing. Rebuya et al. (2020) reported that religious tourism visitors who fit into the lower common class usually visit sacred sites in pursuit of the meaning of their existence. Their main purpose is purely spiritual and involves great faith in the divine for answered prayers and sustenance of their daily needs. The results also showed that Roman Catholics were more spiritually inclined than Protestants, Islam, and Buddhists. Albayrak et al. (2018) confirmed that different religions have different religious tourism experiences but may have resemblances in the discernments for some of its dimensions. Most of the stated experiences pertained to the love and devotion to God and as an offering of prayers to saints. According to the Holy Writ and church doctrines, Catholics have a plethora of customs for articulating their devotion and worship to God, their spiritual activities include a celebration of patron saints (Rebuya et al., 2020).

This research established that religious tourism motivational factors fittingly affect the respondents' religious tourism experience. More religious tourists are motivated and feel a positive experience during their visits to religious sites. As supported by Albayrak, et al (2018), stating that administrators of these sacred sites must consider the factors that persuade religious travelers to visit holy places that may result in a favorable experience and customer loyalty since religious tourism experiences influence overall tourist satisfaction.

The study confirmed the Push and Pull Motivation as well as the Traveler Career Path Theories. It has been established that tourists are indeed affected by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors when traveling. Likewise, can be said of the Travel Career Path Model. Based on the results of the study where tourists' religious tourism experience greatly affects their religious travel motivations as posited by the TCP model. This study adds to the body of knowledge that supports both theoretical frameworks. On a practical note, the results of the study provided tourism professionals with inputs to prepare their tourism marketing plans in specific religious sites allowing for better tourism potentials of the locale thereby improving the local economy.

5. Conclusion

1. Religious travelers visit religious sites not only for the spiritual experience but also to appreciate the sites' historical and architectural appeal.
2. The religious tourists' motivation can be segmented in terms of their religion, country of residence, and type.
3. The tourists' religious tourism experience can likewise be segmented in terms of their average monthly income, religion, country of residence, and type.
4. Of all religions, Catholicity registered to have the most impact in terms of religious motivation as well as religious tourism experience.
5. The more religious visitors are motivated to visit religious sites, the more that they have a positive religious tourism experience.

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. Maintain and/or improve the cultural significance of the religious sites, promote religious tourist sites focusing on the differences between segments based on religion, country of residence, and the type of tourist taking into consideration that religious travelers are interested in visiting non-religious sites and are not motivated with pure religious purpose but also aimed at educational, historical, cultural and follow trends in tourism.
2. Religious tourists' experience may be enriched by segmenting the activities that can be done in religious sites based on income, religion, country of residence, and type of religious tourists visiting. This may include immersion with the residents, a celebration of religious festivities, and shopping.

Limitations of this study and suggestions for future studies

This study was conducted during the pandemic, thus, limiting the researcher to conduct the survey with target respondents on sacred sites; future researchers may consider conducting the same assessment of religious tourism visitors' motivational factors and their experience at the religious sites, consequently, covering each region to focus on developing the services of the said sites. Different religious travelers per region may have different perspectives on the dimensions of religious tourism and eventually their experiences. Lastly, given that there are contradictory results in some portions of the study, future researchers may want to conduct a similar study to support or negate the outcomes of this undertaking.

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