

THE YLOCANDIA TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE PHILIPPINES**Ana Leah A. Alconis¹, Leonardo B. Aquino²**^{1,2} University of Northern Philippines, Tamag, Vigan City, Ilocos Sur, Philippines*For Correspondence; Tel. +639178129079, Email: analeah.alconis@unp.edu.ph

ABSTRACT: *Travel and tourism have been vital social activities of human beings since the past. This study aimed to assess the Tourism Industry of Metro Vigan and suggests how to enhance the industry so that policymakers and stakeholders have a basis to improve the 5As of the province's tourism which enhances the safety, satisfaction, and meaningful experience of visitors. Data were collected by questionnaire and interviews of people involved in the tourism industry in Metro Vigan. The study found that all the components that were taken into consideration meet the needs and demands of the tourism industry. To ensure the sustainability of the tourism industry of the province, what should be enhanced now includes the 5As of tourism through the development of a website, construction of a parking structure, lowering of local business fees, assigning a permanent tourism officer, providing a free internet zone, proper garbage bins, and comfort rooms.*

Keywords: Accessibility, Accommodation, Amenities, Attraction, Activities

1. INTRODUCTION

Travel has fascinated man. Travel and tourism have been vital social activities of human beings in the past. The urge to explore new places in one's own country and seek a change of surroundings has been experienced since ancient times. Nowadays, people are thrilled to travel to panoramic places, historical, and religious convictions worldwide. Travel includes staying in places outside their environment for leisure, business, or other purposes for months or even years. Such enthusiasm gives the tourism industry an incredible boom in business globally. Because of this, tourism has become an important sector that has a significant impact on the development of countries, specifically on the economy, socio-culture, and environment.

The tourism industry is unlike any other industry because, instead of a product, one sells a place and all the things it has to offer. Marketing should constantly put forth the best possible image of one's destination while creating interest on a broad scale in as many ways as possible [1]. The tourism industry survives due to various business enterprises and services [2]. The marketing is mainly the tourists' experience; they can be stored only in their memories. The need to reach the target audience, market venue, service, entertainment, or other tourist items in the hotel business or other forms of business that cater to tourists is important [3].

The tourism elements need to be considered. These are as follows: 1) *Accessibility* is how to reach a place of attraction by any public transport system in the shortest time possible, having good road condition with signages, and with spacious parking space; 2) *Accommodation* refers to a place for events or for an overnight stay that is affordable, conducive, safe, and with prompt and courteous services; 3) *Amenities* refer to other conveniences required for good and comfortable living while traveling such as shopping malls, information centers, comfort rooms, garbage disposal, and free internet connections; 4) *Attraction* which includes all those factors that attract a tourist such as natural, cultural, human-made, entertainment clubs, and local cuisine; and 5) *Activities* includes happenings in a destination or attraction holds such as

festivities, nightlife, recreational, religious, and historical. All those tourism services are significant components taken into account in setting the branding strategy for the services and products of tourism in Metro Vigan.

In the Philippines, gone are the days when the travel industry was just a marginal sector of governance that was often regarded as a non-essential component in development [4]. Policymakers and other stakeholders recognize tourism's contribution to the sustainable development goals countrywide due to the significant impact of tourism in the development of places and its direct and multiplying effects on other sectors and industries. So, it has become a significant challenge to the tourism industry to meet and satisfy the needs and demands of tourists.

Based on the reviewed related studies, it is revealed that travel and tourism have been a significant part of man's life for different choices, purposes, and reasons such as to search and explore different cultures or religious and educational excursions. It is also essential to take note of the tourism elements in assessing the needs of tourists when developing a strategic plan for a place. With this, the researchers would like to determine the current status, problems, and concerns of the tourism industry which will serve as a basis for administrators to sustain and further improve the global competitiveness of the province.

The research study focused on Metro Vigan consisting of Vigan City, Caoayan, Bantay, Santa Catalina, San Vicente, and San Ildefonso. This study was conducted to analyze the extent of the provision of tourism services, determine the problems and concerns encountered, and propose enhancements needed for the improvement of the industry.

2. METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive method of research. The questionnaire along the 5As of the tourism industry was adapted from the study of Haneef (2017). Quota Sampling was used to determine the participants (n=66) who were the in-charge and workers of the tourism industry under the municipalities of Metro Vigan. The data collected for this study were tabulated, analyzed, interpreted, and summarized. The study passed through the UNP Ethics Review Committee.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the components taken into consideration meet the needs and demands of the tourism industry in Metro Vigan. The respondents who directly interact with tourists have a strong positive attitude towards tourists. They are aware of the essential requirements for booming tourism. The extent of the provision of tourism elements that represent the essential requirements for booming tourism can be summarized as follows:

Accessibility

Along with accessibility, there is an extensive road network that leads to various destinations. Tourists can choose from a variety of public transportation such as taxis, tricycles, and Kalesas. Tourists can also drive on their own to explore the province. There are markers and indicators which are intentionally done to ensure that tourists don't get lost and reach their destination safely and efficiently. However, spacious parking facilities are limited, indicating that tourist destinations in Metro Vigan do not provide a roomy secured location designated for parking.

Accommodation

Accommodation is a requirement for any tourism activity. Accommodation managers in Metro Vigan try their best to make all their clients satisfied and feel comfortable. They offer prompt and courteous services. Tourist destinations have conference/ convention facilities, lodgings, and several meeting rooms that provide a very accommodating destination environment.

Amenities

Amenities are the critical elements of a destination. The tourism industry in Metro Vigan provides essential things to make tourists' experiences more pleasant and unforgettable. The tourism municipal officers of Ilocos Sur claimed that the amenities and facilities of the province are suited to the needs of the tourists [5]. Moreover, the destinations provide easy access to their buildings and rooms, including recreational areas. On the other hand, municipalities need information centers to provide valid, reliable, and accurate information about the different tourist destinations. Moreover, additional comfort rooms and garbage facilities in public places are needed for public sanitation and cleanliness in the destinations.

Attractions

Tourist attractions are components of the tourism industry. These include places, events, and things that attract visitors to destinations. Ilocos Sur is full of rich culture, historic colonial sites, natural attractions, and local products and delicacies. The province's popularity continuously increased after its City of Vigan was recognized as UNESCO World Heritage City. Culture and heritage sites are among the notable attractions of tourists in these cities [6]. However, the different municipalities lack entertainment clubs such as bars, café, and disco parlors where visitors can socialize and spend their free time.

Activities

Tourism activities provide opportunities for visitors to learn about the way Ilocanos live, their culture, and their traditions. Furthermore, attendance at festivities and visits to heritage sites are parts of their holiday experience. Metro Vigan

celebrates enjoyable activities during holidays and special occasions. Tourism activities in Metro Vigan arouse trip-taking behaviors of travelers. Festivals had an overall positive perceived effect on the City of Vigan [7]. Festivals help attract tourists, which boosts a city's tourism and other business growth. Moreover, the festival is rich in culture and has a sense of identity among all Ilocanos committed to ensuring the conversion, preservation, and promotion of the Ilocano cultural, artistic, historical, and intellectual heritage [8].

The problems and concerns encountered in the Tourism Industry

The researchers also identified the problems and concerns encountered related to the Tourism Industry in Metro Vigan as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Matrix of the Problems and Concerns Encountered in the Tourism Industry

| Tourism Factors | Problems and Concerns |
|-----------------|---|
| Accessibility | Heavy Traffic |
| | Limited parking space |
| | Overcharging of fare |
| Accommodation | COVID-19 pandemic. |
| | Not all hotels provide shuttle services |
| | High fees on business permit |
| Amenities | Improper waste disposal and sanitation |
| | Few Tourist Assistance Centers and Tourist Guide |
| | Poor internet connection |
| Attraction | Lack of promotional marketing |
| | Maintenance/Improvement of tourist scenic spots |
| | Minimal tourist attractions |
| Activities | More leisure activities in the different tourist destinations |
| | Lack of wide dissemination of events and festivities |
| | No regular nighttime events and attraction |

Accessibility

The heavy traffic and limited parking space are evident, particularly along the City's main thoroughfare due to the rapid increase in vehicles and narrow streets. Furthermore, the "overcharging of fare" is experienced by some tourists in the province. Despite the corrective measures in local municipalities, some drivers still take advantage of tourists by charging them higher than the supposedly local transportation fare price.

Accommodation

The covid-19 pandemic greatly affects accommodation businesses. Indeed, the tourism industry is greatly affected by this pandemic because of restricted mobility and social distancing. The restrictions placed on travel and stay-at-home orders issued by the authorities led to a sharp decline in hotel occupancies and revenues [9]. Furthermore, lodging expenses in the province are pretty costly to commensurate with the high cost of business permits and other government fees. Additionally, the hotel shuttle services are another factor that the guests need during their stay.

Amenities

Since some tourist destinations and public places in the province have limited garbage disposal visible in the areas, plastic wastes left by tourists, especially during significant events, are scattered around the place. Not all municipalities have established a tourism department or an assistance center with permanent tourism officers and guides that provide information about the different tourist

attractions/destinations, local products, native food and delicacies, and services. Additionally, a slow internet connection also affects tourist satisfaction.

Attraction

The lack of propaganda and campaign materials affects the promotional marketing of the different municipalities' tourist destinations and native commodities. It does not seem so important where the all-inclusive resort is located as long as it is well connected to the market [10]. Additionally, the continuous maintenance and further improvement of scenic tourist spots are one of the challenges for municipalities to be globally competitive while maintaining their historical uniqueness. Despite the many breathtaking sceneries of the province, the minimal tourist attraction is still observed. There are still many gorgeous places in the province that are not yet developed and well-visited by tourists.

Activities

The limited leisure activities and no regular nighttime events are some of the problems and concerns of the different municipalities. Leisure activities are other alternative undertakings of tourists aside from sightseeing. These also encourage tourists to stay longer. Out-of-home leisure time substantially impacts the interactions with alters and monetary expenditures [11]. Furthermore, Metro Vigan has various events and festivals all year round that need to be widely disseminated.

Proposed enhancement needed for the improvement of the Tourism Industry

The researchers proposed answers to the identified tourism dilemma of Metro Vigan as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Matrix of the Proposed Enhancement for the Improvement of the Tourism Industry

| Tourism Factors | Proposed Enhancement |
|-----------------|---|
| Accessibility | A website with an electronic map that provides route options to minimize heavy traffic may be considered. |
| | A parking structure at the center of the town may be constructed. |
| | The municipalities may develop a website containing information on regular fares for Kalesas and Tricycles. |
| Accommodation | There is a need for hotel owners to improve their services, focusing on cleanliness, health, and safety. |
| | Accommodation establishments might add additional services such as shuttle buses. |
| | LGUs may consider lowering business tax/fees. |
| Amenities | Comfort rooms and garbage bins may be provided in strategic places. |
| | LGUs may consider assigning a permanent tourism officer to manage the tourism department center. |
| | The provision of a fast and free internet zone to tourist destinations may be considered. |
| Attraction | The municipalities can use online tools to promote the province's tourist destinations and local products. |
| | LGUs may consider the development of potential scenic spots. |
| | LGUs may share additional attractions in their areas. |
| Activities | There is a need for additional indoor and outdoor activities in the destinations. |
| | Website platforms or social media can aid in events and festivities' dissemination. |
| | A night market may also be added as a night attraction. |

Accessibility

A website for Metro Vigan with an electronic map that provides more route options for visitors is proposed to minimize the problem of heavy traffic. This system can intelligently recommend tourist attractions that the users may be interested in due to the relevant information input by the users [12]. At the same time, it can also provide the overall route planning among these attractions and the weather conditions during the tour, which realizes the intelligent planning of the travel itinerary.

It is also suggested that physical obstacles along the road, such as wide sidewalks, can be removed and strictly prohibit vehicles from parking temporarily along the side road. The municipalities may consider constructing a parking structure at the center of the town proper with a minimal fee.

The proposed website may also contain local policies and regulations such as fare charges and other transportation information to minimize overcharging fares.

Accommodation

Since the accommodation businesses had been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need for hotel owners to review their housekeeping services. Accommodation businesses should comply with basic protective measures against COVID-19. Moreover, the municipalities may take some constructive measures, such as giving rebates to owners of accommodation businesses. Furthermore, this is an ideal opportunity for accommodation owners to provide additional services such as shuttle facilities to safeguard tourists while exploring the province.

Amenities

It is suggested that garbage bins and comfort rooms must be visibly located in all tourist destinations for visitors to dispose of their waste appropriately. Likewise, establish more tourist departments/assistance centers operated by permanent tourism officers responsible for promoting local tourism products and services.

The municipalities may consider providing a free internet zone located at strategic places on tourist destinations to access public services and personal entertainment. Destinations should take action to accommodate their online needs during travel [13]. Facilities can include technological infrastructures, such as connected digital rooms with proper functionality and marked areas where travelers can meet and interact physically and digitally.

Attraction

The municipalities may consider using online tools such as social media or a website platform to promote the province's tourist destinations and native products. In many countries, domestic campaigns are the first step to restart tourism and reactivate the tourism economy, which will later be followed

by marketing and promotion efforts to attract foreign travelers [14]. These campaigns are being promoted primarily through digital platforms and social media, television, and radio advertisements.

The continuous maintenance and improvement of existing tourist destinations are also encouraged to preserve their natural and historic beauty. Furthermore, the development of potential scenic spots such as ecotourism parks and beaches is encouraged to provide additional attractions that will keep tourists revisiting the place and staying longer.

Activities

The provision of leisure activities such as outdoor and indoor physical activities encourages tourists to stay longer. An online website can also advertise new events and festivities of the municipalities and might be an avenue to inform the public of the activities in the future.

Additionally, a night market may also be added as a night attraction so that tourists can do their shopping at night to save some time. Night markets are the most popular and unique characteristics of domestic and foreign tourists' nightlife. They have great potential value for tourism development [15].

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The extent of the provision of tourism in Metro Vigan is at a sustainable level. The respondents are very much mindful of the needs and want of tourists. They are aware of the benefits brought about by this industry. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affects the inflow of tourists. The strict implementation of health and safety protocols such as COVID-19 test results and travel passes, among others, makes trips to destinations harder. At present, there are problems/issues and challenges encountered related to Tourism in Metro Vigan along with accessibility, accommodation, amenities, attraction, and activities. Since there are problems/issues in the tourism industry in Metro Vigan, the researchers propose an enhancement to minimize said problems/issues.

Since the tourism industry is one of the most significant sources of employment and development opportunities, sustainable planning activities are significant to plan ways and means to improve the 5As of tourism, which enhances the safety, satisfaction, and meaningful experience of visitors. Municipalities may consider the findings of this research in the promotion of their tourism industry.

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