



Assessing Religious Tourism Motivational Factors and Experiences of Visitors to Selected Religious Sites in Camarines Sur, Philippines

Niño R. Rebuya¹, Emy S. Lasarte², Mericia Mila A. Amador², Gina R. De la Roca²

¹Tourism Management Department, Partido State University—San Jose Campus, San Jose, Camarines Sur, Philippines

²Partido State University—San Jose Campus, San Jose, Camarines Sur, Philippines

Email: ninorebuya@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Rebuya, N.R., Lasarte, E.S., Amador, M.M.A. and De la Roca, G.R. (2020) Assessing Religious Tourism Motivational Factors and Experiences of Visitors to Selected Religious Sites in Camarines Sur, Philippines. *Open Access Library Journal*, 7: e6404.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1106404>

Received: May 8, 2020

Accepted: June 1, 2020

Published: June 4, 2020

Copyright © 2020 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

In recent years, pilgrimage is considered as one of the growing activities of people in the world. In the Philippines, the presence of numerous religious sites and activities makes it more significant in promoting pilgrimage or religious tourism most particularly in Bicol region where the home of *Ina* popularly known as *Our Lady of Virgin Peñafrancia* is located. Along this, it is deemed important to further understand the intentions and behaviors of religious travelers. Hence, this paper assessed the religious tourism motivational factors (religious and secular) and experiences of visitors to selected sacred sites using a descriptive method of research. It was found that religious motives significantly prevail as very important factors for visitors to set out on journey in comparison to secular motives which is regarded as not very important travel motivator towards religious sites. This indicates that religious visitors of the destination are motivated due to their intrinsic spiritual desire such as satisfaction of religious convictions and fulfillment of religious curiosity (faith and practice). Their experiences were mainly observed for spiritual participation (religious) rather than for tourism activity (secular). Therefore, it is very important to put balance between visitors who came for religious and secular motives, thus recognizing the vital roles among churches' administrators and a regional tourism organization is necessary.

Subject Areas

Social Sciences and Humanities

Keywords

Religious Tourism, Pilgrims, Secular Motives, Religious Motives, Visitor Experience

1. Introduction

Globally, religious or pilgrimage tourism is regarded as an ancient form of travel. It is said that religion is one of the factors that motivate people to set out on a journey [1] and millions of people travel towards the great pilgrimage centers to satisfy one's own religious conviction and fulfill their religious curiosity. This type of tourism has such an important social and cultural characteristic, as social practice and changing individual beliefs. Hence, it owns a kind of socio-cultural potential of influencing the motivational state of a person, which has the need of cultural and religious objects required for the spirituality ideological existence [2].

It is estimated that approximately 240 million people per year go on pilgrimages, the majority of them being Christians, Muslims, and Hindus. Religiously or spiritually motivated travel has become widespread and popularized in recent decades. Many of those people travel to sacred places in strong belief that they will be cured and to pay respect to God, but some of them are just curious to see those sacred sites and destinations [3]. The main motives such as search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy, lead people to sacred sites [4]. It is also argued that pilgrims are generally not considered tourists, or, at least, they are regarded as being different from tourists [5]. This view suggests that pilgrims are not tourists because they travel for spiritual reasons, while tourists travel for more secular reasons such as curiosity or pleasure [3]. Religious tourists or pilgrims seek to escape the stresses of daily work and life in general. Many thus desire some spiritual invigorating formative and cultural experience in which they grow and become enlightened by what they encounter at a destination. Many enjoy dabbling in diverse world views and lifestyles experiencing other cultures [6]. On the other hand, for Christianity, the idea for pilgrimage is undoubtedly linked to the belief that "The Church is Pilgrim" as the will of people following God.

The religion of our country combined with ecological culture, natural scene and historical sites. Thus, it is regarded that in the early days, the religion and tourism of our country have already formed mutually promoting and developing together. In the Philippines, where it is considered as the third largest Catholic population in the world, faith has several ways of expressing itself. It depends on the local history of church, the national tradition, a whole set of cultural elements which make the expression of faith unique in some places. People of strong faith regardless of their social status do not have the words or the will to define their faith. They just practiced it and live with it along their lives [7]. Filipinos another way of practicing one's own belief is experienced through many great events, from the novena, recitation of rosary, attending to processions of saints, and the religious devotion to various spiritual representation of Jesus Christ. These practices are believed by the Filipinos to be the salvation of their distress and misfortune in life, thus, spiritual faith will live forever as it is embedded in the Christian's culture.

In this light, it is important to mention that motives of modern religious tourists differ from medieval pilgrims. Nowadays, religious tourism refers not only to the form of tourism with strong or single-minded religious motives of pilgrimage, but also to people who undertake non-pilgrimage tourist activities such as travelling to religious sites for sightseeing, cultivation and recreation [3]. Given the rise of religious tourism and strong spiritual conviction of pilgrims, it is vital to understand what motivates travelers to visit sacred sites and individual experiences [8].

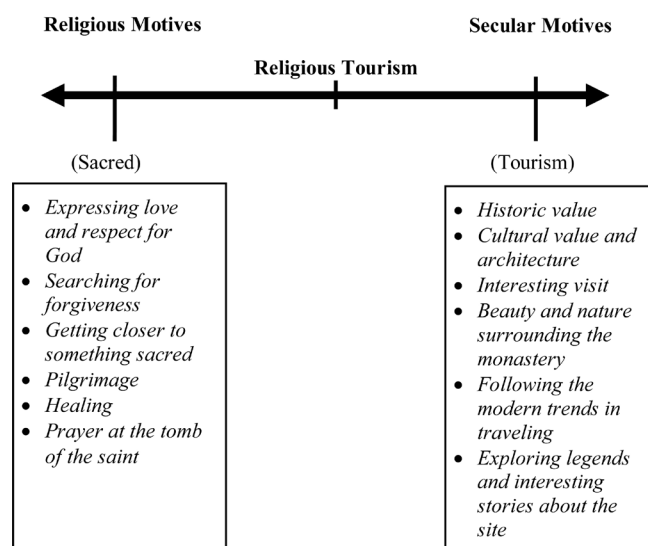
2. Objectives of the Study

Generally, this paper aimed at understanding the motivations and experiences of religious travelers and at providing baseline in suggesting regulations and policies for visitors and sites as well. Specifically, it assessed the religious tourism motives such as religious and secular and further evaluated the experiences of visitors to six selected religious sites in the province of Camarines Sur, Philippines.

3. Materials and Methods

This paper employed a descriptive method of research which is considered common in the leisure and tourism area, for three reasons: 1) the relative newness of the field, 2) the changing nature of phenomena being studied, and 3) the frequent separation between research and action [9]. It is also aimed to present and describe the characteristics of the subject being studied [10].

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, a questionnaire-based survey was utilized in a self-administered form that serves as the main gathering tool. This instrument was modified from sources cited in the work of Božić [3] and has adopted the theoretical framework of Smith [11] which suggests and differentiates religious and secular motives (see **Figure 1**).



Source: Smith (1992) & Božić, et al. (2016)

Figure 1. The pilgrim-tourist motives.

Religious motives are purely spiritual faith and adoration to God while secular motives are combined with visits to sacred sites while performing recreation and other tourism related activities found in the place.

The study was conducted at the six religious sites (see **Figure 2**) during three months (March, April, and May) time in the year 2018 as the summer and lenten seasons in the country. The selection of the sites was based on its popularity and with the highest recorded influx of visitors for the last three years in Camarines Sur, one of the provinces in Region V also known as *Bicol* region. It is considered as one of the major pilgrimage sites in the Philippines and a center of the 300-year old devotion to the *Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia*, declaring it as a pilgrim city of the country.



1. The Miraculous Our Lady of Virgin Peñafrancia. Housed in Our Lady of Peñafrancia Church, the *Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia* is a miraculous wooden statue of the Blessed virgin, which was an exact replica of Spain's Peña de Francia. Because of Her countless miracles, millions of devotees and pilgrims, local and foreign tourists alike, visit Naga City every year during the month of September in celebration of the nine-day festivity in Her glorious honor. This Blessed Mother is sweetly addressed as "INA" as sign of unconditional love and unwavering faith of the devotees.

2. Our Lady of Prompt Succor. The Miraculous Image of *Nuestra Señora de Proto Soccoro* was said to be part of the church in Buhi yet no one seems to remember how and when the image got to its altar. The image stands approximately three and a half feet in height and is made of very hard wood and is practically antique.

3. Hinulid (Christ laid to rest). Pilgrims travel to Calabanga, mostly on foot, to visit the Amang Hinulid, the image of Christ laid to rest. As part of the tradition, the Hinulid draws hundreds of devotees not only from Camarines Sur, but also from other parts of the country.

4. Hinulid (Christ laid to rest). Considered one of the oldest religious image of Christ laid to rest located in San Jose, Camarines Sur. It is believed for its healing miracles that strengthen the faith of locals and visitors. Influx of numerous devotees and pilgrims are observed every Friday most particularly during holy week.

5. Our Lady of Peace. Our Lady of Most Holy Rosary, Mother of Peace Grotto is located on top of Caglago Mountain in Barangay Tabgon, Caramoan, Camarines Sur. A flight of 524 steps to the grotto leads to the 26-foot image of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

6. Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto. The grotto is built on top of Calvario Hill at the Ibalon Hotel Compound. It faces Mt. Iriga and offers a bird's eye view of the city's central business district. During lent, the grotto is also the set for the crucifixion scene of the street play on the Passion and death of Christ where many devotees come together to profess their faith and personal intention.

Figure 2. Major religious sites and attractions in Camarines Sur.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of religious visitors.

Socio-demographic Profile	Characteristics	Frequency (1200)
Gender	Male	284
	Female	916
Age	51 above years old	310
	41 - 50	460
	31 - 40	233
	21 - 30	152
	20 below years old	45
Marital status	Single	239
	Married	432
	Solo Parent	318
	Widow	211
Monthly income	10,001 above	54
	5001 - 10,000	412
	1001 - 5000	682
	1000 below	52
Religion	Roman Catholic	941
	Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Aglipay)	251
	Protestant	5
	Born Again	3
Residence	Within region	871
	Outside region	256
	Foreign	73

The survey was administered to 1200 respondents equally distributed across the six study sites. Each site was represented by 200 visitors selected through convenience sampling technique where every respondent on-site has a chance to be selected in the survey. Most of the visitors are female between 41 - 50 ages and married whose monthly income ranging from Php 1001.00 - 5000.00. They are majority Roman Catholic and visitors within the region (*see Table 1*).

Respondents' profile is consistent with the report of Asia Society [12] that the Philippines proudly boasts to be the only Christian nation in Asia, where more than 86 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 6 percent belong to various nationalized Christian cults, and another 2 percent belong to well over 100 Protestant denominations, where Camarines Sur alone constitutes a 93.86 percent of catholic population.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the religious motives of visitors. It was noted that the very important motivational factors for religious visitors are the beliefs for miracle

Table 2. Religious motives.

Religious Motives	Mean	Interpretation
Expressing love and respect to God	3.75	Very important
Searching for forgiveness	2.54	Important
Getting closer to something sacred	2.50	Important
Pilgrimage	3.33	Very important
Spiritual healing	3.76	Very important
Prayer at the tomb of the saint	3.30	Very important
Beliefs for miracles	3.96	Very important
Devotion to God	3.28	Very important
Grand Weighted Mean	3.30	Very important

(3.96), spiritual healing (3.76), expressing love and respect to God (3.75), pilgrimage (3.33), prayer at the tomb of the saint (3.30), and devotion to God (3.28). Similarly, motives of searching for forgiveness (2.54) and getting closer to something sacred (2.50) are viewed important factors in their visit.

These findings have reflected for many Filipino Catholic practices and ethnic identity which are intricately interwoven into cultural meanings of identity, family, and community [13]. This powerful alignment of religious and cultural practices has carried over through generations, and Filipino Catholics has sustained a wide variety of church practices and attitudes to guide them and are able to manage life's challenges and hardships.

Based on the scripture and church teachings, Filipino Catholics have so many ways of expressing devotion and worship to God. It encompasses faithfully attending mass and participating to private and public processions [14]. Furthermore, their spiritual actions were also visible through recitation of the rosary, charismatic gatherings, celebration of the Patron saints, kissing the feet and/or touching of saints and other images, *visita iglesia* (seven churches visitation), *senakulo* (passion play), *pabasa ng pasyon* (reading of the passion), *penitensya* (penance) that are usually observed during lenten season. A connection to divine power may also be sought through amulets, pilgrimages, saints, and novena [15]. These practices are believed by the Filipinos to be the salvation of their distress and misfortune in life, thus, spiritual faith will live forever as it is imbedded in the Christian's culture.

Along with secular motives presented in **Table 3**, it was clearly understood that secular motives are not very important factors for visitors such as cultural-historic value and architecture (2.40), following the modern trends in traveling (2.33), desire for novel experience (2.30), beauty of the nature surrounding the religious site/s (2.05), and desire to interact with people (1.90). While, there were only few factors considered important along secular which are the curiosity to see attraction (3.00), desire to be a better person (2.76), and exploring the legends and interesting stories about religious site/s (2.60).

Table 3. Secular motives.

Secular Motives	Mean	Interpretation
Cultural-historic value and architecture	2.40	Not very important
Beauty of the nature surrounding the religious site/s	2.05	Not very important
Following the modern trends in travelling	2.33	Not very important
Exploring the legends and interesting stories about religious site/s	2.60	Important
Curiosity to see attraction	3.00	Important
Desire to be a better person	2.76	Important
Desire for novel experience	2.30	Not very important
Desire to interact with people	1.90	Not very important
Grand Weighted Mean	2.41	Not very important

Result on secular motives is mirrored on the profile of visitors that most of them were belonging to senior age and lower social class based on their income. Thus, respondents are characterized under religious pilgrim whose these types of travellers searches for the meaning of life, does not live a luxury of life, is not concerned with social status, does not exploit the local people, and does not buy souvenirs [16]. They are visiting sacred sites purely for spiritual purposes and intervention in the belief that God will grant their prayers and will continue to provide on their everyday lives.

On the other hand, it can also be observed that some of the factors such as exploring the legends and interesting stories about religious sites, curiosity to see attraction, and desire to be a better person were viewed important motives by the visitors. With ever changing global political landscapes, religion has retained a significant place as a social movement with complexity of structures and functions, which pervades culture and traditions. The revival of visitation to pilgrimage sites was at the same time the rediscovery regarding secular public space and has introduced new form of thinking to find spirituality and develop alternative religious movements [17]. 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 [18].

The general religious tourism experiences of visitors are shown in **Table 4**. They strongly agree that religious travel gives them spiritual fulfillment (3.97), participation to religious activity shows their devotion to God (3.50), religious travel expresses their love and respect to God (3.30), and prayer to miraculous saint/s strengthens their belief to God (3.25). In the same way on visit to sacred places heals them spiritually (3.10), gives them feeling of forgiveness (3.05), and brings them closer to God (3.00). Contrarily, they disagree on their experiences that religious sites make them appreciate the historic value of the place (2.46) and the religious activity/attraction portrays historical and cultural value that widens their understanding (2.05).

Table 4. Visitors' religious tourism experience.

Religious Tourism Experience	Mean	Interpretation
Religious travel expresses my love and respect to God	3.30	Strongly agree
Visit to religious site gives me feeling of forgiveness	3.05	Agree
Visit to religious site brings me closer to God	3.00	Agree
Religious travel gives me spiritual fulfillment	3.97	Strongly agree
Visit to sacred places heals me spiritually	3.10	Agree
Offering prayer at the tomb of the saints strengthens my connection to God	2.60	Agree
Prayer to miraculous saint/s strengthens my belief to God	3.25	Strongly Agree
Participation to religious activity shows my devotion to God	3.50	Strongly Agree
Religious sites makes me appreciate the historic value of the place	2.46	Disagree
The religious activity/attraction portrays historical and cultural value that widens my understanding	2.05	Disagree
Religious site is in harmony with the local surroundings	1.54	Strongly disagree
Local residents are hospitable to tourists	2.50	Agree
Grand Weighted Mean	2.86	Agree

Visitors' experiences were mainly observed on religious aspects rather than secular. Among the many reasons and/or motivations for people to travel are religion or spirituality and major tourism destinations across the world have developed largely due to their connections to sacred people, places and events [4]. There are two distinguished aspects of religious tourism, such as: 1) the faith of a tourist, who has 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 [19].

5. Conclusions and Implications

The religious motivational factors of visitors in the destination were significantly prevailing on the religious motives rather than secular motives which also reflected on their experiences. This indicates that religious visitors are motivated due to their intrinsic spiritual desire such as satisfaction of religious convictions and fulfillment of religious curiosity (faith and practice). In this sense, visitors are religious travelers themselves since their main motives are search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy which leads people to sacred sites [4].

In a broad sense, religious tourism is any trip motivated, either exclusively or partly, by religious reasons [20]. Although religious issues are not the only ones considered by the visitors to religious sites or events, some would be on the purpose of experiencing cultural, traditional, spiritual, and landscape patterns

which set them on a journey. This can also be noted that with the rise of travelers for religious tourism whether on religious or secular motives, pilgrimage destinations and/or sites have become a multifunctional nature that welcomes tourists in general.

Therefore, it is very important to put balance between visitors who came for religious and secular motives, hence, recognizing the crucial role among churches' administrators and regional tourism organizations through local government units to implement measures that will preserve religious practices while taking advantage of its tourism significance.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the Research and Development Office of Partido State University for technical and financial support; the respective manager/administrator of study sites for positive response on the administration of surveys; and for the friends and families of the researchers throughout the success of this paper.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Cristea, A.A., *et al.* (2015) The Role of Media in Promoting Religious Tourism in Romania. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, **188**, 302-306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.398>
- [2] Kurmanaliyeva, *et al.* (2014) Religious Tourism as a Sociocultural Phenomenon of the Present “The Unique Sense Today Is a Universal Tomorrow. This Is the Way Religions Are Created and Values Are Made”. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, **143**, 958-963. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.534>
- [3] Bužic, S., *et al.* (2016) Exploring the Motives of Religious Travel by Applying the Ahp Method—The Case of Monastery Vujan (Serbia). *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, **4**, 33-34.
- [4] Timothy, D.J. and Olse, N.D. (2006) *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*. Routledge, London and New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203001073>
- [5] Collins-Kreiner, N. (2010) Researching Pilgrimage: Continuity and Transformations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **37**, 440-456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.10.016>
- [6] Nicolaides, A. (2016) Marian Tourism: Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Pilgrimage. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, **5**, 1-19.
- [7] de Charentenay, P. (2018) *A Filipino Practice of Faith*. Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo De Manila University, Quezon.
- [8] Raj, R., Griffin, K. and Blackwell, R. (2015) Motivations for Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Festivals and Events. In: Raj, R. and Griffin, K., Eds., *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Management: An International Perspective*, 2nd Edition, CABI, Wallingford, 103. <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781780645230.0000>
- [9] Veal, A.J. (2011) *Research Methods for Leisure and Tourism: A Practical Guide*.

Fourth Edition, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.

- [10] Turk, E.S. and Uysal, M. (2017) *Research Methods for Leisure, Recreation and Tourism*. 2nd Edition, CAB International, Wallingford, 15.
- [11] Smith, V. (1992) The Quest in Guest. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **19**, 1-17.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(92\)90103-V](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(92)90103-V)
- [12] Miller, J. (2020) *Religion in the Philippines*. Asia Society. <http://asiasociety.org>
- [13] Nadal, K.L. (2009) *Filipino American Psychology: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice*. AuthorHouse, Bloomington.
- [14] Mulder, N. (1997) *Inside Philippine Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life*. New Dat Publishers, Quezon City.
- [15] Lagman, R.A., *et al.* (2015) "Leaving It to God": Religion, Spirituality and Filipina American Breast Cancer Survivors. HHS Public Access, Providence.
- [16] Libosada, C. and Bosangit, C. (2007) *Introduction to Tourism: A Comprehensive Guide to Travel and Tourism Industry*. ANVIL Publishing Inc., Pasig City.
- [17] Raj, R. (2012) Religious Tourist's Motivation for Visiting Religious Sites. *International Journal of Tourism Policy*, **4**, 95-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTP.2012.048997>
- [18] Asi, L.M., *et al.* (2015) Religious Tourism in Batangas, Philippines. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, **3**, 58-66.
- [19] SIGA Team (2012) *Diverse Beliefs: Tourism of Faith, Religious Tourism Gains Ground*. Strategic Initiatives & Government Advisory (SIGA).
- [20] Rinschede, G. (1992) Forms of Religious Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **19**, 51-67. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(92\)90106-Y](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(92)90106-Y)