

## Assessment of Overall Tourists Experience in Selected Tourism Development Clusters in Northern Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the overall tourists' experience in the selected tourism development clusters in Northern Philippines. The descriptive quantitative design made use of 200 respondents, with findings that the purpose of travel is to learn, with the intention of creating positive overall experience, through achieving a harmony of positive cues, elimination of negative cues, identification of mix memorabilia, and the engagement of all their five senses. The study further asserts that there is no significant difference in the overall experience of the respondents based on the five principles of experience design. It concludes that the overall tourists experience has not reached the richest experiences that encompass all aspects of entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetic. As such, the study recommends the tourism stakeholders should form an inter-agency group that would regularly evaluate the destination development strategy aimed at supporting the development of tourism destinations and enhancing the overall tourists' experience. This inter-agency group main task is to monitor changes in tourist behavior in the market and guide the tourism stakeholders in the development of its products that would meet the current needs of the tourists. Finally, this inter-agency task force should regularly conduct inspection of the tourism stakeholders to ensure compliance of the destination development strategy and that the tourists have a positive experience.

**Keywords:** *Tourists' Experience, Clustering Approach And Experience Design.*



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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major revenue generator and a catalyst of socio-economic growth. According to Sharan (2020), it is a tool for economic activity and development that is why many countries

always innovate their tourism products to remain competitive and sustain its growth. From the point of view of the tourists, they purchase the experiences provided by the infrastructures (tangible products) and the services (intangible

products) at a destination (Lee, Jeong & Qu, 2019). Similarly, Eglite (2021) said that the main purpose of travel is about collecting experiences and sights. On the other hand, from the point of view of the producers of tourism products it is argued that tourism stakeholders link the tourism assets through reference to the food, landscape or other cultural realities that provide the tourists with experiences of not just places to go and things to see, but the feelings, sensations and activities (Eglite, 2021). In so doing, tourism trends are now skewed to participating in, learning from and experiencing about destinations and not just visiting them. A big challenge for producers of tourism products as it develops its products that could provide the best experience to the travelers and remain competitive in the market.

Faced with a similar challenge, the tourism industry in the Philippines adapts a cluster strategy wherein compatible attractions are clustered by physical feature or by tour aimed at providing the tourists with value-for-money destinations (Sharan, 2020). A match could result to customer satisfaction and could lead to customer loyalty that could make the destination competitive in the market. On the other hand, the missed match, or difference between potential and actual tourism visitation growth, can be characterized as the tourism gap. Many studies have been explored on the issues related to tourist experience and service gaps from macro level like the study made in Canada (Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2016 mentioned in Shao, Lin 2020) on closing the service gaps to create a long-term advantage for the region, while on micro level studies that is similar to studies on service gaps and urban destination as a day educational visitor's experience. However, there is no study on tourist experience and destinations clusters. As a strategy of a destination, clustering is beneficial to the other destinations that do not have popular attractions so travellers will also go and visit their place after visiting the main

attractions that motivated them to choose a destination. But from the point of view of the tourists, the issue is whether these destinations, which form part of the cluster, can also provide the experience that visitors are looking for.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the purpose of the study is to assess the overall tourists experience in selected tourism development clusters in Northern Philippines. The findings of the study will be beneficial to the country's Department of Tourism (DOT), the local government units (LGUs) of tourist destination areas (TDAs) and the tourism sites (TSs) in a destination, the Northern Philippines cluster of Metro Manila, Rizal, and Cavite, domestic and foreign travelers of this destination cluster, the researcher, and future researchers. Through this research, the gaps and areas for improvement in cluster development are addressed based on tourists' experience. Further, the study determined whether the tourists' experience is consistently delivered by the different areas within the cluster. With the presence of different attractions and activities the study measured the tourists' level of experience. In developing cluster destinations, tourists' experiences should be sustained all throughout the areas within the cluster. A balanced and sustained visitor experience is an indication of a successful cluster tourism development plan. This study is significant in sustaining the growth of tourism in the developed and developing areas in Metro Manila and nearby provinces of Rizal and Cavite and all the local people who are dependent on tourism for their economic survival.

## **METHOD**

The research design of the study was descriptive and was intended to assess the overall tourists' experience in the selected tourism development clusters in Northern Philippines because it is the most appropriate design for the study as it described how, what, when, and where in

the assessment of the overall tourists' experience in the selected tourism development clusters in Northern Philippines. Furthermore, the quantitative approach was used as it is concerned with quantifying and analyzing variables in order to arrive at the conclusions on the assessment of the overall tourists' experience in the selected tourism development clusters in Northern Philippines, because the study used statistical tools to analyze numerical data in order to answer questions such as who, how much, what, where, when, how many, and how (Sharan, 2020).

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This study aimed to assess the overall tourists' experience in the selected tourism development clusters in Northern Philippines. The design was descriptive, using the quantitative approach on 200 respondents. The study indicated that majority of the respondents were aged between 18 and 27 years old, female, single, employed as staff for 0-5 years, have participated in educational tours, where the purpose of travel is to learn. The respondents' overall experience were enhanced by the theme of tourism destinations and tourism sites in the Northern Philippines cluster, by the harmony of positive cues, through the elimination of negative cues, by having mix memorabilia, and through the engagement of all their five senses. The study revealed that there is no significant difference in the overall experience of the respondents based on the five principles of experience design; the overall experience by the respondents towards tourism destinations and tourism sites in the Northern Philippine cluster that has the components of entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetic in various levels, because the respondent have not reached the total experience that encompasses all four aspects of realm of experience that should have created the sweet spot around the area where the experience spectra met.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be

concluded that having no significant difference in the overall tourists experience in the selected tourism destinations and tourism sites in the Northern Philippine cluster offers areas of improvement and a new direction for strategic marketing of identified tourism destinations. The components of entertainment, education, escapism and aesthetic can still be used as the frame of reference and applying to it the overarching guide of harmonizing of positive cues, elimination of negative cues, making mix memorabilia, and the engagement of all five senses in a tourism experience.

The study recommends the following to improve the overall tourists' experience on tourism destinations and areas in identified clusters, as follows:

1. The Department of Tourism, the local government units, and the various tourism stakeholders should form an inter-agency group that should regularly evaluate the destination development strategy of destinations in the different tourism destination cluster for the implementation of complementing programs involving transport networks, infrastructure projects, accommodation and recreational facilities, human resource development, and marketing plans, that are all directed to support the development of tourism destinations throughout the regions, thereby enhancing the overall tourists' experience.
2. The inter-agency group should monitor changes in tourists' behavior in the identified markets that needs enhancement, to guide the tourism stakeholders in the development of its products that would meet the current needs of its tourists.
3. Local government units should regularly conduct inspection of the tourism stakeholders to ensure compliance to its destination development strategy, and maintain positive tourists experience.

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