

Assessment of Ecotourism in Banaue, Ifugao, Philippines

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Abstract: *The study utilized descriptive research method to assess the expectation and satisfaction of tourist towards some ecotourism sites of Banaue Ifugao, Philippines. A total of 104 international and domestic/local tourists who visited Banaue ecotourism sites such as Banaue rice terraces, Bangaan rice terraces, Batad rice terraces and Tapiya waterfalls were interviewed using a questionnaire. Frequency, percentage, correlation of variables and analysis of variance were utilized to analyze data. Results show that majority of the tourists are first timers with moderate expectation but much satisfied when personally visited the ecotourism sites. This implies that tourists are not well informed about Banaue ecotourism destinations. Thus, there is a need to strengthen strategic promotional approaches, marketing of the services and programs to tourists, and improve destination attributes to attract tourists.*

Keywords: ecotourism, expectation, satisfaction, tourist, rice terraces

1. Introduction

The municipality of Banaue is known of its endowed natural beauty, refreshing climate and distinctive endowment spells out its ideal role as an ecotourism destination. The diverse attractions of the municipality's natural and manmade ecosystems such as scenic mountains, rivers, rice terraces and rich cultural and historical legacy are spread over the communities which considered being the main hub for ecotourism in the province and as one of the tourist destination in the country.

Over the years, the ecotourism in the municipality of Banaue has been continuously providing livelihood such as inn/hotels, restaurant, tour guide, tricycle/jeep/van for hire, department/sari-sari stores/buy and sell, wood carving, and weaving to the indigenous people and contributes to the economic growth of the province.

Banaue is one of the municipality in Ifugao which belongs to the Luzon cluster of the Tourism Master Plan because of its unique features and the existence of the rice terraces which made it to become a tourist destination. Past national and local initiatives have promoted the natural and manmade tourist potentials in the area through the sustainable management of ecotourism sites and the preservation of the cultural heritage. It commenced with the formulation of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) Tourism Master Plan which gave premium to ecotourism to generate long-term benefits from tourism activities while preserving environmental quality and the region's cultural wealth. Despite the programs tourist arrival continued to miss with actual arrival in the municipality of Banaue and other part of the region. The situation is accounted to poor infrastructure and non-maintenance of tourist attraction areas [1].

The study of the level of expectation and satisfaction according to Singh as cited by A.S. Lather, R. Singh & K. A. Singh [2a], has paramount significant in so far as sustainable development of tourism at the given destination is concerned. While the level of expectation of the potential tourist acts as

a deciding factor in his/her decision to visit a particular destination, the satisfaction level speaks about the quality of the composition of tourist product (attraction + services + socio-cultural status + economic + ecological environment) experienced. Hence, the study was conducted to assess the expectation and satisfaction of tourist visiting some ecotourism sites located at Banaue, Ifugao, Philippines

2. Ecotourism Sites in Banaue Ifugao

The main tourist attraction in the province of Ifugao is the Ifugao Rice Terraces (IRT) and it is being promoted by the Department of Tourism of the country as one of the Special Interest Destinations in the Philippines [3]. There are three (3) rice terraces considered in the study that could be found in the municipality of Banaue, two (2) of which are declared by UNESCO as a "Living Cultural Landscape (LCL). The two declared LCL are Batad rice terraces and Bangaan rice terraces. There is also an undeclared LCL known as Banaue rice terraces.

Aside from the rice terraces, the municipality of Banaue is abounds with a variety of natural resources catering to adventure ecotourism, one of which is the Tapiyah waterfalls. As described by the Provincial Planning Office of Ifugao (PPDO-Ifugao), the ecotourism sites considered in the study are:

1. Banaue rice terraces. It is located at Barangay Viewpoint, which is about 15 minutes' drive from the town center of Banaue. Several view decks are established to serve as viewing area while enjoying the scenic beauty of the terraces. The rice terraces rise steeply from the base of the mountain range to a height of a few thousand feet.
2. Batad rice terraces. The rice terraces of Batad are tiered and take the shape of an amphitheater. Batad, can be reached through a concreated road from the town proper until a hill called "Saddle". From the hill, it takes about twenty (20) minutes downhill hike through a trail to reach the famous terraces.

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3. Tappiyah waterfalls. It is a spectacular waterfall with a phenomenal 70-meter fall that drops to a large natural swimming pool. The waterfalls are situated at Barangay Batad, Banaue Ifugao. It is adjacent to the Batad rice terraces. Tourists usually enjoy the crystal clear water of the falls after trekking the Batad rice terraces.
4. Bangaan rice terraces. Surrounded by scenic terraced rice fields is a picturesque village whose inhabitants continue to preserve their traditional way of life. The rice terrace is characterized by having a pot-shaped formation when viewed from the center of the barangay.

3. Research Methodology

The study used descriptive research method to acquire data. A survey questionnaires were administered to 104 international and domestic tourists who visited the ecotourism sites of Banaue, Ifugao such as Banaue rice terraces, Batad rice terraces, Bangaan rice terraces and Tapiya waterfalls from May to June 2015. A series of interviews were conducted to augment the gathered data through the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested to domestic tourists and was revised based from feedback received.

Data generated were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics like percentage and frequency, correlation of variables and analysis of variance using the Statistical Packaged for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented in the form of table.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Ecotourists

The demographic profile of the respondents considered in the study includes gender, age, marital status, types of tourist and educational levels. Table 1 shows the frequency and percent distribution of the demographic profile of the tourists. It shows that there were more than one half (55.80%) of the tourist respondents were females while 44.20% were male who visited the ecotourism sites. Comparing the four tourism sites, more female visited Viewpoint rice terraces (40) followed by Batad rice terraces (8), Tapiya falls (7) and Bangaan Rice Terraces (3). The result could be accounted to the accessibility of the ecotourism sites.

The tourist respondents were on their active stage since the dominant age group of the tourists was 21 to 30 years old with 41.35% of the respondents, 20 years old and below made up the smallest group, representing 8.65% and the mean age was 31 years old.

Most of the tourists were single accounting to 59.6% of the total population. Accordingly, singles have lesser family responsibility; they have time to visit other places to unwind as stated by the respondents during the interview. In the other hand, there were 42 (40.40%) domestic/balibkayan tourists. It is already a common practice in the country that balibkayans together with their families and/or friends are visiting tourist destinations to relax from tedious work.

Forty-six of the tourist respondents finished graduate school/or with units earned dominates and the least were 8 respondents who were secondary graduates. The result of the level of education indicates that most of the tourists who visited the sites have relatively high educational attainment.

Table 1: Frequency and percent distribution of the demographic profile of the tourists

<i>Information sought</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	46	44.20
Female	58	55.80
Age (years)		
20 yrs. old & below	9	8.65
21 - 30 yrs old	43	41.35
31 - 40 yrs old	22	21.15
41 - 50 yrs old	12	11.54
Above 50 yrs old	18	17.31
Marital Status		
Single	59.6	59.60
Married	42	40.40
Type of Tourists		
Domestic	42	40.40
International	62	59.60
Educational Attainment		
Graduate School/or with units earned	46	44.2
College Graduate	34	32.7
Vocational/Technical Courses/or undergraduate	16	15.4
Secondary Graduate	8	7.8

4.2 Travel Behavior Characteristics

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of the travel behavior characteristics of the respondents. Majority (73.1%) mentioned that it was their first visit to the ecotourism sites and there were 76 tourist's respondents who did not have any previous experience with the sites. Nevertheless, 18 tourists visited 2 to 4 times and the least was 3 tourists who mentioned that they visited the ecotourism sites 3 times.

As to the length of stay, 70 tourists stayed for 1 to 3 days, a minimal number (5) of tourists stayed more than 9 days. The average length of stay was 4.23 days which is higher than the report from the PPDO of Ifugao that the average length of stay of tourists in province is 2.5 days. In the category plan of travel, majority (67.30%) of the respondents planned in advance their trip for less than three months and the least was 3-6 months having 8 respondents.

The study further disclosed that 30 of the tourists preferred to travel with friends followed by 29 each traveled with their families and relatives, and organized groups. These tourists found the sites an avenue where they can enjoy accompanied with their friends, families and relatives. The tourists in groups were found in Viewpoint rice terraces and Bangaan rice terraces due to accessibility as mentioned by them. There were at least 16 tourist respondents who visited the sites alone, although they admitted that they prefer to visit the sites in groups if they will be given another chance. Most of the tourist respondents knew the sites from the internet (52),

friends and family (41), Tourist brochure/guidebooks (40) and the least information were 9 tourist respondents each knew from television/radio and previous visit.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of the travel behavior characteristics of the tourists

Information Sought	Frequency	Percentage
Is this your first visit to Banaue Eco-tourism Sites?		
Yes	76	73.1
No	28	26.9
Length of stay		
1 to 3 days	70	67.31
4 to 6 days	22	21.15
7 to 9 days	7	6.73
10 days and above	5	4.81
How long in advance did you planned to visit Banaue?		
Less than 3 mons	70	67.3
3 to 6 mons	11	10.6
Over 6 mons	23	22.1
Describe your travel?		
Alone	16	15.40
Family and/or relatives	29	27.90
Friends	30	28.80
Organized groups	29	27.80
What is/are Your Sources of Information		
Family and/or friends	41	39.42
Previous Visits	6	5.77
Internet	52	50.00
Travel Agency/ies	13	12.50
TV/Radio	6	5.77
Newspapers/Magazines	9	8.65
Tourist brochure/guidebooks	40	38.46
Word of mouth	18	17.31

*Multiple responses expressed in absolute numbers

4.3 Correlation of Tourist Satisfaction with some Variables of Demographic Profile, Travel Behavior and Expectation

The profile variables of ecotourism such as days spend and expectations were found to be significant when correlated with satisfaction of tourists. The other profile variables such as age and income were not significant to satisfaction. Usually when the tourists are satisfied with the ecotourism sites they visited, they tend to spend more days on the destination than what was initially planned by them. The ecotourism sites at Banaue were furnished with affordable lodging facilities and restaurants. Bangaan Rice terraces and Tapiya falls do not have an onsite lodging facilities and refreshments/restaurants but these are sufficed by the presence of land transportation facilities for Bangaan and the distance to available support facilities such as Inn/lodging and restaurants for Tapiya waterfall is short.

Table 3: Correlation of satisfaction with some variables of demographic profile, travel behavior and expectation

Profile	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Remarks
Age	-0.153	0.122	No significant Correlation
Income	-0.127	0.258	No significant Correlation
Days spent	.211*	0.031	Significant Correlation
Expectation	.626**	0.000	Significant Correlation

4.4. Correlation between the Levels of Expectation and Satisfaction of Tourists

Table 4 shows the correlation between the levels of expectation and satisfaction of tourist in Banaue. The result revealed that there is a significant difference in the level of expectation and satisfaction of tourist with respect to tour attraction and maintenance factor variables. It is remarkable that the mean values of all the variables in terms of expectation are classified as moderate but the levels of satisfaction of the variables are all classified as much satisfied. Moderate expectations are best, as the possibility of moderately satisfied or highly satisfied tourist's increases, thereby ensuring returning clientele, which is the major motive of all destination [2b]. The finding reveals that most of the ecotourists respondents are not well informed or knowledgeable about the ecotourism sites at Banaue.

Akama and Kieti [4] stressed that expectations are formed through information from advertisements and word of mouth perceptions from other tourists during past experience. In the other hand, according to A.S. Lather, R. Singh & K. A. Singh expectations would rely more on the influence of past experience than sources of information.

4.5 Overall Tourist Satisfaction on Ecotourism Sites

Table 5 presents the overall satisfaction of Tourist in all the ecotourism sites located at Banaue such as Banaue rice terraces, Batad rice terraces, Bangaan rice terraces and Tappiyah waterfalls. The tourists were much satisfied in all the ecotourism sites as reflected in the computed mean that range from 4.65-5.25 with an overall mean of 4.86. The result indicates that the tourists are satisfied on the different attractions of each of the ecotourism sites. Satisfied tourist is expected to revisit and stay longer in the ecotourism destination.

Attraction and Maintenance Factor of Ecotourism Sites	Expectation		Satisfaction		t-value	p-value	Remarks
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description			
Heritage Attraction	4.20	moderate	4.78	much	1.924	0.103	No Significant Difference
Cultural Attraction	4.40	moderate	4.69	much	1.590	0.150	No Significant Difference
General Tour Attraction	4.04	moderate	4.34	much	2.952	0.011	Significant Difference
Maintenance Factor	4.06	moderate	4.38	much	2.248	0.048	Significant Difference

Ecotourism Sites	Mean	Description
Viewpoint rice terraces	4.79	Much satisfied
Batad rice terraces	5.25	Much satisfied
Bangaan rice terraces	4.65	Much satisfied
Tappiyah waterfalls	4.74	Much satisfied
Over-all	4.86	Much satisfied

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As shown in the result of the study, the tourist who visited the ecotourism sites in Banaue expected moderately in terms of heritage attraction, cultural attraction, general tour attraction and maintenance factor. However, the tourists are much satisfied when they visited the ecotourism sites. Significant differences were found on general tour attraction and maintenance factor when expectation were correlated with satisfaction. The days spend and expectations of tourist were found to be significant when correlated with satisfaction. The tourist who visited all the ecotourism sites was much satisfied.

Provision of sufficient fund to maintain and improve the tourism sites and a more effective promotional and marketing strategy may be recommended to attract a countless number of tourists to visit, and stay longer at Banaue, Ifugao.

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Author Profile

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