

Enhancing Tourist Experience in Butuan City: Integrating Balangay Heritage as an Ancillary Service in Accommodation Facilities



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ABSTRACT: In the competitive landscape of the global hospitality industry, differentiating accommodation services through innovative offerings is essential. This study explores the integration of Balangay heritage into the guest experience at accommodation facilities in Butuan City, aiming to enrich the tourist experience. Employing the H.du Cros model, the research evaluates the market attractiveness and robustness of Balangay heritage as a potential ancillary service. Surveys conducted with guests at various accommodations in Butuan City and interviews with hotel management and city tourism officials serve as the primary data sources. Results reveal that Balangay heritage exhibits moderate robustness and high market appeal, with 70.3% of respondents endorsing its integration as an ancillary service. Despite its promise, challenges related to the management and organization of the heritage attraction are identified. To address these issues, the study proposes a strategic framework for stakeholders, aiming to streamline the effective integration of Balangay heritage and thus enhance the tourist experience in Butuan City. This approach offers valuable insights into the synergy between heritage preservation and hospitality innovation, underscoring the potential for cultural heritage to enrich the tourism offering.

KEYWORDS: Tourist Experience, Cultural Heritage, Ancillary Services, Innovation in Hospitality, Heritage Preservation

I. INTRODUCTION

The global hotel industry, constantly facing competition and economic fluctuations, seeks innovation in its service offerings. Operating non-stop, accommodations represent the hospitality sector's largest sub-sector, with room bookings as their primary revenue source. Despite the focus on specialized services like food, beverage, and wellness, the increasing competition offers a chance for hotels to differentiate through effective ancillary service management, enhancing overall revenue (Dail, 2014; Smith & Jenner, 2017).

The trend towards service personalization and adaptation to guest needs suggests a shift in revenue strategies, emphasizing the total value of the hotel's offerings beyond just room rates. Ancillary services, including food and beverage, spa, and conference facilities, now play a crucial role in a hotel's financial health, especially in non-tourism areas where weekend occupancy can dip significantly, affecting overall income (Frye, 2010; Thompson, 2015).

Opportunities for growth in hospitality are burgeoning, fueled by increased leisure time, income, and affordable tourism. Hotels and similar facilities can leverage ancillary services to generate extra revenue; heritage attractions, for instance, offer a unique way to enhance guest experience and spending. Heritage, defined as "things worth saving," plays a significant role in cultural tourism, responding to tourists' growing preference for authentic and individualized experiences over mass tourism (Lowenthal, 1985; Graham et al., 2000; Jones & Shaw, 2007; Richards, 2011).

In the Philippines, Butuan City's rich history, highlighted by the Balangay boats, presents a prime opportunity for accommodation facilities to integrate cultural heritage as an ancillary offering. Despite Butuan's potential, the integration of Balangay heritage into the local accommodation sector remains underexplored. This paper examines the feasibility of leveraging Balangay heritage as an ancillary product in Butuan City's accommodation facilities, aiming to enrich guest stays with personalized cultural experiences (Santos, 2019; Nguyen & Cheung, 2016).

Enhancing Tourist Experience in Butuan City: Integrating Balangay Heritage as an Ancillary Service in Accommodation Facilities

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating the significance of cultural heritage attractions in enhancing tourist experiences, recent studies have underscored the unique value these attractions add to the hospitality industry. Cultural heritage sites offer a deep dive into the history, traditions, and essence of a destination, significantly enriching the tourist experience (Richards, 2018). As tourists seek more meaningful and educational vacations, cultural heritage attractions respond by providing immersive experiences that connect visitors with the local community's past and present (Timothy & Boyd, 2015).

The allure of cultural heritage attractions lies in their ability to offer authentic insights into the cultural fabric of a destination, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation among tourists (Smith, 2006). These attractions not only serve as educational experiences but also as a means of preserving and promoting cultural identity (Garrod & Fyall, 2000). The integration of cultural heritage into the hospitality industry thus represents a strategic approach to diversifying tourism offerings and enhancing the attractiveness of destinations.

Furthermore, experiences at cultural heritage sites are increasingly being personalized, leveraging digital technologies to create more engaging and interactive visits (Lopez et al., 2020). This personalization enhances visitor satisfaction by catering to individual interests and preferences, further augmenting the value of cultural heritage attractions in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Incorporating cultural heritage attractions into the broader tourism experience can significantly impact guest satisfaction and destination loyalty. Tourists' encounters with cultural heritage can lead to heightened emotional connections and a more profound sense of place, encouraging repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth (Kim & Thapa, 2018). This emotional engagement underscores the potential of cultural heritage attractions to complement traditional hospitality services, creating a more comprehensive and fulfilling tourist experience.

In conclusion, the integration of cultural heritage attractions into the hospitality industry enhances the tourist experience by providing meaningful, educational, and personalized encounters with the cultural essence of destinations. This synergy between cultural heritage and hospitality services not only contributes to tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty but also plays a crucial role in the sustainable preservation and promotion of cultural identities, aligning with the industry's innovative strategies to meet evolving market demands.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With a population of 337,063 spread over 59 rural and 27 urban barangays, Butuan City, the regional hub of Caraga in Mindanao, was the study's conducted location. The Butuan City Tourism Office and different sources of data, such as websites, have been utilized to identify 53 accommodation facilities out of the 9,619 registered establishments in the city.

Stakeholders in Butuan's hospitality and tourism sector were among the chosen respondents according to particular standards. Representatives from associations' executive offices, city tourist officers, proprietors, and management teams were among the key informants. In order to guarantee thorough insights from a variety of viewpoints within the industry, sampling strategies combined purposeful and random methodologies.

Data collection was supported by a set of modified standard questionnaires and evaluation tools that included both checklist items and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions covering a range of topics about the integration of the Balangay heritage attraction were used during key informant interviews. A survey pertaining to demographic profiles and an assessment of Butuan's historical resources were carried out among visitors and those residing in lodging establishments in the city.

A detailed descriptive analysis was performed on the data, which included calculating the frequency distribution and percentage. The H was employed in the cultural asset appraisal. Du Cros Model, which evaluates the heritage asset's robustness, design, cultural significance, and marketability. To test hypotheses and investigate correlations between variables, statistical techniques including R-Squared, Chi-Square, Pearson Rho Value, and Probability Value were utilized.

The questionnaire was found to be consistent and reliable by the use of Cronbach's alpha in a reliability test, which produced an 85.5% reliability score. In order to verify the accuracy of the information and analyze themes associated with the assessment of the Balangay heritage attraction, qualitative data analysis was conducted according to a planned strategy.

Enhancing Tourist Experience in Butuan City: Integrating Balangay Heritage as an Ancillary Service in Accommodation Facilities

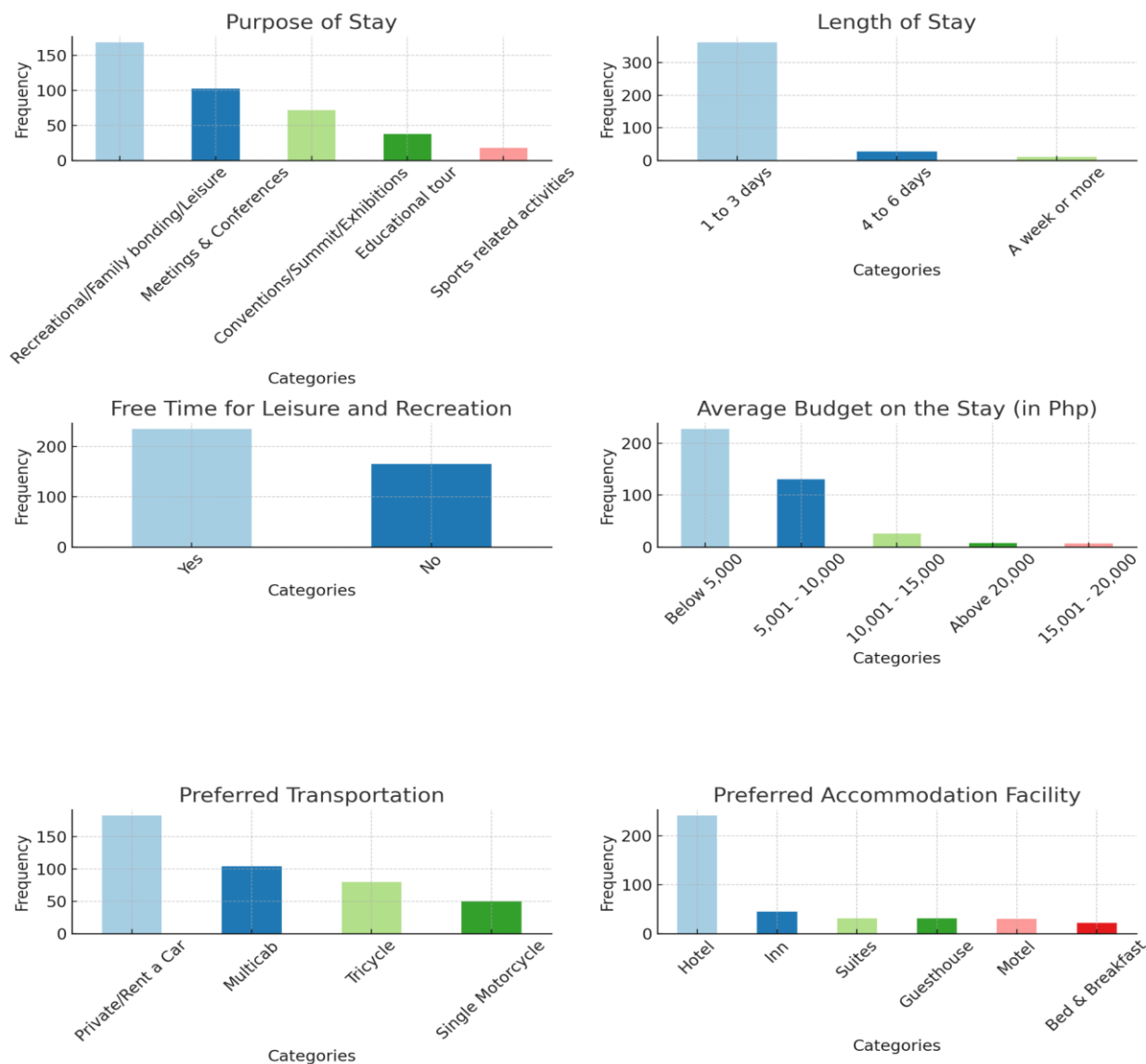


Figure 1. Distribution of responses in terms of their Preferences

Figure 1 presents an analysis of the accommodation preferences among respondents, which reveals that a plurality (37.6%) prioritize leisure and family bonding as the primary motivation for their stay, resonating especially with the most represented age demographic. Other cited reasons for accommodation include attending meetings (22.9%), participating in conventions or exhibitions (16.0%), and engaging in educational tours (12.8%). The data suggest a preference for shorter durations of stay, with a substantial majority (90.5%) favoring one to three-night stays. This trend underscores the importance of leisure facilities in accommodation choices, as supported by 58.8% of respondents who place value on such amenities.

Budget considerations also play a pivotal role, with a majority (57.0%) indicating a preference for spending under 5,000 pesos. This presents a nuanced challenge for accommodations in Butuan City, where room rates typically vary from 1,300 to 4,330 pesos. Despite budgetary constraints, the data indicate a preference for private or rental cars (43.9%) and hotel accommodations (60.2%). This preference may be attributed to the comprehensive facilities and services offered by hotels, which align with the needs and motivations of respondents seeking quality experiences during their temporary stays, as discussed in Cerovic (2003).

Enhancing Tourist Experience in Butuan City: Integrating Balangay Heritage as an Ancillary Service in Accommodation Facilities

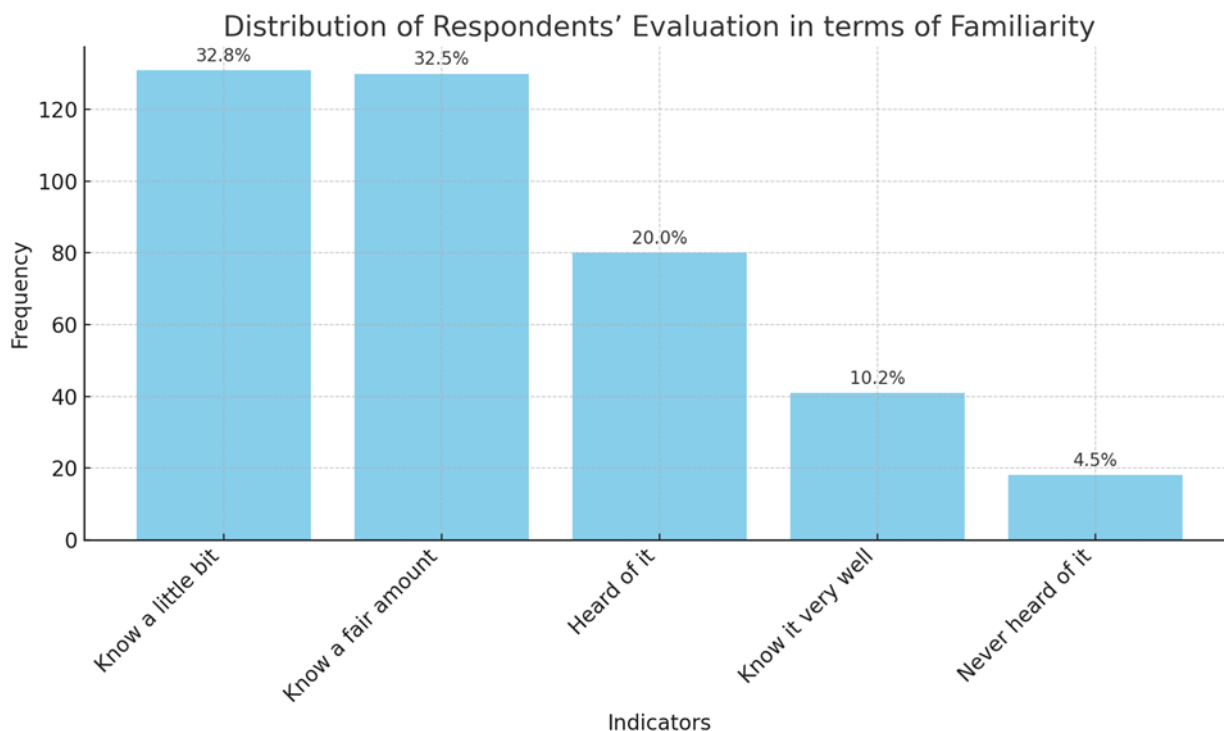


Figure 2. Distribution of the responses in terms of Familiarity

Figure 2 presents a nuanced picture of the respondents' familiarity with the Balangay heritage attraction in Butuan. A majority indicates a basic awareness, with 32.8% acknowledging only a slight acquaintance with the site. Notably, a modest 10.2% exhibit an in-depth knowledge, indicative of a highly informed minority. The data also reveals a notable portion of respondents, amounting to 24.5% combined, who either have not heard of the attraction or possess mere cursory awareness, signaling a potential gap in the attraction's visibility and outreach. This underscores the importance of targeted awareness campaigns, as the data suggests that a significant fraction of the demographic might be overlooked in certain assessments due to a lack of familiarity. The source of this data, accessed on October 2, 2018, is www.visitmyphilippines.com, which underscores the relevance of the findings within the context of the local tourism landscape at that time.

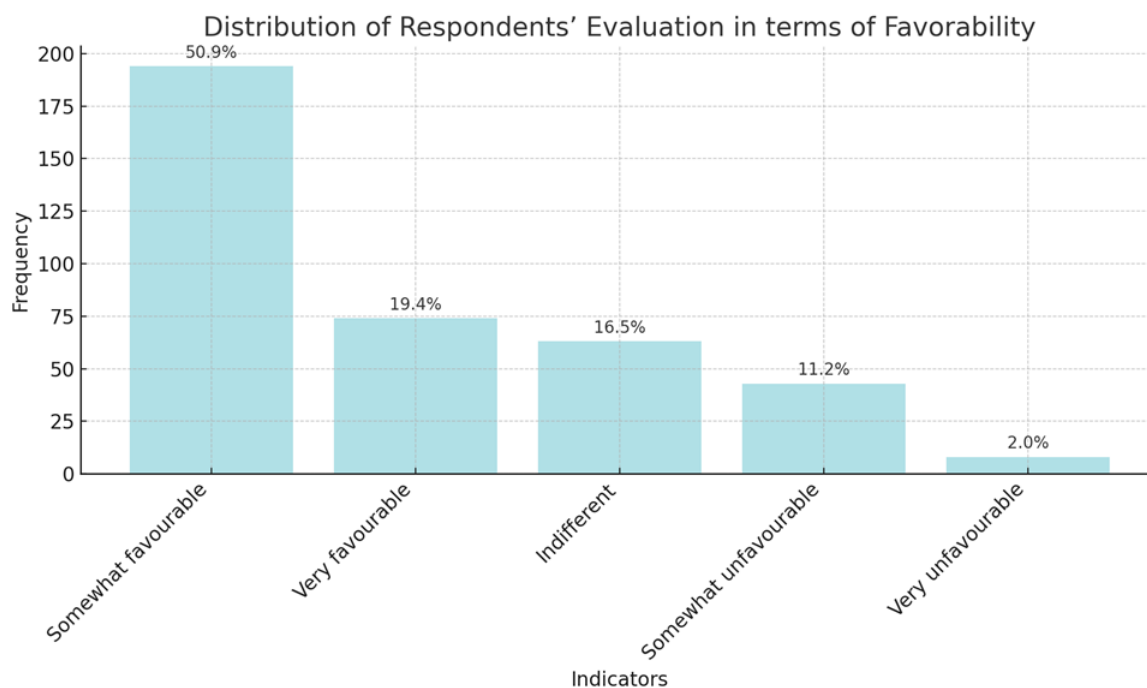


Figure 3. Distribution of responses in terms of Favorability

Enhancing Tourist Experience in Butuan City: Integrating Balangay Heritage as an Ancillary Service in Accommodation Facilities

Figure 3 captures the distribution of respondents' evaluations regarding the integration of the Balangay heritage attraction within select lodging establishments. Over half of the participants (50.9%) have a 'somewhat favorable' opinion, reflecting considerable but not overwhelming enthusiasm for the incorporation of the attraction. Meanwhile, a significant minority of 19.4% show 'very favorable' support, denoting a robust endorsement for the inclusion of the Balangay heritage within hospitality services. This data suggests a general positive inclination towards enhancing accommodation facilities with this cultural element, highlighting potential for increased visitor interest and cultural enrichment. These findings are informed by resources from www.visitmyphilippines.com, as of October 2, 2018, indicating the Balangay's recognized value in the tourism sector.

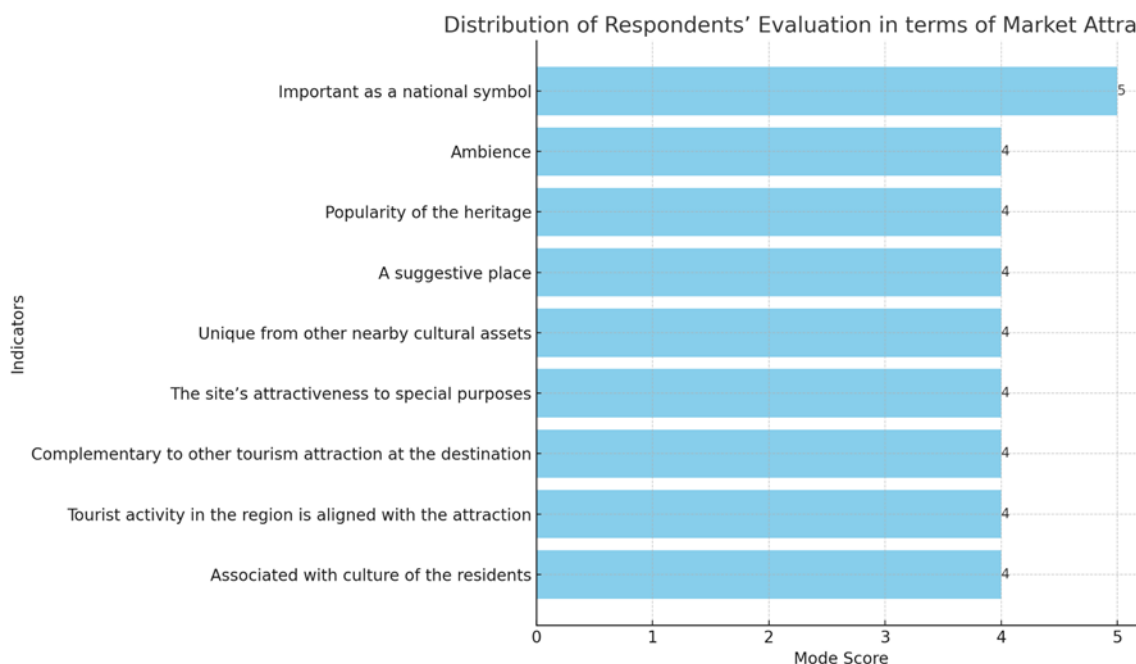


Figure 4. Distribution of responses in terms of Market Attractiveness

Figure 4 delineates a bar chart that assesses respondents' perceptions of market attractiveness in relation to the Balangay heritage site, using a set of nine distinct criteria. The criterion "Important as a national symbol" distinguishes itself with the peak mode score of 5, indicative of "Great" importance, which mirrors the legislative acknowledgment of the Balangay as the Philippines' national boat, as stipulated in HB 7070 (2018). This high rating underlines the profound cultural resonance the Balangay holds as a national emblem. The uniform mode score of 4 for the remaining indicators conveys a generally favorable sentiment, underscoring the site's appeal and reinforcing its viability as a tourist destination, a viewpoint supported by Alexa & Lache (2011) and Holt (1995). These scores collectively affirm the respondents' positive appraisal of the Balangay heritage site's market appeal, suggesting its strong potential to attract tourism and enrich cultural engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion drawn from the study's findings underscores the significant influence of respondents' demographic profiles on their choice of accommodation, highlighting the importance of factors such as educational attainment, sex, civil status, and age in shaping preferences. Moreover, respondents' perception of familiarity with the Balangay heritage attraction and their favorability towards integrating it as an ancillary product are key determinants of their attraction to the site, particularly due to its national cultural importance. However, challenges persist in coordinating between the institutions responsible for managing the attraction, with limited oversight from the City Tourism Office. Despite these hurdles, opportunities for development exist, driven by the high market appeal stemming from the Balangay's perceived national cultural significance.

RECOMMENDATION

Hotel management should segment guest profiles for integrating the heritage attraction with guest rooms, while the Hotel and Restaurant Association can use the study as a reference for revenue-generating activities. Guests should provide feedback to ensure the heritage attraction meets expectations, and tour operators must communicate with hotels for efficient itinerary planning. Local institutions, like the Butuan City tourism office, should coordinate with relevant organizations for site maintenance, and residents can contribute by providing facilities for tourists. Schools should promote the attraction through educational activities, and future researchers should focus on measuring guest satisfaction to drive continuous improvement..

Enhancing Tourist Experience in Butuan City: Integrating Balangay Heritage as an Ancillary Service in Accommodation Facilities

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