

## Local Community Perception Towards Faith Tourism

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**ABSTRACT.** The research explored the local community perception towards faith tourism in Davao City. Qualitative method of research was used conducting an in-depth interview utilizing structured questions. The study was conducted within Davao City choosing 8 informants and from each sector of the society. the findings showed that informants regarded faith tourism as destination-oriented practice of faith and synonymous with religious tourism with the purpose of strengthening their faith through worship and expect God to bless such ordeal. Their perception on the importance of faith tourism concerns about the appearance of the faith tourism destination, wherein half of the informants considered it as secondary matter only while the other half considered it big deal because it affects the decisions of the pilgrims to visit the place. Some informants consider the history and character of the faith tourism destination as important while others consider the worship experience in the said faith tourism destination as the most important factor in faith tourism. Davao city is prepared already with the people's support and government's promotion. The implication of the study concerned about the support of the local government and the department of tourism concerning faith tourism such as its inclusion in promoting tourist spots in the Philippines as well as providing accessibility to the place as well as safety and security for the tourists.

*Keywords: Local Community, Perception, and Faith Tourism*

### INTRODUCTION

Religion business enterprise isn't well researched and documented. Few reliable statistics are accessible relating to its size and price. At intervals the business enterprise in some countries considered holidaymaker arrivals referring to their travel as 'religious' or spiritual journey. There are some exceptions, chief destinations wherever spiritual business enterprise is very standard like Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Israel (Mintel, 2012).

In Europe, the growth of the population is one of the indicators of thye growth of believers in God as well. However, the increase of those who are more inclined to the humanitarian side are departing from their usual religious belief and focusing of new ways of expressing their religious faith. There rarer also many individuals who are not religious by nature but showed curiosity towards religiosity, which is an indication of the growing number of people interested in faith tourism disclosing that spiritual or religious tourism is a big market (Brunn, 2015).

In the Philippines, being able ti immerse in the prevailing traditions as well as customs of the people's religion is one of the factors why a person join religious tourism to a specific area. This specially a matter of fact when one decided to go to the Philippines considering the richness of the place' culture as well as traditions, as can be traced in the Philippines' complex history, wherein various foreign culture influences the people (Cebu-Philippines, 2015). In Davao City, Faith tourism is only visible with the sect the kingdom of Jesus Christ lead by Apollo S. Quiboloy, wherein their prayer mountain attracts visitors and other members from other places visiting the place located at Tamayong, Calinan, Davao City; apart from the place there is no other faith tourism attraction in Davao City.

### METHOD

Qualitative method of research was utilized employing an interview survey with structured questions choosing 8 informants and from each sector of the society. Guide questionnaires were used for the in-depth interviews as the instrument in collecting the needed data for the study. Each informant of the study was approached by the researcher and was asked if they are willing to voluntarily become the informants of the study. Qualitative research method is a method of research that many questions are being asked to appoint in numerous academic disciplines where its goal might differ concerning background such as a psychologist looking to collect a deep perception of human behavior and the reasons such behavior governs (Denzin, 2015).

Informants were separately met by the researchers and bring him/her to a place where there was no disturbance, and they can ask questions wherein the informant (interviewee) can think well and answer accurately the questions. The whole interview was recorded with the permission of the informant for later analysis and input. The format of their interview was semi-structured, in which they were given the list of questions but there still has conversations that were not part of the guide but was still appropriate for the purpose of the study. Data gathered in an Audio form were transcribed, and then translated into English in preparation for analysis and interpretation.

## RESULTS

Majority of the informants claimed that it is a pilgrimage, which is a destination-oriented conviction of belief (I2-1, I2-2, I4-1); majority as well declared that religious people wanted to travel (I3-2, I1-1, I1-2); on the other hand, few reiterated that faith tourism is religious tourism. The purpose of tourism is to worship the Lord God, wherein people wanted to strengthen their beliefs (I1-1, I2-1, I4-2). Some stated that the reason for faith tourism is leisure and pilgrimage seeking retreats and devote their time worshiping God (I1-2, I4-1), others still claimed that Filipinos are devoted Catholics and wanted to participate in religious celebration such as Sinulog (I3-1, I3-2).

Most informants declared that the Muslims are the best example of faith tourism because they really save money in order to travel to Raj (I2-1, I1-1, I1-2, I2-2, I4-2), while only few informants manifested that it's the Catholic because Filipinos are mostly catholic (I3-1, I3-2). Regarding rating themselves from 1 to 10, most informants answered level 8 with varying interest such as having the interest but cannot afford to go (I2-2, I4-2), while others appreciate religious tourism (I2-1, I4-1) while others still wanted to go to Jerusalem to strengthen their faith (I3-1, I3-2). Some of the informants rated their interest 7 with the reason they don't participate in faith tourism but indicated they believe in it (I1-1, I1-2).

Concerning the physical appearance of the destination that affects one's interest in visiting religious sites, the informants expressed their respective perspectives wherein half of the informants declared that physical appearance is secondary, but the story behind (I1-1, I1-2, I2-2, I4-2) while another half claimed that physical appearance can affect decision-making; to see is to believe the site (I3-2, I2-1, I3-1, I4-1). Also, majority of the informants indicated that the most important factors in faith tourism is its history and the characters from religion (I1-2, I2-1, I4-2) as well as pinpointing participation and experience in traveling as the importance of religious destinations (I1-1, I3-2, I4-1). Few however expressed that in visiting religious destinations, physical appearance has a big factor.

Informants acknowledged the potentiality of the Catholic religious group believing that the religious organization is ready to accommodate mass tourism (I2-1, I2-2, I3-1) while some are convince that are the Evangelical Christian churches (I1-1, I1-2) as well as the place itself, Davao City (I3-2, I4-1). Few recommended Muslim faith tourism considering that they are known for their journey to hajj devoted to worship Allah (I4-2). They also believed that faith

tourism can flourish through public support and promotion (I4-1, I2-1, I3-1, I3-2, I4-2) while few express their opinion stating that Davao City is not really poised for faith tourism but has the potential and needs development (I1-1, I1-2, I2-2).

## **DISCUSSIONS**

What comes first in the informants' minds when asked about faith tourism concerns about destination-oriented practice of faith, the realization that faith tourism is actually religious tourism, wherein people travel with the purpose of strengthening their faith; thus, faith tourism concerns about people traveling for religious reason and has something to do with their faith. In the same manner, concerning the reasons why people travel for faith tourism, the informants declared they worship God to strengthen their faith through a pilgrimage where leisure is included and expecting God to bless such ordeal.

Favoring a faith tourism sector to prevail was based by the informants on what they observed such as the Muslim with their organization Islam, wherein they save money whole year round in order to join the Hajj in Mecca, Madina, Saudi Arabia, and having the honor of being called a Hajji. The Catholics' faith tourism is traveling within the country only, visiting other parts of the country celebrating their respective fiesta celebration in the name of a patron and considered their travel as a pilgrim, faith tourism.

Half of the informants consider the physical appearance of the faith tourism as secondary in importance while the other half consider it as something that can influence pilgrims' decision to visit the faith tourism destination, an indication physical appearance is moderately important for the pilgrims visiting the place. When it comes to the value and importance of religious destination, the informants said it lies on its history and character as well as on its physical appearance and the worship experience in the said faith tourism destination should be considered as the most important factor in faith tourism.

About the religious group that has the potentials to become a faith tourism destination, some mentioned the Christian Churches, which refers to evangelical churches, other suggested the Catholic church, considering that this religious organization can accommodate mass tourism and others recommended Muslims with their religion Islam. When it comes to faith tourism flourishing in Davao City, some informants argued that Davao city is not poised for faith tourism as a destination, although it has a potential and needs development for such tourism attraction; others showed positive outlook arguing that faith tourism can flourish in Davao City with the support of the local government and the people as well as promoting it.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that in understanding faith tourism, informants regarded it as destination oriented practice of faith and synonymous with religious tourism with the purpose of strengthening their faith through worship and expect God to bless such ordeal. Their interest on faith tourism sector showed that mostly favoured the Muslims in their dedication with faith tourism striving to reach Mecca annually to join the Hajj while some believed that most Filipinos practice faith tourism by visiting cities that celebrates annual fiestas in honor of their patrons. Their perception on the importance of faith tourism concerns about the appearance of the faith tourism destination, wherein half of the informants considered it as secondary matter only while the other half considered it big deal because it affects the decisions of the pilgrims to visit the place. Some informants consider the history and character of the faith tourism destination as important while others consider the worship experience in the said faith tourism destination as the most important factor in faith tourism. About Davao City as potential faith tourism place, some argued that the religious sector that

can best provide faith tourism destination are the Christian evangelical church, others insist the Catholic church, while others still declared its the Muslims with their religion Islam. Many believed that faith tourism cannot flourish in Davao City, more development is needed others believed, Davao city is prepared already with the people's support and government's promotion.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are given:

The administrators of the local government of Davao City should develop the available tourist spots in Davao City and let the religious organization make their own initiative to attract tourists or members of their organization to visit their respective worship centers and sites, Infrastructure, roads and Transportation will be the support of the local government.

The religious denomination clergies may spread their religion abroad such as the case with Apollo Quiboloy whose religion reaches the shore of USA and other countries, wherein other nationalities belonging to his sect take time to visit Davao City dubbed as faith tourism.

The Davao City residents may treat faith tourism as a new concept in tourism that Davao City is not dependent upon when it comes to tourism considering that tourists coming to Davao city are interested with exotic and rare animals but still support it because it can add to the City's revenue.

The future researchers may conduct similar study, particularly the live experiences of extent of medical tourists in Davao City.

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