

Authenticity and Travel Visits at Pila Heritage Sites: A Foundation for Developing Sustainable Visitor Attractions

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Abstract

This research takes a closer look at how the authenticity of Pila's heritage sites shapes the travel experience and plays a key role in developing sustainable tourist attractions. By diving into the rich history and culture of Pila, we explore how visitors connect with these places, and how the sense of "authenticity" can deepen their experience while helping to preserve what makes these sites special. Our study emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between welcoming visitors and safeguarding the local heritage for future generations. We also reflect on how sustainable tourism can benefit the community, fostering both pride and responsibility. In the end, this paper offers insights into how we can create tourism experiences that are not only memorable and meaningful for travellers but also respectful and supportive of the local culture and environment. This study investigates the authenticity of heritage tourism in Pila, Laguna, Philippines, focusing on the roles of spiritual, experiential, commercial, and architectural authenticity in shaping tourist satisfaction, revisit intentions, and loyalty. Survey data reveal high authenticity perceptions: spiritual authenticity ($M = 3.33$), experiential authenticity ($M = 3.30$), commercial authenticity ($M = 3.47$), and architectural authenticity ($M = 3.63$), all rated as "Very High." The strongest correlations were found between commercial authenticity and tourist loyalty ($r = 0.6375$) and revisit intention ($r = 0.6838$), as well as between experiential authenticity and revisit intention ($r = 0.6264$). These findings highlight the importance of authenticity in fostering long-term visitor engagement, supporting local identity, and contributing to tourism growth.

Keywords: Authenticity, Sustainable, Heritage, Tourism.

1. Introduction

Heritage sites are one of the factors boosting Tourism in different places, it leads to travel demands and interest of tourists for a reason and it benefits every sector in terms of transportation, government, and also the local economy. The modernization and the passage of time affects historical sites in terms of materials, popularity and the authenticity. International organizations like UNESCO assign and maintain heritage sites, which are locations of great cultural or environmental importance. These locations may be natural wonders, historic structures, archeological remains, or cultural landscapes. By displaying human creativity, creative thinking, and our bond with nature, they provide an understanding into the past. Heritage sites serve as more than just tourist destinations; they are stores of information, inspiration, and identity that serve as a constant

reminder of our common past and the value of protecting our natural and cultural heritage for coming generations.

Heritage tourism for one, is prosperous in Pila Laguna. Town Plaza Pila is considered as one of the rare, preserved examples of Spanish colonial town configuration, with the plaza complex surrounded by the church, tribunal, school, and huge ancestral houses of the town's major people as the town's core. Pila is known for its heritage sites in terms of historical houses, buildings and churches, these sites represent and help the sustainable tourism in Laguna also here in the Philippines. It is an old settlement that is thought to have existed prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, as proven by the Laguna Copper Plate Inscription. Pila's original colony was located in what is now part of Victoria town. Because of the continual floods, the town was relocated to Santa Clara in 1800, which is now the current location. The Pila church was the first in the country to be consecrated to Saint Anthony of Padua. The first Spanish-Tagalog dictionary was printed at this church. Father Juan Plascencia, the first priest of the church, was the author of the first book printed in the Philippines in 1593.

In this regard, the researchers conducted a study entitled "Authenticity and Travel Visits to Heritage Sites in Pila, Laguna: Foundation to Sustainable Tourist Attraction. It aimed to determine the relationship between the level of authenticity and travel visits to Pila Heritage Sites.

2. Theoretical background

The model that was utilized in this study is the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT). It is a crucial explanation of how consumers react to external stimuli, and it proposes that individuals evaluate stimuli based on their subjective interpretation of environmental events, personal concerns, historical experiences, and other sensitivities. Evaluation refers to an individual's cognitive response to a stimulus, while emotion is the psychological interpretation of the cognitive evaluation. Consumer behaviour is the specific action that is taken in response to relevant emotions following the evaluation of a stimulus.

3. Research question or Research hypothesis or Problem statement

It specifically tackled to determine the profile of respondents in regards to age, gender and marital status. Also, to measure the level of Authenticity of Pila Heritage Sites in terms of 2.1 Existential Authenticity 2.1.1 Spiritual Authenticity 2.1.2 Experiential Authenticity 2.2 Object-based Authenticity 2.2.1 Commercial Authenticity 2.2.2 Architectural Authenticity and the Frequency of Travel Visits as perceived by Intention to Visit and Tourist Loyalty.

4. Data and methods

Descriptive Correlational research type was utilized in this study to assess the relationship between authenticity and travel visits on how it affects each other and also to discuss the natural phenomenon of the given variables beside to address the factors that highly affect the travel demand and tourist satisfaction in the Heritage sites authenticity at Pila, Laguna. One hundred (100) were chosen randomly to accomplish the questionnaires

5. Results

Table 1 shows the summary of mean results on the Existential Authenticity in terms of Spiritual and Experiential Authenticity.

Table 1. Summary of the Mean Results

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Spiritual Authenticity	3.30	Strongly Agree
Experiential Authenticity	3.33	Strongly Agree
4.00 - 3.00		Strongly Agree
2.99 - 2.00		Agree
1.99 - 1.00		Disagree
1.00 - 0.99		Strongly Disagree

The level of existential authenticity of heritage sites in Pila Laguna in terms of spiritual authenticity attained a remark of Strongly Agree with a mean score of 3.33, a standard deviation of 0.73 and was Very High among the respondents.

Spiritual Authenticity is highly driving tourist interest in Pila, Laguna. It is important to sustain and preserve the originality of old houses in Pila, Laguna, based on data gathered by research using questionnaire tourist deep connections about the authenticity in the heritage sites of Pila, Laguna is a factor that influences their interest in visiting and revisiting the said heritage sites.

This study explores the intersection of spiritual tourism and cultural heritage at sacred sites. It emphasizes how authenticity plays a central role in shaping visitors' spiritual experiences. The authors also discuss how sacred heritage sites balance tourism and spirituality, Collins-Kreiner et. Al. Journal of Heritage Tourism (2020)

The level of existential authenticity of heritage sites in Pila Laguna in terms of experiential authenticity was remarked with Strongly Agree. It has received a mean score of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.76 with its statements being interpreted as Very High.

The result reflects the tourist experience in the authenticity of heritage sites in pila laguna, by sustaining its originality is the best strategy to increase and maintain the travel demand of Pila, Laguna.

Ye, B.H., Qiu, H., & Yuen, P.P. Journal of Travel Research (2020), This study investigates how experiential authenticity affects tourists' motivations and satisfaction during cultural tourism experiences. It looks at how tourists perceive authenticity in various contexts and how it influences their decision-making processes. The perception of experiential authenticity significantly impacts tourist satisfaction, with those seeking "authentic" interactions feeling more fulfilled.

Table 2 shows the summary of mean results on the Object-Based Authenticity in terms of Commercial and Architectural Authenticity.

Table 2. Summary of the Mean Results

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Commercial Authenticity	3.47	Strongly Agree
Architectural Authenticity	3.54	Strongly Agree

The level of object-based authenticity of heritage sites in Pila Laguna in terms of commercial authenticity got a mean score of 3.47 and a standard deviation of 0.74 gaining a remark of Strongly Agree and the statements interpreted as Very High.

4.00 - 3.00

2.99 - 2.00

Strongly Agree

Agree

The analysis highlights strong community support for the economic benefits of heritage sites in Pila, Laguna, particularly in boosting the local economy through tourism and employment. The importance of amenities for enhancing visitor experience is also recognized, though willingness to engage in educational campaigns is less pronounced. Overall, the perceived commercial authenticity of these sites is very high, reflecting their significant economic value.

The study highlights the economic, social, and cultural benefits of cultural heritage preservation, emphasizing

its role in fostering community empowerment, sustainable tourism development, and cultural diplomacy. By integrating cultural heritage into destination branding strategies, leveraging technology to create immersive experiences, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and adopting sustainable tourism practices, destinations can enhance the quality and satisfaction of tourists while preserving their cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

On the other hand, garnering an overall mean of 3.54 and a standard deviation of 0.71, the level of object-based authenticity of heritage sites in Pila Laguna in terms of architectural authenticity was verbally interpreted as Very High.

The analysis reveals strong community support for preservation efforts at Pila, Laguna, particularly in maintaining architectural and cultural integrity. Despite a slightly lower score for the overall condition of historical structures, the perceived authenticity remains very high, highlighting their cultural significance.

The study of Hatice Aysegül Demir et al. The presented study shows that the rare structural characteristics can both contribute to structural safety and cause vulnerability. Therefore, total consciousness in structural design cannot be stated for the studied Bedesten, but the structural designs that are often preferred in the monuments built at the same period in the proximity to each other have low vulnerability, yielding to conscious preferences.

Table 3 shows the summary of mean results on Frequency of Travel Visits as perceived by Intention to Visit and Tourist Loyalty.

Table 3. Summary of the Mean Results

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Intention to Visit	3.45	Strongly Agree
Tourist Loyalty	3.53	Strongly Agree

4.00 - 3.00	Strongly Agree
2.99 - 2.00	Agree
1.99 - 1.00	Disagree
1.00 – 0.99	Strongly Disagree

Generally, with respect to the frequency of travel visits of heritage sites in Pila Laguna in terms of intention to visit achieved a mean score of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 0.75. It was remarked with Strongly Agree, and the statements were interpreted as Very High.

Guat-Tham See et al (2019) In addition to the current literature, this research examined the impact of price, experience quality, prior knowledge, authenticity, and social influence on tourists' intention to visit heritage hotels in George Town, Penang. It also explores the role of perceived value in this relationship. Findings reveal that all these factors have a significant positive effect in enhancing tourists' visitation intentions. Moreover, the study proves that perceived value is a regulator and has an adjustment effect on how the other factors correlate to intention to visit. This research also provides a few vital implications for practitioners, giving knowledge of the attributes that draw tourists to heritage hotels and some guidelines for the hotel owners or managers regarding how to adapt tourism strategies in their businesses.

The statements under the frequency of travel visits of heritage sites in Pila, Laguna in terms of tourist loyalty

garnered a mean score of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.69 receiving a remark of Strongly Agree, with the statements being interpreted as Very High among the respondents. Pila, Laguna, appears to be a historical tourism location with high levels of tourist satisfaction and loyalty, according to the data. The local tourism industry has proven strong, and relying on and managing these factors, along with the opportunities that present themselves, can only help the region's development.

Juan Antonio Imber et al. The aim of this research is to offer suggestions to Córdoba's heritage facilities that will assist managers in creating a better visitor experience. It turns out that promoting visitor happiness is the primary selling point since it increases public loyalty to tourism destinations. According to other studies, contented visitors are more likely to return and tell their friends about the location. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the main factors that influence heritage visitors' loyalty in a city with a rich cultural legacy and great history

6. Conclusions

1. Architectural authenticity scored highest at 3.54, reflecting a preference for preservation and design, while commercial authenticity also ranked well, emphasizing local experiences. In contrast, spiritual and experiential authenticity scored lower, indicating a focus on tangible aspects over cultural or personal connections
2. Tourist loyalty in Pila, Laguna ranked second, showing strong attachment, but intention to revisit ranked fourth, indicating moderate future interest and the need for continued engagement
3. The researchers reject the null hypothesis, finding a significant relationship between authenticity of heritage sites and travel visits in Pila, Laguna.
4. The researchers recommend a workshop to enhance authenticity and encourage visits to heritage sites in Pila, Laguna.

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