



Tourists' perception of destination attractiveness and propensity in the tourism industries in Zamboanga Del Norte

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine destination attractiveness and its effects on tourists' destination propensity and preferences in Zamboanga del Norte's tourism industry during Calendar Year 2023. It employed descriptive survey and descriptive correlational research methods. The statistical tools used were the weighted mean, standard deviation, and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient, with hypotheses tested at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that tourism destinations in Zamboanga del Norte were perceived as highly attractive and highly preferred. A significant and strong positive correlation between destination attractiveness and destination propensity/preference was also found. Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that the Department of Tourism use this study as a model of best practice and share it with other provinces. Local Government Units (LGUs) may also consider the results as a basis for policy formulation to enhance local tourism and revenue. In addition, managers of tourism establishments may use the findings to improve service delivery. Finally, tourists and future researchers may benefit from the study's contribution to tourism planning and development.

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Introduction

Tourism is now a significant global economic and recreational activity due to its growing popularity and benefits. Countries conduct various marketing and promotional activities to attract more tourists and enhance their satisfaction. If a destination can meet the needs and desires of tourists, they are likely to return and generate positive word-of-mouth promotion. (Gnanapala, 2015). This global phenomenon has transformed travel from a luxury for the few to an accessible leisure activity for many. As a result, the

tourism industry generates significant employment opportunities, contributes to infrastructure development, and fosters cultural exchange between visitors and local communities (Gnanapala, 2015; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). However, the rapid growth of tourism also poses challenges, including environmental strain and the need for responsible tourism practices to ensure the sustainability of destinations (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2020).

Destination attractiveness plays an important role in influencing tourists' destination choices, as it is defined as the perceived capability of a destination to provide individual benefits (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017). Attractiveness is a significant factor in social interactions and interpersonal dynamics, as it is defined as the ability to generate interest and attract others' attention. On the other hand, the Philippines welcomed 5,450,557 international visitors in 2023, well above the 4.8 million target arrivals set earlier by the Department of Tourism (DOT) for the entire year. Of this number, 91.80 percent or 5,003,475 are foreigners, while the remaining are 447,082 overseas Filipinos (Rocamora, 2024).

Currently, several tourism industries regard tourists' preferences as a significant factor in determining service quality (Tapak et al., 2019). Tourists' perceptions of a destination's appeal and likelihood of visiting are important indicators of tourism interest and have substantial research value. Tourists must select a destination for destination marketers to better understand the destination's competitive position in the market. This information can then be combined with tourist preferences and satisfaction. (Xu, 2020). Tourists are inclined to favor individuals who provide rewards or exhibit behavior beneficial to them (Kim et al., 2020).

Dey et al. (2020) stated that destination attractiveness has a moderated relationship with propensity. Furthermore, it indicated that tourist attractiveness is significantly associated with destination preferences. The study findings suggested that cultural and rural attractiveness play an important part in influencing tourists' destination choices. This highlighted the importance of emphasizing these aspects in promotional campaigns by both government and private organizations. This aligned with the concept of homestays serving as a platform to exhibit ethnic culture and local attractions to tourists. (Joshi, 2018).

Several studies, both domestic and international, have examined tourists' perceptions of attractiveness and behavioral preferences regarding travel destinations. For instance, research in the Philippines has shown a preference for nature-based activities and budget-friendly options, particularly among millennials. (Ruña & Diamante, 2020). Additionally, studies in Davao City highlighted the importance of understanding local tourist behavior, with a focus on natural attractions during the pandemic (Alcaraz et al., 2023). However, most researchers have utilized various structural models to forecast tourist behavior. Other studies have used only one or two aspects to offer a comprehensive understanding of tourists' behavior before, during, and after experiencing tourism products. (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Within the Philippines, the Zamboanga Peninsula, particularly Zamboanga City, has emerged as a popular tourist destination (National Economic and Development Authority Region IX, 2023). Data from the National Economic and Development Authority Region IX (NEDA IX) revealed a significant disparity in tourist arrivals between Zamboanga City and Zamboanga del Norte, with Zamboanga City attracting a considerably higher number of domestic and foreign tourists. In 2023, Zamboanga City

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received 140,380 domestic and 222 foreign tourists, while Zamboanga del Norte received only 47,646 domestic and 259 foreign tourists (National Economic and Development Authority Region IX, 2023).

This disparity in tourist arrivals between geographically proximate locations within the same region presented a compelling research gap. While existing studies explored the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourist propensity (Dey et al., 2020), a deeper understanding of these factors specific to Zamboanga del Norte is lacking. Although Zamboanga del Norte boasts various natural attractions and cultural experiences, it appears to lag behind Zamboanga City in attracting tourists.

The researcher investigated tourist behavior by considering factors such as destination attractiveness, tourists' propensity, and preferences. This study's findings provided valuable insights into the tourism industry in Zamboanga del Norte. Investigating tourist behavior in Zamboanga del Norte through the lens of destination attractiveness and propensity can bridge this knowledge gap. Understanding tourists' perceptions of the province's attractiveness and their propensity to visit yields valuable insights. These insights can be used by stakeholders in Zamboanga del Norte's tourism industry to develop targeted marketing strategies and service offerings that cater to specific tourist preferences. Ultimately, this research can contribute to the sustainable growth and development of the tourism industry in Zamboanga del Norte, enabling the province to compete more effectively within the region.

Literature review

Destination attractiveness

Destination attractiveness is defined by Johnson (2017) as the ability of a location to satisfy tourist needs through the availability, quantity, and management of local services. This attractiveness translates into a complete leisure experience, offering mental escape, relaxation, unique experiences, and physical well-being.

Obaid (2014) builds on this concept by introducing destination preference. Preference refers to a tourist's preference for a specific destination relative to others. It directly influences destination choice and can serve as a measure of attractiveness. Obaid describes preference as a psychological commitment and a positive attitude towards a place, leading to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Employee travel motivations and activity preferences mirror those of tourists, according to Al-Ansi & Han (2019). They argue that destination activities serve as pull factors – aspects that actively draw tourists. These pull factors are further categorized into destination attributes that influence tourists' decisions. They encompass external, tangible resources a destination possesses, as well as tourist perceptions and expectations.

Destination propensity

The preference is the degree to which consumers prefer one commodity to another. It is a subjective description method that can reflect certain emotions and tendencies in people's hearts. Preferences have individual characteristics and group characteristics. In other words, a group with common characteristics

exhibits similar theoretical patterns (Sander et al., 2018). In addition, tourists' preference for tourism destination choice means that some common factors will affect tourism destination choice by groups of tourists with specific characteristics (Lindner-Cendrowska & Błazejczyk, 2018). Moreover, Preferences for destination selection directly affect the development trajectory of outbound tourism. Therefore, predicting destination preference is of great significance. At present, many scholars have conducted research on the choice of tourism destinations and have achieved certain theoretical results (Ma & Kuik, 2018).

In addition, characteristics of tourism destination selection preference can be divided into tourist characteristics, tourism destination characteristics, and their interaction. -The essential characteristics of passenger characteristics are mainly described from the granularity of passenger operation number, passenger expense number, passenger days, and passenger time (Chen et al., 2019). On the other hand, the greater the resemblance between visitors' and tourism destination selection preferences, the more likely tourists' preferences will be reflected in tourism destination selection (Artuger & Cetinsoz, 2017). Travel preferences are the activities and places people would like to engage in or visit. Millennials, also called Generation Y, significantly impact the travel and tourism industry as they reach their peak earning years and spending power (Ruña & Diamante, 2020).

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 3. First, the independent variable: destination attractiveness, with twenty-four (24) items. Lastly, destination propensity with seventeen (17) items (Johnson, 2017).

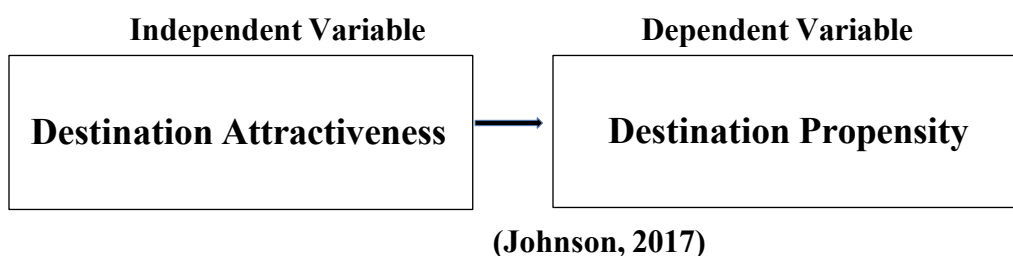


Figure 3. Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 1: The framework reflects a correlation between destination attractiveness and destination propensity. The study intends to examine the influence of destination attractiveness and destination propensity.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the attractiveness of destinations and its effects on tourist destination propensity in Zamboanga del Norte in 2023.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the respondents' perceived level of destination attractiveness?

2. What is the respondents' perceived level of destination propensity?
3. Is there a significant relationship between destination attractiveness and destination propensity?

Hypothesis

Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant influence of destination attractiveness and destination propensity (Johnson, 2017). Building on this research, the current study seeks to explore the effects and relationships between destination attractiveness and destination propensity.

Scope and limitations of the study

This study is limited to destination attractiveness and propensity/preferences among three hundred sixty-six (366) valid respondents out of three hundred eighty (380) who were initially surveyed. Only responses without errors or inconsistencies were included in the analysis. These are tourists in Dakak Resort and Properties, Gloria de Dapitan, Manuels Resort, Dipolog City Boulevard, Viewpoint at Tinindugan Osmeña, Rizal's Shrine, and Linabo Peak in Zamboanga del Norte during the calendar year 2023.

Research methodology

The study included survey and descriptive-correlational research methods. The survey method was employed, with data collected via a questionnaire. Survey research is a general term for standardized, mass-administered questioning of a representative sample of individuals from the population under study (Coe et al., 2021). On the other hand, correlational research is a type of non-experimental research method in which a researcher measures variables, understands them, and assesses the statistical relationship between them, with no influence from extraneous variables (Bhat, 2019). A correlational analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between destination attractiveness and destination propensity.

The researcher obtained formal permission from key stakeholders in Zamboanga del Norte's tourism industry to administer and distribute questionnaires for data collection in Calendar Year 2023. The study focused on major tourism sites in Dapitan City, including Dakak Resort and Properties, Gloria de Dapitan, and Rizal's Shrine. Other covered locations included Manuel's Resort in the Municipality of Piñan, the Dipolog City Boulevard, Linabo Peak in Barangay Lugdungan, Dipolog City, and the Viewpoint in Tinindugan, Sergio Osmeña. In compliance with basic research ethics, the researcher observed informed participation, confidentiality, and proper handling of responses. Considering that the study involved no sensitive topics and posed minimal risk to participants, a full ethical review was deemed unnecessary.

The following ranges of values with their descriptive interpretation will be used:

Destination attractiveness

Scale	Range of Values	Description	Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	Strongly agree	Very Highly Attractive(VHA)
4	3.41-4.20	Agree	Highly Attractive (HA)

3	2.61-3.40	Somewhat Agree	Average Attractive (AA)
2	1.81-2.60	Disagree	Low Attractive (LA)
1	1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Attractive (VLA)

Destination propensity/preference

Scale	Range of Values	Description	Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	Strongly agree	Very Highly Preferred (VHP)
4	3.41-4.20	Agree	Highly Preferred (HP)
3	2.61-3.40	Somewhat Agree	Average Preferred (AP)
2	1.81-2.60	Disagree	Lowly Preferred (LP)
1	1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very Lowly Preferred (VLP)

Data presentation and analysis

The data are presented in accordance with the statement of the problems of the current study. The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the respondents' perceived level of destination attractiveness?

Table 1: *Perceived level of destination attractiveness*

Destination Attractiveness	Mean	SD	D	I
1. The destination must have infrastructure in place (e.g., roads, buildings, and utilities)	4.41	0.77	SA	VHA
2. The destination must have health and medical facilities in place to serve tourists	4.45	0.80	SA	VHA
3. The destination must have telecommunication systems available (e.g., Wi-Fi, internet, and cell phone usage/reception)	4.43	0.80	SA	VHA
4. The destination must have a public safety and security system in place	4.56	0.71	SA	VHA
5. The destination must have transportation services in place (e.g., taxis, Uber, rental cars, and a metro system)	4.37	0.79	SA	VHA
6. Destination must have a sustainability plan	4.39	0.78	SA	VHA
7. Destination must have historic/heritage sites to visit (e.g., historic landmarks and historic buildings)	4.45	0.74	SA	VHA
8. The destination must have artistic architectural features to visit (e.g., art galleries, museums, and statues)	4.47	0.69	SA	VHA
9. The destination must have local foods and authentic cuisines	4.52	0.71	SA	VHA
10. Destination must have special events or festivals to attend (e.g., sporting events and cultural festivals)	4.36	0.80	SA	VHA
11. The destination must have a variety of lodging options	4.35	0.78	SA	VHA
12. The destination must have an accessible airport facility	4.23	0.89	SA	VHA
13. Destination must have access to user-friendly tourist information (e.g., visitor centers and tour guides)	4.46	0.73	SA	VHA

14. Destination must be clean and sanitary	4.63	0.59	SA	VHA
15. The destination must have natural attractions/scenery (e.g., mountains, beaches, lakes, etc.)	4.63	0.59	SA	VHA
16. The destination must have water-based activities (e.g., swimming, snorkeling, jet skiing, rafting, etc.)	4.40	0.76	SA	VHA
17. The destination must have nature-based activities (e.g., hiking, mountain climbing, and camping)	4.48	0.73	SA	VHA
18. The destination must have a climate for winter-based activities (e.g., skiing)	4.09	1.02	A	HA
19. The destination must have a climate for summer-based activities	4.39	0.77	SA	VHA
20. The destination must have recreational facilities/sports events	4.38	0.77	SA	VHA
21. Destination must have access to shopping facilities	4.29	0.80	SA	VHA
22. The destination must have a local support opportunity (e.g., community service, volunteerism, medical tourism, and agricultural tourism)	4.46	0.72	SA	VHA
23. Destination must have access to amusement/theme parks	4.43	0.73	SA	VHA
24. Destination must have a nightlife (e.g., casinos, bars, clubs, and concerts)	4.14	0.95	A	HA
Overall	4.41	0.78	SA	VHA

Source: (Johnson, 2017)

Table 1 presents the respondents' perceived level of destination attractiveness. The results indicate that the respondents **strongly agree** that a destination should: have adequate infrastructure (e.g., roads, buildings, and utilities); provide health and medical facilities; offer telecommunication systems (e.g., Wi-Fi, internet, and reliable mobile reception); ensure public safety and security; provide transportation services (e.g., taxis, ride-hailing services, rental cars, and metro systems); implement a sustainability plan; feature historic or heritage sites (e.g., landmarks and historic buildings); showcase artistic and architectural attractions (e.g., art galleries, museums, and statues); offer local foods and authentic cuisines; host special events or festivals (e.g., sporting events and cultural festivals); provide a variety of lodging options; have an accessible airport facility; offer user-friendly tourist information (e.g., visitor centers and tour guides); maintain cleanliness and sanitation; provide natural attractions and scenery (e.g., mountains, beaches, and lakes); offer water-based activities (e.g., swimming, snorkeling, jet skiing, and rafting); provide nature-based activities (e.g., hiking, mountain climbing, and camping); have a climate suitable for summer-based activities; provide recreational facilities and sports events; offer access to shopping facilities; provide opportunities for local support (e.g., community service, volunteerism, medical tourism, and agricultural tourism); and offer access to amusement or theme parks.

The respondents also agree that a destination should have a climate suitable for winter-based activities (e.g., skiing) and provide nightlife options (e.g., casinos, bars, clubs, and concerts). Overall, destination attractiveness had a mean of 4.41 and a standard deviation of 0.78, indicating a strong agreement and interpreted as very highly attractive. The standard deviation suggests relative homogeneity in the respondents' ratings. These results imply that the tourism industry in Zamboanga del Norte is perceived as very highly attractive to both local and foreign tourists. This finding aligns with Garganian (2023),

who reported that the level of destination image in the third district of Zamboanga del Norte was **very high**, with an overall mean of **4.48** and a standard deviation of **0.66**. Similarly, Aunalal et al. (2017) noted that tourism destinations benefit from a positive strategic focus that strengthens their image among actual and potential tourists.

3. What is the respondents' perceived level of destination propensity?

Table 2: *Perceived level of destination propensity.*

Destination Propensity/Preference	Mean	SD	D	Interpretation
1. I prefer a destination with telecommunication systems available (e.g., Wi-Fi, internet, and cell phone usage/reception)	4.56	0.64	SA	VHP
2. I prefer a destination with artistic architectural features to visit (e.g., art galleries, museums, and statues)	4.48	0.69	SA	VHP
3. I prefer a destination with local foods and authentic cuisines	4.58	0.64	SA	VHP
4. I prefer a destination with special events or festivals to attend (e.g., sporting events and cultural festivals)	4.47	0.69	SA	VHP
5. I prefer a destination based on the climate (e.g., summer or winter)	4.35	0.83	SA	VHP
6. I prefer a destination based on the nightlife (e.g., casinos, bars, clubs, and concerts)	4.12	0.99	A	HP
7. I prefer a destination with shopping facilities	4.36	0.80	SA	VHP
8. I prefer a destination based on its currency exchange rate	4.19	0.90		
9. I prefer a destination based on its cost of living	4.34	0.80	SA	VHP
10. I prefer a destination based on my personal income	4.37	0.82	SA	VHP
11. I prefer a destination with ease of obtaining a visa or passport	4.26	0.91	SA	VHP
12. I select a destination based on advertisement through TV/online services to be (e.g., Cable, Netflix, and Hulu)	4.15	0.89	A	HP
13. I select a destination based on an advertisement through social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.)	4.31	0.78	SA	VHP
14. I select a destination based on word of mouth from friends and family	4.40	0.71	SA	VHP
15. I prefer a destination that provides travel packages	4.43	0.74	SA	VHP
16. I prefer a destination that provides access to online/mobile travel booking	4.48	0.71	SA	VHP
17. I prefer a destination based on its reputation/ perception	4.48	0.69	SA	VHP
Overall	4.37	0.79	SA	VHP

Source: (Johnson, 2017)

Table 2 presents the respondents' perceived level of destination propensity/preference. The results show

that the respondents strongly agree that they prefer destinations that: have available telecommunication systems (e.g., Wi-Fi, internet, and reliable mobile reception); offer artistic and architectural features to visit (e.g., art galleries, museums, and statues); provide local foods and authentic cuisines; host special events or festivals (e.g., sporting events and cultural festivals); are suitable based on climate (e.g., summer or winter); offer shopping facilities; are favorable in terms of currency exchange rates and cost of living; fit their personal income; allow ease of obtaining a visa or passport; are advertised through social media (e.g., Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.); are recommended through word of mouth from friends and family; provide travel packages; offer access to online or mobile travel booking; and have a good reputation or positive perception.

The respondents also agree that they prefer destinations with nightlife options (e.g., casinos, bars, clubs, and concerts) and those advertised on TV or through online streaming services (e.g., cable, Netflix, and Hulu). Overall, destination propensity/preference had a mean of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 0.79, indicating a strong agreement and a very high preference. The standard deviation indicates relative homogeneity in the responses. This finding suggests that the tourism industry in Zamboanga del Norte is highly preferred by respondents, which may be attributed to the very high quality of its services. This is supported by Garganian (2023), who asserted that the service quality of the tourism industry in the third congressional district of Zamboanga del Norte is very high. Likewise, Munnir et al. (2025) noted that the availability, affordability, and convenience of tourism transportation infrastructure, which enhance accessibility and overall destination quality, tend to contribute to the success of rural tourism destinations.

3. Is there a significant relationship between destination attractiveness and destination propensity?

Table 3: *Test of the relationship between the levels of destination attractiveness and destination propensity*

Variables	rho value	p-value	Interpretation
Destination attractiveness vs Destination propensity	0.52	< 0.01	Large/High Positive Correlation Significant

Source: (Johnson, 2017)

Table 3 presents the test of the relationship between destination attractiveness and destination propensity/preference. Using the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho), the analysis yielded a rho value of 0.52 and a p-value of < 0.01, indicating a statistically significant, strong positive correlation between destination attractiveness and destination propensity/preference. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding implies that destination propensity/preference increases with destination attractiveness. In other words, destination attractiveness has a strong positive influence on destination propensity/preference. Consistent with this result, Garganian (2023) reported a significant moderate positive correlation between destination image and tourist satisfaction, and a significant strong positive correlation between the quality of tourist services and tourist satisfaction.

Discussion

The study theoretically reinforces destination-attractiveness thinking by showing that tourists' evaluations of core destination attributes (e.g., safety, cleanliness, authentic local cuisine, heritage/nature offerings, infrastructure, and visitor-support services) are strongly aligned with their destination propensity or preference, as evidenced by the significant positive correlation; in effect, it supports the view that "attractiveness" functions as a practical bundle of perceived benefits that translates into stronger intention to choose, revisit, recommend, and prioritize a destination.

Practically, the results imply that Zamboanga del Norte's tourism stakeholders can increase tourists' preference by protecting and enhancing the attributes already rated very highly (particularly sanitation/cleanliness, natural scenery, and safety) while addressing comparatively lower-rated dimensions (e.g., winter-climate activities and nightlife, if strategically relevant), strengthening enabling conditions (reliable connectivity, accessible tourist information, transport linkages, and convenient online booking), and building integrated, site-to-site experiences that convert strong perceptions into longer stays and repeat visits; this aligns with using the findings for DOT benchmarking and LGU policy focus on experience quality, sustainability planning, and service standards.

Key limitations of the study include the use of a cross-sectional, self-report survey design that cannot establish causal direction; the concentration of respondents in selected major sites (e.g., Dakak, Gloria de Dapitan, Boulevard, Rizal Shrine, Linabo Peak, Tinindugan viewpoint, Manuel's Resort), which may limit generalizability to other municipalities and emerging destinations; possible response and social desirability bias; and the exclusion of other influential variables (e.g., satisfaction, perceived value, destination image, service quality, travel constraints, risk perceptions, spending profile) that may mediate or moderate the attractiveness propensity link.

Future studies may address these limits by using broader, province-wide sampling across peak/off-peak seasons; adding qualitative interviews or focus groups to explain *why* certain attributes drive preference; employing multivariate/SEM models to test mediators (e.g., satisfaction, perceived value) and moderators (e.g., age, trip purpose, first-time vs repeat visitors); and adopting longitudinal or pre-post designs to evaluate whether specific LGU/DOT interventions (cleanliness programs, wayfinding, digital information systems, events, transport improvements) measurably increase destination propensity and actual revisit behavior.

Conclusions

Tourists generally view Zamboanga del Norte as an attractive destination and exhibit a strong tendency to select, revisit, and recommend its key tourism sites. The study concludes that destination attractiveness, reflected in the overall quality of experiences, availability of essential services, safety, cleanliness, accessibility, and authentic cultural and natural offerings, significantly influences tourists' destination propensity or preference. Thus, enhancing and sustaining the province's core attractions while strengthening enabling support systems such as reliable information services, connectivity, convenient booking options, and well-managed events can further improve tourists' preferences and contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Authors' contribution: Conceptualization, research methodology, data gathering, and analysis are performed by the authors.

Conflict of interest statement: All authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical review statement: The research is submitted to the ethical review committee and approved for the conduct of the study. It does not involve human-sensitive issues.

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