
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Influence of Manaoag Church in Tourist Motivation towards Religious Tourism

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| ABSTRACT

This research delves into the aspects of Religious Tourism. In the Philippines, the abundance of religious sites and activities plays an important role in fostering pilgrimage and enhancing the significance of religious tourism. This study examines the influence of Manaoag Church on tourists' travel motivation. The primary aim of this study is to know the influence of Manaoag Church on tourist motivation towards Religious Tourism. A descriptive research approach and quantitative method were used for this study. In addition, the researchers conducted a convenience sampling survey with a total of 400 respondents, specifically 400 tourists visiting Manaoag Church. The study adapts the theory of Icek Ajzen – Theory of Planned Behavior and John Crompton – Destination Image Theory. The TPB is utilized to explore the motivations that drive tourists to visit the Manaoag Church, focusing on how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence their intentions. Concurrently, Destination Image Theory is applied to assess how the Manaoag Church influences tourist motivations through beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Based on the results, the researchers were able to identify the motivation of the tourists to visit Manaoag Church regarding leisure, perceived benefits, perceived risks, family and peer influence, religious community influence, accessibility of religious sites, financial resources, and previous experience. It showed that the majority of the visitors were females who are 21–30 years old, who are Roman Catholic and visited the site 1-3 times per year. It was also revealed that there was no significant difference in the respondents' assessment of the influence of Manaoag Church in the tourist motivation towards religious tourism when grouped according to frequency of visit in terms of beliefs, emotions, and behavior. In other words, whether a respondent has visited the church once, several times, or more frequently, their assessment of the church's influence on their motivation remains consistent. This could indicate that Manaoag Church's role in religious tourism has a universal appeal or significance, transcending the number of visits a person has made.

| KEYWORDS

Religion, religious tourism, religious site, tourist motivation, minor basilica of our lady of the rosary of manaoag, pilgrimage, pilgrims

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 12 November 2024

PUBLISHED: 18 December 2024

DOI: [10.32996/jths.2024.2.2.3](https://doi.org/10.32996/jths.2024.2.2.3)

1. Introduction

In recent years, Religious Tourism has been considered as one of the growing activities of people in the world. Religious Tourism, which includes travel motivated by personal reason, faith, spiritual growth, and cultural exploration, is a growing sector in the tourism industry, the presence of numerous religious sites and activities makes it more significant in promoting pilgrimage and religious tourism. Along with this, it is deemed important to further understand the motivation of tourists to travel for religious tourism. Tourist motivation is an important factor in understanding why people choose to visit religious sites. The reasons behind why individuals travel to religious sites can vary. Understanding what drives people to visit religious landmarks is essential for making these visits more meaningful and engaging.

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Manaoag Church, a well-known pilgrimage site in the Philippines, attracts many visitors, especially those seeking religious and spiritual experiences. The church is famous for its image of Our Lady of the Rosary of Manaoag, which holds great religious significance for many people. Hence, this study aimed to determine how the Manaoag Church influences the travel motivation of those who visit it as part of their religious tourism experience. It was found that Manaoag Church contributes to the religious experience of the tourists by the church history, environment, and religious practices that may affect tourists' views and behavior. The importance of this study is that the tourism sector is going to be aware of the visitors' various motivation to engage in religious tourism. Through the insights gained from this study, they will be able to identify the specific roles of the religious sites that have a significant impact on the travel motivation of their visitors, which will enable the development of more effective strategies to increase tourist engagement in religious tourism in the Philippines. Thus, this study will fill the gap, adding to knowledge in the field of religious tourism.

2. Literature Review

Religious tourism has evolved into a dynamic field that combines spiritual and secular interests, making it appealing to diverse groups worldwide. Religious tourism has been a significant form of travel, with nearly a million individuals visiting major pilgrimage sites worldwide (Amac & Cornell., 2022). Baek et al. (2022) emphasize that, unlike early pilgrims motivated solely by spiritual exploration or supernatural encounters, modern religious tourists have a mix of personal and religious reasons for their journeys. Rosak-Szyrocka et al. (2023) add that religious tourism, like other tourism sectors, continues to change with improved transportation, accommodations, and accessibility to religious sites across borders. These changes allow a broad spectrum of visitors, including those with secular motivations, to explore culturally and spiritually significant destinations integrating religious tourism into the global tourism landscape.

Religious sites play a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of religious tourism, significantly impacting both the tourism industry and local economies. These sites attract a diverse range of visitors, both domestic and international, serving not only as pilgrimage destinations but also as cultural hubs that promote local heritage and facilitate intercultural exchange. According to Ruru et al. (2022), religious tourism enriches travelers' spiritual lives and enhances overall life satisfaction, while the economic benefits are underscored by Rosak-Szyrocka et al. (2023), who note that the attraction of religious sites stimulates local economies through tourism infrastructure improvements, such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation networks.

Manaoag Church in the Philippines exemplifies this phenomenon, drawing significant numbers of visitors due to its reputation as a spiritual center and pilgrimage site. The church not only highlights the importance of religious tourism in promoting cultural heritage but also demonstrates its role in fostering economic growth within the tourism sector. As Yu et al. (2023) emphasize, religion is a powerful cultural element that profoundly influences both daily life and travel habits. This influence is further elaborated by Liutikas (2021), who discusses how pilgrimage experiences can help individuals discover and affirm their social or personal identities. Moreover, Muthuswamy & Alshiha (2023) argue that religious travel encourages ecumenical dialogue and cultural immersion, allowing visitors to engage with people from diverse religious backgrounds and fostering interfaith understanding and respect.

Manaoag Church stands as a prominent destination for Religious Tourism, particularly during significant periods such as Holy Week. According to the Philippine News Agency (2024), the church attracted approximately 600,000 visitors during Holy Week in 2024, underscoring its importance as a spiritual site. One of the most notable events was the "Pangatang Alay Lakad," which saw over 100,000 devotees making the pilgrimage on foot to the church. This influx of visitors predominantly consisted of individuals from nearby regions, and local officials supported no major incidents, reflecting the well-managed nature of these events. The continued popularity of Manaoag Church is expected to draw even larger crowds during future events, such as the town fiesta, as the church remains a significant cultural and religious landmark. Devotees and tourists are motivated to visit the sacred site due to their belief in the miraculous powers attributed to the venerated Marian image housed within the church. Many consider the image of Our Lady of Manaoag to be a powerful intercessor for the sick, helpless and needy, fostering a sense of hope and healing among the faithful (Chujap et al., 2023).

In addition to its religious significance, Manaoag Church is also a key place for community gatherings and cultural celebrations, which help boost the local economy through tourism. Visitors not only come for spiritual reasons but also to join in the church's traditions, such as the Pilgrimage of Zambaleños, Misa de Gracia, Visita Iglesia, the Summer and October Feasts, processions, and pilgrim image visitations. These activities contribute to the region's cultural heritage. Because of this, Manaoag Church is a great example of how faith, community, and tourism come together, making it an important religious tourism site in the Philippines.

3. Methodology

When collecting primary data from survey questionnaires with close-ended questions, researchers employ the descriptive method to expand the understanding of researchers by describing the present state of the identified variable for this study. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate how the influence of Manaog Church contributes to tourists' motivation for religious tourism. As Sirisilla (2023) stated, the descriptive research method is a valuable method employed by scientists and researchers to collect detailed information about a specific group or phenomenon. This approach offers a comprehensive and accurate representation of the characteristics and behaviors of a particular population or subject.

Descriptive Research, as identified by Creswell (2012), a research method focused on providing a detailed account of the present state of a phenomenon or population. This approach involves collecting data through surveys, or other means to outline the characteristics and conditions without manipulating the variables. It determines the variables to observe and detail for a thorough understanding of the data collected. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, a survey questionnaire was utilized and to ensure that the results align with the study's Statement of the Problem, the researcher tailored the survey questionnaire accordingly.

4. Results and Findings:

Subproblem No. 1: What is the demographic profile of the respondents?

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the respondents according to Age

	Frequency	%
18 – 20	143	35.75
21 – 30	210	52.50
31 – 40	34	8.50
41 – 50	8	2.00
Above 51	5	1.25
Total	400	100 %

Table 1 illustrates the age distribution of the respondents in the study. The largest age group represented is 21 years old, with 210 respondents, accounting for 52.50% of the total. This is followed by the 18-year-old group, comprising 143 respondents or 35.75%. Respondents aged 31 represent 8.50% with 34 individuals, while those aged 41 and 51 contribute the smallest proportions at 2.00% (8 respondents) and 1.25% (5 respondents), respectively.

The findings of this research align with previous studies, particularly those by Aure et al. (2023), who found that 43.33% of respondents aged 21-30, and 30% aged 18-20, were actively engaged in pilgrimage activities. This trend underscores the significance of pilgrimage tourism among younger generations. This stage of life is characterized by an inclination towards adventure, travel, and activities involving places with cultural and religious significance.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of the respondents according to Sex

	Frequency	%
Female	233	58.25
Male	167	41.75
Total	400	100 %

Table 2 presents the sex distribution of the respondents. The majority of participants are female, with 233 respondents accounting for 58.25% of the total. Meanwhile, 167 respondents, or 41.75%, are male.

The findings of the study are supported by Tao-Ing (2022), who observed that women are more active in religious tourism, driven by a desire to explore new cultures and religions. Likewise, Rebuya et al. (2020) found that 76% of respondents in a Camarines Sur study were female, reflecting their strong participation in religious tourism. In Filipino culture, women often lead in organizing religious activities, such as during the Peñafrancia Festival, and their role as family caretakers further emphasizes the importance of religious tourism for both personal and communal well-being.

Table 3. Demographic Profile of the respondents according to Religion

	Frequency	%
Catholic	400	100
Total	400	100 %

Table 4 highlights the respondents' religious affiliation. All 400 respondents, accounting for 100% of the total, identify as Catholic.

This finding aligns with a broader national trend reported by the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2023, which, based on the 2020 Census of Population and Housing, indicated that 78.8% of the total household population in the Philippines is Roman Catholic, representing approximately 85.65 million people out of 108.67 million.

Table 4. Demographic Profile of the respondents according to Frequency of Visit

	Frequency	%
1 – 3	209	52.25
4 – 6	66	16.50
7 – 9	22	5.50
10 or more	106	26.50
Total	400	100 %

Table 5 details the respondents' frequency of visits to the museums. The largest group, comprising 209 respondents (52.25%), reported visiting the church once. A notable portion, 106 respondents (26.50%), indicated visiting ten times, while 66 respondents (16.50%) visited four times. Only 22 respondents (5.50%) reported visiting seven times.

In a study by Mindanao et al. (2020), it was found that first-time to third time visitors are more likely to visit historical attractions. Many people are drawn to these sites out of curiosity or the desire to experience them for the first time. This aligns with the current findings, indicating that a significant portion of tourists at Manaoag Church are likely first-time visitors. They must have heard or read that the church is one of the best places to visit, so they initiate to go and visit the attraction.

Subproblem No. 2: What motives the tourists to visit Manaoag Church in terms of the following?

Table 5. Summary of Respondents' Assessment on motives the tourists to visit Manaoag Church

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
1. Attitude Towards Religious Tourism	3.63	SA	1
2. Subjective Norms	3.44	SA	2
3. Perceived Behavioral Control	3.33	SA	3
Overall weighted mean	3.47	SA	

Table 5 summarizes the respondents' assessment of the motives driving tourists to visit Manaoag Church. The highest-ranked factor was Attitude Towards Religious Tourism, with a weighted mean of 3.63, interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This indicates that respondents hold a highly positive outlook on religious tourism and its relevance to their visit to Manaoag Church. Ranking second was Subjective Norms, with a weighted mean of 3.44, also interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This suggests that social influences, such as cultural expectations or encouragement from others, play a significant role in motivating visits to the church. The lowest-ranked factor was Perceived Behavioral Control, with a weighted mean of 3.33, still interpreted as "Strongly Agree." This indicates that while respondents generally feel empowered and capable of visiting the church, this factor is slightly less influential compared to the other two.

The findings on the motives of driving tourists to visit Manaoag Church align with recent research on the role of personal attitudes in religious tourism. According to Sharif & Tavitiyaman (2020), personal attitudes towards religious tourism significantly influence the likelihood of individuals visiting religious sites. Aligning with recent research studies that while personal attitudes and social factors are primary motivators, a supportive environment, including ease of access and available facilities, contributes

to enhancing the overall tourism experience (Ahn & Lee, 2022). Therefore, the findings support the idea that a combination of positive attitudes, social encouragement, and accessibility can foster greater visitation to religious sites, as emphasized by McKercher and Du Cros (2022).

Subproblem No. 3: How does visiting Manaoag Church influence the tourists’ motivation towards religious tourism in terms of:

Table 6. Assessment of Beliefs, Emotions, and Behavior

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Beliefs			
1. I believe that Manaoag Church is an important cultural and religious site that enhances the overall experience of religious tourism	3.69	SA	
2. I consider the natural environment around Manaoag Church to enhance its attractiveness as a religious tourism	3.68	SA	
3. I believe that Manaoag Church serves as a unifying space for people from diverse religions	3.53	SA	
Sub-mean	3.63	SA	2.5
Emotions			
1. I feel a deep sense of emotional fulfillment when visiting Manaoag Church	3.63	SA	
2. I experienced a great sense of satisfaction and pleasure during my visit to Manaoag Church	3.64	SA	
3. I sense a welcoming atmosphere at Manaoag Church that makes me feel included	3.64	SA	
Sub-mean	3.64	SA	1
Behavior			
1. My experience at Manaoag Church makes me more inclined to plan future visits to similar religious tourism destinations	3.54	SA	
2. I would recommend visiting Manaoag Church to others based on the positive emotional experience I had	3.68	SA	
3. I plan to share my valuable experiences at Manaoag Church with others to motivate them to travel for religious tourism	3.66	SA	
Sub-mean	3.63	SA	2.5
Overall weighted mean	3.63	SA	

Table 6 signifies that the respondents strongly agree that the beliefs, emotions, and behavior positively influence the respondents' experiences and perceptions of Manaoag Church, as manifested by the overall weighted mean for all indicators was 3.63. The findings demonstrate that emotional fulfillment is a key factor in visitors' overall satisfaction, reinforcing the value of Manaoag Church as a welcoming and spiritually enriching destination. Beliefs about the church’s cultural and religious significance further enhance its appeal, while positive behavioral intentions, such as recommendations and sharing experiences, suggest that visitors act as advocates for religious tourism.

The results of the table above show that tourists are also being influence by their emotion, these are the emotions that they felt during their visit to Manaoag. To support this result, based on the result of a study by Rebuya et al., (2020) it was indicated that religious visitors are motivated by their intrinsic spiritual desire such as satisfaction of religious convictions and fulfillment of religious curiosity (faith and practice). This explains why visitors feel those emotions because it was their spiritual desire in the first place. According to Tao-Ing (2022), the nature surrounding the site complements the solemnity of the church, helping to pacify visitors' mental and emotional states, while creating a closer connection to faith and nature.

Subproblem No. 4: Is there a significant difference in the respondents' assessment of the influence of Manaoag Church in the tourist motivation towards religious tourism in terms of the above-mentioned aspects when they are grouped according to frequency of visit?

Table 11. Results of the comparisons in the respondents' assessment on the influence of Manaoag Church in the tourist motivation towards Religious Tourism

Sources of Variation	ss	df	MS	F-stat	Decision	VI
Between	9.6609	3	3.2203	0.6437	Accept H_0	Not Significant
Within	45.0276	9	5.0031			

Critical Value @.05 = 4.26

The computed F-statistic value of 0.6437 is significantly smaller than the critical value of 4.26 at the 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 9 degrees of freedom. This result leads to the acceptance of the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant difference in the respondents' assessment of Manaoag Church's influence on tourist motivation for religious tourism, regardless of the frequency of their visits. The acceptance of the null hypothesis suggests that the frequency of visits does not significantly impact how respondents perceive the influence of Manaoag Church on their motivation to engage in religious tourism. In other words, whether a respondent has visited the church once, several times, or more frequently, their assessment of the church's influence on their motivation remains consistent.

This could indicate that Manaoag Church's role in religious tourism has a universal appeal or significance, transcending the number of visits a person has made. It may also suggest that the factors influencing a tourist's motivation to visit the church are stable and do not change considerably based on the frequency of their visits. As a result, the church may be perceived as a strong, consistent destination for religious tourism, offering enduring value to both first-time visitors and repeat tourists. This finding may reflect the consistent appeal and influence of the church on individuals, regardless of the frequency of their visits, underscoring its universal draw as a religious and cultural site.

This aligns with findings from Bagheri et al., (2023), who suggest that positive emotional experiences encourage tourists to revisit and recommend these destinations. Additionally, Abdulsalam and Dahana (2022) found that tourists who visit religious destinations frequently or occasionally develop a significant attachment to the place. Supporting this, Tao et al., (2022) observed that high participation levels of first time and repeat visitors, particularly during key events such as religious festivals, pilgrimage seasons, or cultural ceremonies, foster stronger attachments. Vada et al. (2019) also note that these occasions enhance visitors' perceptions of the site's authenticity, which deepens with each visit. In summary, the frequency of visits to religious sites can deepen beliefs, emotions, and influence religious behaviors. The attachment formed with these places typically reaches a steady level and remains unaffected by the number of visits.

5. Conclusion

Identifying the Manaoag Church's influence on tourists' motivation towards religious tourism was the objective of the study. Young adult women made up a significant portion of religious tourism participants. Young adults between the ages of 21 and 30 who identify as Roman Catholic and visit the site one to three times annually fall into this category. Many women are motivated to travel because they genuinely want to visit the many regions of the world and diversify their perspectives. Leisure, perceived risks, and perceived benefits all positively influence respondents' desire to travel and engage in religious tourism, according to the majority of respondents who "Strongly Agree" with this statement. They feel that Manaoag Church offers a relaxing environment where they may freely enjoy their free time without having to participate in structured activities. Additionally, they think that going to Manaoag Church helps them grow as individuals, improves their faith, and gives their lives more meaning. Lastly, they have belief that Manaoag Church will offer a safe and fulfilling experience. This motive creates a positive experience that encourages continued visits and strengthens visitors' motivation to travel for religious tourism.

As they believe that Manaoag Church is a significant cultural and religious site that enhances the overall experience of religious tourism, the respondents strongly agreed that their beliefs, emotions, and behaviors have a positive impact on their experiences and perceptions of Manaoag Church and other religious sites. They also stated that they experienced a great sense of satisfaction and pleasure during their visit and felt included in the welcoming atmosphere of the site. Moreover, because of their favorable emotional experience, they will recommend others to visit Manaoag Church based on the positive experience they had. Additionally, when respondents were grouped by frequency of visit, the study revealed that there were no significant differences in beliefs, emotions, or behavior in their assessment of the influence of Manaoag Church in tourist motivation. This suggests that

the number of visits does not vary significantly, indicating that the church's appealing factor is the same for all visitors and that the role of Manaoag Church in religious tourism has a universal appeal or significance that transcends the number of visits a person has made, whether frequent or occasional.

The following suggestions are hereby provided:

1. The results show that people 51 years of age and older seldom visit religious sites. Therefore, the researchers suggested that religious sites adopt or follow the World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) general guidelines for age-friendly regulations, specifically the "**Recommendations on Accessible Tourism (AT)**" that are specifically designed for older visitors and people with disabilities in religious sites. Make sure that mass, events, and blessing practices are accessible to them by providing ramps, signage, ample restroom space, and seating arrangements for elderly people, people with mobility impairments, and people in need of assistance.
2. It is imperative for religious sites to continue prioritizing accessibility improvements. In order to handle bigger crowds, particularly during religious events, the researchers suggested that the Local Government Unit and Local Tourism Office should acquire and expand the existing parking spaces near the church premises to accommodate larger crowds, especially during religious events. In order to offer a lower parking price, the local government unit can partnership with local lot owners. Offering more designated parking spaces for religious site visitors and a not costly parking fee, this will ease visitor access and reduce stress when arriving due to traffic congestion.
3. The religious sites could further emphasize the spiritual and emotional aspects of the visit, enhancing the connection between visitors' beliefs and the overall experience. Offering additional activities that align with visitors' religious and emotional needs may further deepen their engagement and satisfaction. Thus, the researchers proposed that religious sites together with religious organizations could create "**Religious Fellowship Gatherings**," such as women's fellowships, men's fellowships, and young adult fellowships, similar to those held at Hillsong Church in South Africa, where they have ministries like Hillsong Men, Hillsong Sisterhood, and Hillsong Young Adults, where it provides a meaningful opportunity for individuals to connect through shared religious experiences.
4. Since the frequency of visits does not significantly alter respondents' perceptions, efforts to engage both first-time and repeat visitors should focus on enhancing the overall religious and cultural experience at religious sites. Therefore, to address the said results, the researchers recommended that the local tourism office in partnership with the religious sites should develop program such as the "**Pilgrimage Passport Program**" just like in Camino de Santiago in Spain serves as a vital spiritual initiative, positioning the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary of Manaoag as a central starting point for tourists embarking on journeys of religious tourism. Tourists who visit the religious sites will receive a stamp in their passport, marking the beginning of their religious tourism journey. As they collect stamps from other sacred sites in the Philippines, it will deepen their motivation to travel for religious tourism.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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