

## **SATISFACTION LEVEL OF LPU–LAGUNA ASIAN CRUISE PARTICIPANTS: BASIS FOR CRUISE TOUR IMPROVEMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*This is a study on students' satisfaction level with their Asian Cruise Tour by undergraduate students of College of International Tourism and Hospitality Management (CITHM) in Lyceum of the Philippines–Laguna who are in their fourth year, last semester. This study shows how the students' demographic profile and some other factors such as products, services, cruise's itinerary, and cost could affect their satisfaction level with regard their Asian Cruise Tour experience. The study also aims to determine the threats, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths (TOWS) of the Asian Cruise Tour to be able to identify if there are some areas needed to be improved. As the researchers have gathered data through survey questionnaires, the results have shown that the students' overall experience in their Asian Cruise Tour has satisfied them enough, most especially with the products and the services. On the other hand, although the students were satisfied, there is still a need for improvement when it comes to some factors.*

**Keywords:** *Asian Cruise, students, satisfaction, TOWS, products, services, itineraries, cost*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today, more people are engaged in different types of tourism activities and one of these is cruising. It is defined as having a trip by sea with pleasure voyages. The cruise line industry has experienced rapid growth. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) had reported a total of 22.1 million of global ocean cruise passengers in 2014, and 23 million passengers sailed last 2015. It is four percent higher than in year 2014 (CLIA, 2015). Cruising is a worldwide event, and every year, millions of tourists prefer to cruise (Mancini, M., 2004).

The Asian cruise industry is featured as the new rising market in the cruise industry. Now, the Asian cruise has only five percent total cruise market share to offer but the Asian cruise market has seen great possibilities as a new market that can nourish the cruise industry (Yi et al., 2011). In fact, the CLIA said that "Asia-to-Asia cruises and short sailings will dominate itineraries in 2015" (CLIA, p.6, 2014). Many cruisers were very satisfied with their cruise vacation, and still, many of them want to cruise again (CLIA, 2015). Based on the study of David Mc A (2015), there are college and high school students that have already cruised. Basically, they were students who participate in school tours.

## **Review of related literature and studies**

From the words of David Mc A (2015), cruise covers all the aspects of interaction that a passenger may have with the tourism company and its services: transportation, airports and seaports, climate, and so on. Several factors can also affect the cruise experience of a passenger such as: most commonly the food and beverage provided on a ship, destinations, entertainment, and customer service offered by the crews; shopping, tours and itineraries were some of the strong factors that affect the cruise experience, and the overall satisfaction of the passengers.

## **Product and services offered in a cruise ship**

Andriotis (2010) said that the first factor was named product and service as this factor was made by variables assessing on shore satisfaction on the characteristics of the offered product and services. An incredible product inwardly associated to the customers or tourists and fulfills their essential need (David Mc A, 2015). According to the study of Ford (2011), “service” is a word with various implications. As a relatable point of manner to consider, service will be a transaction relationship that makes quality between supplier organization and its customer. There are five categories of cruise service products: food and beverages, leisure facilities, activities and entertainment, service facilities, and on-shore tours and among them, the least consequential concern of the tourists are activities and service facilities.

Ford (2011) stated that in the hospitality organization, they must use promising skills and make service standards that help the workers know how and why the consistent distribution of a high-quality guest experience is critical to guest contentment and organizational prosperity. Here are the crucial segments and the most difficult ones to handle in delivering service: attitude, genuine concern, friendliness, and helpfulness of the staff and all other crew members in which this has a large contribution to guests’ satisfaction and determine the most part of both value and quality in the total experience of the customer.

## **Tour itineraries**

According to Rodrigue and Notteboom (2013), the choice of cruise itineraries and even the ports of call are precisely considered to increase the business potential of a cruise fleet. Having a combined or multiple destination itineraries could be a huge motivational factor for the cruisers (Teye & Paris, 2011). One of the most exciting perks of cruising is the shore excursion which allows cruisers to tour their destination where they could also experience different adventures (Bhadauria et al., 2014).

Excursion with the right choice of destination and trained tour guide/s is a contribution in making the passengers satisfied (Sirbu, 2013). Moreover, the

guests' time is also being considered and is given importance in the cruise itinerary so the schedule/plan must be worth their money (Ford, 2011).

Teye and Paris (2011) said that one possible key for the passengers to cruise again is their satisfactory experience at a specific destination.

### **Cost of cruising**

Mancini (2004) stated that there are many factors to be considered in pricing a cruise such as the type of selected cabin/accommodation of the guest, the number of persons per room, and even the season in one place/destination. Adams (2013) said that the cost of a cruise trip is the most vital motivational factor for the passengers and the other factors such as the destinations and its duration only follow.

### **TOWS (threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strength)**

According to the study of Kantawateera (2013), the weather, increasing rate of crimes, and lack of support for tourism of the government were some of the mentioned threats to tourism. Many accommodations and attractions were seen as an opportunity for a destination. In addition, inclusion of a country in a foreign cruise itinerary will lead to many tourist visitors, which can result in infrastructural developments while lack of information to the tourist about the tours was seen as a weakness (Ilcheva, 2010). As for the strengths, social, cultural, and environmental factors take a great contribution such as the host community was hospitable, there are many festivals, and natural beauty of the place can make the tourist more satisfied (Kantawateera et al., 2013).

### **Objectives of the study**

This study aimed to determine the satisfaction level of LPU–Laguna cruise participants. More specifically, to determine the demographic profile of respondents in terms of age, gender, program, and socio-economic status; and to determine the satisfaction level of the participants in the aspects of products, services, itineraries, and cost; also, to determine the TOWS and key result area (KRA) based on the significant relationship and satisfaction level. The last among the objectives is to propose an action plan that may be revealed for proper implementation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researchers used the descriptive research which means describing people who take part of the study. This study used quantitative approach. The most commonly used method for descriptive research is survey or content analysis (Shields, 2015). There was a written questionnaire given to the participants to gather the data needed.

The study was composed of the total population which consists of 47 respondents. This study has no sampling method since all of the participants of the said tour were included and were given a survey questionnaire. The respondents were the Tourism and Hospitality students of Lyceum of the Philippines–Laguna (AY 2014–2015). They can give reliable information needed in this study because they were also the participants of the Asian Cruise Tour that happened last November 2015. Female respondents were composed of 23 individuals while 15 individuals were male. Majority of the respondents were aged from 16–18 years old, four of the respondents were aged 19 and 21 years old while one of the respondents is 21 years old. Students with Tourism major dominated the participants of the said tour.

The primary instrument used by the researchers was a written questionnaire. It is a survey provided by the researchers and responded on by the participants of the Asian Cruise Tour. The questionnaire has three parts: the first part consists of the demographic profile of the respondents while the second part refers to the factors such as products, services, itineraries, and cost of the tour to measure the satisfaction level of the respondents. The third part consists of the threats, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths (TOWS) of the Asian Cruise Tour. The researchers considered the things such as accommodations, food and beverage, entertainment, facilities, cabin crews of the ship, etc. Then, the researchers came up with a standardized questionnaire that is also found in different studies. For the reliability test, the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.890. This means that the questions in the data gathering tool is reliable and has consistency since the value is in between 0.70 and above. The reliability test for the survey questionnaire was validated by the researchers' statistician.

The researchers constructed a title for this study and read different open-access journals to gather information needed and to support the statements written on this study. Then, they collected the list of the participants from the CITHM Department and consulted their statistician to determine the respondents of the study. Afterwards, the researchers provided and produced the written questionnaire which is based on the review of related literature of this study and was approved by the researchers' adviser, statistician, and research professor. The researchers looked for the participants and have them answer the survey questionnaire.

Before the questionnaire was answered, the researchers oriented the respondents about the study and what it is all about. All the information gathered were tabulated and treated accurately and will remain confidential. The demographic profile of the respondents was presented with the use of percent formula in getting the percentage by counting the frequency of each respondent. In addition, the researchers used the formula of weighted mean for each statement to determine the level of satisfaction of the respondents with the attractions and recreational activities of the resort, which used a four-point Likert Scale and used the following interpretation:

**Table 1. Scale for satisfaction**

| Range | Scale       | Verbal Interpretation |
|-------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 4     | 3.50 – 4.00 | Very Satisfied        |
| 3     | 2.50 – 3.49 | Satisfied             |
| 2     | 1.50 – 2.49 | Dissatisfied          |
| 1     | 1.00 – 1.49 | Not Satisfied at all  |

To determine the significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their satisfaction level, the researchers, with the help of the statistician, used the Pearson Chi-square with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After the researchers finished conducting surveys with the respondents and data were tabulated, they were able to come up with information that answers their objectives.

Table 2 represents the overall satisfaction of the participants in terms of the following factors: products, services, itineraries and tours, and cost. The result shows that the respondents are very satisfied in the product and services, and satisfied with the itineraries and tours, as well as the cost of the tour. Baker's (2014) study has supported this result where he said that when cruisers had a great experience on their cruise tour, it is assured that their overall experience has satisfied them enough. Table 2 shows that overall, the participants were satisfied on what they have experienced in the Cruise Tour program.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of overall satisfaction level of participants in terms products, services, itineraries and tours, and cost of the tour**

| Satisfaction level in terms of: | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| Products                        | 3.61          | Very Satisfied        | 1    |
| Services                        | 3.60          | Very Satisfied        | 2    |
| Itineraries and Tours           | 3.32          | Satisfied             | 3    |
| Cost of the Tour                | 3.09          | Satisfied             | 4    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>           | <b>3.41</b>   | <b>Satisfied</b>      |      |

### **Significant relationship between the respondents' gender and the satisfaction level of the respondents in terms of products, services, itineraries, and cost**

The result has shown that there is a significant relationship with gender only in terms of product in measuring customer loyalty, while in terms services, itineraries, and cost, there is no significant relationship. The three negative results supported the literature stated in Gandhi-Arora's (2002) study that the gender demographic is not that significant when it comes to customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, it contradicted the first variable result. Gender has a significant relationship with product. There are some products offered on board for males and females. Female tourists usually drink ladies' drinks and can mostly be seen on spas and swimming pools, while male tourists are usually seen in sport bars and gyms.

### **Significant relationship between the respondents' program and the satisfaction level of the respondents in terms of products, services, itineraries, and cost**

This shows that only services and cost have significant relationships with the program in measuring customer satisfaction. Products and itineraries have nothing to do when measuring customer satisfaction with regard to the cruiser's program. A program has a significant relationship with the services because as International Tourism or Hospitality Management students, the first thing that is taught to them is to provide an excellent service in the field, and sometimes, they are not that aware of the products offered on board and the itineraries of cruise ships. Good service can replace bad foods/products but bad service cannot be replaced by good food. With regard to cost, all programs were aware of the inclusions in the tour.

### **Perceived threats, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths**

Table 3 represents the descriptive statistics of perceived threats by the respondents in participating in cruise tours. One reason why passengers may not board a cruise trip is due to crime or negative event that could happen in a cruise (Tarlow et al., 2012). Having the lowest weighted mean of 2.74, it is evident in the study that it is the least concern of the respondents. All tourists really have a high level of expectation because cruising portrays a luxurious living. They expect a cruise ship to meet their needs and wants, and provide them excellent services.

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics of perceived threats by the respondents in participating in cruise tours**

| Threats   | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|---|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| Tourists have high level of expectations          | 3.55          | Strongly Agree        | 1    |
| Not enough support from the government in tourism | 2.55          | Agree                 | 2    |
| Conflicts between laws and policies               | 2.83          | Agree                 | 3    |
| Weather   | 2.94          | Agree                 | 4    |
| The increasing number of crimes                   | 2.74          | Agree                 | 5    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                             | <b>2.92</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

Table 4 is a descriptive statistics of perceived opportunities of the respondents in participating in cruise tours. With the highest weighted mean of 3.34, the opportunities for the tourists to watch and be familiar with cultural activities supported the study of Manning (2006) that one opportunity of the passengers/cruisers is to enjoy and interact with local people in a specific destination when the ship docks. The respondents agreed that one of the opportunities that a tourist can experience in cruise tours is to watch festivals that may help a tourist to be familiar with different cultures of other people. It is also an opportunity that a country can be included in foreign itineraries since the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and Alaska regions were the most popular cruise tour itineraries.

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics of perceived opportunities of the respondents in participating in cruise tours**

| Opportunities  | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|--|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| Tourists can watch and be familiar with cultural activities such as festivals. | 3.34          | Agree                 | 3    |
| There are many accommodations available for tourists to stay.                  | 3.34          | Agree                 | 3    |
| Inclusion of the host country to a foreign cruise itinerary                    | 3.34          | Agree                 | 3    |
| Recognized quality of services   | 3.26          | Agree                 | 4    |
| Many attractions to visit  | 3.04          | Agree                 | 5    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>  | <b>3.26</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

Table 5 shows descriptive statistics of perceived weaknesses of the respondents in cruise tours. In the study of Tapscott (2010), being able to enjoy and experience a destination is the second main reason people cruise with high-profile and popular tourist destinations. As for the result shown above, it is the first concern of the respondents. With these destinations, the respondents who have tried cruising strongly agree that there must be enough time to explore the designated tourist attraction. One weakness of the cruise tour that the respondents perceived was the lack of monetary support from the government. The tourism industry was seen as one of the fastest-growing industries that could bring large income to the government by the expenditures of the tourist in a certain country or region.

**Table 5. Descriptive statistics of perceived weaknesses of the respondents in participating in cruise tours**

| <b>Weakness</b>   | <b>Weighted Mean</b> | <b>Verbal Interpretation</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
|---|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| Limited time on shores  | 2.87                 | Agree                        | 1           |
| Few activities for tourists                                   | 2.85                 | Agree                        | 2           |
| Not enough information given to passengers regarding the tour | 2.81                 | Agree                        | 3.5         |
| Not enough support for budget from the government             | 2.81                 | Agree                        | 3.5         |
| Not enough advertising and promotions                         | 2.74                 | Agree                        | 5           |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>   | <b>2.82</b>          | <b>Agree</b>                 |             |

Table 6 states the descriptive statistics of perceived strengths by the respondents in participating in cruise tours. Having the highest weighted mean of 3.38, it showed that the natural environment is really the strength of a cruise tour. The study showed just like what Hull and Losekoot (2012) have said in their study that the cruise tour's strength is mainly found on the environment and its destination's attractions. The main reason a tourist wants to have a tour is to be relaxed and to be free from stress. Showcasing a natural environment and unique/new destinations is one of the factors why tourists considered these two as strengths of the cruise tour.



**Table 6. Descriptive statistics of perceived strengths by the respondents in participating in cruise tours**

| Strengths                                     | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|---|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| Showcasing the natural environment            | 3.38          | Agree                 | 1    |
| Valuable souvenirs/handicrafts                | 3.32          | Agree                 | 3.5  |
| New/unique environment                        | 3.32          | Agree                 | 3.5  |
| The residents/hosts warmly welcomes tourists. | 3.23          | Agree                 | 4    |
| There are many accommodations to choose from. | 3.21          | Agree                 | 5    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                         | <b>3.29</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

**Table 7. Key result area**

| Key Result Area   | Strategies   |
|---|--|
| 1. The cruise ship was found to offer different activities on board that everyone can have fun and make a memorable life experience with, but somehow, these activities do not fulfill the wants and needs of the students.                                   | Cruise line companies must ensure that they develop activities on board that are suited to the needs of the students. Since Hospitality Management and Travel and Tourism students can be their market also, evaluation forms should be distributed after the Cruise Tour program so that these companies could listen to the students' feedback to determine their wants and needs. |
| 2. The staff were helpful and concerned with guests' needs.   | The staff hired on board should be more dedicated and passionate to their jobs. In hospitality and tourism industries, the staff are expected to be professional and hospitable. Interpersonal seminars should be conducted to on-board crews.   |
| 3. Like on-board activities, there are shore excursion activities that can be more fun and exciting. The participants were satisfied but there are still areas that need improvement like they should be given enough time to experience the shore excursion. | For next year's Cruise Tour program for students, the destination should have many tourist attractions where students can have fun while learning, at the same time, since this is the main purpose of having school tours.  |

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|---|--|
| 4. Price is always the first thing that a student considers in joining a tour. It should be affordable and reasonable, and fairly commensurate with quality service, but there are respondents who said that they were not that motivated to join the tour because of the price and there are also some students who want to participate but cannot join because of the cost. | Conduct bidding among travel agencies and cruise line companies that offers least expensive package tours but, at the same time, have high-quality products and services. Ask the students what they want to include to their tour because they might have some ideas and suggestions that can help develop the Cruise Tour program. |
| 5. In going to a new place, safety is an important thing to consider. The respondents agreed that there is an increase in crime rates.  | Check for the crime rate in the destination of the Cruise Tour program and orient the participants to bring an identification card with them and provide a contact number of a professor who also joins the tour with them.  |
| 6. Marketing is showcasing what you can offer. Respondents showed this as one of the weaknesses of the Cruise Tour program. Advertisements and promotions are not enough.   | Put some signage where everyone can see. Provide a design layout that is eye-catching and make someone motivated to join the tour.   |
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**Table 8. Action plans**

| <b>Proposed Enhancement Program</b>      | <b>Projects</b>  | <b>Activities</b>  | <b>Person Involved</b>   |
|--|--|--|--|
| Innovation of new products and services  | Evaluate the wants and needs of students, and from that, create new products or develop the existing products which are suited for the students. | Checking of new trends and developing products that may satisfy the students like new itineraries  | Cruise line company and travel agent   |
| Interpersonal seminars among cabin crews | A seminar that can improve the communication skills of the staff as they interact with guests  | Discuss the importance of communication and personality development.   | Cruise line companies, manning agencies, and possible applicants for a cabin crew position |
| Creation of new itineraries              | Identification of newly developed tourism sites that were not that crowded   | Search for the best destination that has low crime rate and has many tourist attractions to visit, but at the same time, can educate the students. | Travel agent and cruise line companies   |
| Finding a trusted travel agency          | Look for a trusted travel agency that can give discounts for groups or for students.   | Look for a travel agency or cruise line company that offers least expensive but quality products and services.                                     | Dean (CITHM), Cruise Line Chairperson and HM Chairperson                                   |

|                               |   |   |  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Pre-departure orientation     | An orientation that will be held before the participants depart the country | Orient the students what to do during emergency situations and what to do and not do during the tour. | Cruise Line Chairperson and travel agent |
| Improved marketing strategies | A meeting that will discuss a new marketing strategy                        | Producing flyers, leaflets, and any kind of advertisements and promotion materials                    | Travel agents                            |

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

Majority of the respondents were females who take up International Travel and Tourism Management, aged 17 years old and have parents whose monthly income is ₱40,000 and above. When it comes to the factors that affect satisfaction level, the respondents were very satisfied with the aspect of products and services. Overall, the Asian Cruise Tour participants were satisfied. There is a significant relationship between gender of the respondents with products, program/course with services, and program/course with cost. Their perception towards the threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strengths (TOWS) was rated as agree. It was found out that even though the participants of the Asian Cruise Tour were satisfied, there are still some areas that need improvement like itineraries and cost.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researchers would like to recommend that the College of International Tourism and Hospitality Management (CITHM) discuss the importance and essence of participating in school tours so that many students would become motivated to join. Since more Tourism students join the Asian Cruise Tour than Cruise Lines students, the faculty must discuss how the Asian Cruise Tour could help Cruise Line students in their careers. Also, it is recommended to conduct more school tours like Asian Cruise Tour that may help the students to familiarize themselves with and understand the field that they have chosen by observation. Development of career workshops can be an additional help to make the students practice and develop their skills. The CITHM should check for new trends and different destinations that have many tourist attractions, and consider the needs and wants of the students before conducting school tours. Proposed measures may be reviewed for proper recommendation in the implementation of the Asian

Cruise Tour program. Future researchers may conduct the same research with new variables.

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