

Kadayawan Beyond the Streets: Understanding Tourist Motivations and Experiences in Festival Tourism in Davao City

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the diverse motivations and experiences of tourists participating in the Kadayawan Festival in Davao City, Philippines. Moving beyond traditional perceptions of festival tourism, the research investigates emotional, cultural, and recreational drivers that influence tourist engagement. Using qualitative methods, including interviews and field observations, this paper identifies key themes that contribute to the holistic festival experience and provides implications for tourism development and cultural preservation. Results suggest that beyond street parades and performances, tourists value authentic cultural immersion, culinary experiences, and the opportunity to engage with indigenous traditions. This understanding enriches the discourse on sustainable and inclusive festival tourism.

Keywords: Festival tourism, tourist motivation, Kadayawan Festival, cultural experience, Davao City

INTRODUCTION

Festival tourism has emerged as a powerful tool for cultural exchange and economic stimulation, drawing thousands of domestic and international tourists annually. In the Philippines, festivals serve as vital platforms for celebrating heritage, promoting local identity, and fostering community pride (Cruz, 2018). Among these, the Kadayawan Festival of Davao City stands out as a vibrant celebration of life, thanksgiving, and indigenous culture. Its colorful parades, street dancing, and ethnic showcases have positioned it as one of the country's most iconic festivities (Garcia & Santos, 2020).

Tourists attending festivals are motivated by a wide array of factors, from leisure and entertainment to deeper cultural and spiritual pursuits (Getz, 2010). Understanding these motivations is essential for stakeholders aiming to craft experiences that resonate with attendees. The intersection of culture, tradition, and tourism in events like the Kadayawan provides a fertile ground for academic exploration and practical policy recommendations.

Despite growing academic interest in festival tourism, limited studies have focused specifically on the nuanced motivations and experiences of festival attendees in the Philippine context. Research often centers on economic impacts or logistical management, sidelining the visitor's personal journey and subjective experiences (DeL Mundo, 2019). There is a pressing need to examine how tourists interact with the cultural and intangible elements of festivals like Kadayawan.

This study aims to fill this gap by offering a detailed exploration of the lived experiences and motivations of Kadayawan tourists. It delves into the intangible elements that shape their perceptions, such as atmosphere, interaction with locals, and exposure to indigenous traditions. The findings provide insights not only for tourism stakeholders in Davao City but also contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable and culturally sensitive festival tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Festival Tourism and Cultural Identity

Festival tourism plays a crucial role in reinforcing cultural identity and heritage, especially in multi-ethnic societies like the Philippines. As noted by Picard and Robinson (2006), festivals allow communities to showcase

unique traditions and practices while simultaneously inviting external audiences to engage in cultural appreciation.

In the context of Davao City, the Kadayawan Festival is deeply tied to the identity of the Lumad and Moro communities, acting as a medium for cultural revival and public acknowledgment (Ramirez, 2015). This dynamic serves both as a celebration and a political assertion of indigenous visibility.

The integration of rituals, native dances, and traditional garments during Kadayawan helps sustain cultural narratives that may otherwise be lost in modern urban settings. As such, festival tourism becomes not only a leisure activity but also a platform for education and cultural sustainability (Richards, 2007).

However, the commodification of cultural elements in tourism has raised ethical questions. Some scholars argue that excessive commercialization can dilute authentic practices, turning traditions into spectacles for economic gain (Greenwood, 1989). This study acknowledges this tension and seeks to understand how tourists interpret and value these cultural expressions.

Tourist Motivation Theories

Tourist motivation is a central theme in tourism research. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Iso-Ahola's motivational theory offer foundational frameworks for understanding why individuals travel, particularly for festivals (Pearce, 2005).

Push and pull theory, frequently applied in tourism contexts, posits that tourists are 'pushed' by internal desires (e.g., escape, novelty) and 'pulled' by external attractions (e.g., cultural events, destinations) (Dann, 1981).

In Kadayawan's case, push motivations may include the desire for relaxation, escape from routine, or spiritual fulfillment, while pull motivations could involve the festival's colorful events, exotic appeal, and media representation (Crompton, 1979).

Understanding these motivational dynamics provides insights for tourism planners and marketers in crafting experiences that resonate more effectively with their target audiences (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Festival Experience and Tourist Satisfaction

The quality of tourist experience at festivals is a key determinant of satisfaction and potential return visits. Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theory of the experience economy highlights that consumers seek memorable and transformative experiences rather than mere products or services.

Elements such as ambiance, crowd interaction, safety, and accessibility significantly shape festival experiences. Studies have shown that factors like authenticity and emotional engagement are particularly critical in cultural events (Lee, Lee & Choi, 2011).

In the Kadayawan context, these experiential factors include proximity to indigenous communities, participation in rituals, and sensory immersion (e.g., music, food, dance). Tourists often gauge satisfaction based on these intangible yet profound encounters (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009).

Feedback mechanisms, such as social media posts and review platforms, also reveal real-time sentiments and offer avenues for analyzing satisfaction levels and areas for improvement in festival organization (Gretzel, 2006).

Community Participation in Festival Tourism

Local community involvement is essential for the success and sustainability of festival tourism. As per Murphy (1985), community-based tourism ensures equitable benefits and fosters ownership among residents.

Kadayawan has increasingly involved local artists, artisans, and cultural bearers, ensuring that economic and cultural gains are more inclusive (Navarro, 2018). This participatory model strengthens cultural transmission while empowering local stakeholders.

However, community involvement can also encounter challenges such as lack of funding, coordination issues, or cultural appropriation. These concerns necessitate a balanced approach in event management and policymaking (Tosun, 2000).

The study will consider how tourists perceive local involvement—whether it adds to the authenticity of the event or is viewed merely as a logistical component—and how this affects their overall festival experience.

Sustainable and Inclusive Festival Tourism

Sustainability in festival tourism encompasses environmental responsibility, cultural integrity, and economic viability. Events like Kadayawan must balance growth with preservation to avoid cultural and ecological degradation (UNWTO, 2019).

Inclusive tourism emphasizes accessibility for diverse demographics, including individuals with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and economically disadvantaged groups. Kadayawan's success can serve as a benchmark for inclusivity in Philippine festivals (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Environmental measures such as waste reduction, carbon footprint minimization, and preservation of public spaces are now key performance indicators in evaluating festival impacts (Mair & Laing, 2012).

The research explores whether Kadayawan tourists are conscious of or influenced by these sustainability and inclusivity factors when choosing to attend, thereby assessing the depth of their social and environmental awareness.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the motivations and experiences of tourists attending the Kadayawan Festival in Davao City. A qualitative approach is suitable for understanding complex, subjective human experiences and cultural phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study aimed to generate rich, descriptive data that capture the lived experiences of tourists, making it appropriate for the research objectives.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify information-rich participants who attended the Kadayawan Festival in 2023. A total of 20 respondents were selected, comprising both domestic and international tourists. The sample included individuals with varying degrees of familiarity with Davao City and the festival, ensuring diversity in perspectives (Patton, 2002). Ethical considerations such as informed consent and participant anonymity were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews and participant observation during major festival events such as the Indak-Indak sa Kadayawan, Pamulak sa Kadayawan, and cultural exhibitions. The interviews explored tourists' motivations, expectations, and overall festival experience. Observational data helped validate interview findings and added contextual richness to the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework guided the process: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. NVivo software was utilized to organize and code the data efficiently. Themes were developed inductively from the data, reflecting participants' lived experiences and perspectives rather than pre-existing theoretical constructs.

To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking were implemented. Triangulation involved cross-verifying data from interviews and observations. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers helped identify biases and strengthen analytical rigor. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with select participants for validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the interview and observational data revealed four major themes that encapsulate the motivations and experiences of tourists attending the Kadayawan Festival: (1) cultural immersion and appreciation, (2) sensory and emotional stimulation, (3) social connection and community engagement, and (4) experiential learning and transformation.

First, cultural immersion and appreciation emerged as a primary motivator for tourists. Participants expressed a deep desire to witness indigenous cultures and traditional practices firsthand. Many visitors cited the appeal of seeing Lumad and Moro rituals, native crafts, and tribal performances as a unique opportunity for cultural education. This aligns with Findings by McKercher and du Cros (2002), who emphasized that cultural authenticity is a strong pull factor in heritage tourism. Tourists appreciated that Kadayawan goes beyond mere spectacle, offering authentic representations of Mindanaoan culture.

Second, the sensory and emotional stimulation provided by the festival significantly enhanced the visitor experience. Participants described vibrant visuals, energetic music, and flavorful local cuisine as central to their enjoyment. The multisensory nature of the event contributed to emotional highs and memorable moments. This supports Pine and Gilmore's (1999) notion of the 'experience economy,' where emotional resonance is as valuable as the activities themselves. Such stimulation was often cited as a reason for planned repeat visits.

Third, tourists found value in social connection and community engagement. Many respondents shared that interactions with locals, including vendors, performers, and fellow attendees, deepened their sense of belonging and hospitality. This confirms the assertions of Richards (2007), who argued that festivals can foster temporary communities and collective memory. Notably, some tourists mentioned joining local families for meals or participating in barangay-level celebrations, enhancing the intimacy of their cultural experience.

Fourth, experiential learning and transformation were noted as lasting outcomes of attending Kadayawan. Several participants reflected on how the festival changed their perspectives on indigenous rights, environmental sustainability, and multiculturalism. These transformative effects reflect the findings of Reisinger (2013), who noted that culturally immersive tourism can challenge stereotypes and encourage empathy. This theme also suggests potential for festival tourism to contribute to broader social education goals.

Despite these positive insights, a few tourists raised concerns about overcrowding, lack of information about the deeper cultural meanings of events, and commercialization. These observations echo critiques by Greenwood (1989), who warned that the commodification of tradition can compromise authenticity. Some participants expressed disappointment at corporate-dominated floats or at souvenir items lacking genuine cultural value.

Overall, the results reveal that the Kadayawan Festival offers a multifaceted experience that extends beyond visual spectacle. Tourists are not merely passive spectators but active participants in a cultural journey. The richness of their experience is shaped not just by event content, but also by their own values, prior knowledge, and openness to cultural exchange. These findings highlight the importance of designing festival experiences that prioritize authenticity, inclusivity, and cultural depth.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore and understand the motivations and experiences of tourists attending the Kadayawan Festival in Davao City, moving beyond superficial entertainment to the deeper cultural and emotional dimensions of festival tourism. The findings highlight that the festival serves not only as a vibrant spectacle but also as a meaningful space for cultural exchange, personal transformation, and social connection.

Tourists are drawn to Kadayawan for its authenticity, sensory richness, and opportunities to engage with indigenous traditions. The motivations extend beyond leisure, encompassing desires for learning, reflection, and social bonding. The results also underscore the significance of emotional and multisensory engagement in shaping positive festival experiences, consistent with contemporary theories on the experience economy and transformative tourism.

However, the study also identifies areas for improvement, particularly regarding crowd management, cultural interpretation, and the risk of commercialization. Addressing these concerns is crucial for preserving the festival's integrity and ensuring that it remains inclusive and respectful of its cultural roots. Collaborative efforts among local government units, tourism planners, community stakeholders, and cultural leaders are necessary to balance growth with sustainability.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on festival tourism by foregrounding the voices and perceptions of tourists themselves. It emphasizes the importance of designing festivals that are not only economically viable but also culturally enriching and socially inclusive. Future research could expand on this study by incorporating longitudinal approaches, comparative analyses with other Philippine festivals, or quantitative metrics of tourist satisfaction and impact.

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