

# Destination Image of Boracay Island and Tourist Satisfaction: Bases for Strategic Tourism Development Plan Enhancement

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Date received: May 16, 2024  
Date revised: October 18, 2024  
Date accepted: November 3, 2024

Originality: 90%  
Grammarly Score: 99%  
Similarity: 10%

## Recommended citation:

Casidsid, R., De Jose, T. (2024). Destination image of Boracay Island and tourist satisfaction: Bases for strategic tourism development plan enhancement. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2(12), 166-171.  
<https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0219>

**Abstract.** This study aimed to establish tourists' destination image of Boracay Island and their tourist satisfaction levels to provide bases for crafting enhancements in the existing Strategic Tourism Development Plan. Using the descriptive-correlational design, the researcher developed a questionnaire modeled after the work of Tran (2015) and surveyed conveniently 385, observing the proportional allocation sampling technique. The study found that respondents have a high destination image regarding attributes and offers. Likewise, they also admitted that they were very satisfied with their tourist experience on Boracay Island. The study also found significant relationships between tourist satisfaction and destination image regarding attributes and offers. The study's findings were used as a springboard for offering enhancements to the Strategic Tourism Development Plan. The study's findings and output are recommended for utilization, adoption, and dissemination.

**Keywords:** Destination image; Tourist Satisfaction; Boracay Island.

## 1.0 Introduction

It is known to everyone in the tourism industry that Boracay Island, located in the Philippines, has long been known as a top tourism destination celebrated for its beautiful beaches, lively nightlife, and stunning natural scenery (Carlos et al., 2023). The influx of tourists has positioned Boracay Island as a "tourist-friendly" destination, catering to the diverse interests and preferences of various types of travelers, including families, friends, couples, and solo adventurers. Maintaining the island's destination image and tourist trust is crucial amidst current challenges. Boracay's tourism industry faced obstacles related to regulations, infrastructure maintenance, entry procedures, illegal activities compromising safety and security, and overall satisfaction with hospitality and services (Boracay-Caticlan Sustainable Development Council, 2023).

These challenges have led to a decline in the island's reputation and have affected travelers' perceptions of Boracay as a premier destination in the Philippines. Issues such as deteriorating infrastructure and safety concerns have resulted in negative travel experiences, impacting Boracay's destination image negatively. Comparative analyses of tourist satisfaction surveys and feedback data from Boracay and other beaches can help identify common trends, preferences, and areas of improvement for destination management and marketing strategies (Salmon et al., 2020). Understanding Boracay Island's destination image and tourist trust is crucial for informing strategic

tourism development plans. By assessing traveler perceptions and satisfaction, stakeholders can identify areas for improvement and develop initiatives to enhance the island's tourism sector effectively. These efforts will lay the groundwork for sustainable tourism development and ensure Boracay's continued appeal as a top destination in the Philippines.

Destination loyalty is always pivotal to the success and competitiveness of any tourist destination. It goes beyond mere repeat visits. It cuts across emotional attachment and positive perception about a destination. It also includes the willingness to advocate for the destination to other travelers (Lemy et al., 2020). Thus, any tourist destination must establish its sense of the matter. In this way, better planning is not only for managing the destination but also for the industry. Despite the plethora of research on the matter, very few studies have been conducted on the top tourism destinations in the Philippines. Researching this becomes a part of the social responsibility of destination managers, as Lee and Choi (2018) implied in their study.

Boracay's challenges and interventions provide a unique case study for understanding the complexities of sustainable tourism development. Destinations like Bali, Indonesia, and Phuket, Thailand, have faced similar challenges related to environmental degradation and overcrowding (Bagus et al., 2023). However, their approaches to addressing these challenges may differ based on local contexts, governance structures, and stakeholder dynamics. By comparing Boracay's interventions with those of other beach destinations, researchers can identify the best practices, lessons learned, and areas for improvement in sustainable tourism management. Studying tourist satisfaction levels across different beach destinations can provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to a positive visitor experience.

This study aimed to determine the destination image of Boracay Island and tourist satisfaction to enhance the existing Strategic Tourism Development Plan (Maming et al., 2021). The specific objectives were to address the low international tourist arrivals at Boracay Island by analyzing key factors related to tourist experiences. First, the study determined the profile of international tourists in terms of age, gender, income, occupation, origin, and frequency of travel. It also sought to assess tourists' perceptions of Boracay Island's destination image, focusing on its attributes and offers. Additionally, the study evaluated the level of satisfaction experienced by tourists during their stay on the island. Another objective was to identify if there is a significant relationship between the tourists' perception of the destination image and their overall satisfaction. Finally, the study aimed to provide recommendations for enhancing the existing strategic tourism development plan based on the research findings. This study was grounded in Boracay's unique challenges and distinct situations that differ from other referenced studies in several ways. It focused on tourist factors such as destination image and satisfaction and how they can inform strategic and sustainable tourism development planners to address Boracay's current conditions. While other related studies focused on socio-economic, cultural, environmental, and the role of information technology, this research at hand emphasized the island's unique position and offered practical recommendations for enhancing Boracay's tourism appeal. Thus, the results of this study can assist concerned agencies in restoring the image of Boracay Island as a top tourist destination without prejudice to its sustainability.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The descriptive-correlational research design using the survey method was used in this study. This design is particularly useful when the goal is to identify associations or patterns among variables within a specific population or context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Correlational designs seek to determine whether changes in one variable are associated with changes in another. Correlation indicates that two variables are related in some way. The goal is to describe the nature and strength of the relationships between variables without making causal inferences. A survey method is used to achieve the objectives of the study. Surveys are an efficient method for gathering and collecting data from a sample of individuals or groups by asking them questions about their opinions, attitudes, behaviors, or characteristics.

### **2.2 Research Locale**

This study was conducted in Boracay Island, Malay, in the Province of Aklan in the Philippines. It is an island paradise, famous for its fine white sand beaches and crystal-clear waters. Acclaimed as the best beach in the world, the island is the premier tourist destination and dubbed the crown jewel of the Philippine tourism industry.

Roughly shaped like a dumbbell or a dog bone, it has a total land area of 1002 hectares. It is seven (7) kilometers long, and the narrowest part is nearly one (1) kilometer wide. The best part of the island is its four (4) kilometer white beach, also called Long Beach by the locals.

### **2.3 Research Participants**

The research involved 385 tourists who were on Boracay Island at the time of the study. These tourists were randomly chosen to avoid bias in the selection. The determination of the sample size was made through scientific sampling using the previous year's data on tourist arrivals. Three types of visitors were identified: (1) foreign, (2) local, and (3) balikbayan or Overseas Filipino Workers. Proportional allocation was eventually used to determine the number of samples from each group of participants.

### **2.4 Research Instrument**

This study adapted and modified the research instrument of Tran (2015) in the study "Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty: A Case Study of Hue, Vietnam". The decision to adopt the instrument is made considering that the material has already been standardized and its contents have been evaluated for reliability. The instrument was modified to suit the present study by tweaking the first part to accommodate the variables required by the present study. The second part is the survey proper. Five questions were given to the respondents. The first question is about their general impression of the image of Boracay Island. The second question is about the destination image of Boracay in terms of its attributes and the various things it offers to tourists. The third question is about their level of satisfaction with Boracay Island. These three questions used a 4-point Likert Scale to measure respondent's perceptions. The scale is interpreted as 1 (very bad/low), 2 (bad/low), 3 (fair), and 4 (very good/high).

### **2.5 Data Gathering Procedure**

The researcher personally administered the instrument by sending a letter first addressed to the Office of the Local Chief Executive of Malay LGU through to the Office of the Malay Tourism Officer requesting to conduct the study in Boracay Island. Permission of the Local Chief Executive was secured before conducting the study. The following steps were observed in conducting the data gathering properly: First, the researcher briefed and explained the background of the study. Second, the flow of the data gathering was discussed properly with the respondents. Third, the researcher gave the respondents ample time to complete and answer the questionnaire form. Lastly, the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information and their respective survey results.

Once the researcher had gathered enough responses through the questionnaire form for the study, the researcher started interpreting the questionnaire results using SPSS to generate descriptive and inferential data. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were first calculated to provide a comprehensive overview of both variables, the respondents' perceptions of Boracay's destination image, and their reported satisfaction levels with their visit. The two variables were correlated to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction. This data analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of destination image on tourist satisfaction, reinforcing that enhancing the island's image could improve tourist satisfaction. It ensured that the results were statistically validated and provided actionable insights for tourism stakeholders, informing strategic enhancements to the island's tourism development plan to focus on key image factors influencing tourist satisfaction.

### **2.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were properly observed during the present study. Permission to conduct the study was requested from the office of the Municipal Mayor, and voluntary participation of the respondents was requested. Necessary permits were secured before the conduct of the study, and a letter request was also given to the respondents. The researcher informed the respondents that no harm would come to them concerning the study and that their responses would be utilized for research purposes only as part of an academic requirement. Respondents were informed that they can not answer questions where they are uncomfortable as part of their right to self-determination.

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Destination Image of Boracay Island

##### *In terms of Attributes*

Table 1 reveals the ratings made by the respondents on the destination image of Boracay Island as to its attributes. Data shows that tourism quality is rated ahead of all other indicators with a mean of 3.54, which is interpreted as high. This is explained by the fact that the Department of Tourism and the Local Government Unit of Malay provide the tourism service providers and front-liners with appropriate training to improve their skills.

**Table 1.** Destination Image of Boracay Island in terms of its attributes

| Attributes              | Mean        | Verbal Interpretation |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Tourism service quality | 3.54        | High                  |
| Public safety           | 3.51        | High                  |
| Overall cleanliness     | 3.40        | High                  |
| Fair pricing            | 3.17        | Fair                  |
| Vendors and beggars     | 3.04        | Fair                  |
| <b>Average</b>          | <b>3.33</b> | <b>High</b>           |

The lowest mean rating for all attributes is on vendors and beggars, with a mean of 3.04, which is interpreted as fair. The problem with beggars is difficult in the area despite continued monitoring by the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office. Available data from the LGU reflects those beggars on the island who were once sent home during the pandemic, with the LGU shouldering their expenses. However, when the island started accepting tourists, they returned clad in tourist attire, making it difficult for the assigned personnel at the Caticlan Jetty Port to screen and apprehend them. Once on the island, they refused to leave and returned to their old ways. The average mean of 3.33 indicates that the destination image in terms of typical attributes is high. This is because the majority of the attributes have been rated high. Public safety and cleanliness have also been rated high because anyone in Boracay would not miss seeing uniformed PNP personnel, as well as the Municipal Auxiliary Police, actively doing their jobs. Waste segregation at the source and regular garbage collection are strictly implemented every morning. This is aligned with the findings of Tran (2015), who noted that a strong and positive destination image is often reflected in consistent and high ratings across various attributes.

##### *In terms of Offers*

Table 2 presents the pooled ratings made by the respondents regarding the destination image of Boracay in terms of its offers. The average mean of 3.43 speaks of the respondents' high appreciation of what Boracay Island offers. This perception also suggests that during the time of the survey, these offers were available for tourists to take advantage of.

**Table 2.** Destination Image of Boracay Island in terms of its offers

| Offers                                 | Mean        | Verbal Interpretation |
|----------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Scenic Attractions                     | 3.62        | High                  |
| Cultural Attractions                   | 3.12        | Fair                  |
| Religious Places                       | 3.09        | Fair                  |
| Island Architecture and Landscape      | 3.52        | High                  |
| Festivals and Events                   | 3.23        | High                  |
| Local Souvenirs & Handicrafts          | 3.36        | High                  |
| Hospitality of the local people        | 3.55        | High                  |
| Variety of cuisines                    | 3.56        | High                  |
| Shopping opportunity                   | 3.40        | High                  |
| Quality tourism service                | 3.56        | High                  |
| Variety of guided tours and activities | 3.60        | High                  |
| Reliable tourism information access    | 3.50        | High                  |
| <b>Average</b>                         | <b>3.43</b> | <b>High</b>           |

Four offers stand out on the list. First is that of 'scenic attractions', which received a mean rating of 3.62, which is interpreted as high. Next to this is a 'variety of guided tours and activities' with a mean of 3.60, which is interpreted as high. This is followed by 'variety of cuisines' and 'quality tourism service', which both received a mean rating of 3.56, which is also interpreted as high. These findings confirm that Boracay Island has scenic attractions that tourists look forward to seeing. This includes the world-famous long white beach, Bolabog Beach, Beach Front Boracay Sunset, Keyhole, and the wetland parks. As to a variety of guided tours and services, tourists

can bask in choices of island hopping with lunch included, snorkeling, cliff-diving, paraw sailing, and other customizations that tourists would like. Regarding cuisine or culinary experience, Boracay offers almost all cuisines to cater to its diverse clients, from oriental cuisines to western cuisines. Buffets at hotels also cater to the diverse tastes of their clients, making sure that there is always food to one's liking in the buffet service area. Regarding quality tourism service, the discussion in the preceding section already mentioned the reason.

It can also be glossed from the data that only two offers have received fair ratings. These are cultural attractions with a mean of 3.12 and 'religious places' with a mean of 3.09. The findings reflect not the lack of such offers but the extent to which such attractions would attract tourists' attention. Cultural activities on the island are limited because of the difficulty of organizing indigenous people sheltered by a religious organization that manages their affairs on the island. In terms of religious places, the island has them, but only to the extent that they can serve the locals of the island and some interested guests. The observed standard deviations show that the ratings made by respondents are not that much different from one another. This is consistent with the notion that cultural tourism development often faces hurdles related to community engagement and organizational capacity (Erni, 2022).

### 3.2 Tourist Satisfaction

Table 3 displays the pooled ratings made by respondents on the survey about their tourist satisfaction experience in Boracay. The satisfaction survey includes twelve attributes that contribute to tourist satisfaction.

**Table 3.** Respondents' level of tourist satisfaction

| <b>Attributes</b>                             | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Verbal Interpretation</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| Many scenic attractions.                      | 3.72        | Very Satisfied               |
| A wide range of cultural activities.          | 3.40        | Very Satisfied               |
| A unique lifestyle of the local people.       | 3.49        | Very Satisfied               |
| Interesting traditional festivals and events. | 3.42        | Very Satisfied               |
| A peaceful atmosphere.                        | 3.55        | Very Satisfied               |
| A friendly and welcoming people.              | 3.64        | Very Satisfied               |
| Delicious food and cuisines.                  | 3.80        | Very Satisfied               |
| Local souvenirs and handicraft products.      | 3.57        | Very Satisfied               |
| Well-skilled and hospitable tourism staff.    | 3.61        | Very Satisfied               |
| Modern means of transport.                    | 3.53        | Very Satisfied               |
| <b>Average</b>                                | <b>3.57</b> | <b>Very Satisfied</b>        |

The data presented in the above table provides evidence that respondents are very satisfied with their general tourist experience. This can be seen in all mean ratings interpreted as very satisfied. The average mean rating of 3.57 for this section of the survey proves that the overall tourist satisfaction experience is very satisfactory. The standard deviation values provided reflect a small difference in their ratings of each attribute surveyed.

Three attributes stand out in the least with their high mean ratings over others; these include (1) delicious food and cuisine with a mean rating of 3.80, (2) many scenic attractions with a mean rating of 3.72, and (3) friendly and welcoming people with a mean rating of 3.64. These findings confirm that the efforts of both the national and local governments have paid off because tourists can feel them. The many scenic attractions are appreciated because they are accessible, and this is because of the investments made in infrastructure projects and the coordinated efforts to ensure safety and tranquility on the island. Delicious food and cuisines are thanks to the trained personnel who chose to work in Boracay because of the opportunities it offers, being a tourism hub in the province and the region. The friendly and welcoming people are thanks to the various training provided to tourism service providers and frontliners.

As noted in the preceding discussion on destination image, Boracay lacks cultural and religious experience. This is partly due to the migration of many of the original locals due to the island's development. The indigenous people of the island are also under threat of dispersion. Without a thriving local community, promoting the island's indigenous culture is difficult. Also, carrying capacity restrictions have led to fewer festivals and events on the island due to stringent regulations during the island's rehabilitation several years ago. Based on a study carried out by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources –Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau (2018), the island's carrying capacity for tourism is set at 19,215 at any given time, which translates to approximately 6,405 arrivals per day for visitors staying three days.

### 3.3 Relationship Between Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Image

Table 4 reveals the results of the inferential analysis rendered to establish the significance of the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination image. The resulting data shows that both destination attributes and offers have a very strong relationship with tourist satisfaction. Likewise, the p-values of 0.00 indicate a highly significant relationship among the variables surveyed. This implies that as destination attributes, as well as destination offers, get better, the tourist satisfaction experience becomes better. This implies that as destination attributes and offers improve, the level of tourist satisfaction correspondingly increases. This finding is consistent with previous research by Chia et al. (2021), which demonstrated that destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' overall satisfaction. Additionally, the work of Yuan and Vui (2023) supports this notion, highlighting that positive destination attributes significantly enhance tourists' satisfaction and loyalty.

**Table 4.** Significance of the relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction

| Variables                       | Cramer's V | Description | p-value | Interpretation |
|---------------------------------|------------|-------------|---------|----------------|
| <i>Tourist Satisfaction and</i> |            |             |         |                |
| Attribute                       | 0.428      | Very Strong | 0.00    | Significant    |
| Offers                          | 0.471      | Very Strong | 0.00    | Significant    |

## 4.0 Conclusion

In light of the findings, several conclusions were drawn. First, local tourists play a crucial role in providing Boracay Island with the volume of visitors needed to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic on its tourism health. Second, Boracay Island is recognized as an ideal tourism destination, possessing the attributes and tourism services that travelers seek in a destination. Third, the tourist experience in Boracay is highly satisfying, as it effectively meets the expectations of its clients. Additionally, the destination image strongly predicts tourist satisfaction; the higher the destination image, the more satisfying the experience becomes. Lastly, enhancements to the existing Strategic Tourism Development Plan are essential to ensure that the island remains competitive while remaining committed to sustainable tourism practices. A collaborative effort with all stakeholders will help address the current challenges and secure Boracay's position as a globally recognized premier tourist destination.

## 5.0 Contributions of Authors

The sole author initiated and completed this study.

## 6.0 Funding

The author funded this work.

## 7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## 8.0 Acknowledgment

The author would like to express his gratitude to everyone who helped him, either directly or indirectly, to finish this study and who inspired him during the months it took to assemble everything.

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