

Viability of Rural Tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has emerged as a significant avenue for sustainable development, promoting economic growth while preserving cultural and natural resources. This study assessed the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, Philippines, focusing on natural beauty, cultural heritage, accessibility, accommodations, marketing, and socio-economic factors. The research also aimed to identify hindrances to tourism development and propose a tourism road map for sustainable growth. A descriptive-correlation research design was employed, utilizing primary data collected from 100 respondents, including 50 local residents and 50 tourists from selected barangays. Data were gathered through a validated researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, ranking, and Chi-square tests. Findings indicated that all aspects of rural tourism in Malitbog were rated highly viable. Natural beauty and resources received the highest ratings, followed by cultural heritage and activities. Accessibility, accommodation, marketing, and socio-economic factors were also deemed highly viable, highlighting Malitbog's potential as a rural tourism destination. Hindrances identified included gaps in signage, safety measures, and tourism-related entrepreneurial skills. Statistical analysis revealed no significant relationship between respondents' demographic profiles and their perceptions of tourism viability, suggesting that infrastructure, marketing, and community engagement are more influential factors. The study concludes that Malitbog possesses strong potential for sustainable rural tourism development. Recommendations include improving accessibility, enhancing safety and security measures, strengthening marketing efforts, and providing training to boost local participation. A proposed tourism road map outlines actionable strategies for stakeholders to harness tourism as a tool for inclusive economic growth and heritage conservation.

Keywords: rural tourism, sustainable development, cultural heritage, tourism viability, community engagement

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism can be a powerful tool for sustainable development, but it is important to ensure that tourism is developed in a way that benefits the local community and protects the environment. Consequently, the analysis of definitions reveals four key aspects of rural tourism that include location, sustainable development, community-based features, and experiences (Rosalina et al., 2021). In addition, it is confirmed that efforts to understand sustainable rural tourism from the customer perspective have been increased since customer loyalty is considered important for sustainability (An & Alarcon, 2020). Chen et al. (2023) stated that, tourists who have positive experiences in rural areas are more likely to remember them, feel connected to nature, and be aware of environmental issues. Hence, it's a timely contribution as rural tourism is becoming increasingly important in the global tourism industry (Priatmoko et al., 2023) and is often seen as a way to promote heritage conservation and sustainable development (Zielinski et al., 2020).

Moreover, J. Yang et al. (2021) concluded, that local government should implement tourism-related development projects to enhance rural tourism activities to develop the local economy and increase employment. As Kumar & Valeri (2022) noted, the most important factors influencing rural tourism development are infrastructure development, growing environmental conscience, support of local government

and community, availability of funds with the government and participation of the private sector. However, integrating cultures into rural tourism is not always successful (Tang & Xu, 2023). As indicated by Wang & Sun (2023), building diverse social linkages between local governments and rural residents is conducive to promoting cooperation, shedding light on rural cooperative behaviors, and sustainable tourism development.

As a teacher of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Southern Leyte State University, the researcher is wellprepared to study whether rural tourism could be successful in Malitbog, Southern Leyte. Through the researcher's teaching and experience, she learned a lot about tourism, especially in smaller, rural places like Malitbog. She understands the local community and its needs, which will help her do this research effectively. By using what she knows about tourism and working closely with the community, she hopes to find out if rural tourism could be a good thing for Malitbog.

In her role as a mentor to aspiring hospitality and tourism students, the researcher has witnessed firsthand the transformative power of tourism in rural settings. She has seen how initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable tourism can empower local communities, create employment opportunities, and foster a sense of pride in their heritage. These experiences have fueled her belief in the viability of rural tourism to catalyze positive change in Malitbog, motivating her to undertake this research with unwavering dedication and passion.

Objectives

This study determined the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, Philippines. The findings served as the basis for a proposed tourism road map for sustainable rural tourism development. Specifically, this study sought to:

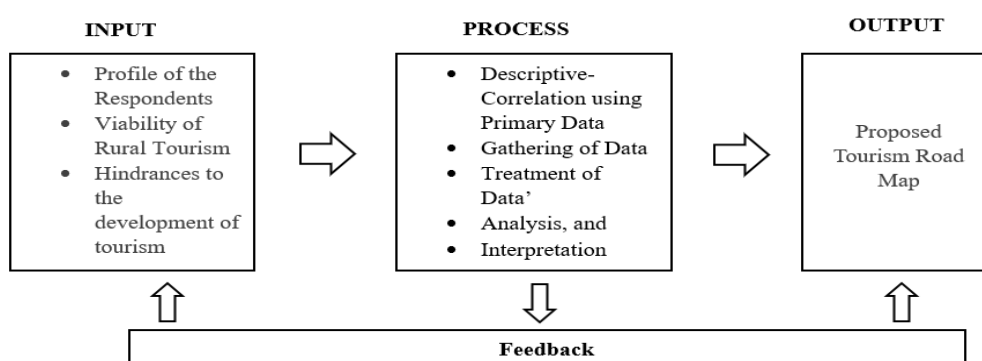
1. Determine the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, occupation, and length of stay.
2. Assess the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog in terms of: natural beauty and resources, cultural heritage and activities, accessibility and infrastructure, accommodation and services, marketing and promotion, and socioeconomic factors.
3. Identify the hindrances to the development of rural tourism in terms of accessibility, peace and order, and safety and security.
4. Analyze the relationship between the profile of the respondents and the viability of rural tourism.
5. Propose a tourism road map to enhance rural tourism development in Malitbog, Southern Leyte.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study used the Descriptive-Correlation method, employing Primary Data to assess the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte. The data were gathered from selected Barangays in Malitbog. Figure 1 shows the flow of the study.

Figure 1 Flow of the Study



Environment

The researcher conducted the study in the municipality of Malitbog, Southern Leyte. Southern Leyte, often referred to as the "Land of History," gained this title due to the Spanish colonization of the region, which lasted for over 300 years. During this period, Christianity was introduced, and the Spaniards built several churches and convents, leaving a lasting cultural and historical legacy. In 1959, Southern Leyte was separated from Leyte and became an independent province.

Malitbog is a town located in the province of Southern Leyte, in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. It is characterized by lush landscapes, scenic coastlines, and the natural beauty typical of the area. The municipality consists of 37 barangays, categorized as follows: 21 barangays are coastal, 4 are inland, and 12 are mountain barangays. The data for the study were gathered from the barangays of San Vicente, San Jose, and Sta. Cruz, which provided diverse perspectives on the viability of rural tourism.

Geographically, Malitbog is blessed with fertile lands that support agricultural activities, while its surrounding seas offer abundant fishing opportunities, making agriculture and fishing the primary economic activities in the area. The town is also home to well-known tourist spots such as the historic Malitbog Church, known for its Spanish-era architecture. The stunning Malitbog pristine beaches further highlight the town's coastal charm, attracting visitors seeking natural beauty and cultural heritage. Studying Malitbog offers insights into the complexities of rural life in the Philippines and the interplay between culture, economy, and environment in shaping local communities.

Respondents

The study's respondents were tourists and local residents staying in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, in 2024. This was one vital process that kept the study successful. All of these participants were selected through random sampling, which ensured that each member of the population had an equal chance of being included in the sample.

The respondents consisted of fifty (50) tourists, both local and international, and fifty (50) residents of the barangay. The researchers chose this municipality because it was deemed suitable and applicable to the study.

Instrument

The researcher utilized researcher-made survey questionnaires that were given to the respondents. The instrument was designed to focus on answering the statement of the problem. The questionnaire contained 24 questions, which allowed the researchers to obtain the required data for the study.

Before conducting the actual data collection, the questionnaire was validated, pilot-tested to nonparticipants/non-respondents, and underwent a reliability test. It passed the reliability test with a Cronbach's alpha result of .840, ensuring that the instrument was reliable and effective in gathering data.

The data-gathering instrument for the viability was structured on a scale ranging from 4 to 1, where: 4- highly viable, 3- moderately viable, 2- less viable, and 1- not viable.

Meanwhile, the data-gathering instrument for the hindrances was structured on a scale ranging from 4 to 1, where: 4- strongly agree, 3- agree, 2- disagree, and 1- strongly disagree. The legend helped the researcher analyze the results of the data-gathering process.

Research Procedure

The researcher-made instrument was used to gather data about the respondents. The researchers also asked for the full cooperation of the respondents in filling out and answering the researcher-made questionnaires based on their self-assessment. Once the tabulation and computation were done, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data.

Gathering Data

The researchers decided to conduct the study in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, wherein the respondents were tourists and local residents.

The researcher sought written approval from the mayor of the municipality and the selected respondents to conduct a study about the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, Philippines.

The respondents were allowed to answer the research questionnaire, provided that the researcher was present during the period. The information and data were collected, classified, and treated accordingly.

Data Analysis

Frequency Count and Percent were used to help the researchers summarize data by providing a quick overview of the most common values in a data set. They were also used to analyze data by identifying patterns and trends, and to interpret data by providing insights into the meaning of the data.

Weighted Mean was used to summarize, analyze, and interpret the data by giving more weight to responses from certain groups of respondents.

The data were gathered and treated accordingly. After the tabulation, analysis, and interpretation of the gathered data, the researchers summarized the findings, conclusion, and recommendation of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the survey conducted among the locals and the tourists regarding the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, Philippines. The data is organized into key categories, including the demographic profile of respondents, the rural tourism's viability in various dimensions such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, accessibility, accommodation, marketing, and socio-economic factors, as well as the hindrances to tourism development. These results were analyzed and interpreted to provide insights into the current strengths, challenges, and opportunities for developing Malitbog as a rural tourism destination.

A. Profile of the Respondents

This section presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, occupation, and length of stay. Understanding these characteristics provides context for interpreting their perceptions of rural tourism viability in Malitbog, Southern Leyte.

TABLE 1 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Respondents' Profile		Frequency	Percent
Age Group	18-24 yo	21	21
	25-30 yo	18	18
	31-39 yo	24	24
	40-49 yo	19	19
	50 & above yo	18	18
Gender	Male	43	43
	Female	57	57
Civil Status	Single	46	46

	Married	39	39
	Separated	7	7
	Widowed	8	8
Occupation	Student	21	21
	Employed	39	39
	Self-employed	12	12
	Unemployed	19	19
	Retired	9	9
Length of Stay	Tourist (short stay)	50	50
	11-20 yrs	7	7
	21-30 yrs	12	12
	31-40 yrs	14	14
	41-50 yrs	10	10
	51 & above yrs	7	7
	Total	100	100

The data presents key trends among the respondents by identifying the categories with the highest frequencies for each demographic variable. In terms of age, the largest group belongs to the 31–39 age bracket, comprising 24 respondents (24%), followed closely by those aged 18–24 and 40–49 years. This shows that the sample is largely composed of individuals in their early to mid-adulthood, a stage often associated with active economic participation and travel engagement. As for gender, female respondents form the majority with 57 individuals (57%), indicating stronger female representation in the survey. Regarding civil status, the highest frequency is observed among single respondents, totaling 46 individuals (46%), followed by married participants at 39%. For occupation, the largest group consists of employed respondents (39%), reflecting individuals who are economically active and likely to have regular exposure to tourism-related activities. Meanwhile, the length of stay data shows that tourists with short stays represent the biggest share of the sample, accounting for 50 respondents (50%), while the remaining half are long-term residents who have stayed in the community for varying durations. These demographics suggest that the respondents are predominantly young to middle-aged adults, mostly female, and largely employed, with a significant portion consisting of short-term tourists. Such characteristics may influence how they perceive rural tourism, as employed and younger adults typically demonstrate greater mobility, interest in leisure activities, and openness to new tourism experiences. The profile also reflects a balanced mix of locals and visitors, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of rural tourism viability from both resident and tourist perspectives.

The finding aligns with Place Attachment Theory, as developed by (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), which emphasizes the emotional bonds individuals form with specific places over time. According to the theory, shortstay tourists may exhibit lower levels of place attachment, focusing primarily on recreational and aesthetic experiences. Medium- and long-term residents, however, are more likely to develop strong attachments to the area, prioritizing its preservation and sustainability. These differing perspectives influence how individuals evaluate and engage with tourism development.

B. Viability of Rural Tourism

Presented in the table is the viability of rural tourism at Malitbog, Southern Leyte in terms of Natural Beauty and Resources, Cultural Heritage and Activities, Accessibility and Infrastructure, Accommodation and Services, Marketing and Promotion, and Socio-Economic.

TABLE 2 NATURAL BEAUTY AND RESOURCES

Indicator	Mean	Viability
1. The natural beauty and scenery of rural areas are attractive to tourists	3.61	Highly Viable
2. The uniqueness and variety of natural attractions (waterfalls, caves) are a draw for tourists	3.60	Highly Viable
Aggregate Mean	3.61	Highly Viable

The data shows that the overall mean for Natural Beauty and Resources is 3.61 and is described as highly viable. The highest-rated indicator is indicator 1, the natural beauty and scenery of rural areas are attractive to tourists, with a mean of 3.61, described as highly viable. The least-rated indicator is indicator 2, the uniqueness and variety of natural attractions (waterfalls, caves) are a draw for tourists, with a mean of 3.60, also described as highly viable. The findings imply that Malitbog's natural attractions are a strong asset for rural tourism development, highlighting the importance of preserving and promoting the town's pristine landscapes and scenic views as a primary draw for visitors.

TABLE 3 CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ACTIVITIES

Indicator	Mean	Viability
1. The cultural traditions and festivals are well-preserved and appealing to tourists	3.68	Highly Viable
2. Local handicrafts and products have the viability to be successful souvenirs	3.48	Highly Viable
Aggregate Mean	3.58	Highly Viable

The data shows that the overall mean for Cultural Heritage and Activities is 3.58 and is described as highly viable. The highest-rated indicator is indicator 1, the cultural traditions and festivals are well-preserved and appealing to tourists, with a mean of 3.68, described as highly viable. The least-rated indicator is indicator 2, local handicrafts and products have the viability to be successful souvenirs, with a mean of 3.48, also described as highly viable. The findings imply that Malitbog's cultural heritage and activities are strong assets for rural tourism, highlighting the importance of continuing to preserve festivals, traditions, and local products as key attractions for visitors.

TABLE 4 ACCESSIBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Indicator	Mean	Viability
1. The ease of access for tourists using public transportation	3.61	Highly Viable
2. The quality of roads leading to rural tourist destinations	3.54	Highly Viable
3. The availability of basic amenities (toilets, rest areas) caters to tourist needs	3.58	Highly Viable
4. Signage and tourist information are readily available	3.39	Highly Viable

Aggregate Mean	3.53	Highly Viable
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The data shows that the overall mean for Accessibility and Infrastructure is 3.53 and is described as highly viable.

The highest-rated indicator is indicator 1, the ease of access for tourists using public transportation, with a mean of 3.61, described as highly viable. The least-rated indicator is indicator 4, signage and tourist information are readily available, with a mean of 3.39, also described as highly viable. The findings imply that Malitbog's accessibility and infrastructure are supportive of rural tourism development, emphasizing the need to maintain good transportation options, quality roads, basic amenities, and adequate tourist information to enhance the visitor experience.

TABLE 5 Accommodation and Services

Indicator	Mean	Viability
1. There is a sufficient variety of accommodation options (homestays, resorts) for tourists	3.63	Highly Viable
2. The quality of accommodation options meets tourist expectations	3.62	Highly Viable
3. The availability of enough tour guides and tourism service providers	3.40	Highly Viable
Aggregate Mean	3.55	Highly Viable

The data shows that the overall mean for Accommodation and Services is 3.55 and is described as highly viable.

The highest-rated indicator is indicator 1, there is a sufficient variety of accommodation options (homestays, resorts) for tourists, with a mean of 3.63, described as highly viable. The least-rated indicator is indicator 3, the availability of enough tour guides and tourism service providers, with a mean of 3.40, also described as highly viable. The findings imply that Malitbog's accommodation and tourism services are well-positioned to support rural tourism, highlighting the importance of maintaining quality lodging options and ensuring the availability of skilled tour guides and service providers to enhance the visitor experience.

TABLE 6 Marketing and Promotion

Indicator	Mean	Viability
1. The effectiveness of marketing and promotion efforts in rural tourism destinations	3.45	Highly Viable
2. The strength of the online presence (websites, social media) for promoting the tourism	3.40	Highly Viable
Aggregate Mean	3.43	Highly Viable

The data shows that the overall mean for Marketing and Promotion is 3.43 and is described as highly viable. The highest-rated indicator is indicator 1, the effectiveness of marketing and promotion efforts in rural tourism destinations, with a mean of 3.45, described as highly viable. The least-rated indicator is indicator 2, the strength of the online presence (websites, social media) for promoting the tourism, with a mean of 3.40, also described as highly viable. The findings imply that Malitbog's marketing and promotion efforts are generally effective, highlighting the importance of strengthening online platforms and social media presence to attract more tourists and enhance the visibility of rural tourism destinations.

TABLE 7 SOCIO ECONOMIC

Indicator	Mean	Viability
1. To what extent do the local residents possess the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in and benefit from rural tourism initiatives (e.g., hospitality, handicraft production, tour guiding)?	3.39	Highly Viable
2. What is the current level of entrepreneurial spirit and interest among local residents to start and operate tourism-related businesses (e.g., homestays, souvenir shops, local food stalls)?	3.49	Highly Viable
Aggregate Mean	3.44	Highly Viable

The data shows that the overall mean for Socio-Economic Viability is 3.44 and is described as highly viable. The highest-rated indicator is indicator 2, the current level of entrepreneurial spirit and interest among local residents to start and operate tourism-related businesses (e.g., homestays, souvenir shops, local food stalls), with a mean of 3.49, described as highly viable. The least-rated indicator is indicator 1, the extent to which local residents possess the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in and benefit from rural tourism initiatives (e.g., hospitality, handicraft production, tour guiding), with a mean of 3.39, also described as highly viable. The findings imply that while the local community shows strong potential for participation in rural tourism, there is a need to further enhance skills and training to maximize economic benefits.

TABLE 8 Summary of Viability of Rural Tourism

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
A. Natural Beauty and Resources	3.61	Highly Viable
B. Cultural Heritage and Activities	3.58	Highly Viable
C. Accessibility and Infrastructure:	3.53	Highly Viable
D. Accommodation and Services	3.55	Highly Viable
E. Marketing and Promotion	3.43	Highly Viable
F. Socio-Economic	3.44	Highly Viable
Overall Mean	3.52	Highly Viable

The data shows that the overall mean score of 3.52, classified as highly viable, reflects the respondents' recognition of Malitbog's strengths in various aspects of rural tourism, including natural beauty, cultural heritage, accessibility, accommodations, marketing, and socio-economic factors. This indicates that Malitbog has a solid foundation to develop as a rural tourism destination, with significant opportunities for growth and improvement. Among the indicators, the highest mean score was 3.61 for Natural Beauty and Resources, classified as highly viable. This suggests that the respondents place the greatest value on Malitbog's scenic landscapes, pristine attractions, and natural assets as key drivers of its tourism viability. The second-highest mean score, 3.58, was for Cultural Heritage and Activities, also rated as highly viable. This reflects the importance of Malitbog's rich cultural traditions, vibrant festivals, and local handicrafts in enhancing its appeal as a rural tourism destination. While other dimensions also received high scores, Marketing and Promotion and Socio-Economic scored slightly lower with mean scores of 3.43 and 3.44, respectively. These scores suggest that while respondents acknowledge the efforts in promoting Malitbog and the entrepreneurial potential of its

residents, there is room for improvement in enhancing digital visibility, training local residents, and encouraging community participation in tourism initiatives.

The findings align with Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), which emphasizes the importance of addressing basic and higher-level needs to achieve development. The high scores for natural beauty and cultural heritage align with the aesthetic and self-actualization needs of tourists, while the slightly lower scores for socioeconomic factors highlight the necessity of meeting local residents' physiological and safety needs through tourism-related livelihood opportunities. A related study, Sustainable Rural Tourism Development: A Community-Based Approach by (Hall & Richards, 2000), supports these findings. The study highlights the importance of leveraging natural and cultural resources while fostering community engagement to create sustainable rural tourism. Similar to the results in Malitbog, the research emphasizes the need to balance tourism development with local participation and infrastructure enhancement to ensure long-term success.

C. Hindrances to the Development of Rural Tourism

Presented in the table are the results of the respondents' perceptions regarding the various areas of hindrance to rural tourism development in Malitbog, Southern Leyte. The data highlighted key issues such as accessibility, peace and order, and safety and security.

TABLE 9 Accessibility

Indicator	Mean	Agreement Level
1. Public transportation is reliable and convenient.	3.62	Strongly Agree
2. The quality of roads leading to tourist destinations is good.	3.65	Strongly Agree
3. There are clear signage and directions to guide tourists to attractions.	3.49	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean	3.59	Strongly Agree

The data shows that the overall mean for Accessibility is 3.59 and is described as strongly agree, indicating that respondents perceive accessibility as a significant factor in rural tourism development. The highest-rated indicator is indicator 2, the quality of roads leading to tourist destinations is good, with a mean of 3.65, described as strongly agree. The least-rated indicator is indicator 3, there are clear signage and directions to guide tourists to attractions, with a mean of 3.49, also described as strongly agree. The findings imply that while public transportation and road quality are generally seen as reliable and convenient, there is room for improvement in providing clearer signage and directions to enhance tourists' navigation and overall experience in Malitbog.

TABLE 10 PEACE AND ORDER

Indicator	Mean	Agreement Level
1. I feel safe and secure visiting tourist destinations	3.61	Strongly Agree
2. There are minimal incidents of crime or disturbances that could disrupt tourist activities.	3.55	Strongly Agree
3. The presence of law enforcement and security personnel is reassuring to tourists.	3.42	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean	3.53	Strongly Agree

The data shows that the overall mean for Peace and Order is 3.53 and is described as strongly agree, indicating that respondents perceive safety and security as important factors in rural tourism development. The highest rated indicator is indicator 1, I feel safe and secure visiting tourist destinations, with a mean of 3.61, described as strongly agree. The least-rated indicator is indicator 3, the presence of law enforcement and security personnel is reassuring to tourists, with a mean of 3.42, also described as strongly agree. The findings imply that while visitors generally feel safe and incidents of crime are minimal, maintaining a visible presence of law enforcement and security personnel is essential to further enhance tourists' confidence and the overall appeal of Malitbog as a rural tourism destination.

TABLE 11 Safety and Security

Indicator	Mean	Agreement Level
1. Tourist destinations are well-maintained and pose minimal risk of accidents or injuries.	3.43	Strongly Agree
2. There are adequate safety measures in place for activities like swimming, hiking, or spelunking.	3.40	Strongly Agree
3. Tourists have access to emergency medical services in case of accidents or illnesses.	3.39	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean	3.41	Strongly Agree

The data shows that the overall mean for Safety and Security is 3.41 and is described as strongly agree, indicating that respondents perceive safety measures as an important aspect of rural tourism development. The highest rated indicator is indicator 1, tourist destinations are well-maintained and pose minimal risk of accidents or injuries, with a mean of 3.43, described as strongly agree. The least-rated indicator is indicator 3, tourists have access to emergency medical services in case of accidents or illnesses, with a mean of 3.39, also described as strongly agree. The findings imply that while tourist sites are generally well-maintained and safe, there is a need to enhance safety measures and ensure adequate access to emergency services to further improve visitor confidence and minimize risks during activities in Malitbog.

TABLE 12 Summary of the Hindrances to The Development of Rural Tourism

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
A. Accessibility	3.59	Strongly Agree
B. Peace and Order	3.53	Strongly Agree
C. Safety and Security	3.41	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.51	Strongly Agree

The data presents the summary of the hindrances to the development of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, based on key dimensions: accessibility, peace and order, and safety and security. The overall mean score of 3.51, interpreted as strongly agree, reflects the respondents' recognition of these factors as critical challenges that need to be addressed to enhance the viability of rural tourism in the area. The relatively high mean score suggests that respondents strongly agree on the importance of improving infrastructure, ensuring public safety, and implementing safety measures to create a more appealing and secure tourism environment. These factors significantly influence the overall visitor experience and the likelihood of tourists choosing Malitbog as a destination. The highest-ranked dimension was accessibility, with a mean score of 3.59, interpreted as strongly agree. This highlights that respondents place great importance on reliable public transportation, well-maintained roads, and clear signage to guide tourists to key attractions. Accessibility

remains a primary concern for rural tourism, as it directly impacts the ease of travel and exploration for visitors. The second-highest dimension was peace and order, scoring 3.53, also interpreted as strongly agree. Respondents emphasized the significance of maintaining a stable and peaceful environment, with minimal incidents of crime or disturbances. The presence of law enforcement and security personnel further contributes to fostering confidence among tourists and creating a positive perception of the destination. The lowest-ranked dimension, safety and security, received a mean score of 3.41, still interpreted as strongly agree. This indicates that while respondents acknowledge existing safety measures, there is room for improvement in areas such as emergency medical services, safety protocols for recreational activities, and maintaining tourist facilities.

The findings align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), which identifies safety and security as fundamental requirements that must be met to enable individuals to fully enjoy higher-level experiences such as recreation and exploration. Enhancing infrastructure, public safety, and emergency response systems in Malitbog will not only address these hindrances but also strengthen its position as a reliable and tourist-friendly rural destination. A study that supports these findings is *Challenges in Rural Tourism Development: Addressing Safety and Accessibility Concerns* by (Lane & Kastenzholz, 2015). The study highlights the critical role of infrastructure, safety, and public security in promoting rural tourism. Similar to the results in Malitbog, the research emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts to improve accessibility, foster peace and order, and implement effective safety measures to enhance the tourism experience.

D. Relationship Between the Profile of the Respondents and the Viability of Rural Tourism

Presented in the table below are the results of the statistical analysis conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the respondents' profiles in terms of age, sex, civil status, occupation, and length of stay in relation to rural tourism viability.

TABLE 13 Significance of The Relationship Between the Profile of The Respondents and The Viability of Rural Tourism

Rural Tourism Viability vs.	n	Chi-Square Test Value	df	p-Value	Decision Ho	Remark
A. Age Groups	100	18.289	16	0.307	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
B. Sex	100	6.278	4	0.179	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
C. Civil Status	100	7.585	12	0.817	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
D. Occupation	100	14.545	16	0.558	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
E. Length of Stay	100	5.902	20	0.999	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
*Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ level						

The data presents the significance of the relationship between the respondents' profile (age, sex, civil status, occupation, and length of stay) and the viability of rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte. The analysis reveals no significant relationship between these demographic factors and the different aspects of rural tourism viability. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted for all indicators, indicating that age, sex, civil status, occupation, and length of stay do not significantly influence respondents' perceptions of rural tourism viability. The findings suggest that other factors may play a more important role in shaping perceptions of rural tourism.

The findings align with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are stronger predictors of behavior and perceptions than demographic characteristics. In the context of rural tourism, individuals' attitudes toward tourism development and their experiences with local attractions may have a greater impact on their perceptions than their age, gender, or civil status. Moreover, a related study, *Exploring the Influence of Demographics on Perceptions of*

Tourism Development by (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012), supports these findings. The study found that while demographic variables like age and gender were not significant predictors of attitudes toward tourism, other factors such as community involvement and perceived economic benefits had a stronger influence.

E. Proposed Tourism Road Map

TABLE 14 Tourism Road Map

Key Area	Specific Issue	Improvement Strategy	Timeline	Responsible Stakeholders
Marketing & Promotion	Weak online presence (websites, social media)	Develop and maintain an official tourism website and active social media pages showcasing attractions, events, and accommodations.	Short-term (3-6 months)	LGU, Tourism Office, Private Sector
	Limited promotional efforts	Partner with travel influencers and bloggers to promote Malitbog as a rural tourism destination.	Medium-term (6-12 months)	Tourism Office, Local Entrepreneurs
	Lack of tourism brochures and materials	Create brochures, maps, and digital guides that highlight key attractions and distribute them in transport hubs, hotels, and online.	Short-term (3-6 months)	LGU, Tourism Office, Local Businesses
Socio-Economic	Limited entrepreneurial skills among locals	Conduct training and workshops on tourism-related businesses (homestays, handicrafts, food stalls).	Medium-term (6-12 months)	TESDA, DTI, LGU, Academe
	Low participation in tourism enterprises	Provide micro-financing or grants for locals to start tourism-related businesses.	Medium-term (6-12 months)	LGU, NGOs, DTI
Accessibility & Infrastructure	Lack of clear signage and tourist information	Install directional and informational signage in key locations (e.g., road intersections, tourist sites).	Short-term (3-6 months)	LGU, DPWH, Tourism Office
	Need for guided tours and information centers	Establish a tourism information center and train local guides.	Medium-term (6-12 months)	LGU, Tourism Office, Private Sector
Safety & Security	Emergency response services are limited	Set up a dedicated tourist assistance desk and improve emergency response coordination.	Long-term (1-2 years)	LGU, PNP, Local Health Units

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that rural tourism in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, holds significant viability across all key dimensions: natural beauty and resources, cultural heritage and activities, accessibility and infrastructure, accommodation and services, marketing and promotion, and socio-economic factors.

There was no significant relationship found between respondents' demographic profiles and their perceptions of tourism viability, indicating that factors like infrastructure, marketing, and community readiness play a more critical role.

Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, such as improving transportation, enhancing safety measures, and strengthening community engagement, is essential to unlocking Malitbog's full potential as a sustainable and inclusive rural tourism destination.

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