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Tour Guiding Familiarization of 3rd year Tourism Management Students: An Experimental Learning towards Tour Activity Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the overall perception of the 3rd year Tourism Management students on the Batis Aramin, Lucban, Quezon Tour by means of establishing the perceived value in experiential learning, identifying the most valuable activity, and how these affect their learning as Tourism students. This is a phenomenological study that allowed the respondents to fully express and expound on their lived experiences during the tour. The data were gathered using structured interview and focus group discussion to allow the respondents to freely narrate their experiences. They were pre-selected employing purposive sampling from those who actively participated in all the activities. Using thematic analysis, most of the responses revealed that students learn better when provided with “hands-on” and allowed to observe and collect a wide range of information. It was evidenced by the numerous responses in this study that the students learned the concrete experience of tour guiding and reflective observation about what they have learned during the tour. This study underscores the importance of allowing the students to become reflective learners and that taking into consideration of the students’ feedback constitutes a significant role in their learning and improvement of the tour guiding program of the school.

Keywords: tour guiding; experiential learning; reflective learners; learning and program improvement

Introduction

The success and failure of the tour depends on the efficiency and competence of the tour guide. In this manner, tourism students of ACCESS Computer and Technical College are being trained to become tour guides or tour facilitators. To meet this expectation, ACCESS has been facilitating tours that would give students opportunities to learn from the actual scenarios involved during tours.

There had been numerous tours that were facilitated by ACCESS and with this, none of which were evaluated as regards students’ feedback, learning gained and experiences encountered. Faculty members were interviewed, results were garnered, however, these are not enough. In depth evaluation and analysis are required.

The phenomenology of the tour needs to be explored further and surveys seem to be limiting as it will tend to break the phenomena into pieces. Basically, the entire experiences or phenomena need to be explored in its entirety without breaking it into components. This is a phenomenological study that allows the respondents to fully express and expound on their lived experiences during the tour.

Batis Aramin, Lucban, Quezon Tour was chosen for this study because it is in this tour where “tour guiding familiarization” is one of its objectives. Batis Aramin tour included indoor activities, outdoor activities and rolling tour. Indoor activities would include seminar

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

(lecture and processing of teambuilding activities); outdoor activities would include teambuilding activities, rappelling, zip-line and wall climbing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is for institutional growth specifically the development of the Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM) Program of the college.

Objectives/Research Questions

The objective of the study is to determine the overall perception of the 3rd year tourism management students on the Batis Aramin, Lucban, Quezon Tour by means of determining the perceived value in experiential learning, the most valuable activity, and how these affect their learnings as tourism students.

The main problem is: What is the overall perception of 3rd year tourism management students of ACCESS Computer College, Camarin branch on the Batis Aramin, Lucban, Quezon Tour?

Sub-problems:

1. How do 3rd year tourism students perceive value in experiential learning?
2. What kind of activities do they see valuable in the Batis Aramin Tour?
3. How does a tour affect their learning as Tourism Management students?

The Theory

This study is anchored on the 4-staged cyclical theory of learning, Kolb's Experiential Learning theory. It is a holistic perspective that combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior. Kolb's theory too was anchored on John Dewey's "Learning by David A. Kolb believes "learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through information of experience (1984, p. 38). The theory presents a cyclical model of learning, consisting of four stages. One may begin at any stage but must follow each other in a sequence:

- Concrete experience (DO)
- Reflective Observation (OBSERVE)
- Abstract conceptualization (THINK)
- Active experimentation (PLAN)

Kolb's four-stage learning cycle shows how experience is translated through reflection into concepts, which in turn are used as guides for experimentation and the choice of new experience.

- Kolb identified four learning styles which correspond to these stages:
- Assimilators – those who learn better when presented with sound logical theories to consider
- Convergers – those who learn better when provided with practical application of concepts and theories
- Accommodators – those who learn better when provided with "hands-on" experiences
- Divergers – those who learner better when allowed to observe and collect a wide range of information

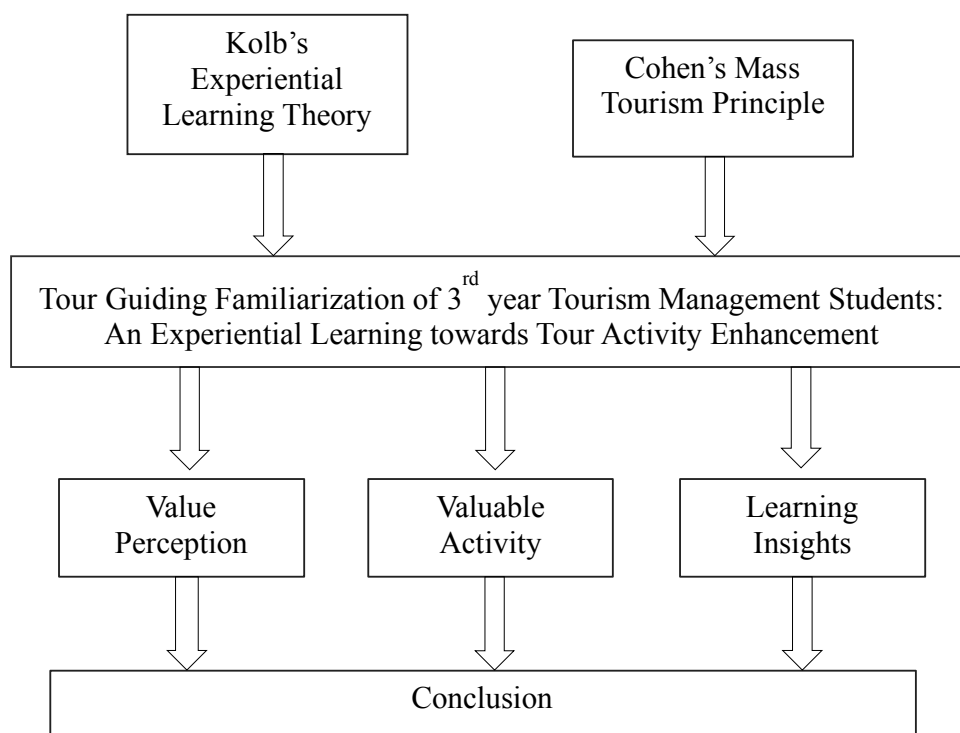
Furthermore, this is significantly based on the study conducted by Cohen (1979). "Already in 1979 Cohen conducted a study on guided tour tourism. Unfortunately after this, not much research has been done, but even today, 31 years later, his main argument

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

still smartly illustrates the environment that is created in guided tours. According to Cohen (1979) the guided tour tourist is moving in an environment where familiarity is maximized and novelty is minimized.

This is the kind of mass tourism where big numbers of people are buying similar packages, and packages are organized in standard manners. The tourist is surrounded by the host environment, but not really integrated in it. By moving in large groups at the same time, having a fixed schedule to follow, and bringing the luxury from home, the tourist is experiencing the host culture from a certain distance. This kind of tourism is separate from the rest of the culture and daily flow of life."

Research Paradigm



Literature Review

Related Literature

The development of Batis Aramin Resort rooted from the childhood dream of Mr. Filomeno D. Valde. The property has been sold to the family when he was still young. It has become a favorite picnic place for his friends. It is a blessed land because old folks say that the place used to be the hiding place of the Holy Sepulcre (Mahal na Senyor) during the World War II. Fascinated by its green meadows, abundant vegetation, cool fresh air and its ever flowing crystal clear water from the spring called the ARAMIN, he decided to convert it to a resort.

A pool and several cottages were built. It formally opened in the Easter of 1997. It was flocked by thousands and eager picnickers during its opening salvo since there was no resort in the vicinity. It was classified as Special Interest Resort by the Department of Tourism. Additional cottages for overnight accommodation were added in subsequent years.

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

A 14-room hotel was built in 2005 and a multipurpose sports court was added in 2006. Air conditioned multi purpose halls were added. Several villas were also built in 2007.

At present, it has become a favorite rendezvous for garden weddings and reception, birthday and anniversary celebrations, seminar and conferences. It is also a place for games and spiritual gatherings. It feels like being at home while away from home. It is the best place where you could commune with nature while enjoying dining, hiking, swimming, fishing, boating or simply relaxing with your family and friends. The place is very comfortable, easy to reach, the foods are very palatable, the price definitely is very affordable, and the staff are very accommodating and approachable. Guests are pampered according to their tastes and whims. No wonder guests keep on coming back very often, making ARAMIN their home because they really experience being in paradise.

Tour Guiding Familiarization

There are studies that support the concept on familiarization. One of which is that of Huang and Weiler's paper "A review and evaluation of China's quality assurance system for tour guiding" (2010) evaluates the effectiveness of China's tour guiding quality assurance system as an instrument for sustainable tourism. It notes the importance of China's 131,000 tour guides for inbound, outbound and domestic tourism. China's tour guiding quality assurance and regulatory mechanisms are then reviewed, including qualification examination, licensing, professional certification, training, awards for excellence, professional associations and codes of conduct. Structurally, China's comprehensive and comparatively regulated system may be recommendable to other countries, particularly its certification and licensing systems. However, the findings suggest that tour guide quality assurance in China may be constrained by an over-reliance on government and the absence of industry-driven mechanisms for some elements such as monitoring, enforcement and rewarding excellence. Most importantly, the focus of China's quality assurance system is on a limited number of tour guiding roles and tends to overlook those most critical to harnessing the guide as a vehicle for sustainable tourism. Key future development areas could extend recognition and reward for the guide's performance as a role model, advocate, mentor, interpreter, cultural broker and environmental monitor.

Tour guiding being an educational activity is strengthened further by the study of Gustavsson and Hallin's paper entitled "Guiding in the City of Tomorrow" (2013) explores an intrinsic case of a guided tour of a future city: Stockholm Royal Seaport. Whereas guided city tours usually aim at educating and enlightening those guided about the past and present of the place visited – building the truth claim by relating what is said in the tour to the physical environment of the tour – the case described in this paper offers the opportunity to explore how the urban future is made material to those guided. The study shows that the guide's actions materialized the urban future in two ways: by using future components of the future and by using present components of the future. Based on this analysis, we conclude that both these ways function as ways of confirming the present.

Moreover, the learning experience during the tour is explained by Mak, Wong and Chang entitled "Factors affecting the service quality of the tour guiding profession in Macau" (2010), it examines the factors affecting the service quality of the tour guiding profession in Macau. In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from the Macau Tourist Guide Association, the Macau Government Tourist Office and selected practising tour guides to explore the issues from multiple insiders' perspectives. The factors identified were classified into six categories: unhealthy business practices, market domination, immaturity of tourist market, changing tourist behaviour, intense competition between inbound tour operators and human resource issues. The findings suggest that a number of

these problems actually originated from the unhealthy business practices of the tourist-generating country, namely mainland China in this study. Considering the growing importance of the Chinese outbound tourism market, the study findings will be of significant value to Macau and to other destinations targeting the Chinese market.

The learning culture in tour guiding is further explained by Lugosi and Bray (2008) which examines the impacts of organisational culture on the learning and development of tour guides. Drawing on a case study of a small entrepreneurial tour company, the paper considers the nature of the organisation's culture, the tours it provides, including their narrative contents and the processes of organisational learning and socialisation. Their paper suggests that the development of a learning culture within such an organisation may benefit from the provision of appropriate learning opportunities among the guides and facilitators who coordinate guide development.

Carmody, in her study entitled "Intensive tour guide training in regional Australia: an analysis of the Savannah Guides organisation and professional development schools" (2013) explained that a number of authors believe that tour guide training may hold a key to passing on the concept of sustainable tourism to tourists. Savannah Guides Limited (SGL) is an organisation for tour guides interpreting and protecting the tropical savannahs of northern Australia. This paper examines the provision of intensive professional development schools, which the SGL organisation provides, to raise standards of professionalism for nature-based tour guides in remote regions. Its framework is based on Schein's three levels of organisational culture model, and Black and Ham's 10-element performance-based tour guide certification programme. Active participant observation of the development school process and a self-administered questionnaire to SGL members were used to understand the organisation's success. The main motivations for tour guiding are explored, as are the ways in which tour guides acquire knowledge. It is suggested that the provision of professional development schools in nature-based tourism regions benefits the guide and the tour guiding industry, and contributes to the protection of the natural environment. It is proposed that the SGL training model of professional development schools and certification be adopted by tour guiding organisations in other regional destinations as a way of nurturing and advancing quality tour guiding and professionalism.

Experiential Learning

Larsen and Meged's study entitled "Tourists Co-producing Guided tours" (2013) explained that the guided tour is a stigmatized tourist practice. In contrast to studies portraying sightseeing tours as an over-determined stage where tourists passively follow pre-scripted routes and scripts, this article also uncovers creativity, detours and productive practices. We examine how tourists can be said to perform both in and out of tune with guide's script and the interaction order of guiding more broadly. What is distinctive and innovative about the perspective is that we regard guides and tourists as mutual depending co-producers of the guided tour. First, the article begins with a short discussion of some of Goffman's central concepts. Second, we move on to a more general discussion of how front-stage tourism services are performances where both tourist staff and guests play their part. Third, we examine ethnographically how participants on guided tours in Copenhagen co-produce this particular service by employing various tactics that we label and discuss.

Jonasson and Scherle in their study entitled "Performing Co-produced Guided tours" (2012) explains that Tour guides have traditionally played a key role in linking tour operators, incoming agencies and tourists. However, very little attention has been given to the competences that involve performative aspects of guiding. Such performative competences involve the complex maneuvering in native and foreign cultures, intercultural

mediating, functioning as pathfinders and mentors, and negotiating in unfamiliar destinations to their guests in a culturally sensitive manner, and coordinating group movements in space. The article examines the complexity involved in guided tours, and consequently the need for a deeper understanding of the performative aspects of guided tours. The article concludes that the performative aspects of guiding tourists involve interpretations, mediations and translations through verbal and bodily communication. It also involves the ability to engage by producing intense moments through narratives and creative affordances. One final conclusion from this work is that it is a challenge to actually use the variety of scientific perspectives offered within tourism education programs in order to produce hybrid study outcomes, but, it could also be seen as the pragmatic approach that tour guides adopt in practice.

Salazar's study entitled "Community-based cultural tourism: issues, threats and opportunities" (2012) used examples from long-term anthropological fieldwork in Tanzania, this paper critically analyzes how well generally accepted community-based tourism discourses resonate with the reality on the ground. It focuses on how local guides handle their role as ambassadors of communal cultural heritage and how community members react to their narratives and practices. It pays special attention to the time-limited, project-based development method, the need for an effective exit strategy, for quality control, tour guide training and long-term tour guide retention. The study is based on a program funded by the Netherlands-based development agency, Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV), from 1995 to 2001, and on post-program experiences. Findings reveal multiple complex issues of power and resistance that illustrate many community-based tourism conflicts. The encounter with the "Other" is shown to be central and that the role of professional intermediaries in facilitating this experience of cultural contact is crucial. Tour guides are often the only "locals" with whom tourists spend considerable time: they have considerable agency in the image-building process of the peoples and places visited, (re)shaping tourist destination images and indirectly influencing the self-image of those visited too. The paper provides ideas for overcoming the issues and problems described.

Bryon explained in his study entitled "Tour guides as storytellers – from selling to sharing" 2012 said that due to changing tourist desires, the rise of the experience economy and technological innovations, the demand for stories has dramatically increased over the last few years. Consequently, an impressive demand for stories has generally emerged in tourism, and particularly in tour guiding. Based on a qualitative exploratory study, this paper identifies four major types of storytelling as an important feature, of which two types can be derived from and subdivided into three subgroups of organizations: official guides, alternative guides, entrepreneurial guides (commercial, event and coach tours), and relational guides (private, independent and residential guides). All types have different target groups, are organized differently and bring different kinds of stories, each using different experiential techniques. There is a clear development towards more topical and less historical stories, the use of experiential techniques, and a focus on niche tourists. However, young tour-guide organizations struggle to get on the radar of the established tourism industry because of their own anti-authoritarian position and the distrust of official guides.

Phenomenological Approach

Kenyon explains in his paper entitled "Exploring phenomenological research" (2004) explores the characteristics and attractiveness of two focus group techniques. It positions the discussion within the context of how pre-testing different qualitative techniques enables the researcher to discover the most appropriate research technique to stimulate a hypothesis concerning experiential intertextuality. The paper considers the value of using focus group

methodology that is considered to be an excellent method to encourage free-flowing discussion. Past research has suggested focus groups are particularly appropriate when gathering data about how young people interpret media. Two focus group methods were chosen for the pre-test: semi-structured questioning and nondirective questioning. After conducting the pre-test three significant areas stood out; this led to the conclusion that non-directive questioning was the more appropriate technique to use. The three significant areas were: first, questioning style changed interviewees' answering style; second, the focal point differed between the group, the researcher and the research topic; and third, the structure of silences was different. Furthermore, non-directive questioning shifted interviewees' responses away from the television advertisement specifically, and more towards social and experiential references. The secondary objective examined in this paper outlines the logistics used to determine a process suitable for the sample selection of homogeneous groups. The research process was tested and clear guidelines are shown with reference to choosing participants for the focus groups and gaining acceptance from the head teacher, parents/guardians and the interviewees.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research based on lived experiences of the respondents about a specific phenomenon. The respondents were chosen utilizing the purposive sampling to identify the participants who have had experiences related to the phenomenon being studied. The data gathering technique employed were structured interview and focused group discussion to allow the respondents to freely narrate their experiences.

The participants (key respondents) were chosen from the Camarin Third Year Tourism Management students who attended and actively participated in the Batis Aramin, Lucban, Quezon Tour held on September 2013. They were the high performing ones belonging to the upper bracket of the class and who actively participated in all the activities during the tour as reflected in the discussion of their travelogue.

They were invited and convened in the classroom for the structured interview and focus group discussion (FGD). Ethical research was observed in the conduct of interview and group discussion as the participants (key respondents) were informed of the following:

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- that they were participating in a research;
 - the purpose of the research;
 - the benefits of the research;
 - the procedures of the research;
 - the voluntary nature of research participation (discussion of their feedback); and,
 - the procedures used to protect required confidentiality.
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Specifically, the researchers introduced themselves to the participants (key respondents) indicating the purpose of the gathering. They were informed that the reason for having a discussion regarding the Batis Aramin Tour was to have an initial evaluation of the activity as it was the first scheduled tour in that place. It was also highlighted that the evaluation would be for the improvement of succeeding tours. The research questions were then written on the board and the participants (key respondents) answered each question on a sheet of paper in their preferred language – either English or Filipino. The actual research questions that were put to participants (key respondents) were:

1. How do you perceive value in experiential learning?
2. What kind of activities do you see valuable in the Batis Aramin tour?
3. How does a tour affect your learning as Tourism Management student?

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

After answering the questions, the group was divided into two batches with nine members in each batch. Each batch was handled separately by the researchers. The research questions were raised and each participant (key respondent) was tasked to give a no right – no wrong responses. Each participant freely expressed their feedbacks in either English or (Tagalog) Filipino in the course of the discussion. Sometimes they were fidgety during the discussion.

The responses were recorded. Furthermore, the researchers asked some follow up questions pertaining to the answers given by the respondents. The time spent for each batch was roughly 30-45 minutes.

The data analysis used was interpretive approach and thematic analysis. An interpretive approach provides a deep insight into “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p.118).

Findings

Question 1

The findings in the first question revealed that the students perceive the tour to be more effective approach to learning, this also facilitates understanding of concepts better than classroom setting.

“Ma’am for me, it could just only be an idea, we can’t do it here in the classroom; but there at Batis Aramin we could do it, given the expanse of the place...”

What is it that you can do in Aramin but you cannot in the classroom?

“the activities there..if we are only to remain in the classroom, we could only think of those, but when we were there we were able to do them freely...”

(Codilla, Tourism Management student)

The respondents also expressed that learning too cannot be confined within the classroom as well as there could also be an element of entertainment and fun-filled exercises. The result is explained by a similar study conducted by Lugosi and Bray wherein the development of a learning culture within such an organisation may benefit from the provision of appropriate learning opportunities among the guides and facilitators who coordinate guide development. (2008) The learning opportunities were presented during the entire tour.

Question 2

The findings for the second inquiry were mainly focused on team building experiences and activities. Students appreciated the value of the team building activities as these were expressed in their responses. The team building activities prompted them towards self-discovery and open-mindedness.

“For me the most valuable activity was the “unity walk” because if we didn’t focus our attention on that activity everybody would fall. The same thing with the tower building, without focus it would fall, and all our efforts would just be wasted. Also in the wall climbing and rapelling because I was able to overcome my fear of heights even though I was trembling as I was going down, then suddenly I realized I was already on the ground. I was just thinking that it would be an achievement, and so I was able to do the activity.”

(Vartimar, Tourism Management student)

“For me the building blocks activity was valuable. If it got destroyed you would start from the beginning. Our group members there were from a different course and it was

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

our first time to be with them in those activities and yet we were able to finish the task...we became united..."

(Makabenta, Tourism Management student)

The second and third ranking set of responses for the second inquiry is an off-shoot of the top ranking set of responses. These are developing confidence, overcoming fear, determination (second rank); and stirring of one's curiosity (third rank). As the respondents were performing the several exercises during the teambuilding activities, there were realizations/reflections about how they view the entire tour. Their expressed behavior regarding realization conforms with Kolb's explanation of stages of learning, wherein he explained that reflective observation was manifested during experiential learning.

The respondents' experiential learning spawned not only self-discovery but also more learned concepts based on how they performed. This also explained by Kolb's explanation concrete experience.

Question 3

The findings for the third question are mostly on acquisition of sufficient knowledge. Tourism Management students appreciated the learning experience by expressing what they have learned during the tour.

"As a tourism student, tour guiding has a significant role because we have a tour guiding subject...for one to become a good tour guide he/she has to learn how to follow instructions, what you should do, your body language, knowing the history of every place...we could apply all these in the near future when we ourselves become real tour guides..."

(Christina, Tourism Management student)

This findings is explained by Gustavsson and Hallin's study wherein guided city tours usually aim at educating and enlightening those guided about the past and present of the place visited – building the truth claim by relating what is said in the tour to the physical environment of the tour (2013).

The respondents also envision themselves to be tour facilitators in the future. And lastly, they also learned the value of compassion and interpersonal relations as important factors needed for their profession.

The tour guiding experience allows students to familiarize themselves with usual scenarios involved during tours. This is further explained by Cohen's Mass tourism principle wherein familiarization is maximized and novelty is minimized (1979).

Discussion

Most of the responses garnered from the discussion revealed two of the four learning styles of Kolb. And these are the Accommodators, those who learn better when provided with "hands-on" and Divergers, those who learn better when allowed to observe and collect a wide range of information.

When the students/participants were asked about the quality of their tour, their answers were mostly positive with full appreciation of the activities performed.

Being Accomodators and Divergers at the same time prove to be effective learning styles for the participants (would-be tour guides). The effectiveness comprise the absorption of lesson through experiential learning since they were practically walked through the entire tour. Another component of the effectiveness is the ability to repeat what has been observed. They

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

inject humor to what was learned which makes it more exciting, enjoyable and interesting. They manage to gauge their would-be audience. And lastly, they try new approaches and suitable activities in the application of what was learned.

It was through Cohen's guided tourism that facilitated the learning output (based on Kolb's Experiential theory – Accomodators and Divergers). The phenomenology of guided tourism opened more opportunities for learning based on the actual and hands experience of the students during their Batis Aramin Tour. The experience is uniquely theirs thus making it permanent and constantly remembered.

Conclusion

In regards to cyclical model of learning of Kolb, it was evidenced by the numerous responses in this study, that the students learned the concrete experience of tour guiding as well as having reflective observation about what they have significantly learned during the tour.

The concrete experiences comprise all the teambuilding exercises, indoor activities, leisure activities and rolling tour that the students had. Each student's reflective observation were contributory to their total learning of tour guiding experience. Their reflections were based on how they were able to handle their emotions, anxieties and confusions during most of the activities.

Moreover, the garnered results also agree with the theory of Cohen (1979), where in the tourists (students) were actually immersed in the environment of tour guiding and teambuilding. The students having strict schedule to follow were indirectly taught to familiarize themselves with various activities needed for their total growth (e.g. conquering fear, teamwork etc.) especially when they were asked to perform an activity for the first time (e.g. rapelling, wall climbing and zipline). They have seen and experienced how it is to be tour guides by reflecting on how the tour guides/facilitators handled them and facilitated the tour. The tourist is surrounded by the host environment, but not really integrated in it. (Cohen 1979).

Recommendations

1. The students may have "Practice Tour Guiding (graded)" in any of their tours
2. Since one of the items within the itinerary was not mentioned during the focused group discussion, it means that there was little or no impact on the learners. This activity was the indoor seminar. It is recommended that the approach during the seminar be improved to enhance receptiveness of the learners.
3. The students' immediate feedback right after each activity may be sought in order to process fully the learning experience. This would also eliminate doubts and unnecessary emotional stresses. Someone should process the behavior dynamics of individuals within the group. Chaperones may/should assist in the processing of learnings.
4. Tour guiding activities may be enhanced alongside with teambuilding. These would include associating tour guiding with team values. With regards to overcoming fears, it is best to process these feelings to avoid tendencies of developing trauma; process of team development should be processed in class.
5. Guided assessment in relation to their tour would be based on the lessons within the classroom (program-based depending on the subject integration). From their responses we would be able to determine if the experiential learning matches the lectures and theories discussed. There should be values integration even during games and recreational activities.

TOUR GUIDING FAMILIARIZATION OF 3RD YEAR TOURISM

6. Leadership skills may be tapped through some of the activities.
7. During the trip, the tour guides may ask randomly the tourism students as regards how they view tour guiding activities. Tour facilitators may be randomly interviewed regarding their work and actual scenario in the industry.
8. Schema/program based on the itinerary
9. Improvement of approach during the seminars
10. Students are to make a travelogue after their tour

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