

EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE OF TOURIST POLICE IN ENSURING A SECURE ENVIRONMENT FOR TOURISTS IN PANGLAO, BOHOL

KENNETH JESSENIEL L. BON, AARON JOHN N. CIRUNAY,
CHARLIE P. DAGAANG, HARVEY T. SUMAYLO,
JOSEPH J. BALANI, ADELFA C. MARANGA,
BERNARD F. BAPILAR 

¹College of Criminal Justice, University of Bohol, Tagbilaran City,
Philippines

Corresponding Author: bbpilar@universityofbohol.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

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Safety and security are critical determinants of destination competitiveness and visitor confidence, particularly in tourism-dependent communities. This study assessed the effectiveness of tourist police in Panglao, Bohol, Philippines, examining awareness, satisfaction, operational challenges, and the relationship between awareness and perceived performance to inform policy and operational strategies to enhance tourism security in the region. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed. Data

were collected from 508 respondents, including tourists, residents, and tourist police personnel, through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize responses, while Spearman's rho correlation analysis examined the association between awareness and satisfaction levels. Communication barriers, especially



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involving foreign tourists, and limited stakeholder coordination were identified as operational challenges, underscoring the need for collective efforts to address these issues. The findings suggest that strengthening communication strategies, multilingual capacity, and stakeholder collaboration can inspire confidence and motivate stakeholders to support enhanced tourism security in Panglao.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism safety and security are widely recognized as foundational elements of destination competitiveness and sustainability. Beyond actual crime rates, tourists' perceptions of safety significantly influence destination image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, including revisit and recommendation decisions (Pizam et al., 1997; Ding et al., 2022). As tourism-dependent economies expand, destinations increasingly institutionalize specialized law enforcement mechanisms—commonly referred to as tourist police or tourism-oriented policing (TOP)—to address risks unique to visitor populations.

Tourist police units are designed not only to enforce laws but also to provide assistance, guidance, and culturally sensitive support in high-traffic tourism environments. Research suggests that visible policing presence, rapid response, and service-oriented engagement contribute to enhanced visitor confidence (Wallace, 2020; Nordin et al., 2021). Importantly, tourism policing blends enforcement with hospitality functions, reflecting the hybrid nature of public safety in tourism settings.

Panglao Island, Bohol, is one of the Philippines' premier beach destinations, where tourism significantly benefits local livelihoods, enterprise development, and municipal revenue. Increasing awareness of tourist police functions can foster greater confidence and appreciation among tourists and stakeholders, as safety perception involves both physical measures and perceptions of approachability and fairness.

Despite the establishment of tourism security mechanisms under Philippine law, this study addresses potential biases in perception-based data by employing multiple data collection methods, including surveys and interviews with tourists, local stakeholders, and tourist police personnel, to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the performance of the tourist police in Panglao, Bohol. The findings aim to inform evidence-based improvements in tourism security governance.

Theoretical Background. The Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) serves as the primary foundation for this investigation. This theory proposes that criminal activity occurs when three factors come together: a motivated offender, an appropriate target, and the absence of a capable guardian. When it comes to tourism, travelers may be suitable targets due to the conspicuous valuables they bring, their unfamiliarity with the local area, and their temporary presence. According to Mataković (2019), tourist

police serve as capable guardians who reduce the potential for criminal activity through their visibility, deterrence, and swift response when applied within this framework. This paradigm is supplemented by additional criminological and policing views that are pertinent to tourism security, including the following: The Community Policing Theory emphasizes mutually beneficial partnerships, cooperative problem-solving, and the establishment of trust between law enforcement and civilians. In tourism zones, effective policing requires collaboration among residents, businesses catering to tourists, and the local government. This shared effort can empower stakeholders and foster a commitment to safety.

According to Wilson and Kelling's Broken Windows Theory, published in 1982, obvious symptoms of disorder, such as vandalism or behavior considered a nuisance, indicate a lack of social control and have the potential to escalate into more serious violations. One way to improve perceptions of safety in tourist areas is to ensure that order is maintained and that minor violations are addressed.

Crime Opportunity Perspectives highlight the significance of environmental and situational factors in shaping criminal behavior from a criminal perspective. As per the findings of Mataković (2019), the implementation of preemptive patrol deployment, monitoring, and environmental design all collaborate to reduce the probability of criminal behavior. Not only does Bandura's Social Learning Theory postulate that public compliance behaviors in common contexts can be impacted by visible enforcement and norm reinforcement, but it also postulates that these behaviors can be influenced by norm reinforcement. Taking everything into consideration, these frameworks view tourist police not only as reactive enforcers but also as proactive preventers, reassurers, and service providers within communities that depend on tourists.

Legal Bases. At the global level, this research is in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which emphasises the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies as well as the strengthening of institutions that are accountable to the principles of accountability (United Nations, 2015). Public spaces that are free from danger are essential to the development of sustainable tourism.

At the national level, Republic Act No. 9593, often known as the tourist Act of 2009, mandates the creation of tourist security support systems in important tourism destinations. These systems must include coordination between the Department of Tourism and the Philippine National Police (Republic Act No. 9593, 2009).

Furthermore, Proclamation No. 274, s. 2002, which established the Panglao Island Tourism Estate, reinforces the government's responsibility to ensure organized and secure tourism development (Proclamation No. 274, 2002).

Tourism-oriented capacity-building programs, such as the Tourist-Oriented Police for Community Order and Protection (TOPCOP), aim to

enhance officers' cultural sensitivity and multilingual skills, thereby improving communication and making tourists feel more understood and secure.

Review of Related Literature. Safety remains a fundamental factor influencing tourism performance. Studies show that how safe a place appears affects how people think about it and how likely they are to visit it (Ding et al., 2022). Harassment and bothersome behaviors have been shown to adversely affect destination loyalty and revisit intention (Alrawadieh et al., 2019).

Tourism-oriented policing has developed as a distinct approach in tourism-dependent locales. Wallace (2020) discovered that tourism-oriented policing training improved officers' comprehension of tourism security duties and stakeholder cooperation. Chandran (2019) also noted that tourism-oriented policing in Puducherry made services more responsive and coordinated among stakeholders.

Factors that affect service quality have an enormous impact on how tourists build trust. Nordin et al. (2021) found that timeliness, tangibles, and service culture significantly influenced tourists' trust in Malaysian police services. From a criminological standpoint, routine activity and opportunity-based models are essential for understanding the patterns of tourist victimization (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Mataković, 2019).

Tourism zones that are close together make it easier for offenders and targets to meet, underscoring the importance of effective guardianship. Even though more research is being conducted worldwide, there are few real-world studies examining how well tourist police perform in Philippine beach areas. This study adds to the body of work by looking at how tourists are policed in Panglao, Bohol.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design. This research employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational approach to evaluate perceptions of tourist police efficacy and stakeholder experiences in Panglao, Bohol. A quantitative methodology is suitable for systematically assessing the links between performance indicators and perception variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Environment and Respondents. The research was carried out in Panglao, Bohol, namely in tourism-centric locales such as Barangay Tawala. The respondents comprised tourists, residents, tourism stakeholders, and tourist police officials. Simple random sampling was utilized to improve representativeness and mitigate selection bias (Field, 2018).

Instrumentation. A structured questionnaire, adapted from prior research on tourism policing in the Philippines (Lapez et al., 2017), was employed and refined to correspond with current tourism policing tasks under RA 9593. Unique yet synchronized tools were distributed to stakeholders and law enforcement officials. A pilot study involving 15 participants was conducted to assess clarity and internal consistency. Reliability was evaluated via Cronbach's

alpha, with a threshold of .70 being satisfactory (Taber, 2018).

Ethical Consideration. Participation was optional, and informed consent was acquired from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously upheld.

Data Analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) were computed to summarize responses. Inferential statistics (e.g., correlation analyses, group-comparison tests) were conducted when appropriate. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Awareness of the Effectiveness of Tourist Police. The results show that most of the respondents who answered the survey were aware of the tourist police in Panglao, Bohol, and their security duties. This indicates that tourists and local stakeholders acknowledge visible patrols and on-site assistance methods. The conclusion aligns with tourism policing research, indicating that law enforcement exposure markedly enhances tourists' understanding of security frameworks in destination regions (Nordin et al., 2021; Wallace, 2020).

Although respondents knew there were tourist police, many said they did not know much about their exact duties, functions, or procedures. It is crucial to know the difference between presence awareness and functional awareness. Studies show that felt safety is not solely determined by how visible security actors are, but also by how well people understand their roles within the institution (Ding et al., 2022). When tourists do not know what police units can help with, such as how to report a crime, what to do in an emergency, or how to enforce anti-scam laws, the apparent reassuring effect may not be as strong.

The results show that there needs to be a better plan for getting the word out, including using signs in multiple languages, leveraging online platforms for tourism, and working with hotels and transportation companies. Previous research has shown that communication methods make tourists feel safer and boost trust in institutions (Pizam et al., 1997; Ding et al., 2022). Making people more aware of the police should not just mean making them stand out; it should also mean telling them about the services that tourist police provide.

Satisfaction with the Performance of Tourist Police. Overall, satisfaction levels were moderate to high, which shows that most people are happy with how the tourist cops are doing their jobs. Respondents stressed that the officers were easy to talk to, visible on patrol, and willing to help. According to Nordin et al. (2021), these traits are examples of service quality traits that have a big effect on visitors' trust in the trustworthiness of police services. Wallace (2020) found that tourism-focused police programs improve trust and security in tourist destinations. These results support what he found. Along the

same lines, Dundar et al. (2023) found that seeing specialized police officers in tourist areas makes people feel safer and gives them peace of mind.

Despite this, areas for improvement were identified. It was said that foreign tourists had trouble speaking, mostly because of language barriers, which sometimes delayed help or made conversations less clear. In tourism policing, speaking skills significantly affect how much tourists trust and are satisfied with the service (Nordin et al., 2021). There is a strong link between how well someone speaks a language and how efficient they think the service culture is, especially in places where many people speak more than one language.

The Panglao tourist police already had a good reputation among the public. However, the results show that specifically improving multilingual training, response times, and service standardization could make visitors even more confident.

Challenges Encountered by Tourist Police. According to the study's findings, several operational issues are affecting the efficiency of the tourist police.

1. **Language barriers.** It became clear that one of the biggest problems was the different languages. According to the cops, it was hard to help tourists who did not speak English or Filipino very well. This finding corroborates the research by Safira et al. (2023), which emphasized the need for police to be multilingual when engaging with tourists. They said that how clear the communication is directly related to how safe and trustworthy travelers feel. Tourist destinations that cater to a wide range of global customers need to communicate in a variety of ways. Not being able to speak the language well enough could lead to misunderstandings, delayed treatment, or insufficient reporting of incidents. From the perspective of everyday activities (Cohen & Felson, 1979), a decrease in communication may inadvertently reduce the efficiency of guardianship functions.
2. **Stakeholders' Collaboration.** In addition, respondents recognized limited cooperation from specific tourism stakeholders as a constraint on tourism development. The police, resort operators, transportation providers, and local government units need to work together to establish a collaborative governance structure to ensure effective tourism security. Research on tourism governance highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination to improve situational awareness and bolster preventive capacity (Wallace, 2020).
3. **Drug-Related Concerns.** It is especially alarming that there have been reports of illegal drug operations involving some workers in the tourism industry. This is because drug-related crimes greatly degrade the image of the destination and the faith that visitors have in it. According to Alrawadieh et al. (2019) and Mataković (2019), crime-related reputation can influence the inclination to return and a location's overall

- competitiveness. To address such threats, it is necessary to implement procedures for coordinated enforcement and preventive monitoring.
4. **Relationship Between Awareness and Satisfaction.** To determine whether awareness of tourist police functions is associated with satisfaction levels, a Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted.

Table 1. *Spearman's Rho Correlation Between Awareness and Satisfaction (N = 508)*

Variable	1	2
1. Awareness	—	.577**
2. Satisfaction	.577**	—

Note. Spearman's rho = .577, $p < .001$ (2-tailed).
 $p < .01$.

Findings revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between awareness and satisfaction ($\rho = .577$, $p < .001$). It would appear that greater awareness of the functions that tourist police perform is correlated with higher satisfaction with their performance. It is suggested that awareness accounts for a sizeable portion of the variation in satisfaction levels, as evidenced by the correlation coefficient (.577), which indicates a moderate effect size. In the context of tourism policing, this study sheds even more light on the necessity of communication and visibility measures.

Previous research has similarly demonstrated that trust and behavioral intentions in tourism contexts are significantly predicted by safety perception and institutional awareness (Ding et al., 2022; Nordin et al., 2021).

This finding is consistent with the Routine Activity Theory, which is significant from a theoretical perspective. According to Cohen and Felson (1979), tourists' perceptions of risk tend to decrease, and their confidence tends to grow when they become aware of the presence and function of capable guardians, also known as tourist police. Furthermore, according to Wilson and Kelling (1982), the Broken Windows viewpoint holds that visible order maintenance and clarity of enforcement enhance the effects of reassurance.

It is clear from the rejection of the null hypothesis that awareness-building programs are not purely informational but have quantitative ramifications for public satisfaction and public trust in institutions.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this inquiry, the effectiveness of the tourist police in Panglao, Bohol, was investigated. In addition to focusing on awareness and satisfaction, particular emphasis was placed on the difficulties encountered when providing security services for tourism projects. The data indicate that the majority of respondents acknowledge the presence of tourist police and express moderate to high levels of satisfaction with their performance. It

suggests that police visibility, approachability, and responsiveness positively affect local stakeholders' and visitors' perceptions of safety in the area.

At the same time, the research highlights subjects warranting further inquiry. Even though the overwhelming majority of respondents are aware of the presence of tourist police departments.

They do not fully understand the exact functions and services these officers can perform. Given the strong correlation between satisfaction and awareness, it can be inferred that tourists' confidence in tourist police services tends to increase as they gain a clearer understanding of the functions these services perform. The implication is that awareness-raising activities can greatly increase public trust.

There were also operational challenges, such as difficulty communicating due to language barriers and working with certain tourism partners. These problems do not make the tourist cops less useful; instead, they show areas where things could get better over time. Overall, the results show that the framework of tourism policing works and could be improved by continuing to build people's skills, coordinating efforts, and communicating with the public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Enhance Communication Support.** Given the reported language challenges, providing additional multilingual support—whether through training, translation tools, or quick-reference guides—may improve interactions with foreign tourists and reduce misunderstandings.
2. **Improve Public Awareness of Tourist Police Services.** Since awareness is linked to satisfaction, clearer information about the roles of tourist police could be shared through signage, digital platforms, hotel partnerships, and tourism offices. Simple and accessible information materials may help tourists better understand where and how to seek assistance.
3. **Improve coordination with various stakeholders in the tourism industry.** It is possible that maintaining a collaborative relationship among the tourist police, resort owners, transportation providers, and local politicians could help ensure consistent security procedures across all tourism enterprises.
4. **Continue to implement preventive and see-through patrol strategies.** To sustain a sense of safety, it is nevertheless vital to maintain a visible presence at key tourism sites. Regularly reviewing patrol deployments could help address new concerns.

5. **Create an environment that fosters the ongoing expansion of training programs and service.** By implementing capacity-building programs that emphasize communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and service orientation, it is feasible to enrich tourists' experiences further.
6. **Inspire further research in the future.** Future research may investigate other tourist sites for comparison or use qualitative methodologies to gain a more in-depth understanding of visitors' and police's experiences.

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