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Veronica Arcos Bosquez

MA (Tourism), Tourism and Hospitality Career,
Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Business Management and Information Technology,
State University of Bolívar
Km 3, 1/2 sector Alpachaca, Guaranda, Bolívar, Ecuador
varcos@ueb.edu.ec
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6949-6708>



Germán Sánchez Chávez

MA (Tourism), Tourism and Hospitality Career,
Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Business Management and Information Technology,
State University of Bolívar
Km 3, 1/2 sector Alpachaca, Guaranda, Bolívar, Ecuador
gsanchez@ueb.edu.ec
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6097-8663>



Dolly Del Salto Dávila

MA (Tourism), Tourism and Hospitality Career,
Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Business Management and Information Technology,
State University of Bolívar
Km 3, 1/2 sector Alpachaca, Guaranda, Bolívar, Ecuador
ddelsalto@ueb.edu.ec
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0773-2186>



Carlos Peña Guamán

MA (Tourism), Tourism and Hospitality Career,
Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Business Management and Information Technology,
State University of Bolívar
Km 3, 1/2 sector Alpachaca, Guaranda, Bolívar, Ecuador
cpena@ueb.edu.ec
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0858-0244>

Rural tourism prospects on the example of communities of Parroquia Salinas in Guaranda, Ecuador

Abstract. Tourism plays a pivotal role in the global economy, contributing significantly to income generation, job opportunities, and new ventures. When managed responsibly and sustainably, it can minimize adverse impacts on the environment and cultural heritage while maximizing economic and social benefits. Ecuador since 1980s has been witnessing the emergence of community tourism as a developmental path for local communities residing in ancestral territories. It provided indigenous and peasant populations with self-management of their territories and resources, bolstering their income through community tourism initiatives. Salinas parish stands out with over 25 years of promoting rural tourism through community management. The communities involved, namely, Yacubiana, Natawa, Mulidiaguán, and Tigreurco, express a need to promote feasible ventures that foster economic and sustainable development. They aim to enhance their natural and cultural resources and offer complementary services such as cheese, chocolate, textiles, and more. Their goal is to improve the quality of life for residents while boosting tourist demand.

This research compiles data obtained through field observations, and we analyze the supply and demand characteristics of these communities of Ecuador. A diagnosis assesses their available resources that can be considered tourist attractions. Furthermore, a proposal is outlined, focusing on designing a tourist product tailored to the tourist profile and specifying the activities to be conducted in each community. The ultimate aim is to integrate these communities into the realm of community tourism and thereby enhance their overall development. It was evidenced that the tourists who visit maintain an age range of 30 to 40 years old, both men and women. They come from cities like: Quito, Ambato, Quevedo of Ecuador, while the foreign tourists come from France, Spain, and Germany. Tourists are mainly motivated by community tourism, visiting micro-enterprises where the process of elaboration of each product, which are known worldwide through its brand «El Salinerito», are presented. An attempt is made to promote the tourist attractions that are being suitable for tourist visits.

Keywords: Tourism; Rural Tourism; Regional Development; Local Community; Local Brand; Attraction; Tourist Product; Visitor; Tourist Product; Ecuador; Salinas; Guaranda

JEL Classifications: E24; E41; E64; I18; J28; J31

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1. Introduction and Brief Literature Review

Tourism is an activity characterized according to the context where it is developed, the environmental conditions and the natural and cultural resources that promote its development, therefore, the modality known as community tourism is an activity that takes place in rural areas which represents an alternative for the economic and social development of the areas where the territory converges. Rural community tourism has as its objective the permanence in local communities located in rural areas organized around the provision of tourist services for the benefit of the community, it implies the search by the tourist for historical, cultural, and environmental elements of the communities (CODESPA, 2013). Rural tourism is fundamentally linked to craft activities, mystical experiences and the collection of wild plant species (fruits, seeds and fungi) for human consumption and for ornamental purposes in natural spaces. It is in these activities, related to traditional knowledge (medical or gastronomic), where the activation of intangible cultural heritage by tourism is best expressed (Palomino et al., 2016; Cabanilla & Garrido, 2018).

Reyes et al. (2017), details the activities that were carried out to publicize the existing tourist dynamics in 32 municipalities located on the Mexican South Western Pacific coast, and the results allowed the identification of several spaces where the bases of sustainable tourism can be established. Inostroza (2008) mentions in his essay that the model must conceive community tourism as part of a comprehensive rural development strategy that promotes sustainable agricultural activity under a logic of productive diversification. According to what was described by García & Neme (2017), in the Latin America, Ecuador is pointed out as a pioneer country in community tourism, citing Ruiz et al. (2013), who details that since the 1980s this type of tourism has become a strategic activity linked to ecotourism; gaining strength from 2000, the year in which the need to legalize it also arose.

Rural tourism in the province of Bolívar arises in the Salinas parish with the development of productive, livestock and business activities under the social and solidarity economy approach. Located just 30 km north of the city of Guaranda, and located at 3550 meter, its temperature varies between 7 to 5 °C, becoming a natural tourist attraction, thanks to the existence of large cliffs, archaeological caves, salt mines, mineral and thermal water springs that are mute witnesses of the history and development of its town. Constituted as a civil parish in 1884, it takes its name from the presence of Salinas in this territory that in aboriginal times belonged to the Tomabelas Indians, the same ones who were an important source of work for its inhabitants (Salinas, 2022). The parish is working with 11 communities that have a tourism vocation, each time with positive results that motivate other communities to undertake new initiatives, thanks to the coordination of the Parish GAD together with the Salinas Community Tourism Center. Therefore, the objective of this research is to determine the tourist offer of the community bases in the communities of Natawa Yacubiana, Mulidiaguán and Tigreurco as well as the characteristics of the demand through the identification of the profile of the visitors of the place.

2. Methods

The present investigation corresponds to a non-experimental work under a cross-sectional design of data collection through field observation, using registration sheets and the application of a survey, it applies the qualitative and quantitative approach; the description of the study phenomenon was made and later a descriptive and interpretative analysis of the field work was systematized information on the characteristics of the supply and demand of the communities under study, which allowed applying an inductive analysis of the results obtained through the sample and the application of generalization to the population. To determine the sample of the demand of tourists to whom the survey was applied, a universe based on the number of people who visit the Salinas parish has been considered. According to the visits registered in the community tourism office in Salinas, there is the presence of 9,000 tourists during the year 2018, other operators also register the entry of 10,000 tourists, which added together give the amount of 19,000 national and foreign tourists who visit the parish of Salinas. The confidence levels for the research are given in [Table 1](#), while sample data is given in [Table 2](#).

Table 1:
Confidence levels

Confidence levels							
<i>k</i>	1.15	1.28	1.44	1.65	1.96	2	2.58
Confidence levels	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	95.5%	99%

Source: Calculated by the authors based on data retrieved from feedback networks

Table 2:
Sample data

Acronym	Description	Quantity
<i>N</i>	Population size	19000
<i>K</i>	Confidence level	95%=1.96
<i>e</i>	Mistake	5%=0.05
<i>p</i>	Proportion of individuals (data unknown) have characteristic	0.5
<i>q</i>	Proportion of individuals that do not have characteristics	0.5
<i>n</i>	Size / number of respondents	379

Source: Calculated by the authors

$$n = \frac{K^2 * p * q * N}{(e^2 * (N - 1)) + K^2 * p * q} \quad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5 * 19000}{(0.05^2 * (19000 - 1)) + 1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5} \quad (2)$$

n = 379 respondents.

3. Results

The organizational structure in the parish gradually shows its management to incorporate communities with a tourist vocation in its offer. The Salinas Community Tourism Center is responsible for the tourist operation within the parish, and they are the ones who articulate the communities to generate a provision of quality tourist services, an articulated work that promotes order in the offer, all this results in a pleasant experience on the part of tourists who arrive at this destination. The statistics of the Salinas de Guaranda parish indicate that the population is 7,262 inhabitants, 20.50% represents the parish head and 79.50% the communities, in recent years, according to historical data, a population growth in the parish capital, while in the communities it is decreasing (Salinas, 2022).

3.1. Natural and Cultural Attractions of the Communities

In the communities studied in the present investigation, Natawa, Yacubiana, Tigreurco and Muldiaguán, 15 attractions have been inventoried with their respective hierarchies, as can be seen in Table 3.

In addition to these attractions, the communities are characterized by the development of activities such as agriculture and livestock; and above all through the community micro-industry, which consists of the manufacture of high-quality textiles, dairy products and chocolates for export, which have gained great notoriety both nationally and internationally. Most of the inhabitants of the parish are dedicated to these productive activities, organized in small family industries.

Table 3:
Outlook of the natural and cultural attractions of the communities of Salinas parish in Ecuador

Community	Name	Category	Type	Subtype
Natawa	Natawa Cheesemaker	cultural manifestations	technical and scientific achievements	industrial centers
	Natawa Crafts	cultural manifestations	cultural and popular heritage	arts and crafts
	Nougat Factory	cultural manifestations	technical and scientific achievements	industrial centers
Yacubian	Cave of The Immaculate Virgin	nature attraction	speleological phenomena	caves and caverns
	Be Awaesuni Rumi	nature attraction	forest	paramo
	Yacubiana River	nature attraction	river	river
	Yacubian Cheese Maker	cultural manifestations	technical and scientific achievements	industrial centers
	Chaka Rumi	nature attraction	mountain	middle mountain
Tigreurco	Tigreurco Hill	nature attraction	forest	lower montane
	Community Cheesemaker	cultural manifestations	technical and scientific achievements	industrial centers
	Community Church	cultural manifestations	architecture	historical/vernacular
Muldiaguán	Community Cheesemaker	cultural manifestations	technical and scientific achievements	industrial centers
	Sugar Cane Branch	cultural manifestations	technical and scientific achievements	agricultural and fishing centers
	Wood Crafts	cultural manifestations	cultural and popular heritage	arts and crafts
	Lagoon River Green	nature attraction	lacustrine environments	lagoon

Source: Collected and compiled by the authors from the publicly available sources

3.2. Profile of the Visitor of the Parish of Salinas

Through the application of surveys, the profile of the tourist was identified, knowing the motivations and preferences when visiting the attractions of the Salinas Parish, the survey was assigned to 379 tourists, obtaining the following results that are shown below in [Table 3](#).

According to the results of the obtained by survey, the most frequent visitors are in the age range of 33 to 38 years with 23% of responses; Likewise, in relation to gender, a greater frequency of male visitors can be seen with 56% of responses; 59.48% of the visitors are professionals who generate their own economic income, among them are state officials, teachers, retirees, housewives, independent professionals; In addition, 238 tourists, which corresponds to 64%, are national tourists who visit the Salinas Parish, being the most frequent visitors from the city of Guaranda and Quito, while 141 visitors with 36% are international tourists, Spain being the country with 15%. that registers the most visits; Most of the respondents have university studies in 44%, followed by those who have postgraduate studies in 20% who contribute to the popular and solidarity economy of the Salinas Parish, visiting its micro-enterprises and tourist attractions; 54% of the visitors are motivated to visit the enterprises in the place; In the same way, 65% express their interest in visiting micro-enterprises, among them are the Confectionery Factory, Cheese Factory, Handmade Balls Factory, the «Salinerito» Stuffing Machine, Salinas Communal Spinning Mill - the places with which Salinas is associated and identified by the management of the popular and solidarity economy; with 37% they prefer to organize the trip on their own without using the services of an operator or the community center; Likewise, the highest percentage of visitors do so as a family with 44% responses; the months that register the highest frequency of visits are July and August with 35.36% of responses; Likewise, the most required service is food with 47% of responses and finally it is shown that the average stay in the area with 62% is between 1 to 2 overnight stays.

To design a tourist product in the Salinas parish to improve the tourist offer from the communities, the identification of the natural and cultural attractions of the Natawa, Yacubiana, Tigreurco and Mulidiaguán communities was carried out, which were integrated with each other to result in the «Salinas Route, community tourism an experience to live» map.

4. Discussion

The objective set out in the present investigation was to determine the tourist offer of the community bases in the communities of Natawa Yacubiana, Mulidiaguán and Tigreurco of the Salinas parish as well as the characteristics of the demand through the identification of the profile of the visitors. After completing the investigation and coinciding with several secondary sources, it can be pointed out that the communities have a tourism potential with the possibility of generating opportunities for the development of community tourism. The parish has been identified as one of the tourist destinations with the most national and foreign tourists in the province of Bolívar, its projections are encouraging after the pandemic, since it has service providers and tourists consider that this destination is a good time to visit.

There have been other investigations such as by Carrasco & Aspajo (2017), mentioning that there are deficiencies that prevent the development of a place, this due to the lack of management between institutions that have mismanaged their resources; the communities of Natawa, Yacubiana, Tigreurco and Mulidiaguán have significant tourism potential in terms of nature and culture, but tourism development still needs to be promoted; highlighting that these communities have more strengths than weaknesses, with adequate tourism planning by the tourism area of the Decentralized Autonomous Government of Salinas and the Salinas Community Tourism Center, these sectors will be a destination that can be visited by tourists and also be included in the national tourism promotion.

In the same way, Robayo (2015) highlights that encouraging tourism development and the care of the natural and cultural sites of the Parish of Salinas with adequate tourism planning that involves all stakeholders in a proper governance system, great positive results will be achieved. Effects added to the particularity of the destination in promoting the popular and solidarity economy, identity strengthening culture, new tourism initiatives, the same ones that would be contributing to the economic and social development of the communities. According to the authors Cabanilla & Garrido (2018) community tourism offers the opportunity to carry out an additional activity to agricultural and livestock production. In the same way, in our investigation, the tourist attractions that have been identified in the four communities are unique and unrepeatable resources, the same ones that could generate a diversity of tourist enterprises in the operational field and services of the tourist activity, causing the revitalization of the economy.

Through the characterization of the demand, which allowed analyzing the profile, the motivations and the degree of satisfaction, the authors Barragán & Ayaviri (2017) highlight the results that show that entrepreneurship contributes significantly to local development. In this sense, community organization, solidarity economy, leadership and entrepreneurial culture are key factors for their relation to supply and demand is generated success of the enterprises in the communities of the Salinas parish.

5. Conclusions

Through the characterization of the tourist demand that visits the Salinas parish, essential information was obtained on the motivations and preferences of the tourist that allows to improve the tourist services of a destination and in this way provide an unforgettable experience to locals and strangers. It was evidenced that the tourists who visit maintain an age range of 30 to 40 years old, both men and women. They come from cities like: Quito, Ambato, Quevedo of Ecuador, while the foreign tourists come from France, Spain, and Germany. Tourists are mainly motivated by community tourism, visiting micro-enterprises where the process of elaboration of each product, which are known worldwide through its brand «El Salinerito», are presented. An attempt is made to promote the tourist attractions that are being suitable for tourist visits.

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