

Evaluation of Destination Management at Governor's Rapid, Quirino Province, Philippines: A Basis for Marketing Development

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the decline in tourist arrivals at Governor's Rapid in Quirino Province, Philippines, and evaluates the strategies employed by local stakeholders to promote and manage the site, with the goal of identifying pathways for sustainable ecotourism development.

Method: A basic qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with tourism officers, community members, and visitors, selected via purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes.

Result: The study identified multiple interrelated factors contributing to the decline, including limited infrastructure, weak promotional efforts, environmental degradation, and poor coordination among agencies. Existing initiatives, such as community involvement and occasional tourism campaigns, were found to be fragmented and reactive. The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted travel behaviors, exacerbating the decline.

Contribution: Findings underscore the urgent need for innovative, inclusive, and locally driven tourism management strategies. Recommendations include enhancing destination branding, improving infrastructure and accessibility, fostering stronger stakeholder collaboration, and adopting a resilience-based tourism framework. The study contributes to the broader discourse on rural tourism recovery and offers practical guidance for local policy-making and sustainable tourism development in post-pandemic contexts.

Keywords: Destination management, Ecotourism, Sustainable tourism, Stakeholder perspectives, Rural tourism development

Introduction

Tourism remains an important sector in the global economy, recognized as the third-largest export category after fuels and chemicals, accounting for approximately 7% of global trade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Tourism, 2022). The onset of the pandemic in 2020 triggered unprecedented disruption across the tourism industry. International tourist arrivals plummeted by an estimated 74%, resulting in the loss of over one trillion USD in export revenues and millions of tourism-related jobs worldwide (Sigala, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020). Early projections by the World Trade Organization indicated a 20%–30% contraction in global tourism for the year 2020, with recovery trajectories anticipated to be slower and more complex than initially expected (Harchandani & Shome, 2021; Škare et al., 2021). The pandemic's impact extended beyond macroeconomic indicators, fundamentally altering traveler behavior and perceptions. Risk aversion, health-related concerns, and reduced consumer confidence significantly influenced the public's willingness to travel (Polyzos et al., 2021; Aman et al., 2019). As noted by Yeh (2021) and Payne et al. (2021), the long-term ramifications of COVID-19 on tourism behavior are likely to be enduring, requiring



destinations to recalibrate their management strategies to restore traveler confidence and adapt to evolving market conditions.

Within this global context, localized tourism destinations such as Governor's Rapid in Maddela, Quirino Province, Philippines, have faced significant challenges. Established in 2014, Governor's Rapid is an ecotourism site noted for its rugged limestone cliffs and the dynamic flow of the Cagayan River, which supports recreational activities such as kayaking, cliff diving, white-water rafting, and nature-based leisure. Despite its environmental appeal and adventure offerings, the site experienced a drastic decrease in tourist arrivals—from 43,620 in 2019 to only 8,463 in 2023, as reported by the Provincial Tourism Office (Province of Quirino, 2023). This substantial decline underscores the vulnerability of rural ecotourism sites to global crises and raises important questions about the resilience and effectiveness of local destination management practices. While considerable research has examined tourism recovery in major destinations, there remains a paucity of empirical studies focused on small, ecologically sensitive tourism areas in the post-pandemic context—particularly in developing countries. The existing literature has yet to fully address how localized governance, infrastructure limitations, community engagement, and marketing strategies collectively influence recovery efforts at the micro level.

Accordingly, this study seeks to evaluate the current state of destination management at Governor's Rapid and examine the underlying causes of its declining visitor numbers. By identifying internal and external challenges, and proposing evidence-based marketing and management strategies, this research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism recovery. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policy decisions and destination development frameworks not only for Governor's Rapid but also for similarly situated ecotourism locales in the Philippines and beyond.

Research Method

This study employed a developmental research design aimed at producing strategic recommendations and actionable strategies to improve the destination management of Governor's Rapid in Quirino Province. The primary focus of this design is to address the current challenges in tourism promotion, infrastructure, and stakeholder coordination by generating practical solutions to revitalize the site.

The research process began with a comprehensive assessment of the destination through semi-structured interviews with tourism officers, community members, and visitors. Observations were also conducted to examine the site's natural features, current facilities, and visitor experience. This stage allowed the identification of gaps in infrastructure, promotion, environmental management, and stakeholder collaboration.

During the development phase, thematic analysis was applied to the collected data to identify recurring patterns and key factors affecting tourism sustainability. Based on these insights, the study formulated targeted strategies for improving destination branding, enhancing accessibility, fostering community engagement, and strengthening multi-stakeholder coordination.

The resulting recommendations are intended to serve as a practical framework for local authorities and tourism stakeholders to reposition Governor's Rapid as a sustainable and attractive ecotourism destination. By employing this developmental research method, the study provides a meaningful contribution to rural tourism recovery and management, offering locally driven solutions to enhance visitor interest and support sustainable development.

Result and Discussion

It presents the profile of the informants who participated in the study. A total of 25 individuals were involved, representing key stakeholders in the tourism management of Governor's Rapid in Quirino Province. These informants included Provincial Tourism Officers (PTO), Provincial Tourism Staff (PTS), municipal-level tourism officers and staff from Maddela, local community members (LCM), and visitors (V). The selection of respondents was

purposive, focusing on individuals with direct experience or engagement with tourism activities and site management.

Table 1. Profile of Informants in the Tourism Management of Governor’s Rapid, Quirino Province

Informants Group	Frequency	Criteria
Provincial Tourism Officers (PTO)	1	A professional employed by the government responsible for developing, promoting, and managing tourism initiatives within a specific province.
Provincial Tourism Staff (PTS)	4	A group of professionals who support the planning, development, promotion, and delivery of tourism services and initiatives within a government unit in a provincial level.
Maddela Tourism Officer (MTO)	1	A professional employed by the government responsible for developing, promoting, and managing tourism initiatives within a specific municipality.
Maddela Tourism Staff (TS)	9	A group of professionals who support the planning, development, promotion, and delivery of tourism services and initiatives within a government unit in a municipal level.
Local Community members (LCM)	5	Residents who are directly or indirectly affected by tourism activities and developments in their locality.
Visitors (V)	5	Individuals who travel to a destination outside their usual environment for leisure, business, education, or other purposes, typically for a short or temporary period.
TOTAL	25	

Source: Data gathered by the researchers (Millan et. al 2026).

The Provincial Tourism Officers of Quirino provided valuable data on visitor, tourism programs, and developmental plans for Governor's Rapid. Their insights helped align recommendations with local strategies for sustainable tourism growth. The local community members and the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Maddela, Quirino provided unique perspectives on the destination's management and development. Their insights helped improve marketing and overall management, ensuring the destination's success in the tourism industry.

Decline in Tourist Arrivals Due to External Factors

This theme addresses the reasons behind the decrease in the number of tourists visiting Maddela, Quirino. The respondents cited a variety of internal disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This factor intersects to create a decline in both tourist satisfaction and visit frequency.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as the most frequently cited factor contributing to the decline in tourist arrivals at Governor’s Rapid. Respondents consistently highlighted the disruptive effects of government-imposed health protocols, the perception of travel as risky, and the general public's hesitation to engage in recreational activities. These responses point to a broader shift in travel behavior that affected both local and international tourism.

PTS3: *"Since the Covid -19 pandemic there is decrease in tourist arrival."*
MTO6 *"Strict implementation of health protocols during the pandemic"*
LCM2: *"Yes, after the covid-19 pandemic."*
LCM4 *"Wala kaming maraming guest dahil sa pandemic." (We don't have many guests since the pandemic)*
MTO4: *"One factor why tourist arrivals of governors rapid decreased from the year 2020–2022 is pandemic or the covid 19 virus."*
MTO4: *"People are prohibited to roam around for any leisure that causes virus spread."*
MTO1: *"The pandemic itself"*
(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Stakeholders from multiple sectors in the government such as the tourism officers, and local communities acknowledged that the pandemic had a profound and lingering impact on tourist activity at Governor's Rapid. Their testimonials provide firsthand evidence of how national and global health policies intersected with local tourism trends, significantly reducing visitor turnout and altering the site's tourism dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic represents an external force that disrupted the tourism industry worldwide, and Governor's Rapid was no exception. The observed decline in tourist arrivals aligns with global patterns of suppressed travel due to health risks, lockdowns, and policy restrictions (Gössling et al., 2020). The respondents' lived experiences corroborate what Sigala (2020) identified as a 74% drop in international tourist arrivals in 2020, a decline that had lasting ripple effects on local destinations. Beyond the direct loss of visitors, the pandemic reshaped travelers' perceptions of risk. Polyzos, Samitas, and Spyridou (2021) noted that perceived travel risk became a dominant psychological barrier, suppressing tourist intent even after restrictions were lifted. This psychological shift was echoed in Governor's Rapid where both local hosts and travelers remained cautious, limiting leisure travel and social gatherings.

Furthermore, Yeh (2021) emphasized that recovery in tourism will not solely depend on reopening physical access to destinations but also on rebuilding traveler confidence and implementing resilient health and safety strategies. This supports the findings in Governor's Rapid where merely relaxing protocols did not lead to a rapid resurgence in tourism. Instead, the responses indicate a need for structured communication about safety, trust-building, and visible infrastructure improvements to reassure tourists. From a local governance perspective, the implications of these findings suggest the need for an integrated pandemic recovery plan that goes beyond digital marketing and infrastructure upgrades. It calls for a recalibration of the tourism strategy that factors in health-conscious travelers, risk communication, and adaptive service delivery. As suggested by De Canio, Martinelli, and Viglia (2023), the recovery of tourism destinations in a post-pandemic world must leverage positive destination images to counteract the negative effects of perceived risk. Governor's Rapid will benefit from such an approach by pairing its natural attractions with explicit assurances of safety, cleanliness, and preparedness.

Competition from Other Destinations

The emergence and growth of alternative tourist attractions in nearby areas have led to increased competition for Governor's Rapid. Respondents identified this competition as a key contributor to the decline in visitor numbers, with tourists preferring more accessible, well-known, or better-equipped destinations. This trend reflects broader shifts in consumer preference, driven by the desire for novel experiences and convenience. Tourism stakeholders from the provincial and local tourism offices, as well as local community members, frequently referenced the expanding presence and appeal of nearby ecotourism sites as a source of concern. These testimonies illustrate how Governor's Rapid is being outpaced by newer or better-managed destinations, a challenge that threatens its market share and regional significance as a tourist attraction.

PTO1: *"competition from other tourist destination."*

PTS1: *"competition from other eco-tourism spots."*

LCM3: *"Another tourist spot developed."*

PTS2: *"the growth of the other tourist destinations nearby."*

TO4: *"tourist tends to choose more convenient or familiar spot."*

MTO2: *"Establishment as the 'bugadors' are competing from each other."*

TO4: *"Tourist tends to choose more convenient or familiar spot."*

LCM3: *"Another tourist spot developed."*

PTS2: *"The growth of the other tourist destinations nearby."*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

The competitive tourism landscape in Maddela's reflects a broader trend in which emerging destinations vie for attention, often at the expense of older, less dynamic locations. This is a well-documented phenomenon in tourism geography and strategic marketing. As noted by Ban and Faur (2022), increasing competitiveness between local and regional tourism destinations has compelled stakeholders to diversify offerings and enhance promotional strategies to retain visitor interest. Respondents' concerns indicate that Governor's Rapid may be entering the stagnation or decline phase of Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, unless strategic interventions are implemented (Butler, 1980, as cited in Diedrich & Buades, 2009). The availability of more convenient, accessible, or promoted destinations can lead to a redistribution of tourist flows, especially when visitors seek novelty or improved amenities attributes often found in newer or recently redeveloped attractions.

Moreover, according to Schmallegger, Taylor, and Carson (2011), remote or less-developed destinations that fail to innovate or respond to shifting market dynamics are particularly vulnerable to tourism decline. Their research on outback tourism in Australia shows how market diversification and internal innovation systems are critical to maintaining competitiveness. In the case of Governor's Rapid, this underscores the need for the development of unique selling propositions (USPs) and revitalization efforts that distinguish it from its competitors. The implications for local governance and destination managers are significant. Without targeted investment in promotion, facility upgrades, and experience diversification, Governor's Rapid risks being overshadowed by other ecotourism offerings in the region. As tourism becomes more consumer-driven, destinations must align themselves with evolving visitor expectations, including convenience, multi-attraction itineraries, and quality service delivery. Strategically, this competition could also be reframed as an opportunity. Collaboration rather than rivalry such as establishing tourism circuits or joint promotions among sites can enhance regional appeal and distribute tourist traffic more evenly. This would require coordinated planning between the provincial government, local government units, and private sector stakeholders

Decline in Tourist Arrival Due to Internal Challenges

The LGU and other stakeholders are promoting Maddela's tourism through promotion, environmental protection, skill development, and site improvements, despite internal conflict within agencies, legal, environmental, political, and financial challenges hindering smooth operations and strategic long-term planning.

Weak Promotion and Digital Marketing

The stakeholders identified weak promotional strategies and underutilization of digital marketing platforms as key contributors to the decline in tourist visits to Governor's Rapid. The respondents emphasized the need to strengthen online visibility, collaborate with influencers, and simplify promotional efforts through various social media platforms. These actions were seen as critical to rebuilding the destination's public image and attracting a wider audience in a highly competitive digital tourism landscape. Multiple informants, particularly from the Provincial Tourism Office and Maddela Tourism Office, highlighted the role of promotion in the site's decline and recovery efforts. Their responses underscore the limitations

of current marketing approaches and the urgency for digital transformation in tourism communication. These insights reflect a common understanding that effective marketing particularly through social media is essential for increasing awareness and engagement among potential visitors.

PTO1: *“Tourism office supports the management of GRNP through digital marketing and promotion”*

PTS1: *“Strengthen the promotion, collaboration with local bloggers.”*

MTO1: *“Simplify the promotional campaign through various social media platforms.”*

PTS2: *“Marketing them through social media.”*

MTO2: *Boost the promotion of Governor’s Rapid in all social media platforms.”*

PTS1: *“Promote the area or tourist attraction through social media.”*

PTS3: *“Continuous promotion and marketing”*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

In today’s competitive tourism market, digital promotion is essential for sustaining visitor interest and influencing travel decisions. The lack of a strong digital marketing strategy at Governor’s Rapid has hindered its ability to reach target markets, especially younger and tech-savvy travelers who rely heavily on online platforms for trip planning. Florido-Benítez (2022) emphasizes that digital and mobile marketing, branding, and accessible information are critical components of modern tourism promotion. Destinations that fail to adopt these tools risk becoming invisible in a saturated market. Furthermore, the promotion of Governor’s Rapid appears to lack personalization and multi-channel engagement. Pradipta et al. (2020) explain that travelers seeking lesser-known destinations often rely on digital content such as blogs, videos, and interactive maps to discover and assess new places. The absence of such materials for Governor’s Rapid likely limits its discoverability and reduces its competitiveness against better-publicized alternatives. In addition, the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased travelers’ demand for transparency, reassurance, and virtual previews of destinations (De Canio, Martinelli, & Viglia, 2023).

The limited online presence of Governor’s Rapid, including the lack of testimonials, safety information, and user-generated content, further contributes to visitor hesitancy. To address these gaps, tourism officers should develop a cohesive digital marketing strategy that includes: Consistent content production (e.g., photo and video updates); Collaboration with local influencers, vloggers, and bloggers; Optimization of search engine results and hashtags; Use of immersive technologies (e.g., virtual tours or 360° videos); and Real-time engagement through stories, livestreams, and Q&A sessions. These approaches not only enhance the visibility of Governor’s Rapid but also foster a stronger emotional connection with potential tourists, increase revisit intention, and support brand loyalty in the long term.

Infrastructure and Network Development

Infrastructure and network development were cited by respondents as essential components for revitalizing tourism at Governor’s Rapid. These initiatives include the reconstruction of damaged facilities, development of tourism circuits, and improvement of road access. Stakeholders viewed these efforts as critical to enhancing visitor comfort, safety, and accessibility, thereby enabling the destination to better compete in the regional tourism market.

Participants from both the provincial and municipal tourism offices noted that infrastructure rehabilitation and strategic planning were actively underway. They described various improvements, from facility upgrades such as cottages and lavatories to broader eco-tourism development plans involving external agencies like the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). These developments reflect a long-term vision of integrating environmental protection with enhanced visitor infrastructure.

MT04: *"Rehabilitation and build, replaced the destroyed structures where guest will stay like cottages, lavatory, and other facilities needed in order to relax and comfortable for the guest to stay."*

TO4: *"The LGU improved road acces"*

PTS3: *"The tourism office have developed a tourism circuits"*

MT05: *"The quirino province implemented strategies to revitalize the tourism of the rapid through eco-tourism development plan, infrastructure and accessibility of the governor's rapid conservation of the environment with the help of DENR."*

PT01: *"Reconstruction and enhancement of tourism activities."*

PTS4: *"Improvement of Facilities."*

PTS4: *"Developed a tourism circuits"*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Vigorous infrastructure is the foundation of a successful tourism destination. In the case of Governor's Rapid, the reconstruction of visitor facilities and development of road access are not only practical responses to post-pandemic recovery but also long-term investments in tourism competitiveness. These upgrades are particularly important in ecotourism contexts, where infrastructure must balance comfort with minimal environmental impact (Schmallegger, Taylor, & Carson, 2011). According to Catudan (2015), infrastructure development significantly influences regional tourism growth by improving the attractiveness and accessibility of destinations. Governor's Rapid's physical remoteness requires well-maintained roads, signage, and visitor facilities to support safe and enjoyable experiences, especially for families, seniors, and first-time travelers.

The creation of tourism circuits mentioned by several respondents suggests an innovative approach to spatial tourism planning. Petchlaner and Volgger (2014) argue that such integrative strategies strengthen destination networks by promoting multi-site itineraries, which distribute tourist flow, increase average stays, and encourage spending across neighboring areas. For Governor's Rapid, linking the site to other attractions within Quirino Province enhances its value proposition and supports broader economic spillovers. Moreover, the partnership with the DENR signals an important intersection between infrastructure and sustainability. Eco-tourism development plans that incorporate environmental safeguards ensure that physical growth does not come at the cost of resource depletion. This reflects global best practices where tourism infrastructure is not simply expanded but green-designed to protect biodiversity and align with conservation goals (Mili, 2013). However, infrastructure efforts must be sustained and coupled with regular maintenance, operational training, and visitor feedback mechanisms to ensure long-term effectiveness. Without proper upkeep, even the best-designed facilities risk falling into disrepair, eroding public trust and visitor satisfaction.

Other Factors Affecting the Decline in Tourist Arrival

Insufficient Facilities and Accessibility

A major barrier to tourism growth at Governor's Rapid is the inadequacy of visitor facilities and the poor accessibility of the site. Respondents consistently noted the absence of key amenities, challenging transportation routes, and lack of signage as factors that negatively impact the visitor experience. These infrastructural limitations discourage return visits and reduce the site's competitiveness relative to better-equipped destinations. Across stakeholder groups including local tourism officers and local community members concerns were raised about the limitations in physical infrastructure and accessibility. Their narratives highlight both systemic neglect and the pressing need for investment in essential services, accommodations, and transport linkages that facilitate safe and convenient access to Governor's Rapid.

TO4: *"its rough road, limited transportation options or lock of clear signage it makes the place harder to reach."*

LCM2: *“lack of basic facilities and equipments.”*

MTO8: *“Limited tourist activities in the area.”*

PTS4: *“Improvement of Facilities.”*

PTS1: *“Intensified marketing and promotion, improvement of the basic facilities and equipments in the area.”*

V1,2: *“the mode of transportation heading to the place”.*

V1,2,3,4: *“Add more activities and improve the place”*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness are closely tied to the quality and availability of infrastructure and basic services. Governor’s Rapid’s infrastructural shortcomings such as rough access roads, limited transport options, and insufficient visitor amenities undermine the overall tourism experience and diminish the likelihood of repeat visits. This finding aligns with the broader tourism literature, which consistently links infrastructure quality with destination appeal (Catudan, 2015). According to Schmallegger, Taylor, and Carson (2011), destinations in remote or rural settings often face significant structural weaknesses, including underdeveloped facilities and poor internal transport networks. These limitations compromise visitor convenience, reduce accessibility, and limit the ability of destinations to attract diverse market segments. In Governor’s Rapid, this is particularly problematic given its ecotourism positioning, which typically demands both safety and comfort despite its nature-oriented appeal.

Moreover, accessibility goes beyond physical infrastructure it also includes wayfinding systems, public information signage, and ease of movement for individuals with special needs. Mili (2013) argues that inadequate infrastructure and accessibility significantly lower tourists’ satisfaction, especially when expectations about comfort, convenience, and safety are not met. This, in turn, can lead to negative word-of-mouth and a diminished reputation, both of which are detrimental to long-term tourism growth. The implications for local tourism officers are clear: prioritizing infrastructure development must be at the core of any tourism recovery or growth strategy. Investments should include improving road conditions, expanding visitor facilities such as restrooms and information kiosks, and installing directional and interpretive signage. These improvements not only elevate the tourist experience but also support the broader goals of sustainability, safety, and inclusivity. Additionally, establishing reliable transportation options and integrating Governor’s Rapid into regional tourism circuits can enhance its visibility and accessibility, especially for non-local travelers. Such infrastructural enhancements, if coupled with effective promotion and community involvement, could transform the site from a hard-to-reach niche attraction into a competitive ecotourism destination.

Internal Management and Coordination Issues

Inefficiencies in internal governance, unclear administrative roles, and lack of strategic coordination between tourism stakeholders were commonly cited as major barriers to effective tourism development at Governor’s Rapid. Respondents noted overlapping responsibilities, management conflicts, and insufficient local government involvement, which have contributed to delays in implementation, fragmented planning, and ultimately, decreased tourist arrivals. Tourism officers and local government representatives consistently pointed to governance and coordination challenges within and between agencies managing Governor’s Rapid. These include institutional ambiguity between the provincial tourism office and the municipal LGU, conflicts with private landowners, and absence of an integrated management plan. These issues signal a breakdown in collaborative tourism governance, which undermines both service delivery and destination promotion.

MTO1: *“Internal conflict between management and the donors of the land.”*

MTO2: *“No clear-cut policy imposed by the government. Government operated and private*

operated."

MT09: *"Inefficiency in internal management."*

MT03: *"One of the key factors that affected the significant decrease of tourist arrival in governors' rapids is how the provincial government handles the overall tourism activity in said tourist destination."*

MT08: *"Since the governor's rapid is managed by the provincial tourism office, the LGU cannot implement strategies to address the issue."*

MT09: *"Inclusion of the municipal government of Maddela in the overall operation of governors rapid."*

MT02: *"Improve government and private sector companionship."*

MT02: *"Management and operation of the area is solely administered by the Provincial Government."*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Effective destination management hinges on clear administrative roles, inter-agency collaboration, and coherent governance frameworks. In the case of Governor's Rapid, governance fragmentation between the Provincial Tourism Office and the Municipal Local Government Unit (LGU) has created operational ambiguities that stall development and marketing efforts. This mirrors the findings of Otcheskiy et al. (2023), who highlight how internal inefficiencies and stakeholder misalignment can suppress the potential of tourism destinations. As Pearce and Schänzel (2023) explain, well-managed destinations share one critical feature: clearly defined governance systems that integrate all actors in the public, private, and community-based under shared strategic goals.

The absence of a defined tourism master plan and stakeholder consensus in Governor's Rapid has left management reactive rather than proactive, limiting its ability to implement recovery measures or capitalize on growth opportunities. Moreover, the consequences of internal conflict are not just administrative they translate into tangible setbacks in service quality, infrastructure investment, and visitor satisfaction. As Diedrich and Buades (2009) argue, resident and stakeholder perceptions of tourism mismanagement are often early indicators of destination decline. At Governor's Rapid, the perception of misaligned operations and poor coordination directly correlates with the loss of visitor confidence and interest. To address these governance issues, it is critical to revise and implement a comprehensive tourism master plan. This plan should clearly delineate roles between the provincial and municipal bodies, integrate private operators such as the bugadors, and create a framework for regular stakeholder engagement. Joint committees or tourism councils may also help facilitate inclusive planning, minimize conflict, and foster a more unified vision for the site's development. Without strong institutional collaboration and consistent policy direction, other recovery strategies such as marketing and infrastructure investment will have limited impact.

Capacity Building and Environmental Preservation

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of training local tourism personnel and integrating environmental preservation initiatives as dual strategies for sustainable tourism development at Governor's Rapid. These efforts included training for tour guides, capacity-building workshops for hospitality staff, and community-involved conservation practices. Together, they aim to enhance service quality while protecting the natural environment, thereby improving the overall tourist experience and ensuring long-term viability of the destination. Respondents from the tourism offices described ongoing efforts to equip frontline workers with skills in customer service, safety, and sustainability. Simultaneously, the local government has engaged in environmental preservation activities such as clean-up drives and eco-friendly initiatives. These integrated strategies reflect a commitment to building a responsible tourism workforce and fostering environmental stewardship, which are essential for ecotourism destinations like Governor's Rapid.

PTO1: *"Enhancing tourism experience by training local guides to be equipped for their job."*

PTS2: *"We are training more our tour guide"*

MTO4: *"LGU conducted trainings and seminars to the establishment staff in a way to refresh, regenerate and upgrade the knowledge and etiquette and how to properly deal with the guest."*

MTO1: *"The LGU conducts various activities in sustaining the Governor's Rapid like clean up drive"*

TO4: *"Pushed for eco-friendly practices, and involved the community"*

PTO1: *"Improvement and enforce sustainable policies, educate and train local guides."*

PTS4: *"Responsible tourism."*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Capacity building and environmental preservation are core pillars of sustainable tourism, particularly for nature-based destinations such as Governor's Rapid. Strengthening the competencies of tourism personnel not only enhances service delivery but also improves safety, communication, and cultural interpretation for tourists. Praneetham (2020) underscores the critical role of training in fostering professionalism and ecological awareness among tourism workers, which are essential for maintaining visitor satisfaction and promoting environmental ethics. In connection to that, the integration of conservation efforts such as clean-up drives and promotion of eco-friendly behavior reflects growing alignment with global sustainable tourism frameworks. Mili (2013) argues that environmentally responsible practices, supported by local governance, are necessary for preserving a destination's natural assets and ensuring repeat visitation.

This is particularly relevant for Governor's Rapid, whose appeal is deeply tied to its pristine riverine and limestone features. Moreover, involving the local community in both capacity-building and conservation fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, increasing the likelihood of long-term success. As Abukhalifeh and Wondirad (2019) explain, community-based approaches to tourism development lead to improved socio-economic outcomes and greater environmental accountability. In Governor's Rapid, training locals to become certified guides and stewards of the environment positions them as key actors in tourism growth and protection. Strategically, these efforts not only mitigate the risk of environmental degradation but also strengthen the destination's brand as a responsible ecotourism site. By marketing these initiatives such as guide certifications, zero-waste programs, and biodiversity preservation Governor's Rapid can attract niche markets that prioritize ethical and sustainable travel. Moreover, it is critical to institutionalize these training and conservation activities through formal programs, budget allocations, and partnerships with environmental NGOs and educational institutions. Doing so will ensure consistency, scalability, and resilience in the face of increasing tourist demand and environmental pressure.

Environmental and Legal Constraints

Strict environmental regulations and legal constraints related to protected areas have posed challenges to infrastructure development and tourism expansion at Governor's Rapid. Respondents expressed frustration over delayed or halted projects due to legal limitations intended to preserve ecologically sensitive zones. While these restrictions serve conservation objectives, they also hinder strategic development and economic revitalization efforts. Participants from the Provincial Tourism Office reported that their capacity to develop or enhance tourism-related infrastructure has been significantly limited by national environmental laws. Their statements reflect a tension between conservation mandates and the local need to promote tourism growth as a post-pandemic economic recovery strategy.

PTS4: *"Challenges in implementation of law regarding to the protected areas under the environmental law."*

PTS4: *"Project for development is not implemented because of strict environmental laws."*

PTS4: *"Project for development is not implemented"*

PTS3: *"Implementation of law regarding to the protected areas"*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Tourism development in ecologically sensitive areas like Governor's Rapid is often constrained by strict environmental policies intended to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. While such regulations are crucial for ensuring long-term ecological sustainability, they can create practical challenges when not accompanied by adaptive planning and stakeholder engagement. Farrell et al. (2001) emphasize that protected areas often require tailored visitor management strategies to balance conservation with tourism access. In the case of Governor's Rapid, the lack of flexibility in implementing eco-friendly infrastructure projects due to rigid legal restrictions has impeded efforts to improve visitor facilities and promote sustainable tourism growth. Environmental governance frameworks, such as those enforced by the Philippine DENR, are designed to prevent environmental degradation but often lack provisions for community-based tourism development in conservation zones. As Mili (2013) argues, sustainable tourism is not only about regulation but also about participatory approaches that allow for controlled development while preserving natural heritage. If local governments and tourism offices are excluded from planning processes or face opaque legal procedures, they are less likely to innovate or implement eco-sensitive infrastructure projects. Additionally, Brouder (2020) notes that sustainable tourism systems must be resilient and adaptable, particularly in contexts where ecological and economic interests intersect. This includes finding "win-win" models that allow tourism infrastructure such as eco-lodges, boardwalks, and interpretive centers to be developed within environmental guidelines. For Governor's Rapid, integrating Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and stakeholder consultations early in project design could help overcome regulatory barriers. In the absence of such adaptive strategies, the site risks stagnation, with missed opportunities for eco-tourism branding and revenue generation. The key implication is that conservation and tourism are not mutually exclusive, but their integration requires policy coherence, technical support, and stakeholder cooperation.

Financial and Resource Constraints

Financial limitations and restricted access to resources were identified as critical barriers to sustaining tourism initiatives at Governor's Rapid. Respondents pointed to the lack of consistent funding, economic instability, and rising operational costs as impediments to implementing tourism strategies, upgrading facilities, and promoting the site effectively. These constraints have slowed recovery efforts and weakened the competitiveness of the destination. Local tourism officials highlighted the insufficient allocation of public funds and limited revenue-generating mechanisms as key contributors to stagnation at Governor's Rapid. Their accounts illustrate the difficulties of managing a tourism destination without adequate operational budgets or access to sustainable financial support, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

MT02: *"No income generation on the part of the government."*

MT07: *"Economic instability rising operational cost"*

MT02: *"No income generation"*

MT07: *"Rising operational cost"*

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

A consistent theme in tourism development literature is the centrality of adequate financial resources in sustaining both promotional efforts and infrastructural improvements. In the case of Governor's Rapid, the lack of financial capacity has restricted the ability of local stakeholders to respond to competitive pressures and evolving tourist expectations. As Dredge and Jenkins (2007) argue, resource constraints are often the primary bottleneck in tourism planning and implementation, especially at the local government level. The inability to generate or allocate funds for tourism infrastructure, staff training, or marketing compromises

the overall quality of the tourist experience. Moreover, small-scale destinations with minimal commercial activity, such as Governor's Rapid, may face added difficulties in securing private sector investment due to perceived risk and limited profit potential (Brouder, 2020). This creates a cycle where financial scarcity leads to underinvestment, resulting in stagnation or decline in visitor interest. Additionally, the impact of economic shocks, such as those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, has further strained financial resources.

According to Gössling, Scott, and Hall (2020), pandemic-induced economic instability forced many tourism-dependent regions to divert funds to essential services, leaving little for destination promotion or infrastructure rehabilitation. This reflects the reality expressed by Governor's Rapid's stakeholders, who observed rising costs with no clear income streams. To overcome financial and resource constraints, local governments and tourism offices must consider diversified funding mechanisms. These may include: Public-private partnerships (PPPs) to co-develop facilities; Community-based tourism enterprises that generate local income; Grant applications from national tourism or environmental bodies; Imposition of user fees or eco-taxes earmarked for site development. Strengthening fiscal management and improving transparency in resource allocation can also enhance donor and stakeholder trust, increasing the likelihood of securing long-term financial support. Lastly, financial sustainability must be integrated into the broader tourism management plan to ensure resilience and continuity.

Personal Efforts in Preservation

A small but meaningful subset of respondents emphasized their individual commitment to promoting and preserving Governor's Rapid through responsible tourism practices. These efforts included personally advocating for sustainable travel, supporting local conservation initiatives, and modeling eco-friendly behavior. While not institutional in nature, these actions reflect a deep sense of personal stewardship and grassroots engagement in protecting the site's environmental and cultural integrity. Unlike more systemic themes related to infrastructure or governance, this theme captures the voices of stakeholders who proactively support conservation and tourism promotion through individual actions. These narratives highlight the role of local stakeholders in raising awareness and modeling sustainability, even in the absence of formal institutional backing or resources.

TO4: "I contribute to the sustainability of Governor's Rapid by promoting responsible tourism, encouraging sustainable practices, and supporting the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the destination."

MTO4: "support the ecological solid waste management."

TO4: "Promoting responsible tourism"

MTO4: "Support the ecological solid waste management."

(Date of Interview: May 20, 2025)

Although often overlooked in large-scale tourism planning, the personal efforts of local stakeholders can play a vital role in shaping sustainable tourism outcomes. These micro-level actions contribute to the collective identity of a destination and can influence visitor behavior, local policy, and broader community norms (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). In Governor's Rapid, individuals engaging in responsible tourism promotion and environmental practices reflect a growing grassroots commitment to sustainable development. Such personal stewardship aligns with the principles of pro-environmental behavior (PEB), which refer to actions taken voluntarily to minimize one's negative impact on the environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). In tourism contexts, PEB includes everything from waste reduction and energy conservation to education and advocacy.

The presence of these behaviors among tourism officers and local residents at Governor's Rapid suggests a foundation for community-based sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, these personal efforts serve as informal "behavioral cues" for tourists. As Weaver and Lawton

(2007) point out, when locals visibly support sustainability, visitors are more likely to conform to those behaviors. This dynamic reinforces conservation goals while strengthening the authenticity and ethical image of the destination. However, relying solely on individual actions is not enough. For personal efforts to scale and sustain, they must be institutionalized through recognition programs, formal inclusion in planning processes, and opportunities for skill-building. As Dangi and Jamal (2016) recommend, integrating citizen-led sustainability efforts into tourism governance not only empowers communities but also enhances policy effectiveness.

Governor's Rapid could therefore benefit from creating platforms for local champions such as sustainability task forces, volunteer tourism programs, or eco-ambassador roles that legitimize and amplify personal contributions. These efforts can bridge the gap between top-down strategies and bottom-up activism, fostering a culture of shared responsibility.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the decline in tourist arrivals at Governor's Rapid and identify the underlying causes, challenges, and opportunities for revitalizing its tourism sector. Through thematic analysis of stakeholder responses, the study uncovered a range of interrelated issues affecting the destination, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing competition from neighboring sites, insufficient infrastructure and facilities, poor coordination among tourism stakeholders, and inadequate digital marketing strategies. Despite these challenges, the study also highlighted ongoing initiatives such as capacity-building programs, environmental conservation efforts, infrastructure rehabilitation, and community-driven promotion, all of which demonstrate potential pathways for sustainable tourism recovery. Addressing the objective of the study, the findings reveal that the decline in tourism at Governor's Rapid is not attributable to a single factor but rather to a combination of systemic, environmental, and managerial issues. A comprehensive, stakeholder-led marketing development plan that integrates infrastructure improvement, digital promotion, sustainable practices, and inclusive governance is essential to reposition Governor's Rapid as a premier ecotourism destination in Quirino Province

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