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Wave of Change: Revitalization of San Jose Aroma Beach Promenade for Coastal Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

This study aims to develop a thorough revitalization plan for Aroma Beach Promenade and restore its identity. Aroma Beach is a renowned beach destination in Barangay San Roque I, San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, known for its historical significance. It is home to McArthur's Second Landing Marker, commemorating the event when American naval forces, led by General Douglas MacArthur, conducted the "Second Landing" on the beaches of San Jose on December 15, 1944. This marked a crucial moment in the liberation of the Philippine islands from Japanese occupation during the Battle of Mindoro. The significance of this event has established Aroma Beach as a symbol of resilience and independence in both local and national history. Despite its historical importance, Aroma Beach has faced contemporary challenges. The Aroma Beach Promenade, built in 2021 as a sea wall along the water's edge to protect the shoreline and boost tourism, encountered problems during its construction, according to Engr. Magsangkay, the municipal engineer of San Jose, said the construction did not adhere to the proper standards for coastal infrastructure, rendering the structure more vulnerable to environmental hazards. In 2022, Typhoon Paeng severely damaged the promenade, leading to the collapse of large portions of the concrete walkway, including the sea wall section. This event underscored the need for more sophisticated measures to protect the area, both environmentally and architecturally. Descriptive quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the investigation. The findings indicate that while the area has a lot to offer visitors, problems, including poor infrastructure, environmental challenges, and a lack of historical knowledge, persist. In particular, inadequate planting and subpar drainage systems were cited by 85% of survey participants as reasons for their displeasure with the promenade's current state. Furthermore, McArthur's Second Landing Marker and Aroma Beach's historical significance were unknown to 78% of tourists. 82% of respondents highlighted the need for more shade and seating areas, and 67% of respondents said waste management was a serious problem. These results demonstrate how urgently historically appropriate and sustainable revitalization strategies are needed.

KEYWORDS: *Promenade, Coastal Resiliency, Revitalization, Aroma Beach, Second landing*

Introduction

Occidental Mindoro is a province fenced by the Verde Island Passage, Oriental Mindoro, Sulu Sea, Mindoro Strait, and the South China Sea and mountain ranges on the east, dividing the Oriental Mindoro Province. According to PAG ASA (2024), the province is prone to having a probability that it can increase the strength of any typhoon lands. San Jose is situated along the coastal area of its province, where Aroma Beach is located. Aroma Beach is a famous beach destination in Barangay San Roque I, San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, an area with a historical distinction. Its name comes from the Sweet Acacia (Acacia Farnesiana) locally known as “Aroma” trees that formerly bordered the beach. The air was filled with the fresh scent from these trees, which added to the atmosphere's tranquility. Aroma Beach houses one of San Jose Occidental Mindoro's historical landmarks, McArthur's Second Landing Marker. On December 15, 1944, American naval forces, under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, carried out the "Second Landing" on the beaches of San Jose (the "First" being the famous Leyte Landing) to liberate the Philippine islands from Japanese occupation during the Battle of Mindoro. Securing San Jose and the entire island of Mindoro was essential in the effort to reclaim Manila and Luzon, as well as in defeating the Japanese Imperial forces with the combined strength of American and Filipino troops (Horner, 2024). This event has forever cemented Aroma Beach as a symbol of resilience and independence in both local and national history. With all its historical significance, Aroma Beach has had to grapple with contemporary issues. The Aroma Beach Promenade was built as a sea wall in 2021 along the water's edge to protect the shoreline and boost tourism within the area. However, during the promenade’s construction, according to Engr. Magsangkay the municipal engineer of
San Jose stated that the construction planned by Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) did not follow the proper standards when it comes to coastal infrastructure, rendering the structure more vulnerable to environmental hazards. The following year, 2022, Typhoon Paeng severely devastated the promenade until large portions of the concrete walkway went down, including the sea wall portion. This disaster showed quite clearly that more complex measures were called for by way of protection, environmentally and architecturally, in that area.

Aroma Beach plays an essential role in the community's economy, but it also holds both historical and recreational significance. The promenade fronts businesses that rely on tourist activities, such as restaurants and vendors. These activities, however, are hindered by the low volumes of people due to higher temperatures during the day and a general lack of shade. These morning and evening hours signify the time in which the promenade is most populated, which emphasizes the necessity for architectural changes to allow for daytime tourists.

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, the methodologies employed by the researcher to collect all necessary data and information, and the methods used to conduct the study. It encompasses delineating research instruments, data gathering procedures, ethical considerations, data processing, and statistical treatment.

Research Design

The researchers employed the descriptive qualitative and quantitative approach to complete the study considering its architectural integrity, structural condition, and historical significance. The researchers collected data by analyzing construction plans, coastal laws, and historical records, particularly those related to General Douglas MacArthur's Second Landing. The essential documents were obtained from the Local Government Unit of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. The researchers interviewed officials and specialists and administered a public perception survey to gain insights into the promenade's utilization and historical value. The researchers performed site visits and photographic documentation to evaluate the present condition of the structure.

Unit of Analysis and Sampling

The estimated number of respondents is 100 residents and 100 local tourists as the sample size. Despite the smaller sample size, the researchers employed a random sampling method to prevent bias in the selection process.

The random sampling method ensured that every individual in the population had an equal chance of selection, thereby maintaining the sample's representativeness. This enabled the researchers to collect data efficiently and draw conclusions reasonably applicable to the large population of residents and local tourists.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1.0: Aroma Beach Promenade at 6:00 pm onwards

(photo documentation of tourists and visitors along the promenade in the evening)

Figure 1.0 shows that the Aroma Beach Promenade is active during this hour, attracting many tourists. Some love to eat, while others unwind and cycle. There are also vendors present in the vicinity.

Figure 2.0: The current condition of the sea wall

Figure 2.0 shows the current condition of the sea wall at the Aroma Beach Promenade.

This is the result of the reconstruction undertaken after it sustained damage from Typhoon Paeng in 2022.
Figure 3.0: The Acacia Farnesiana (sweet acacia) commonly known as aroma

Figure 3.0 shows the Acacia farnesiana, or Sweet acacia, a medium deciduous tree that is endemic to coastal areas and deserts. However, in some provinces, particularly in Occidental Mindoro, this type of tree is commonly called "Aroma." Yet, the beach was eventually named "Aroma Beach" due to the large number of sweet acacia trees that grew there before.

However, only three Acacia farnesiana trees remain at the Aroma Beach Promenade due to the extensive construction project brought by the later project of the former Mayor JTV which were public rental cottages up to the construction of the promenade started on 2021.

Table 1.0: summary of tourist attraction visitors from January to May 2024 (Department of Tourism, 2024).

Months	Local Tourist	Foreign Tourist
January - March	96,136	4,044
April- May	92,095	9,073
TOTAL	188,231	13,117

Table 1.0 indicates the summary of visitors to tourist attractions from January to May 2024. The numbers suggest this period's domestic and international tourist arrivals are high. The significant number of tourists in the first quarter was due to favorable weather and continued holiday travel. A massive inflow of tourists from April to May is due to giant events like the San Jose Festival, a significant tourist puller for locals and foreigners alike. This season coincides with the summer season when most schools are on holiday, substantially increasing tourist inflows.
Oral Investigation

According to Engr. Masangkay, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), initiated the Aroma Beach Promenade. TIEZA provided the plan and funding, which were then handed over to the San Jose Local Government Unit (LGU) for implementation, with the project beginning in 2021. Engr. Masangkay noted that the project needed to meet the standards required for coastal development, particularly regarding the easement, which was only 15 meters wide.

Furthermore, Engr. Masangkay emphasized that the project needed more proper supervision by professionals, such as architects, who should have been the primary planners. He remarked that the project was executed primarily by government authority without adequate professional oversight.

Additionally, the municipal engineer mentioned that while there are plans to redevelop the promenade, a comprehensive strategy needs to be in place. A proposal by the Municipal Planning and Development Office (MPDO) was rejected because it suggested adding structural elements or facilities to the site, which the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) prohibits. In the past, the Aroma Beach area was filled with cottages and public establishments led by the former Mayor of San Jose (Jose Tapales Villarosa) JTV, which the DENR later demolished due to regulations prohibiting construction near the coastline.

Engr. Masangkay also explained that the seawall collapse during Typhoon Paeng in 2022 was due to improper construction, particularly a shallow foundation. This event highlighted the need for redevelopment, which, according to him, requires proper planning and strict adherence to coastal development laws and standards.

According to Mr. Mark Ranee M. Raguindin, coastal areas are classified into foreshore and easement areas, which are classified under the marine zone or salvage zone. Though these two generally fall into one term, they are defined differently. The foreshore is the area between the highest and lowest tide levels. On the other hand, it is determined that the easement area, also known as littoral rights, is a 20-meter strip of land measured from the highest tide mark.

Mr. Raguindin, explains that the marine zone is government-owned. In fact, according to Republic Act No. 1067, also known as the Water Code of the Philippines, development activities in this zone are limited to recreational purposes and strictly prohibited for residential, facility building, or private establishments. However, if an existing structure exists in the marine zone, its owner will apply for a miscellaneous agreement or rent it from the government, depending on the intended use. In the particular case of the Aroma Beach Promenade, because this project comes under the government's control, a miscellaneous agreement is not needed but rather a proclamation from Congress to make the project legal.

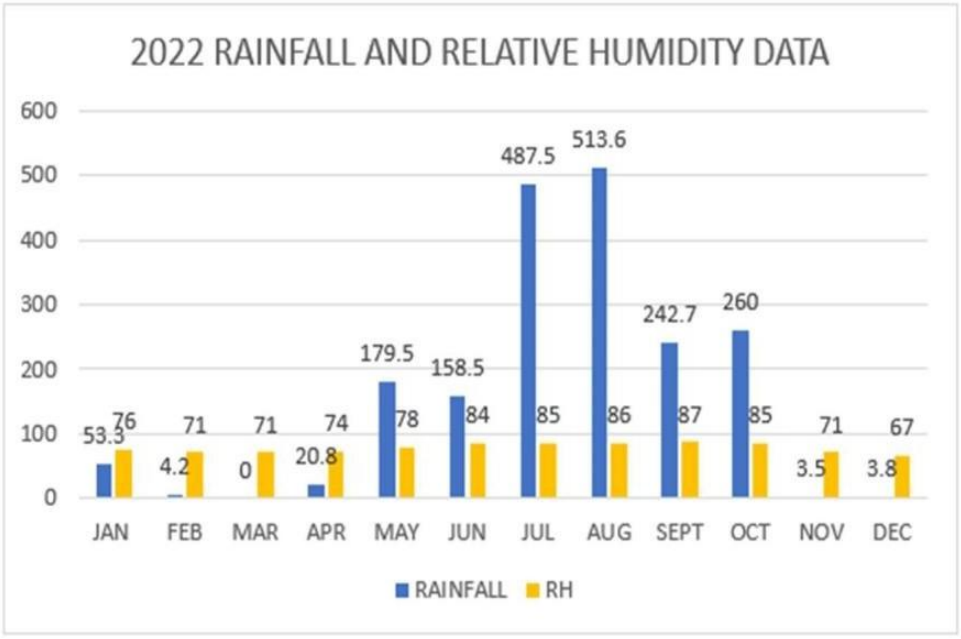
Furthermore, the development of the marine zone should always be open and accessible to the public rather than reserved for exclusive and private use. Moreover, according to Mr. Raguindin, the Water Code of the Philippines requires specific easement measurements based on the type of land or project. A 20-meter easement from the highest tide must be observed for coastal developments. For forest land, the required easement is up to 40 meters.

B. Tables and Graphs

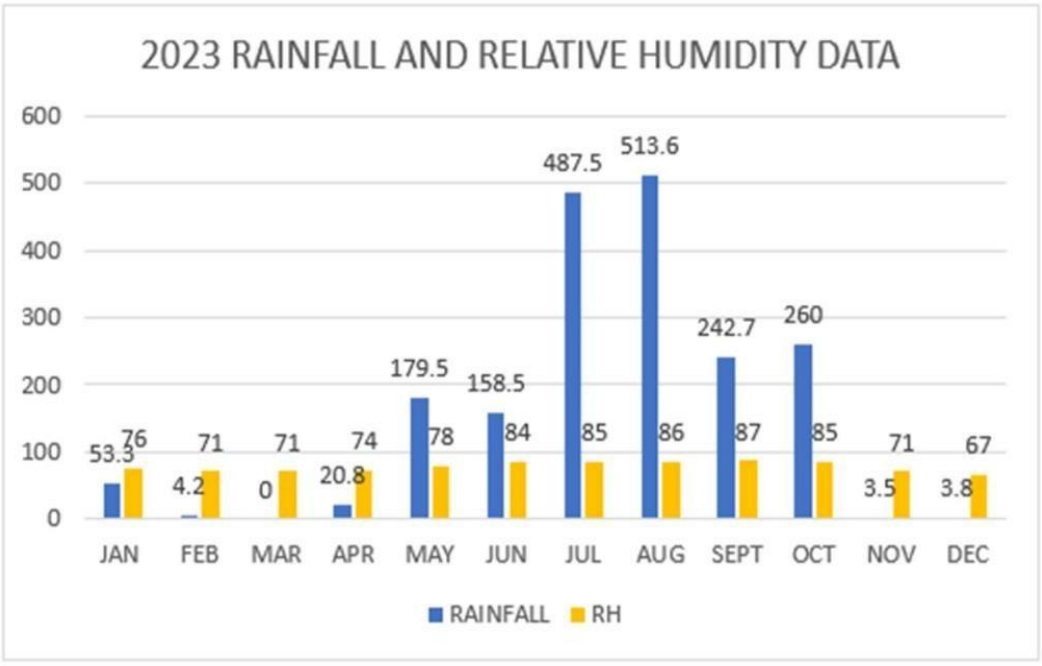
Graph 1.0: 2021 Wind and Speed Direction Data (PAGASA, 2024).

Graph 1.0 indicates wind speed and direction from January up to December 2021. Its most excellent direction was 270° during April and September, while the wind speeds remained low, peaking at three units in most months. This information would help design the Aroma Beach Promenade to obtain maximum airflow and comfort in different seasons.

Graph 2.0: 2022 rainfall and relative humidity data (PAGASA, 2024).

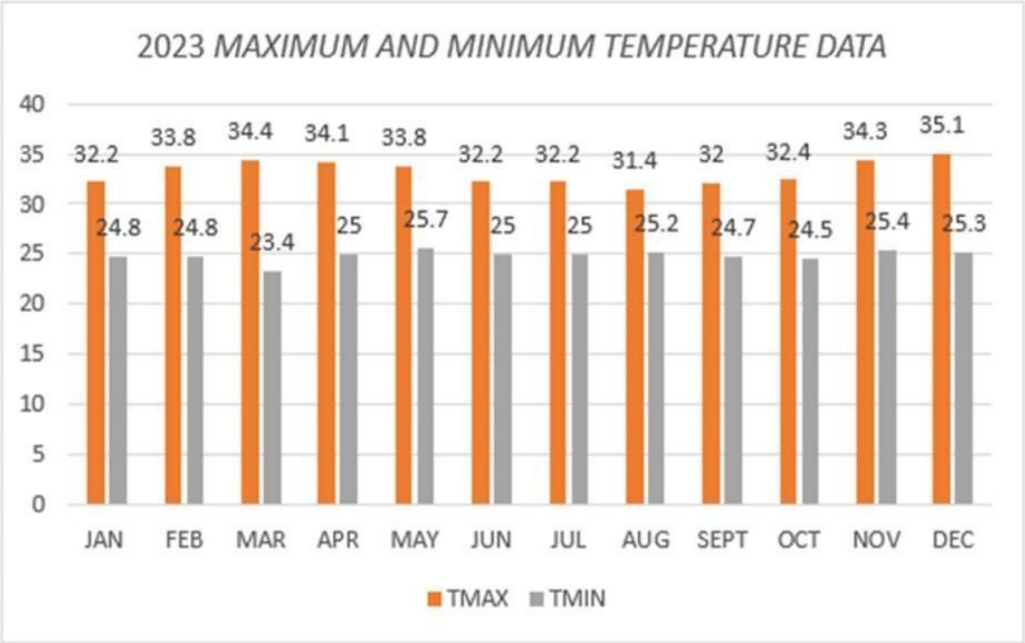


Graph 2.0 Rainfall and relative humidity information for 2022 Month Value July(487.5mm), August (513.6 mm), and October (260 mm) show high rainfall activities. Relative humidity remains stable, with slight anomalies across the year. These points guide the design of the promenade along Aroma Beach so that it has adequate drainage during the peak rainy season. Stable humidity levels determine elements of design that will keep the users comfortable all year.
Graph 3.0: 2023 Rainfall and Relative Humidity Data (PAGASA, 2024).



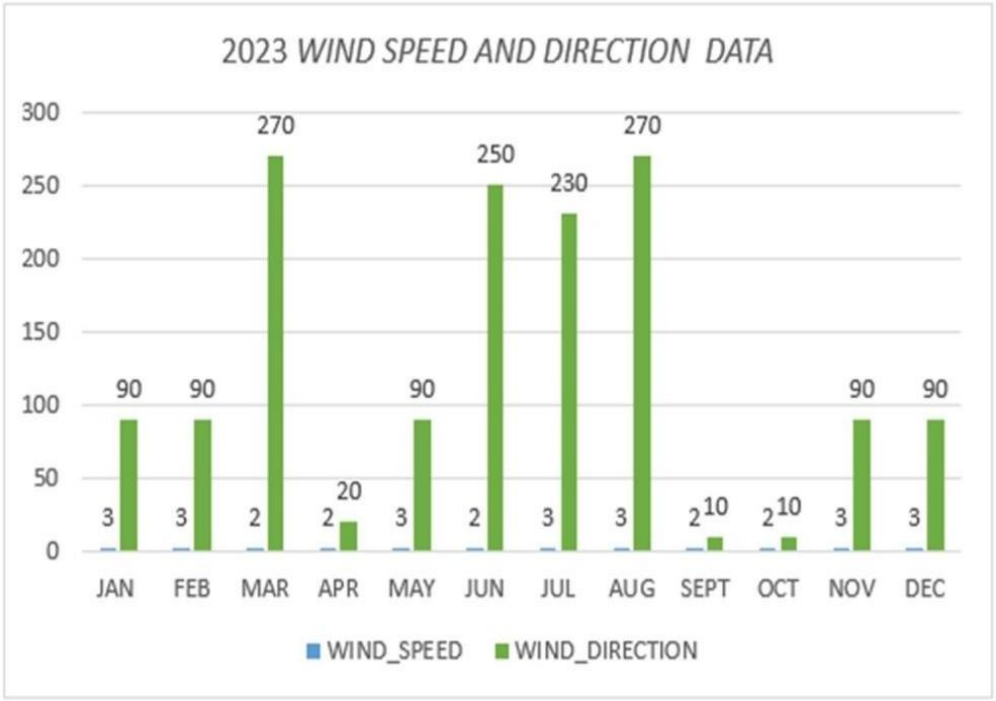
Graph 3.0 indicates that July and August had the highest fall at 487.5 mm and 513.6 mm, respectively. The lowest rainfall was reported in November, with just 3.5 mm of recorded rainfall. Relative humidity varied between 71-87 percent, but 86-87 percent was collected for August, September, and October.

Graph 4.0: 2023 Maximum and Minimum Temperature Data (PAGASA, 2024).



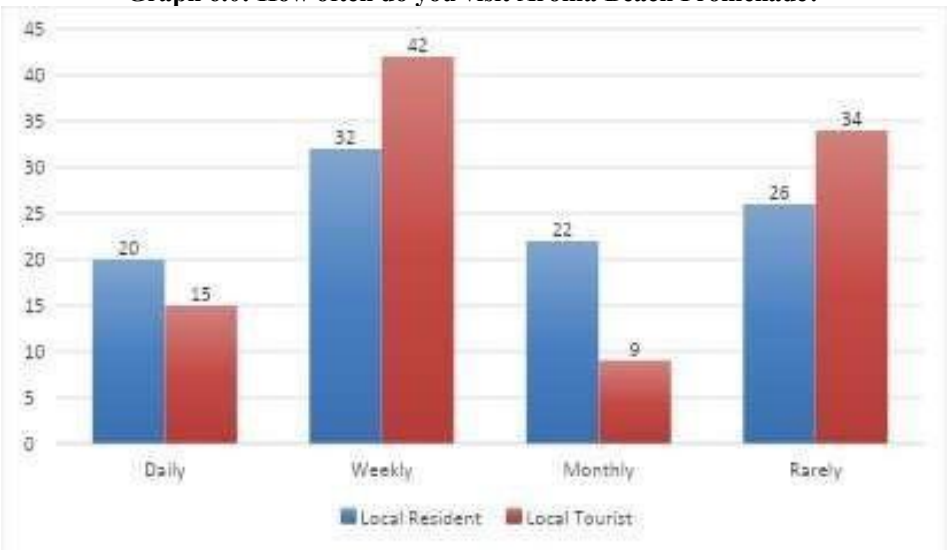
The graph 4.0 indicates the time series maximum and minimum temperatures in 2023. TMAX shows no variation with time and exhibits trends between 31.4°C in August and 35.1°C in December. The minimum temperature records the lowest TMIN at 23.4°C during March, and during May, the temperature peaks at 25.7°C. Both the maximum and minimum temperatures are seasonal and have no extreme fluctuations.

Graph 5.0: 2023 Wind Speed and Direction Data (PAGASA, 2024).



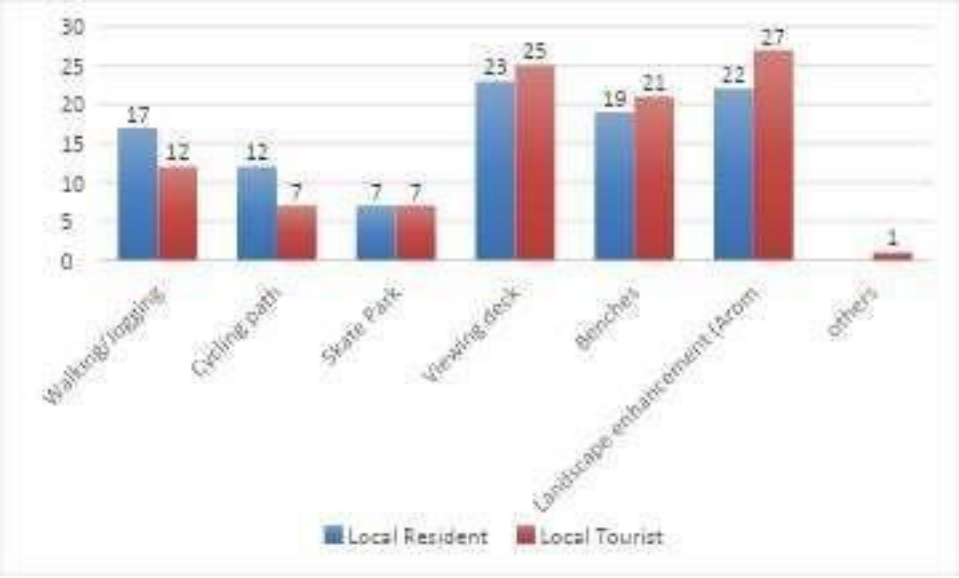
Graph 5.0 shows the 2023 wind speed and direction. Wind speed is steady at three units in most months, decreases to two units in April, and decreases to one in September. Wind direction varies, with significant peaks at 270° for both March and August; other high values appear at 250° in June and 230° in July. Wind direction is maintained at 90° for several months, including January, February, May, October, November, and December.

Graph 6.0: How often do you visit Aroma Beach Promenade?



Graph 6.0 shows how frequently residents and local tourists visit the Aroma Beach Promenade. Most residents, with 32 respondents, visit the promenade weekly. Following this, 26 of the residents see the promenade rarely, 22 monthly, and then 20 of the respondents visit the site daily.
In addition, in The Majority of Local Tourists from Other Towns, Provinces, and Cities, 42 respondents visited the promenade weekly, followed by 32 local tourists who went to the promenade rarely, 15 daily, and then nine respondents visited monthly.

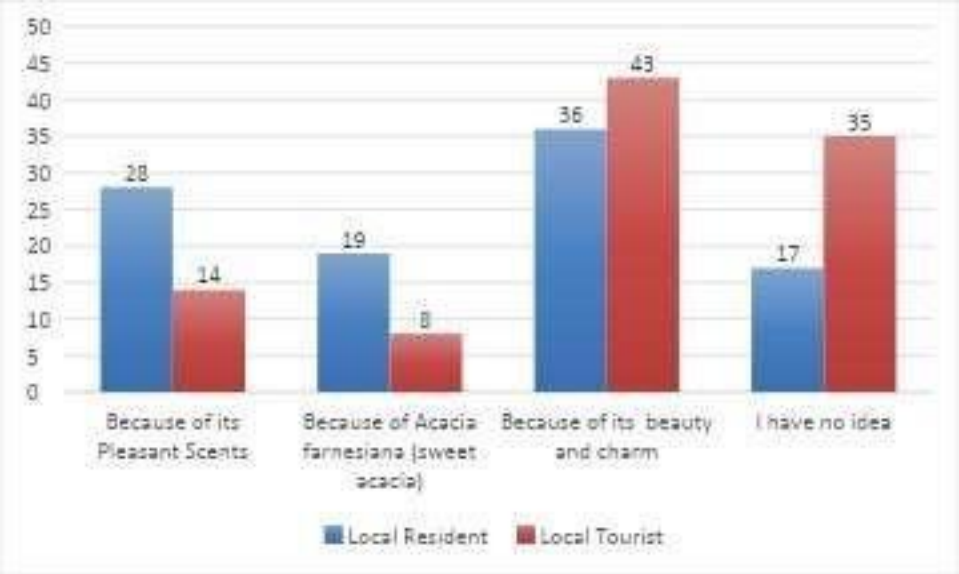
Graph 7.0: Which features would you prefer to see developed or enhanced in the proposed revitalization of Aroma Beach Promenade?



Graph 7.0 illustrates the enhancement preferences and suggested additional features of the respondents to the Aroma Beach Promenade. The results show that 23 residents preferred a viewing deck, while 22 suggested landscape enhancement, specifically adding aromatic plants to the promenade. Additionally, 19 indicated more benches, 17 suggested improvements to the current jogging and walking path, and 11 suggested adding a cycling path. 7 of the locals then proposed a skatepark.
However, most local tourists, precisely 27, prefer landscape improvements, especially adding aromatic plants to the promenade. Next, 25 tourists prefer a viewing deck, 21 want more benches, 12 prefer improvements to the current jogging and walking path, and 7 want to see a cycling path and a skatepark added to the promenade.
As a result, most respondents favor adding a viewing deck to the location and improving the landscape, especially by

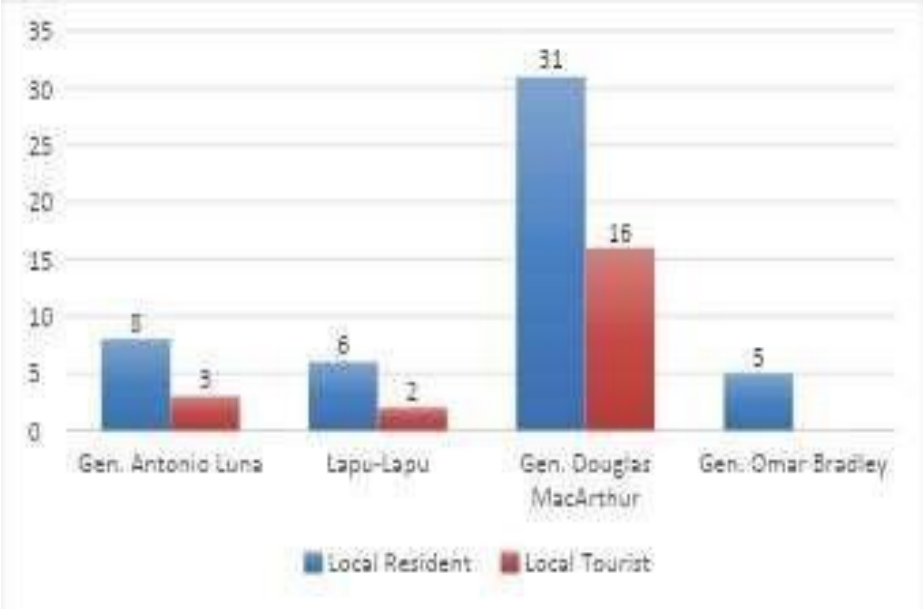
adding trees and aromatic plants to the promenade.
Historical/Cultural Significance of Aroma Beach

Graph 8.0: How do you think Aroma Beach became known?



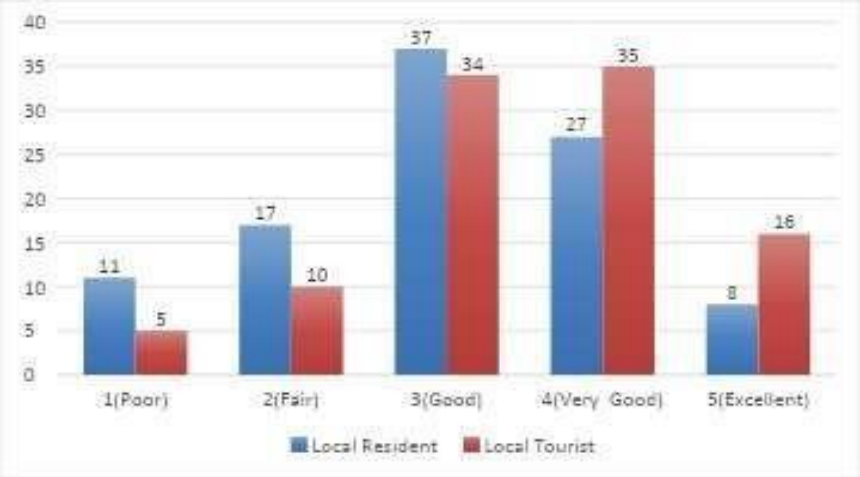
Graph 8.0 demonstrates the respondents' historical knowledge regarding the explanation behind "Aroma" Beach's name. Thirty-six residents answered that it is due to its "beauty and charm." Following this, 28 locals believe it's due to its pleasant scent, while 17 remain unsure.
On the other hand, the 43 local tourists believe its beauty and charm are the main reasons. Following this, 14 tourists thought it was because of Aroma Beach's pleasant scent across the beach, while 35 had no idea.
Only 19 residents and 8 local tourists correctly identified the historical explanation for Aroma Beach's name, which is from Acacia Farnesiana, or Sweet Acacia. Furthermore, most respondents failed to determine the origin of the name "Aroma" Beach.

Graph 9.0: Awareness of the Aroma Beach Historical Significance.



Graph 9.0 indicates the acknowledgment of the respondents who gave Aroma Beach its historical significance. Of 46 residents, 31 residents are correct. However, out of 21 local tourists, 16 correctly identified Gen. Douglas MacArthur, enhancing the site's historical significance.

Graph 10: Waste Management



Graph 10 shows the respondents' evaluation of Aroma Beach's waste management. Thirty-seven residents gave it a three (good) rating. Nineteen respondents gave it a rating of two (fair), eleven gave it a rating of one (poor), eight gave it a rating of five (excellent), and twenty-seven local visitors provided it a rating of four (very good).
Furthermore, it received ratings of 4 (very good) from 35 local tourists, 3 (good) from 34 tourists, 5 (excellent) from 16 tourists, 2 (fair) from 10 tourists, and 1 (poor) from 5 tourists. As a result, the data shows that most respondents perceive the waste management at the Aroma Beach promenade as good.

Conclusion

The revitalization of Aroma Beach Promenade provides a unique opportunity to reinvent it as a premier cultural and recreational destination that still retains the natural and historic feel of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, but with better visitor experiences. The promenade can be the embodiment of harmony between modern usability and the rich cultural heritage of the area, its historical significance to General Douglas MacArthur, and to its native tree Acacia Farnesiana locally called Aroma, by being designed and implemented based on sustainable and responsible design principles.
Among the main conclusions drawn from this exercise is the fact that there are problems with the infrastructure of the promenade. These include poor design, a lack of shade, and concerns about maintenance and waste elimination. Surveys and interviews of local government members and stakeholders pointed to several grievances: better landscaping, viewing decks, and "strict compliance with laws such as the Water Codeof the Philippines". Accordingly, the demand of public society towards more natural shades, comfort, and expression of cultures reveals the necessity for ecologically friendly and user-centric rehabilitation.
The promenade is a lively social and recreational area, as evidenced by visitor patterns. It is particularly popular during local festivals and holidays. However, a climate-responsive design is necessary to address the seasonal problems of high heat and heavy rainfall, making the promenade extremely usable all year round. The site's cultural and historical significance is also underappreciated, which means that certain interpretive and educational components should be included in the visiting experience. These concerns need to be addressed in the reconstruction plan together with strategic facility improvements, cultural education, and sustainability. Enhancements include waste management programs, environmentally friendly infrastructure, and historical story components that will guarantee that the Aroma Beach Promenade develops into a sustainable, and culturally significant destination. By addressing these issues, the revitalized promenade can be an example of sustainable coastal development, promoting tourism, civic involvement, and pride in the area while preserving its unique character as a San Jose, Occidental Mindoro icon.

Recommendations

The research findings have led to the following architectural recommendations to improve the Aroma Beach Promenade's sustainability, usability, and visitor experience:
1. Restoring the area's natural shade and visual attractiveness requires a landscaping plan that reintroduces native trees and shrubs. The plan should also revive aromatic plants that flourish in coastal environments, such as Acacia farnesiana.
2. Establish Aroma Beach Promenade as a recognized historical landmark to guarantee the site's preservation and protection while acknowledging its cultural significance and association with General MacArthur's Second Landing during World War II.

3. An efficient drainage system is necessary to control the runoff volumes produced by rainfall during the June through October peak wet seasons. An effective drainage system is essential for controlling runoff volumes generated by rainfall during the peak wet season from June to October. Implementing rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavement can help prevent erosion and flooding. Rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavement can be used to avoid erosion and flooding.
4. Provide enough shade and cooling in structures and areas that adapt to climate change to make visitors more comfortable during the hot months of March through May. Sustainable materials, green roofs, and shaded regions can all be used.
5. The seawall should continually be strengthened against future calamity breakouts using the proper engineering techniques. Its base should not be shallow to withstand storm surge-induced waves and roaring high tides.
6. Create multipurpose areas that can host various events, including community gatherings, sports, and leisure. Incorporate open spaces for performances or meetings and adjustable seating arrangements.
7. Provide vendors with designated spaces that do not impede traffic flow and offer basic facilities like water and electricity. This will keep the environment clean and boost the local economy.
8. Involving the local community in the planning process guarantees that the planned development satisfies their needs and, for instance, maintains cultural relevance, which can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for the promenade.

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