

# Best practices of tour guides in Eco-Park Panguil Laguna: A basis for the development of comprehensive training plan for tour guiding services

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## ***Abstract***

Tour guiding is one the most lucrative professions under the tourism sector. However, most tour guides lost their job unexpectedly in 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic. In spite of this, many provinces around the country are still positive that tour guiding will be back with a vengeance this 2024. Developing a comprehensive training plan in tour guiding in times of pandemic is not an easy task. Only several schools in the Philippines are offering tour guiding courses and most of them are in the provincial areas where most popular tourist destinations are located. The primary objective of the study is to explore the existence and outcome of the best practices of the tour guides of Eco Park Panguil Laguna. For clearer focus on this study, the researchers were guided by scope and delimitations. This research study specifically focused on Eco Park in Panguil Laguna. In benchmarking the best practices of the tour guides, the researchers had interviewed ten (10) individuals who are working as tour guides of Eco Park in the past years. As such, the survey and interviews were conducted for one week. This study used subsequent mixed method approach, wherein the researchers utilized both qualitative through interview and quantitative through survey using questionnaires in generating data pertinent and cognizant in this study. Findings surmised that the four characteristics of the tour guides; interpersonal skills, communication skills, knowledge and body language are the best practices that should be maintained by tour guides because they have direct impact towards the tourists. Eventually, the output of the study was designed and crafted in the form of a comprehensive training plan intended for assisting individuals who wants to become a tour guide.

***Keywords:*** tour guide, Laguna, sustainability, Philippines

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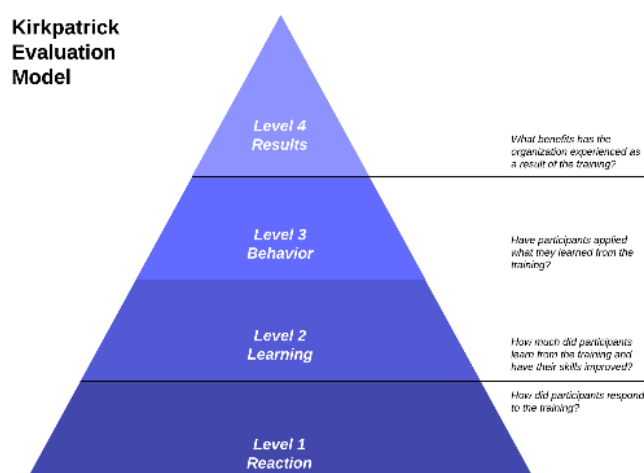
### 1. Introduction

Tour guiding is one the most lucrative professions that we have under the tourism sector. Tourism, the biggest industry in the world was hit enormously this 2020. It has been a rough time for many guides who compromised their profession due to Covid-19 pandemic. In spite of this, many of the provinces around the country are still positive that tour guiding will be back with a vengeance this coming 2024. It has been said that Tour Guiding NCII will soon be introduced in the curriculum of junior high school by the Department of Education. The researcher felt the need that this new subject should be thought under the guidance of a comprehensive training plan. In line with this study will examine the best practices of the tour guides that are based in Eco Park in Panguil, Laguna. which eventually can facilitate in developing a comprehensive training plan in tour guiding.

According to Hoang (2015) tour guide performance is comprised of five dimensions – appearance, professional competence skill, solving problems skill, organizational skill, and entertainment introduction skill. Tour guide performance is not only positively and significantly related to the satisfaction of tourists, but also is one of the factors that determine the destination loyalty of customers. In the same view, Kabii et al (2017) concluded that tour guides are aware of the areas that they need to be trained and should be consulted before organizing such training. Lastly, Najdawi (2019) recommended the necessity to prepare evidence which enhances the skills of tour guides and also advises that training courses be conducted to increase the efficiencies of a tour guide’s knowledge and skills such steps will hopefully. ultimately lead to greater tourist group satisfaction and promote the sustainability of the Jordanian tourism industry

**Research Objectives** - The research objective of this study are the following; 1. To determine the best practices of Local Guides who are based in Eco Park Panguil Laguna; 2.To describe the current level of competencies of the tour guides; 3.To identify the skills gap of the tour guides;4.To develop a comprehensive Local Guiding NCII training curriculum that can be utilized by Laguna State Polytechnic University and other Technical Vocational Institutes.

### *Theoretical Framework*



*Figure 1: Kiripatrick Evaluation Model*

The study is anchored in the theory of Kirkpatrick’s four level training evaluation model (1994). This theory

states that it can objectively analyze the effectiveness and impact of training that can be improved in the future. The model was developed in 1959 and was then updated in 1975, and again in 1994. According to his theory, the four levels are reaction, learning, behavior and results. Reaction is learner focused. It measures if the learners have found the training to be relevant to their role. This has three parts; satisfaction, engagement and relevance. It is generally measure after the training has been completed. On the other hand, learning focuses whether or not the learner has acquired the knowledge, skills, attitude and confidence and commitment that the training program is focused on, Behavior measures behavioral change after learning and shows if the learner are taking what they have learned in training and applying it as they do their job. Lastly, result, focuses on whether or not the targeted outcomes resulted from the training program alongside the support and accountability of organizational members. The Kirkpatrick model is indeed the best-known model for analyzing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs. This is believed to be highly applicable in a vocational setting.

**Scope and Limitations** - The primary objective of the study is to explore the existence and outcome of the best practices of the tour guides of Eco Park in Panguil Laguna. For clearer focus on this study, the researcher were guided by the following scope and delimitations. First, this research study specifically focused on Eco Park. In benchmarking the best practices of the tour guides, the researcher visited ten (10) individuals who are working as tour guides of Eco Park in Panguil Laguna in the past years. As such, the survey and interviews were conducted for one week. Moreover, the areas of considered impact of best practices were on personal and career development. Meanwhile, the study was grounded on perceptions of the tour guides. Lastly, the output of the study was designed and crafted in the form of a comprehensive training plan intended for assisting individuals in making and implementing informed plan in tour guiding qualification. As research locale of the study, Eco Park served as the setting of the study. With the data and information generated from ten tour guides, the best practices were identified. It is assumed that the respondents who took part in the study were able to answer the survey questions to the best of their knowledge. It is also assumed that respondents participating in the study would have some degree of previous experience with the tour guiding.

## 2. Materials and methods

**Research Design** - This study used subsequent mixed method approach, wherein the researchers utilized both qualitative through interview and documentary analysis and quantitative through survey using questionnaires in generating data pertinent and cognizant to this study. As defined Creswell, & Plano Clark, (2017), mixed method research is a research design (or methodology), in which the researchers collect, analyze, and mix (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry. This approach to research is used when this integration provides a better understanding of the research problem than either of each alone. By mixing both quantitative and qualitative research and data, the researchers gain in breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration, while offsetting the weaknesses inherent to using each approach by itself.

**Sampling Technique and Participants** - The researchers had chosen ten (10) who were previously working/and are currently working as tour guides of Eco Park in Panguil Laguna. Some of them have been working since 2014 and some of just have 2 years of working experience as volunteers. All of them answered survey questions and informal interview.

**Instrument** - The researcher administered self-made questionnaires for the respondents. This study's self-made questionnaire underwent content validation and reliability testing to ensure its effectiveness. Initially, expert reviews established content validity, ensuring that the questionnaire items were relevant and aligned with the research objectives. After necessary revisions based on expert feedback, the questionnaire was pretested. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the instrument, which measures internal consistency. The reliability test results yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.85, indicating good internal consistency among the items. This suggests that the questionnaire is reliable and provides consistent measurements across the constructs being studied, making it suitable for the intended research purpose. According to Ritter (2010), Cronbach's alpha

was computed to measure the items' strength of consistency.

Statistics solution (2019) added that Cronbach's alpha was computed by correlating the score for each scale item with the total score for each survey respondent and then comparing that to the variance for all individual item scores the survey for the tour guides is a checklist composed of 20 statements that they need to tick in relation with practices that they are implementing in the past few years. This descriptive quantitative study discussed how these tour guides implement their best practices. A maximum of one-week online interview was necessary to pursue the data gathering to gain substantial data needed in benchmarking best practices in tour guiding. The survey was answered for 15 minutes.

**Data Gathering and Ethical Considerations** - This study underwent various steps in conducting this type of research in order to generate needed data. A questionnaire was developed as a tool in gathering information in relation to benchmarking best practices of the tour guides of Eco Park in Panguil Laguna. It was further discussed and brainstormed for comments and suggestions. The final form was submitted to the Project Leader of the Tour Guiding Training Extension Program for approval before it was finally administered via google forms. After the validation of the instrument, the researcher secured a written permission to the individuals to be interviewed. After given permission the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the selected respondents and then made sure that each respondent understood it. The researcher collected the data by means of survey questionnaire (google forms) that comprises their age, gender, and economic status. After, the respondents have taken the survey, the data were checked, tallied, interpreted and analyzed.

**Data Analysis** - The researcher retrieved the data, then, tallied and tabulated them for presentation. After which, the latter drew the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations. Meanwhile, for the qualitative processing, the researchers made appointments with the identified subjects as interviewees. Using the validated interview questions, the latter conducted the interview on the set schedule appertaining thereto. Then, the interview results were transcribed, coded and analyzed according to device the data needed in the study.

### 3. Results and discussion

**Table 1**

*The Common Practices of Eco Park Panguil Laguna tour guides: Factor 1. Interpersonal skills*

Interpersonal Skills	Frequency	Percent
1. Can easily adjust to any individuals	10	100
2. Practices empathy towards others	6	60
3. Deals with difficult situations easily	10	100
4. Works as a team player	10	100
5. Assists individuals with regard to complaints and suggestions	6	60

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of best practices of ten tour guides of Eco Park in Panguil Laguna benchmarked for the purpose of this study. It can clearly point out in the table that out of the ten (10) tour guides, only three (3) among ten (10) indicators were implemented, namely: can easily adjust to any individuals, deals with difficult situations easily and works as a team player. The importance of interpersonal skills for tour guides remains central to their effectiveness, especially in eco-tourism contexts. Recent studies emphasize the evolving role of tour guides as frontline workers in tourism, balancing the need for professionalism and adaptability to meet the challenges posed by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2020 study by Camilleri notes that resilience and flexibility became key skills for tour guides during the pandemic, as the industry faced abrupt disruptions and shifts in tourist behavior (Camilleri, 2020).

Career orientation and professional development in tour guiding are also increasingly recognized as essential for maintaining quality service. During the pandemic, guides had to adapt by incorporating digital skills and adopting sustainable practices to meet the evolving needs of eco-tourism (Wen et al., 2020). The shift towards sustainability and responsible tourism further highlights the relevance of interpersonal and problem-solving skills, as tour guides are now expected to act as educators, fostering environmental awareness among tourists (Wang, 2020). As a whole, the list of best practices under interpersonal skills is properly

implemented. The practice of these is clear indications that the tour guides were aware of the importance of these characteristics as part of their job. It was very evident that most of the tour guides were career-oriented and very professional through the varied services they provide to their tourists.

**Table 2**

*The Common Practices of Eco Park Panguil Laguna tour guides: Factor 2. Communication Skills*

Communication Skills	Frequency	Percent
1. Speaks fluently in English or any other language spoken by the tourists	10	100
2. Practices well-modulated voice	8	60
3. Uses words that are comprehensible on the part of the tourist	10	100
4. Pronounces words correctly	6	60
5. Motivates others to speak their mind regarding the tour	10	100

The result revealed that communication skills play a very important role in tour guiding. Ability to interact well with the tourists is a best indication that you are providing world class quality service to your guests. Language, as a form of communication tool is something that should be learned, practiced and nurtured by those who are will to enter the tour guiding field. It is pointed out in table 2 that majority of the indicators such as fluency in English, usage of communicative words and being motivator are being practiced by the respondents which indicated that they knew the importance of this aspect in their profession.

Communication skills are self-explanatory, and their importance in the tourism industry is well documented in literature. Wang and Liu's (2020) research further underscore the fact that effective communication leads to tourist satisfaction and total tourism experience. Jones and Smith (2019) also note that tour guides who communicate well and can entertain their clients effectively using highly spoken language have a greater chance of creating memorable experiences, leading to positive word-of-mouth recommendations by tourists. The results that Eco Park guides actively motivate participation support the previous study result where Kim and Lee (2021) show that guides interest in communication can affect tourists' learning and pleasure to a large extent.

There are substantial implications of these findings. Ongoing training programs to improve language skills, voice modulation, and pronunciation are equally essential for Eco Park Panguil to hone the communication abilities of the guides. The second feedback mechanism could come from tourists and serve as guides to decide what they are not communicating that the tourists might want them to do with their other clothing, leading guides to better self-assessments and actions. In addition to this, training must promote interactive skills for tourist involvement so that the tour of the environment is more enriching. By integrating aspects of cultural sensitivity into training programs, you can improve how guides communicate and connect with tourists from various backgrounds. Improving the proficiency in the communication of tour guides is indispensable to creating good experiences, fostering customer satisfaction and image building, and leading to repeat visitation.

**Table 3**

*The Common Practices of Eco Park Panguil Laguna tour guides: Factor 3. Knowledge*

Knowledge	Frequency	Percent
1. Has an in-depth knowledge about the places included in the tour itinerary	10	100
2. Appreciates people from different cultural background	9	90
3. Possesses information that makes the tour more interesting	10	100
4. Updates himself regarding the latest trends in tour guiding and other topics related to tourism	9	90
5. Knows how to inject humor during the tour	10	100

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of the best practices of Eco Park tour guides implemented during the tour. It can be noted that most of the participating local guides are practicing the following: (1) Has an in-depth knowledge about the places included in the tour itinerary, (2) Possesses information that makes the tour more interesting, and (3) knows how to inject humor during the tour. Knowledge is also essential in every tour guide; they are expected to equip themselves with information related to the places which are part of their

itinerary. It is their responsibility to upgrade themselves from time to time to fully satisfy their clients. These conclusions are further validated by recent studies emphasizing the need for knowledge of tour guides. For example, Kuo and Chang (2022) examined how tour guides with knowledge of their destinations successfully improve tourist satisfaction. Researchers have found that when experienced guides lead the tour, they can provide background information, answer questions reassuringly accurately, and help create a more compelling narrative, improving customers' perception of enjoyment.

It is also very important to know how to present information in an attractive and pleasant format. Lee and Kim (2021) reported that guides who master the use of storytelling, humor, and interactivity during their talks are able to keep tourists attentive while creating an even greater emotional bond with the experiences they narrate. That fits with the humor injection that helps enrich the team dynamics element and also makes the tour fun. Wang et al. (2023) also emphasize the need for guides to update their knowledge continuously. Tourism researchers have highlighted the necessity for continuous professional development in tourism. They say that guides constantly looking to improve their knowledge, improve their skills, and so on end up being more adaptable in meeting the changing demands of travellers and can give incredible service. From the identified characteristics of practices among Eco Park tour guides, it can be concluded that there is an apparent realisation amongst the practices about knowledge and communication skills impacting the overall tourist experience. Guides must be equipped with solid professional development and engaging presentation skills to compete while providing quality tours.

**Table 4**

*The Common Practices of Eco Park Panguil Laguna tour guides: Factor 4. Body Language*

Body Language	Frequency	Percent
1. Observes body movements shown in front of the tourists	10	100
2. Effectively expresses his body language towards other people	10	100
3. Practices sensitivity in his non-verbal communication/gestures	10	100
4. Maintains good posture	10	100
5. Good eye contact with the guests	10	100

Table 4 shows the frequency distribution of the best practices of Eco Park tour guides implemented during the tour in connection with body language. It can be clearly gleaned that majority of the respondents perceived the importance of body language in their profession. Non-verbal cues through body language can make or break your relationship with others. As a whole, the respondents elucidated the impact of this factor among their guests. In perspective, tour guides provide their guests with sensitivity on body language which may affect their relationship with their guest during the tour. Recent studies reveal that body language improves the tour experience by expressing excitement, approachability, and positivity. Choi et al. (2023), for example, conducted research. Brotherton is the skills guide used to make eye contact, smile, and have open body language. This improves how inclusive tourists feel on a tour and, therefore, leads to an opportunity for them to engage more actively in the experience

The focus on body language referred to by the interviewees also indicates a realization of how non-verbal communication can influence guest relations. The research of Zhang and Wang (2022) confirms that reading and responding to visitors' non-verbal cues in the visual communication field is a link to adapting tour guides' conversational styles and thereby helps build rapport with them so that guests feel contented and esteemed. Again, this adaptability not only enhances the quality of the tour but also leads to greater guest satisfaction and more loyal guests. The results reveal that the Eco Park Tour Guides recognize the significance of their body language at the professional level. If they understand and master these forms of non-verbal communication, they will begin to attract and better connect with tourists, which in return can produce a more captivating tour experience.

**Table 5***Mean Distribution of Interpersonal, Communication, Knowledge and Body language Skills of Tour Guides in Eco Park Panguil Laguna*

	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Can easily adjust to any individuals	3.21	Agree	8
2. Practices empathy towards others	3.16	Agree	9
3. Deals with difficult situations easily	2.94	Agree	16
4. Works a team player	3.15	Agree	10
5. Assists individuals with regard to complaints	3.12	Agree	11
6. Speaks fluently in English or any other language spoken by the tourists	3.2	Agree	14
7. Practices well-modulated voice	3.25	Agree	7
8. Uses words that are comprehensible on the part of the tourists	3.02	Agree	12
9. Pronounces words correctly	2.96	Agree	15
10. Motivates others to speak their mind regarding the tour	3.03	Agree	13
11. Has an in-depth knowledge about the places included in the itinerary	3.26	Strongly Agree	6
12. Appreciates people from different cultural background	3.26	Strongly Agree	6
13. Possess information that makes the tour more interesting	3.26	Strongly Agree	6
14. Updates regarding the latest trends in tour guiding and other places related to tourism	3.26	Strongly Agree	6
15. Has a good sense of humor	3.26	Strongly Agree	6
16. Observes awareness about the body movements shown in front of the tourists	3.28	Strongly Agree	4
17. Expresses clearly his body language towards other people	3.29	Strongly Agree	3
18. Practices sensitivity in non-verbal communication	3.27	Strongly Agree	5
19. Maintains good posture	3.31	Strongly Agree	2
20. Good eye contact with the guests	3.32	Strongly Agree	1
Overall Mean	3.26	Strongly Agree	

Table 5 shows the mean distribution of the impact of the four given characteristics of tour guides in terms of interpersonal, communication, knowledge and body language as perceived by the respondents. Majority of the respondents agreed on recognizing good eye contact with the guests, with the highest mean of 3.32, followed by maintains good posture (WM=3.31); and expresses clearly his body language towards other people (WM=3.29), all of which are interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. However, they placed least emphasis on pronounces words correctly (WM=3.96); Speaking English and other language spoken by the tourists (WM=3.25); and deals easily with difficult situation (WM=3.21), although are interpreted as “Agree” respectively. It can be surmised that the four characteristics of the tour guides; interpersonal skills, communication skills, knowledge and body language have a direct impact towards the tourists.

Two new studies here support the idea that those qualities matter to tour guides. Specifically, good eye contact and body language are necessary during interactions with tourists to foster trust and engagement (Kim & Lee, 2022). They found that guides more skilled in non-verbal cues make the atmosphere more welcoming and thus enhance tourists' satisfaction. In addition, a study published by Lee et al., E.g., Manual 2023: Effective communications skills, explains how guides who speak well and solve conflicts can improve the travel experience more than they might realize. The results of their research imply that guides may well be very talented at this already; however, constant improvement in fluency along with conflict resolution is crucial for the service standard increase as a whole. Like this, the outcomes revealed that the characteristics of tour guides, including interpersonal behavior, communication behavior, knowledge, and body language, have a direct impact on the tourist experience, While the focus on non-verbal practices, including eye contact or posture, likewise brings about highlighting the importance for guides to enhance their verbal communication adequately when it comes to providing tourists with an all-embracing satisfying tour.

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the given findings of the study, the following are the conclusions formulated for dissemination. It can clearly point out that the four factors, namely; communication skills, body language, interpersonal skills and knowledge are practice evidently by the tour guides of Eco Park Panguil Laguna. This indicates that the tour guides are aware of the importance of these characteristics as part of their job. Hence, the abovementioned practices change in the lives of the tour guides along their facets of development. The result in this study can be applied in developing a comprehensive training program, specifically tailored for tour guiding services

qualification toward realizing career directedness of future tour guides.

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