Santander Tourist Information System– SITUR Santander Colombia

1. Tourist Observatories

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Abstract

Santander is a department of Colombia with great opportunities to become a tourist destination with enough attractions to captivate national and international visitors due to natural biodiversity and cultural heritage. In various forums organized by unions and government agencies responsible for making tourism in Santander a competitive industry, have noted among other weaknesses, the lack of timely information regarding the characterization of regional industry. It is recognized that the lack of information doesn’t allow us to anticipate industry trends, this prevents us from formulating in advance government policies aimed at improving infrastructure and qualification of human skills required to meet growing volumes of visitors. It delays innovation and doesn’t encourage the arrival of new investors. The Santander Tourist information System – SITUR Santander, it’s a project that aims to provide the region with a tool considered fundamental to turn tourism into a competitive regional bet and is a contribution to the efforts made by the National Government to make Colombia a World-class destination. This paper seeks to share the experience its structuring and implementation in order to find new ideas and contribute to consolidate the study of the impact of tourism in regional areas.

Background

Santander is a department of Colombia with excellent opportunities to become a competitive tourist destination; it has enough attractions to captivate national and international visitors, due to the natural biodiversity and historical, cultural and gastronomic heritage. Traditionally, tourism has not been in the region an important sector in the Gross Domestic Product (Regional GDP), in 2012 represents only 1.7%, still lower than the 2.7% from tourism in Colombia’s GDP, in 2012 represents only 1.7%, still lower than the 2.7% from tourism in Colombia’s GDP.

The Colombian government in the 2011-2014 Development Plan ”Prosperity for All” aims to make tourism a world class sector, encouraging domestic tourism and the arrival of new flows of international visitors. Santander is a region in the east of Colombia which wants to contribute to the achievement of this national goal. In the 2012-2015 Development Plan “Santander Seriously” the goal is “making tourism one of the axes of the local growth and development” and warns that achieving it “creates challenges that invite entrepreneurs and governments to find appropriate actions in order to ensure significant contributions to the growth and development of the tourism industry in Santander”.

Until 2007, tourism in Santander mainly focused in the region of the Guanenta Province, sustained by natural attractions for adventure sports in San Gil and the beauty of the historic heritage of Barichara, considered one of the most beautiful municipalities of Colombia, declared a national monument in 1978. Only, after the opening of the Chicamocha National Park (late 2006), the flow of visitors to Santander grew significantly. Since its opening, The

2 DANE.2012. Cálculos OEE – MCITT, Includes hotel and restaurant services
Parque has been visited by nearly two million tourists, a fact that allowed making the region a more attractive destination for Colombians, besides encouraging international tourist arrivals.

In the period 2013-2015, some important tourist megaprojects will be completed which will make Santander a more competitive destination, in the domestic and international market, making tourism a real alternative to achieve the goals of regional development and growth by offering new attractions and activities for visitors, which will definitely make tourism a strategic sector, promoting the improvement of tourism infrastructure needed to serve new visitor flows, encouraging the arrival of investors, directly or indirectly benefiting other productive sectors, creating wealth and prosperity to the region.

This new tourism reality in Santander, will offer visitors in the same region, the opportunity to enjoy various types of tourism:

- Adventure Tourism: Metropolitan Paragliding Park in Ruitoque (2014)
- Ecotourism: Natural Regional Park Santurbán (Recently declared natural Park) in the region of Soto
- Health Tourism: Free trade hospital zone Cardiovascular Foundation of Colombia in Piedecuesta (2015) and the permanent Free Trade Zone Fosunab Foundation in Floridablanca (2014).
- Nautical Tourism: Bucaramanga Reservoir (2015) and the Hidrosogamoso Dam (2014)
- Events and conventions Tourism: Metropolitan Convention Center of Bucaramanga (2014)
- Cultural Tourism: East Cultural Center (2014)
- Birdwatching Tourism: Yariguies Park Natural Reserve and Mesa de los Santos
- Hiking: Roads Recovery from Lenguerke Zapatoca to Barichara (2014)
- Rural Tourism: Coffee farms in Mesa de los Santos and the Guanenta Province.

All these new attractions will maximize the traditional vocation of adventure tourism and historical and cultural heritage. This will lead to the development of other provinces and municipalities of Santander, mainly due to the richness of natural attractions with potential to become tourist products. In addition, the rise and expected growth in the industry will increase the share of tourism in Santander’s GDP. It will lower the indicators of poverty and the unemployment rates, it will generate social equity, and it will encourage the modernization of our cities and towns promoting the improvement of the quality of life of the communities involved in the places of tourist interest.

In several forums organized by guild and government agencies responsible for making tourism a competitive sector in Santander, It has been pointed out among other weaknesses, the lack of timely information regarding the characterization of the industry, the absence of an estimate of the volume of the flows of people coming and the identification of the reasons for traveling, the lack of knowledge of the impact generated by tourism in the natural, social and cultural environment, and not knowing the revenue contribution made to the economy of the region from the sale of products and services to visitors.

Under these conditions, it is recognized that the lack of information doesn’t allow us to anticipate industry trends, this prevents formulating in advance government policies aimed at improving infrastructure and qualification of human skills required to meet growing volumes of visitors. It delays innovation and doesn’t encourage the arrival of new investors.

Introduction

The Santander Tourist Information System - Situr Santander, It’s a Project proposed by the IMarketing research group at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana from Bucaramanga, supported with economic resources provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Bucaramanga and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Colombia through the National Tourism Fund – FONTUR. This project aims to provide the region with a tool considered
fundamental to turn tourism into a competitive regional bet and is a contribution to the efforts made by the National Government to make Colombia a World-class destination.

**Objective**

The Santander Tourism Information System—SITUR Santander is intended to track the tourism industry, study the impact it has on the economic, environmental, social and cultural field as a result of the arrival of visitor flows and help promoting Santander as a tourist destination in order to encourage the use of information in the formulation of investment projects, policy making at the government level and the value generation, that allows to make tourism a feasible alternative for the improvement of the quality of life of the region.

**Framework**

The World Tourism Organization in various scenarios has highlighted the importance of statistical measures of the impact of tourism at sub regional level, information considered of great value to the:

- entrepreneurs in activities related to the design and implementation of marketing strategies and programs
- government agencies in the formulation of policies and actions to promote the tourism industry as one of the axes of development and regional economic growth
- industry stakeholders in order to anticipate trends and seize new opportunities

The International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRTS 2008) and the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008 (TSA-RMF 2008), have become reference documents to track monetary and non-monetary Indicators, providing a set of concepts, definitions, classifications and indicators that serve as the primary basis for the implementation of information systems at a sub-regional level

In this regard, the UNWTO and INROUTE (2012) point out that "the development of a tourism information system must be understood not as an end itself, but as an initiative that besides allowing credible analysis of tourism and its economic consequences, should also support the institutional strengthening of tourism administrations at national and subnational levels."

The dynamics and the impact of tourism is closely linked to the vocation and resources of the region, not only by the natural territory (a spectacular canyon) or by the built heritage (a colonial village) as the main attractions, but because the territory activity largely conditions the willingness of visitors to spend, aspect of fundamental importance and directly associated with the fulfillment of expectations, a key aspect to ensure these activities are generating wealth

It is worth highlighting that measurements at the sub regional level tourism have gained particular attention among researchers. Contributions are highlighted in different scenarios such as the International Conference on Measuring Tourism Economic Contribution at Sub-National Levels in the city of Malaga, Spain (2008), the first international conference about the measurement and economic analysis of the regional tourism in Donostia, Spain (2009), the second conference about the measurement and economic analysis of regional tourism – MOVE in Bilbao, Spain (2011) and the first seminar about regional tourism in Venice, Italy (2012).

Situr Santander draws on the guidelines defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) specifically in relation to the conceptual framework for the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA): Recommended Methodological Framework (RMT 2008), the proposal of the International Network on Regional Economics, Mobility and Tourism (INRouTe) "A closer look at the Tourism: Subnational Measurement and Analysis - Towards a set of WTO Guidelines". Furthermore, we incorporated the contributions made by researchers in various conference papers that have addressed the issue of subnational measurement.

**Elements of the Santander Tourist Information System—Situr Santander**
The Development plan of Santander 2012-2015, poses the objective "to consolidate tourism as a strategy for economic development and social transformation of the department". This purpose has been a reference to propose the design, construction and implementation of a Tourist Information System SITUR Santander as a valuable contribution and a pioneer in Colombia, given that the information will be the basis for the development and growth of the regional tourism industry, circumstance which should encourage the improvement of the living conditions of urban and rural populations of the municipalities involved in this activity.

Situr Santander is structured in two projects aimed to meet the proposed objective from conception, i.e., be a means of promoting the tourist attractions of Santander and facilitate access to information for decision-making in the areas of both the visitor and actors key industry:

1. **Official Tourism Site of Santander:** its main purpose is to promote Santander as a tourist destination through a web site platform. Contains detailed information on places of interest, highlighting the natural, the cultural and historical heritage that identifies our region. It also includes all formal entrepreneurs offering quality products and services for visitors. This website is a response to trends in the tourism industry in the world, recognizing the benefits and new challenges generated by the massive internet access and consolidation of social networks, media is allowing tourists to have a better understanding of the chosen destination, early access during the trip and all the details of the value proposition of interest. The portal offers versions for smartphones and tablets and the future plans a number of applications for mobile devices. (See Figure 1)

![Figure 1. Home Santander Tourism Website – Visita Santander](image)

2. **Tourism Observatory of Santander:** The purpose, allowing users (Government, entrepreneurs, trade unions, universities and the general public), dispose of information related to measurement of the impact of the tourism industry at the regional and sub-regional levels, as a reference to identify opportunities, anticipate problems,
promote investment, improve infrastructure disposed for tourists and the formulation of tourism development plans aimed at consolidating a competitive and attractive offer to local, national and international visitors.

To measure the impact of the tourism industry in Santander, its provinces, municipalities and places of interest, it is planned to develop four integrated study groups articulated in a tourist information system. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2. Santander Tourist Information system Fuente

Source: Adaptation - A Closer Look at Tourism: Sub-national Measurement and Analysis - Towards a Set of UNWTO Guidelines

- Tourism as an Economic sector
In Santander tourism is an industry whose activities are often included in other sectors, which is why it is difficult to know its evolution and growth. In the period 2013-2015, tourism industry will have significant growth resulting from the arrival of larger flows of visitors, attracted by new proposals that will turn this region into a competitive alternative, if compared to other destinations in Colombia.

The benefits of this new reality will be reflected in a better share of tourism in the GDP at regional level, especially for the impact that will be generated from the expenses of a greater volume of visitors, Situation that will boost prosperity and growth of the business activities directly or indirectly related to the supply of goods and services, Circumstance which will lead to the creation of more jobs and wealth for the region.

This group of studies seeks to track four different aspects:

- **Characterizing the flow of visitors to know the profile, the group size and the reasons for traveling, the places visited and the activities undertaken, the estimated spending levels, the use of digital media and the perception of the experience during their stay in Santander. Analysis of temporality.**
- **Characterizing the behavior of the inhabitants of Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area from the perspective of the trips taken internally, nationally and internationally.**
- **Characterizing Santander tourism industry from the perspective of the type of company, size and range of products and services.**
- **Measuring the impact of tourism on employment generation.**

- **Sustainable Tourism**
  Tourism must be sustainable, able to simultaneously address the needs of visitors and host regions, seeking to maintain opportunities for future generations. Essentially, it focuses on the management of resources so that they can satisfy the regional economic, social and cultural needs, respecting the cultural heritage, natural resources and biodiversity.

  Studies are planned to assess how the development and growth of tourism, causes changes in Santander tourist destinations ecosystems. The purpose:
  - Identify the saturation moments of the ability of a place to absorb the flows of visitors (Environmental impact)
  - Anticipate changes in the cultural identity of a region as a result of contact with visitors (Socio-cultural impact)
  - Assess whether tourism activities are contributors to wealth creation in communities and cause significant increases in per-capita income, create jobs or generate new ventures, among other aspects (economic impact).

- **Tourism and Social Cohesion**
  The tourism must be an activity that allows to increase the sense of belonging and the participation of the people of Santander in all the activities and processes laid down in the Development plan of Santander, encourage the inclusion of urban and rural communities in a democratic environment which involves fighting discrimination and protection of minorities, promoting the consolidation of the community as the core of coexistence while preserving and respecting the historical and sociological reality they represent.

  It is expected to undertake studies related to:
  - Governability of tourism destinations
  - Territorial development (proposals to develop new tourist routes and places of interest)
  - The way they protect municipalities as community development axes

- **Strategic foresight of the tourism industry**
  The strategic foresight is defined as the way to build a vision of the future, looking to maximize the opportunities, but understanding that uncertainty is a reality that requires preparation to face it. Clearly, the future of tourism in Santander is difficult to predict with certainty, but it is not predetermined. The truth is that
the termination of the macro tourism projects in the next three, will significantly change the economic vocation of the region, a fact that certainly require all employers to (re) define the concept or idea of their business, (re) structuring the reach of their organization or (re) positioning their corporate identity.

Traditionally, the decisions taken by entrepreneurs in Santander are based on assumptions and paradigms usually anchored in the past, guided only by limited information or some outdated economic data. Others undertake projects simply exploiting the advantages granted by the Colombian government for tourism investment, but without clarity on long-term sustainability.

Situr Santander wants the entrepreneurs of the tourism industry to learn to deal with uncertainty and be able to structure their decisions using the identification of opportunities as reference. Circumstance that should facilitate the development of new tourism products to attract greater flows of visitors. Achieving this purpose requires information from quantitative and qualitative data research, if you want a broad perspective on market trends.

In this sense, the first three groups of Santander Situr studies are research projects of quantitative data, leaving the fourth group to the structuring and implementation of research studies of qualitative data, based on group sessions or in-depth interviews with participation of entrepreneurs, academics, managers, government officials or experts (primary sources). These scenarios should address the central theme of reflection in order to visualize the foreseeable scenarios of tourism industry in Santander, in the medium and long term, timely anticipating difficulties that may arise, because of the environment changes or the information provided of the tracking of the visitors who come to the region or the general industry. This activity will involve the permanent exploration of secondary sources as a state of the art. Technological surveillance (tourism trends nationally and globally) and competitive intelligence (best world practices for product design or management of tourist destinations).

The summary, the ultimate purpose of strategic foresight, is to provide the tourism industry in Santander timely vision of the future, questioning traditional ways to make decisions in business and strengthening the capacity to examine problems from a holistic perspective in order to find appropriate ways to consolidate the department as a competitive destination in national and international markets.

Methodology

The Santander Tourism Observatory will be implemented in several phases. Each project will address progressively research groups with reference to the structure proposed in Figure 2. The projects remain formulated to serve as reference documents for implementation, defining objectives, framework, methodology, sample design, data collection instruments, fieldwork design, data analysis plan and method of dissemination of information available. The Implementation of the observatory has as a reference the opportunity to find Funding sources to address the research projects. Next is presented in detail the implementation dates for each phase:

- Phase I: Tourism as an economic sector - Implementation 2013 - Quantitative Research
- Phase II: The Sustainable Tourism - Implementation 2014 - Quantitative Research
- Phase III: Development of Tourism and Social Cohesion - Implementation 2015 - Quantitative Research
- Phase IV: Strategic Foresight of the tourist industry in Santander - Implementation 2014 - Qualitative Research

Results

The Implementation of the Situr Santander has been developed since 2010 and has had two important moments:

1. The Tourism Website Visita Santander Inaugurated in 2011 (www.visitasantander.co)
2. The Santander Tourism Observatory which opens in November 2013. This first phase allows access to the results of four investigations studying tourism as an economic sector from the perspective of demand and supply. The data collection began in December 2012. Here are some details of the studies implemented.

**Phase I Tourism as an economic sector**

Tourism is one of the world's most important economic sectors. The national governments, departmental and local authorities in their development plans have prioritized making tourism a competitive and sustainable sector, in an effort to energize the internal movement of visitors and the arrival of domestic and international tourists in order to create prosperity and economic progress for the region.

- **From the perspective of demand**

  Studies from the perspective of demand, are focused on identifying and characterizing the flows of visitors who come to a region (non-monetary indicators) and the measurement of the contribution of tourism to the economy (monetary indicators), referring to tourist expenditure corresponding to the amount paid by visitors for the purchase of consumption goods and services and valuable objects, for own use or to give away, before and during trips. Includes expenses incurred by the visitors themselves, as well as expenses paid or reimbursed by others.

**Study 1. Characterization of visitor flows and estimates of expenditure (inbound tourism)**

The goal was to assess the flow of visitors to Santander, the reasons for the trip, the activities performed, the type of products and services purchased the estimated expense, the travel experience and the use of digital and social channels.

- Collected data
  - Sociodemographic profile of the visitor
  - Travel Group profile
  - Reason for the trip
  - Places and activities performed during the visit
  - Length of stay
  - Type of accommodation used
  - Estimated expenditure before, during and after the trip
  - Measurement of the perception and satisfaction of the trip
  - Communication channels used before, during and after the trip

- Type and design of the research
  - Descriptive conclusive research. Adopt a cross-sectional design in multiple samples

- Data collection Instruments
  - Two instruments were designed; the first one to collect demographic data of visitors and the second one to know in detail the reasons for the visit, the experiences before, during and after the trip and the expenditure.

- Study population
  - Non-residents that target the department of Santander, with permanence under one year for any main purpose (business, leisure, or other personal reasons), except for an employee of a resident entity in Santander. These people are called visitors.

- Method for the sample selection
  - Systematic sampling in tourist places, places of accommodation and transportation terminals.

- Sample size
  - The data collection began in December
  - Phase 1: 18,690 visitors have been contacted during this period that have been applied a questionnaire which collected demographic data, and also an authorization is requested to send an electronic survey.
Phase 2: Once the tour groups returned to their place of origin, they were sent an electronic survey that addressed ten items related to the experience of the visit to Santander. 3,505 completed surveys have been received having information from travel groups (on average, each group consists of four people).

Study 2. Characterization of inbound and outbound tourism in the Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga (Santander capital)

The goal was to assess the flow of residents in the metropolitan area of Bucaramanga internally traveling to places of Santander (domestic tourism) or national or international destinations (outbound tourism), identifying the reasons for travel, activities, types of products and services purchased and the estimated expense.

- Collected data
  - Household sociodemographic characterization
  - Type of travel group
  - Main reason for the trip
  - Places visited and length of stay in each
  - Expenditure before and during the trip to Santander or other domestic and international destinations

- Research design
  - Conclusive research at a descriptive level with a longitudinal design

- Data collection instruments’ design
  - Two instruments were designed, the first one to collect demographic data of the household members and the identification of the trips made, a second one to know in detail the reasons for the trips made by household members and the experiences before, during and after travel and expense incurred.

- Study population
  - Households in the Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga from the levels 2-3-4

- Data collection method
  - Stratified probability Sampling

- Sample size
  - A panel of 600 households.

- From the perspective of supply:

The arrival of visitors to a region implies the availability of goods and services to meet their needs and expectations. I.e., the supply meets the demand. Measuring the offer is a way to evaluate the economic impact of tourism. The term “tourist Supply” is the provision of goods and services directly to the visitors which constitute the tourist expense. The analysis of tourism implies “first, showing how to create the conditions that allow producers to provide goods and services to visitors and, second, describing the processes, the production costs and economic performance of the producers in the tourism industries.”

Employment is another important factor to characterize tourism, mainly by the impact it has on the social and productive structure, reason for the interest to measure the types of jobs created and identify the possibility of creating new jobs as a result of the growth in the industry.

Study 3. Characterization of the tourism industry in Santander

The purpose is to characterize the type of tourism industry in Santander.

- Collected data
  - Estimation and characterization of the size of the supply of goods and tourism services installed in Santander.
  - Types of products and services ready to be consumed and used by the flows of tourists arriving in Santander.

The goal is to measure the employment generated by the tourism industry in Santander.

- Collected data
  - Estimated employment generated by the tourism industry of Santander, classified by type of job, sector openings and training requirements
- Research design
  - Conclusive descriptive research
- Data collection instruments’ design
  - Data collection instruments for each of the categories of tourism-related businesses
- Study population
  - Establishments engaged in providing products and services for visitors
- Method for sample selection
  - Stratified sampling
- Sample size
  - 400 companies were contacted.

The diffusion of data is considered a valuable aspect in a tourist information system. A review of tourism observatories in the world, allowed concluding that in general the results of the investigations are compiled in large documents, creating difficulties for users to easily find information of interest. In some observatories, available information is outdated and is no longer useful.

To overcome this difficulty, the Santander Tourism Observatory designed and built a platform available on the web, whose main foundation seeks to facilitate the user to find the information updated monthly, customize the analysis and the variables contrast of interest, have access to estimates, historical series and interpretation of data be able to edit and share charts on social networks or blogs, also know the opinion and interpretation of the researchers of the key findings in quick understanding documents.

It is also important to note that the Tourist Information System Situr Santander integrated into a single platform available on the web, three major modules: (See Figure 3)

- Santander Tourism Website (A) (Information for visitors)
- Santander Tourism Observatory (B) (information to key stakeholders of tourism industry) in its first phase. Each study has a website where users can find in detail the results of research carried out. Later the site will be redesigned to include phases 2, 3 and 4.
- Access to secondary sources (C) serving as the basis for the realization of the Strategic Foresight exercises found in the main menu bar.
On the website of the Santander Tourism Observatory, you can find information related to the implementation of the first phase research corresponding to group of studies related to the “Tourism as an economic sector” (D). For each study are available: (See Figure 4)

- Descriptive analysis of the data (E),
- Multivariate analysis of the data (F),
- Infographics (G),
- Datasheet (H)
- Glossary (I)
Being on the site of Santander Tourism Observatory and clicking descriptive analysis, the user can find for each study: (See Figure 5)

- information organized in modules, with reference to the parts of the data collection instrument (e.g. Characterization of visitors) (I)
- the ability to customize the statistical analysis (cross variables according to the needs and interests of the user) (J)
- perform analyzes for periods of time (months, high and low seasons) (K)
- access to tables with estimates of the main study variables (statistical inference) (L)
- know the historical trends of the main study variables (M)
- learn to interpret the results for all graphs (N)
- Compare behavior of visitors’ types by grouping them. (O)
- edit and print graphics (P)
- Share the charts or graphs on social networks (Q)
- Data access for mobile devices using applications and then taking as input the data collected.

In order to make the data collected and the analysis developed more useful, specialized analysis will be published in a blog that will be organized thematically in six sites. Each study will have a space where the user will find writings by researchers who have previously been published in newsletters sent to all stakeholders of the tourism industry in Santander.

Taking into account that traffic on the Website of Tourism generates relevant information related to people seeking information about Santander, generated data will be edited in the application of Google Analytics in order to allow users to perform their own analysis, evaluating variables such as the source of traffic, type of visitors, search times, pages of interest, length of stay, among other variables.
Conclusions and implications of the Situr project - Santander

The construction of the Tourism Information System necessarily implies the combined efforts to make a vital tool for the development and growth of tourism in Santander. The formulation processes of the projects in a regional level, although may be supported by universal principles and objectives, to replicate them is necessary to adapt the methodological designs to the features and elements of the population being studied and to the sampling frames available. The content of the instruments, procedures for selection of respondents, the sample sizes and the type of statistical analysis, will also vary according to the characteristics of the region under study.

To ensure the sustainability of the project is required to maintain the funding sources long-term and a specialized working group that will improve over time the designs of the projects implemented and the formulation of new studies that can enrich the knowledge of the industry.

The analysis of the collected data in the first phase and quality of available information confirms the usefulness of the Observatory of Tourism. It gives Santander a tool that will warn the tourism industry trends by identifying future opportunities, anticipating threats and quickly measuring the impact of the tourist macro projects under construction. It also allows employers to identify areas of improvement start new projects and encourage innovation in their organizations. To government officials the possibility of designing tourism development plans that contribute to the regional growth and development, ensuring the sustainability of the places of interest and welfare of the communities involved.

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• Shareppy which provided the graphic design of the platform and the construction of the technological tool for the processing and analysis of the data.
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