

# Tourism As Osmosis: The Role of Apology Diplomacy in Shaping Tourist Arrivals in The Philippines

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## Abstract

This paper examines how apology diplomacy influences foreign tourist arrivals to the Philippines from 2008 to 2025, introducing an innovative framework that views tourism as osmotic. Using a descriptive interrupted Time-Series Analysis (ITSA) of the Department of Tourism Data, the study analyzes key crises such as the 2010 Hong Kong hostage crisis, 2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff, 2013 Taiwan fishermen shooting incident, the Canadian Garbage Crisis, the Tubbataha Reef Incident and other crises mentioned. While South Korea becomes a neutral (control) variable to analyze the fact that even if having a similar garbage crisis like Canada's, it has strong tourism relations with the Philippines. It determines how political crises like these affect tourism recovery. Findings show that prompt and sincere public apologies function as a valve that restores tourist flows and repairs damaged bilateral relations, while unapologetic or delayed responses prolong travel bans and negative perceptions. The research concludes that apology diplomacy is a vital soft power instrument, translating symbolic gestures into economic and reputational gains. The Department of Tourism is recommended to implement this tourism risk management mechanisms in case of these kinds of crisis and not only the previous health pandemics (COVID or SARS). This osmosis model of tourism bridges diplomacy, development, and nation branding in the post-crisis context.

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**Keywords**

Apology diplomacy, foreign tourist arrivals, osmosis, political crisis, security, soft power, tourism

**Introduction**

In biology, osmosis describes the movement of water across a semipermeable membrane from lower to higher solute concentration. Djelti (2017) extends this idea into the social sciences by using an “osmosis effect” to explain migration dynamics, aligning it with the enduring push–pull framework originally developed by Lee (1966) and later cited by Djelti (2017). While these migration lenses remain widely used across disciplines, the metaphor also invites a parallel question for international tourism: if people can be “pushed” or “pulled” across borders in ways that resemble osmotic flows, can tourist arrivals be examined through a similar logic, one where the receiving state functions as the membrane that can enable, restrict, or recalibrate mobility?

This study builds on that conceptual bridge by treating tourist flows into the Philippines as a form of osmotic movement shaped by political conditions. The core novelty is not simply the application of osmosis to tourism, but the focus on what happens to the “membrane’s permeability” during political crises, whether security-related or diplomatic, between the Philippines and sending states. In this framing, crisis events may thicken the membrane through fear, sanctions, advisories, or public outrage; conversely, diplomatic repair may restore permeability and normalize travel flows.

Existing scholarship on tourism and international relations has established that tourist appeal is deeply intertwined with soft power, public diplomacy, and nation branding. Nye (2004) defines soft power as a country’s ability to shape preferences through attraction rather than coercion; inbound tourism is one measurable expression of that attraction. Melissen (2005) similarly positions public diplomacy as

the effort by governments to engage foreign publics and cultivate trust and goodwill, while nation branding focuses on strategically managing reputation to enhance a country's desirability for tourism, investment, and broader international engagement. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that political disruption can weaken a state's symbolic attractiveness, while well-managed diplomacy can blunt reputational damage. However, much of the tourism literature still concentrates on marketing-led recovery after demand has already dropped, rather than on more proactive diplomatic mechanisms that might prevent or soften the decline in the first place.

The Philippine case is especially instructive because the country sits at the intersection of strong tourism ambitions and recurrent international flashpoints. International tourism has long functioned as both an economic driver and a barometer of external perceptions. The Philippines attracted over 8.26 million foreign visitors in 2019, more than double the 3.14 million in 2008, reflecting sustained efforts in destination marketing and broad improvements in global visibility (Jesus and Samonte 2023). At the same time, tourism demand is acutely sensitive to safety, stability, and perceived friendliness—factors that can shift quickly during political turmoil. The Philippines has faced crises with notable international repercussions, including the 2010 Manila hostage-taking involving Hong Kong tourists, the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff with China, and the 2013 fatal shooting of a Taiwanese fisherman (Table 1). These incidents triggered heightened media attention, official protests, and in some cases travel restrictions or advisories, creating the conditions for sudden disruptions in visitor flows.

Table 1 Political Crises and the Parties Involved

Political Crisis	Country/Territory	Concerns
2010 Manila Hostage Crisis	Hong Kong	Security-related
2012 Scarborough Shoal Standoff	China	Security-related
2013 Taiwan Fisherman Shooting Incident	Taiwan	Security-related
The USS Guardian damaged the Tubbataha Reef (January 17, 2013)	USA	Diplomatic
The 2020 Kuwait Labor Crisis, leading to the death of OFWs	Kuwait	Diplomatic
2019 Canadian Garbage Crisis (Duterte wanted to wage war against Canada)	Canada	Diplomatic
2013 Sabah Standoff	Malaysia	Diplomatic

Despite these realities, a clear gap remains in how the field explains the specific diplomatic mechanisms that shape tourism recovery trajectories following interstate incidents. First, studies rarely operationalize the osmosis metaphor in ways that connect state-to-state political shocks with measurable tourism outcomes over a long time horizon. Second, while “apology diplomacy” is widely recognized in international relations as a tool for tension management, its empirical role in restoring tourist arrivals, especially when formal apologies are absent, delayed, or contested, has not been sufficiently examined in the Philippine context. In particular, there is limited comparative evidence showing whether tourist flows rebound differently when an erring state issues a formal apology

versus when it relies on alternative forms of public diplomacy or branding narratives.

Against this backdrop, the research problem guiding this paper is: how do security-related and diplomatic crises involving the Philippines affect foreign tourist arrival patterns, and to what extent does apology diplomacy function as a “valve” that helps restore or stabilize these flows? To address this problem, this study examines tourist arrivals to the Philippines from 2008 through August 2025, identifying key crisis episodes and comparing arrival trends across affected sending states. South Korea is used as a control case, particularly in relation to the July 2018 garbage controversy, where the subsequent South Korean government apology and the relatively limited bilateral damage provide a useful contrast. This comparison helps test whether crises accompanied by clearer diplomatic repair processes correspond with less pronounced or shorter-lived declines in tourism.

Accordingly, this paper pursues three objectives. First, it conceptualizes inbound tourist flows to the Philippines through an osmosis-informed framework that treats the receiving state’s political environment and diplomatic behavior as determinants of permeability. Second, it maps and evaluates the impact of identified security-related and diplomatic crises on country-specific tourist arrivals over the study period. Third, it assesses the role of apology diplomacy, whether present, absent, or partial, in shaping the pace and direction of tourism recovery. In line with these objectives, the study advances the expectation that crises associated with unresolved public grievances or the absence of formal apology are more likely to produce sharper or more persistent downturns in arrivals, while cases with timely diplomatic repair will show weaker negative effects or faster normalization.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. Conceptually, it extends Djelti’s (2017) social-science use of osmosis beyond migration by offering a structured way to interpret tourism

flows as politically conditioned mobility. Empirically, it provides a long-run, crisis-sensitive reading of Philippine tourist arrival patterns from 2008 to August 2025, including a comparative control case to strengthen inference. Practically, it highlights apology diplomacy as a potentially underutilized tool for tourism resilience, suggesting that recovery should not be treated solely as a marketing task managed after declines occur, but also as a coordinated diplomatic strategy that can be activated in tandem with the Department of Foreign Affairs to preserve or restore travel confidence.

## **Method**

This study employs a descriptive-analytic research design to examine how apology diplomacy may shape patterns of foreign tourist arrivals to the Philippines. Rather than seeking to prove causal effects, the study focuses on tracing changes in the magnitude and direction of tourist flows before and after major political crises and interpreting these shifts through the lens of apology diplomacy and related diplomatic actions.

To do this, the study uses Interrupted Time-Series Analysis (ITSA) primarily as a descriptive and trend-mapping tool. ITSA is suited to this purpose because it allows clear visualization of movement in tourist arrivals across two key phases: (1) the period prior to a crisis and (2) the period after a crisis, where recovery, stagnation, or further decline may be observed. In line with this descriptive orientation, formal statistical significance tests (e.g., Durbin-Watson, p-values) are not applied. The intention is to avoid overstating causality and instead emphasize policy-relevant interpretation of trend shifts associated with apology-related decisions and public diplomacy responses. This approach is consistent with tourism research that uses trend-based analysis to inform governance and diplomatic strategy (Jesus and Samonte 2023).

Specifically, the study seeks to determine a) the pattern and direction of tourist arrivals before and after a political crisis; and

b) the apparent role of apology diplomacy in restoring, stabilizing, or failing to restore tourist arrival flows. The study is anchored on the Osmosis Model of Tourism Flow and Apology Diplomacy. This framework adapts the biological osmosis metaphor to international tourist mobility by treating cross-border travel as a flow sensitive to changes in political environment and diplomatic relations. Within this model, tourists function as the moving “fluid,” while destination attractiveness, such as iconic Philippine tourism sites and broader branding campaigns, operates as a pull force that draws travelers toward the receiving state. In normal conditions, this attraction supports a steady movement of visitors through state-controlled entry points.

However, political crises can alter the “permeability” of the system. The study classifies crises into two broad types: (1) Diplomatic crises, which arise from perceived policy violations, incursions, or transnational harm that lead to interstate fallout (such as labor-related disputes or transboundary waste controversies); these episodes may trigger negative media coverage, official protests, and heightened political tension; and (2) Security-related crises, which involve violent incidents, armed confrontations, or situations resulting in casualties or physical harm (such as major hostage incidents or maritime standoffs).

In the osmotic analogy, the semi-permeable membrane is represented by the state of diplomatic relations and the political climate influencing access between countries. When a crisis escalates, sending states may impose travel advisories, restrictions, or bans that reduce the flow of their residents to the Philippines. In practical terms, this is the point at which permeability tightens and tourist arrivals may fall sharply.

Apology diplomacy is positioned in the model as a valve or regulator that can either reopen the pathway for travel or leave the blockage in place. Importantly, apology diplomacy in this study is treated as broader than a symbolic statement. It may include 1)

formal apologies issued by political leaders of the erring state; 2) compensation or restitution to victims; 3) legal or administrative actions signaling accountability, and 4) complementary public diplomacy efforts that tourism actors might describe as restoration or recovery marketing.

This interpretation reflects the view that international apologies can serve not only reconciliation but also public diplomacy by reshaping foreign public attitudes and enabling reputational recovery (Mattes and Weeks 2025). In tourism terms, apology diplomacy may support destination trust repair, working alongside established soft power tools such as destination branding (Claro et al. 2023).

At the same time, the framework acknowledges that negative media and public sentiment can sustain damage even after formal diplomatic steps occur. Where apology diplomacy is absent, delayed, or perceived as insincere, the model expects prolonged restrictions or more cautious travel behavior, with potentially deeper or longer declines in tourist arrivals.

Thus, the conceptual framework connects political disruptions, policy responses, and apology practices to observable shifts in tourist flows. Through this lens, the ITSA-based trend analysis is used to assess whether the presence or absence of apology diplomacy appears to coincide with normalisation of travel patterns or continued disruption across the study period.

## **Results**

This study examines foreign tourist arrivals to the Philippines from 2008 to August 2025, using country-by-country arrival data from the Department of Tourism (DOT). To keep the trend reading focused and comparable across cases, the analysis concentrates on the years before and after each crisis, generally using a three-year window around the crisis point (as far back as January 2008 and up to April 2025 where applicable). The main quantitative technique is a

descriptive Interrupted Time-Series Analysis (ITSA), complemented by qualitative case documentation drawn from DOT data, news reports, and government statements.

Across all markets combined, tourist arrivals peaked in 2019 and fell to their lowest levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, before showing a gradual recovery in the post-pandemic period. Figure 1 visually situates the crises between 2008 and 2025 against this broader arc, helping distinguish crisis-related shocks from the global collapse caused by the pandemic.

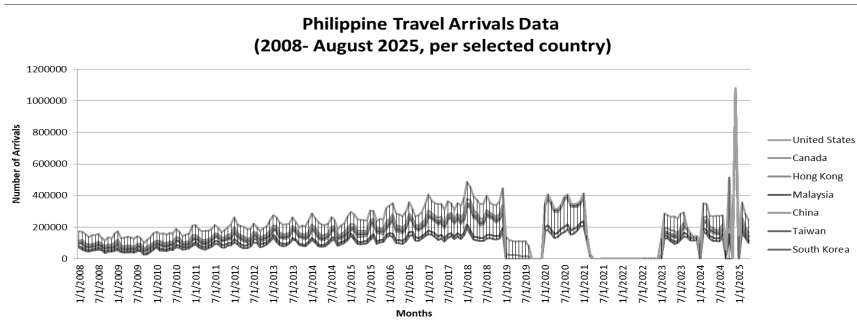


Figure 1. Philippine Total Tourist Arrivals (2008 to 2025)

### ***Country and Crisis-Specific Trends***

Table 2 summarizes the direction and scale of shifts observed across the selected crises. The results show that security-related and diplomatic incidents often coincide with abrupt changes in specific country markets, even when aggregate arrivals continue to grow due to offsetting gains elsewhere.

Table 2. Overview of Political Crises and Recovery Measures

Crisis/Event	Year	Country Affected	Immediate Impact on Tourist Arrivals	Recovery Measures Taken
Manila Hostage Crisis (Bus Hijacking of Hong Kong Tourists)	2010	Hong Kong	-16% drop in HK tourist arrivals (2011); extended black travel alert until 2014	Apology delivered (2014), compensation to victims' families, and public diplomacy missions
Scarborough Shoal Standoff (China–Philippines Maritime Dispute)	2012	China	Near-zero growth in Chinese tourists (only +3% in 2012); travel bans on group tours	Diplomatic rapprochement (2016–2017), high-level state visits, visa facilitation
Taiwan Fisherman Shooting Incident (Coast Guard killing of a Taiwanese national)	2013	Taiwan	-35.8% drop in Taiwanese tourist arrivals (2013)	Swift apology, legal action against the coast guard, lifting of sanctions
Sabah Standoff (Philippines–Malaysia conflict over Sabah incursion)	2013	Malaysia	Minor dip (–4.4% decline in Malaysian arrivals in 2013)	Bilateral peace talks, normalization of relations
Canada's Garbage Problem	2019	Canada	Minor dip (–4.9% decline in Canadian tourist arrivals in 2020)	No tacit apology, but the Canadian PM explained why their garbage cannot be returned to Canada immediately.

Table 2. (Continued)

Crisis/Event	Year	Country Affected	Immediate Impact on Tourist Arrivals	Recovery Measures Taken
U.S.S. Guardian damaged Tubbataha Reef	2013	United States of America	No visible drop	No express apology by releasing official statements about expression of regrets over the incident, aside from payment of \$ 1.9 million in Damages Compensation

### **Hong Kong: 2010 Manila hostage crisis**

The hostage incident in August 2010 corresponds to one of the clearest drops in a single market. After steady growth from 2008–2010, Hong Kong arrivals fell from 133,746 in 2010 to 112,106 in 2011, an approximately 16% decline. The trend later improves, with a more visible recovery following the easing and eventual lifting of the Hong Kong travel alert. The results also show a notable post-apology rebound pattern associated with the April 2014 apology offered by Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada, after which arrival averages appear to improve in subsequent years, culminating in a strong pre-pandemic recovery phase.

A disgruntled ex-policeman took a bus of Hong Kong tourists hostage in Manila, and a bungled police rescue left eight Hong Kong citizens dead. The incident severely strained Philippines–Hong Kong relations (and, by extension, ties with China). In response, Hong Kong authorities issued their highest-level “black” travel alert against the Philippines, effectively discouraging travel by Hong Kong residents for years. As a result, Hong Kong visitor arrivals, which had been rising, fell sharply in 2011. From 133,746 arrivals in 2010 (3.8% of total foreign arrivals), the number dropped to 112,106 in 2011 (Department of Tourism 2011), a decline of about 16%. This

made Hong Kong one of the few markets to contract even as overall foreign arrivals grew by more than 11% that year. Mainland Chinese tourists, while not directly covered by the Hong Kong travel alert, were also reportedly deterred by the negative publicity surrounding the incident.

Figure 2 reflects this pattern clearly. After a steady upward trend from 2008 to 2010, arrivals declined by about 16.2% to 112,106 in 2011. From 2012 onward, visitor numbers gradually recovered, with growth accelerating after the travel alert was lifted in 2014 and eventually peaking around 2018 during President Duterte’s term. Arrivals then declined sharply in line with global travel patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic (2019 to 2021). More recently, the post-COVID period shows renewed upward momentum.

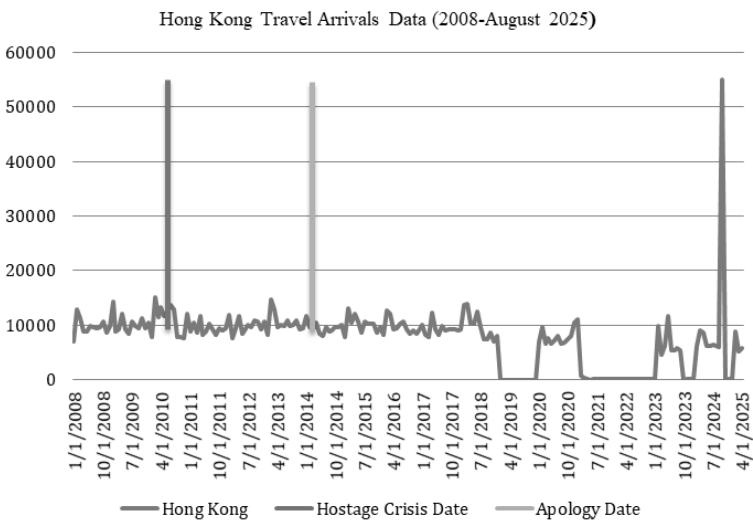


Figure 2. Hong Kong Tourist Arrivals to the Philippines (2008-2025)

A comparison of pre-crisis and post-crisis figures also suggests a gradual rebound following the incident (Table 3). In the month associated with the official apology, arrivals were recorded at 10,523. In the months that followed, average arrivals appear to have exceeded

the pre-crisis average of 11,145, rising to a post-apology monthly average of 12,257 (as of April 2014). This recovery continued over the next several years, culminating in a post-apology peak of roughly 150,000 arrivals in 2018.

Table 3 further indicates that 2015 marked a notable recovery year after the 2014 apology by Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada, with approximately 130,000 arrivals recorded. This followed the Philippine government's formal apology and Estrada's visit to Hong Kong in April 2014. Santos (2014) reports that the Hong Kong government accepted the apology and subsequently withdrew the travel ban/alert against the Philippines.

Table 3. Key Indicators of Hong Kong Traveller Arrivals to the Philippines

Key Indicator	Value
Pre-Crisis Annual Average (2008–2010)	127,915
Crisis Year (2011)	112,106
Post-Crisis Drop	-21,640
% Decline (2011)	16.2%
April 2014 (Apology Month)	10,523
Post-Apology Annual Average (2015–2018)	147,500
Post-Apology Peak (2018)	150,000
After the April 2014 apology, average	12,257 per month
Recovery Year (2015)	130,000

### **China: 2012 Scarborough shoal standoff**

For mainland China, the data shows a sharp slowdown rather than a prolonged collapse. Arrivals grew only +3.2% in 2012 (from 243,137 to 250,883), far below the preceding year's expansion. The slump appears concentrated around the immediate standoff period (April–June 2012), followed by a renewed rise in 2013. The broader trend indicates that Chinese arrivals surge most strongly during the

2016–2018 period, then drop markedly in later years, including the pandemic shock and a post-2022 decline relative to the earlier peak.

A tense naval confrontation erupted between the Philippines and China over Scarborough Shoal (Huangyan Island in China). As the dispute intensified, Chinese state agencies reportedly imposed an unofficial freeze on Chinese tour groups to the Philippines starting in May 2012, with reports suggesting Chinese visitor numbers dropped by as much as 70%.

Tourism quickly became a tool of geopolitical pressure. Before the standoff, China was the Philippines’ fourth-largest and fastest-growing source market, with arrivals posting roughly 30% growth in 2011. During and immediately after the confrontation, that momentum stalled (Figure 3). The 2012 Department of Tourism data show Chinese arrivals rising only slightly to 250,883 from 243,137, an increase of just 3.2%, far below the double-digit growth rates seen in previous years.

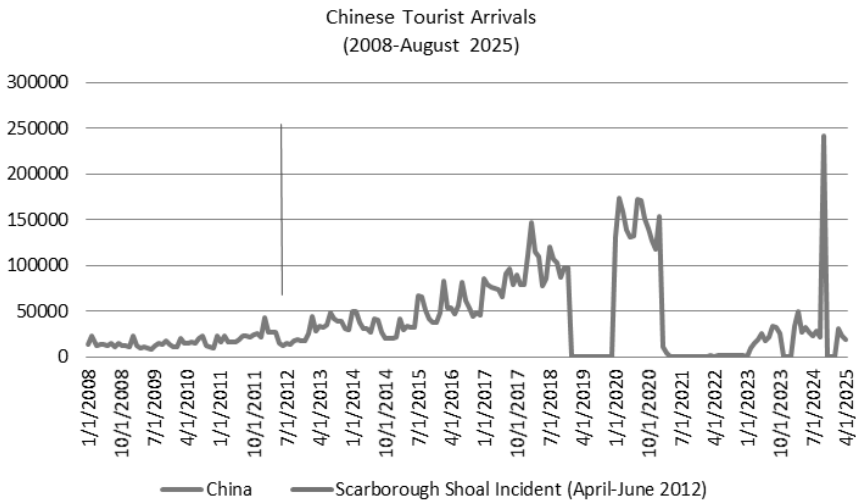


Figure 3. Chinese Tourist Arrivals (2008 to 2025)

In 2013, however, arrivals surged by 69.9% to 426,352, even as political tensions remained unresolved and the Philippines filed an arbitration case in January 2013. This apparent contradiction is likely a matter of timing: the travel freeze appears to have been temporary. By early 2013, many Chinese tourists returned, possibly driven by pent-up demand, a weaker peso, and the resumption of charter flights from secondary cities.

The standoff also affected public sentiment. Unfavorable media coverage in China reportedly encouraged travelers to choose alternative destinations. Only after diplomatic relations warmed under President Duterte beginning in 2016 did Chinese tourism truly boom, highlighting how quickly soft power can be rebuilt. Through nation branding and public diplomacy, such as high-profile state visits, tourism cooperation agreements, and more accommodating visa policies, the Philippines reportedly attracted over 675,000 Chinese tourists in 2016 (a 37.7% jump), more than 968,000 in 2017, and 1.255 million in 2018. By 2018, Chinese arrivals even surpassed those from the United States.

Overall, the Scarborough case underscores how diplomatic context can shape tourist flows: conflict dampened demand, while rapprochement and brand-building helped restore and expand it. It serves as a clear example of how a diplomatic dispute can trigger tourism-related pressure, and how repaired relations can generate a tourism windfall.

Related accounts from the period noted that Chinese arrivals had slowed in 2011–2012. China's arrivals grew only 3.2% in 2012 (to 250,883), a much smaller increase than the previous year, with 2011 arrivals at 243,137, up from 187,446 in 2010. Batongbacal (2013) similarly describes the episode as a diplomatic stalemate, marked by back-and-forth actions at the shoal that eventually contributed to the Philippines' decision to pursue international arbitration, an approach China declined to join.

Unlike the Hong Kong hostage crisis, which weighed on arrivals for a longer period, the tourism impact of the Scarborough incident appears to have been more short-lived—most evident during the months immediately following the standoff (around April to June 2012). While multiple factors can shape these trends, Philippine officials at the time also acknowledged that negative perceptions tied to safety and security issues affected Chinese travel sentiment. Still, the data suggest a gradual recovery by 2014 and a fuller rebound by 2016 (Table 4).

Table 4. Key Indicators of Chinese Traveller Arrivals to the Philippines

Key Indicator	Value
Pre-Crisis Annual Average (2008–2011)	218,430
Crisis Year (2012)	250,883
Post-Crisis Drop (2013)	-230,000 -10% to -12%
Immediate Crisis Drop (monthly): April-June 2012	(-6,000 to -7,000 per month)
% Decline (2014)	8.3%
Apology Month	No Apology But diplomatic rapprochement
Post-Crisis Annual Average (2015–2018)	579,313
Post-Crisis Peak (2019)	1,743,309
After the April 2014 apology, average	12,257 per month
Recovery Year (2016)	490,841 (+63.6% increase)

This paper also compares Chinese-related arrivals across administrations. As discussed in commentary on the Duterte government’s “pivot to China,” including Marites Vitug (2024)’s *Unrequited Love: Duterte’s China Embrace* and related interviews, most analyses focus on foreign policy rather than tourism outcomes. Figure 4 helps fill that gap. It shows a striking surge in Chinese arrivals during the Duterte period (2016–2022) compared with both the pre-Duterte period (2008–2016) and the post-Duterte years (2022–2023). Based on the figure, Chinese tourist arrivals increased by 182.8% during the Duterte period relative to 2008–2016, followed by a steep 76.5% decline from the Duterte period to the Marcos Jr. period. Even combined, the pre- and post-Duterte periods do not appear to match the peak achieved during Duterte’s term.

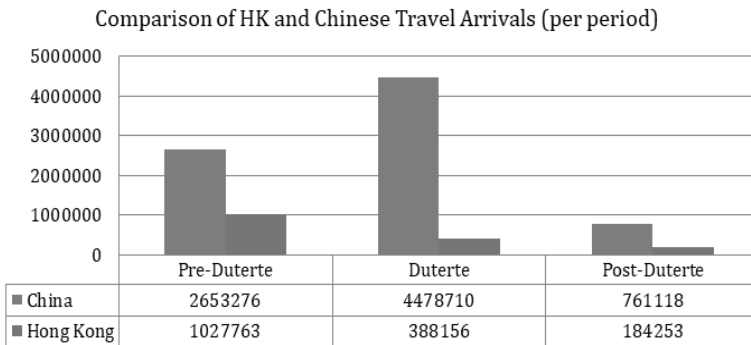


Figure 4. China and Hong Kong Tourist Arrivals (Before, During, and Post-Duterte Periods)

The pattern differs for Hong Kong. The stigma of the 2010 Hong Kong hostage crisis appears to have lingered: even during the Duterte administration, Hong Kong arrivals (78,833) remained below the pre-Duterte average (127,036). Figure-based comparisons indicate a 39.9% drop in Hong Kong arrivals from the pre-Duterte period to Duterte’s term, followed by a further 55.4% decline from Duterte to the Marcos Jr. period. Still, Hong Kong flows did rebound

earlier than many assume; by 2013, arrivals had recovered to about 126,000, though still below the 2010 peak. In 2014, arrivals dipped again, likely because the travel ban remained in effect during the first quarter, before improvement resumed after the ban was lifted.

Taken together, these cases show two different pathways of tourism vulnerability and recovery: Scarborough illustrates the short-term impact of state-linked travel constraints tied to territorial disputes, while the Hong Kong case demonstrates how a high-profile security failure can evolve into a longer, more reputationally sticky diplomatic tourism shock.

### **Taiwan: 2013 fisherman incident**

The Taiwan case shows the steepest immediate annual drop among the major markets discussed. Arrivals fell from 216,511 in 2012 to 139,099 in 2013, a 35.8% decline. A modest rebound follows in 2014 (+2.8%), suggesting that the combination of apology-related actions and the lifting of restrictions helped stabilize the flow. The longer curve suggests fuller normalization in the years after.

In May 2013, the Philippine Coast Guard shot and killed a Taiwanese fisherman in waters near the northern Philippines, triggering public outrage in Taiwan. Taipei responded sharply: it issued a “red” travel alert against the Philippines, imposed sanctions affecting Filipino migrant workers, and froze government-to-government exchanges until Manila issued a formal apology. The impact on tourism was swift (Figure 5). Taiwan had been the Philippines’ fifth-largest source market in 2012, with 216,511 arrivals (Department of Tourism 2012).

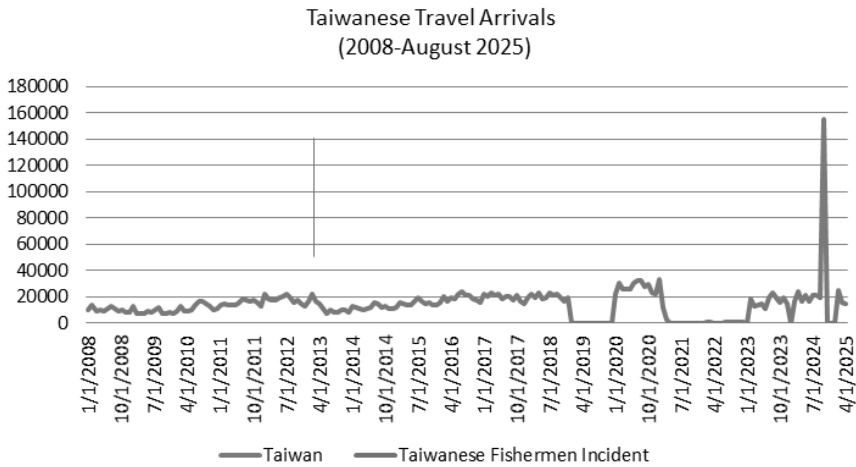


Figure 5. Taiwanese Tourist Arrivals to the Philippines (2008-August 2025)

In 2013, Taiwanese arrivals plunged to 139,099 (Department of Tourism 2013), a 35.8% drop and the steepest decline among major markets that year. Taiwan fell to seventh in the rankings. This contraction was striking given that 2013 was a strong year for Philippine tourism overall and that the travel alert was in place for only about three months (mid-May to mid-August 2013). The episode shows how political outrage and safety concerns can quickly translate into reduced travel demand. Many Taiwanese travelers reportedly opted to avoid the Philippines in the immediate aftermath of the incident.

Although the Philippines moved quickly to ease tensions by issuing an apology and indicting coast guard personnel, confidence took time to rebuild. By 2014, arrivals rose slightly to 142,973 (+2.8%) (Department of Tourism 2014), suggesting a modest rebound after the advisory was lifted and public attention waned. Additional public diplomacy steps, such as joint fisheries talks and compensation for the victim’s family, also helped restore goodwill (Table 5).

Table 5. Key Indicators of the Taiwanese Tourist Arrivals

Key Indicator	Value
Pre-Crisis Annual Average (2008–2023)	13735.29167
Crisis Year (2013)	16445.63636
Post-Crisis Drop (2014)	25855.5 (-12,120.20833)
Immediate Crisis Drop (monthly): April-June 2012	- 75.9% (-3000 June 2013)
Pre-Crisis Monthly Average (2008–2011)	18,202
% Decline (2013)	8.3%
Apology Month	No Apology But diplomatic rapprochement
Post-Crisis Annual Average (2015–2018)	579,313
Post-Crisis Peak (2019)	1,743,309
After the April 2014 apology, average	12,257 per month
Recovery Year (2016)	490,841 (+63.6% increase)

A fuller recovery took longer. It was not until 2016 that Taiwanese arrivals regained and exceeded pre-incident levels, reaching 229,300. The Taiwan case highlights the typical pattern of a short, sharp tourism shock driven by a diplomatic rift: a steep drop in the crisis year, followed by gradual normalization once official gestures, accountability measures, and time ease public sentiment. Because Taiwan accounted for roughly 4–5% of arrivals before 2013, the downturn had limited impact on overall national totals; the Philippines still posted strong aggregate growth in 2013 due to gains from other markets. For tourism businesses with heavy Taiwanese

clientele, such as some dive operators and niche tour providers, the effects were likely much more immediate.

Figure 5 reflects this trajectory. It shows a small rebound in 2014, a stronger rise peaking around the 2018 period, and then a sharp decline in 2020 consistent with the global pandemic shock.

### **Malaysia: 2013 Sabah standoff**

Malaysian arrivals show a short, contained dip. After strong growth in 2012, arrivals fell from 114,513 to 109,437 in 2013 (−4.4%), then rose sharply to 139,245 in 2014 (+27.2%). This pattern suggests a temporary disruption that resolved once bilateral tensions eased and the Philippine government distanced itself from the Sabah incursion.

In early February 2013, an armed group from the southern Philippines loyal to the former Sulu Sultanate entered Sabah, Malaysia, sparking a violent clash with Malaysian forces. Although this was not an official action of the Philippine government, the incident strained Philippines–Malaysia relations. Malaysian tourist arrivals to the Philippines—after growing by nearly 25% in 2012 (Department of Tourism 2012), fell by 4.4% in 2013 (Department of Tourism 2013), slipping from 114,513 to 109,437 (Figure 6).

This decline suggests that some Malaysians may have postponed or avoided travel to the Philippines during the crisis, likely due to heightened nationalist sentiment and safety concerns. The downturn, however, appears to have been short-lived. By 2014, Malaysian arrivals rebounded strongly, rising by 27.2% to 139,245 (Department of Tourism 2014), a new high. This recovery coincided with efforts to ease tensions, including Philippine moves to distance itself from the incursion and diplomatic engagement aimed at calming the situation. Cooperation between both governments, including coordination related to peace efforts in Mindanao, also likely helped normalize ties.

Figure 6 captures this pattern: a modest dip after the Sabah incident, followed by steady growth from 2014 onward, with arrivals

continuing to rise until peaking around 2018. Overall, the Malaysia case appears to have been a contained дипломатик disruption, with tourism recovering quickly once bilateral relations stabilized.

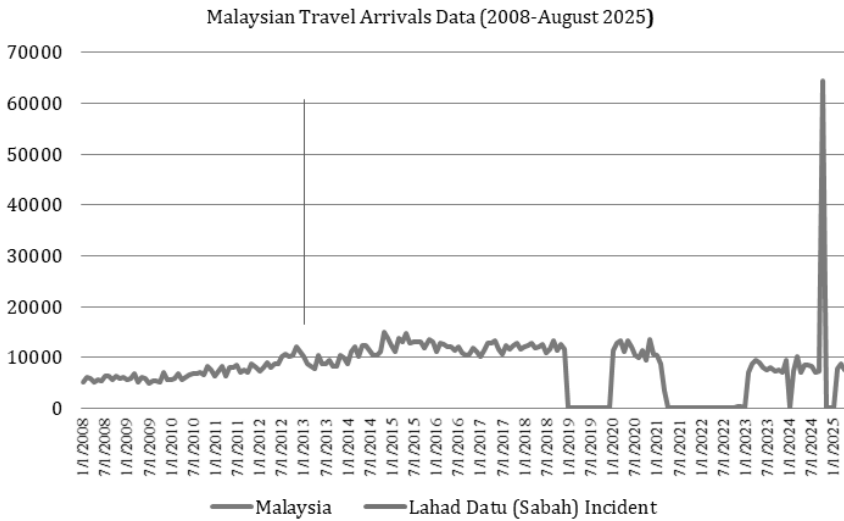


Figure 6. Malaysian Tourist Arrivals to the Philippines (2008-2025)

### Canada: 2019 garbage crisis

The Canadian market reflects a smaller but visible pre-pandemic disruption. Arrivals decreased from 173,297 in 2018 to 164,798 in 2019 (roughly -4.9%). The pandemic then overwhelms the series in 2020–2021. By 2023, arrivals approach pre-crisis levels (170,202), and 2024 figures appear to surpass pre-crisis levels based on partial-year reporting, with the study noting that the full December count is not yet included in the available DOT series.

The Philippines’ soft power took a hit as images of urban warfare circulated globally. Alongside the garbage dispute, Canadian government statements and intense media coverage criticized the Philippines’ ability to ensure tourist safety. Canadian arrivals, then

the eighth-largest market, showed virtually no growth in 2016 (about 175,000, roughly the same as 2015), even as overall arrivals increased by more than 11%. This suggests a market-specific chilling effect on Canadian travel. By 2017–2018, however, Canadian visitor numbers were rising again, implying that while security and diplomatic crises can cause short-term hesitation, they do not necessarily result in lasting declines if the situation stabilizes and mitigation measures are put in place.

Figure 7 marks two key reference points: the blue vertical line indicates the January 2013 incident involving the USS *Guardian* damaging the Tubbataha Reef, while the red vertical line marks the Canadian Garbage Crisis on April 24, 2019. On that date, President Duterte’s strong rhetoric drew renewed attention to the long-running dispute involving waste shipped by a Canadian company (Chronic Inc.). BBC World (2019) reported that 103 cargoes of Canadian garbage had remained in Philippine ports since 2013, prompting repeated diplomatic protests. After inspections, a Manila regional court ruled that about 2,400 tonnes of the waste was illegally shipped, mislabeled as recyclable but allegedly containing hazardous materials in violation of the Basel Convention. The diplomatic strain escalated when the Department of Foreign Affairs recalled diplomats from Canada after the Duterte administration’s May 15, 2019 deadline passed without the garbage being returned, as reported by *Manila Bulletin* (Mabasa and Kabling 2019).

Earlier, during APEC 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said legal barriers complicated the waste’s return (Rappler 2017). He called for a “Canadian solution,” and in 2019 Canada reportedly moved to pass legislation requiring companies to take back their waste shipments, hazardous or otherwise, as reported by BBC News (2019).

Figure 7 suggests a clear, measurable impact on Canadian arrivals. The 2019 crisis appears to coincide with a drop from 173,297 in 2018 to 164,798 in 2019. Arrivals then fell to near zero

during the COVID-19 period in 2020–2021. Recovery was strong by 2023 (170,202), and arrivals appear to have surpassed pre-crisis levels in 2024, with an estimated 216,557 Canadian visitors. This 2024 figure is approximate because the 2024 DOT Statistical Data Report does not include December data; given the holidays, total arrivals likely exceeded the November count.

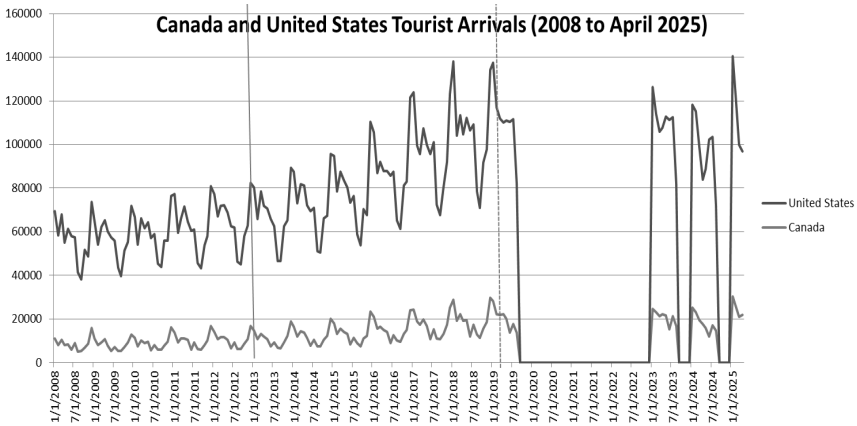


Figure 7. Canadian and American Tourist Arrivals (2008 to April 2025)

### United States: 2013 USS *Guardian*–Tubbataha Reef incident

Unlike cases tied to fatalities or direct harm to foreign nationals, this environmental-security incident did not appear to generate travel bans. The study notes rapid compensation and corrective action, functioning as a practical form of apology diplomacy. In the arrival trend, this case does not show the same kind of abrupt downward shock associated with Hong Kong or Taiwan.

On January 17, 2013, the minesweeper USS *Guardian* ran aground on Tubbataha Reef while transiting from the northern Sulu Sea toward Indonesia. GMA News Online (2013) reported that the

ship had recently made a port call at Subic Bay. The *Guardian* was part of the U.S. fleet that supports key maritime missions, including forward presence, deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

Following a joint investigation, the United States paid about \$1.97 million in compensation to the Philippine government for damage to the reef, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. To prevent further harm, the ship was dismantled and removed in sections.

Environmental groups strongly condemned the incident. Davao Today (2013), citing Alex Lopez, reported that advocates described the damage as severe and warned that the reef's recovery could take centuries. Fernando Hicap, chair of Pamalakaya, reportedly characterized the incident as an "environmental massacre."

## **2020 Kuwait labor crisis**

Figure 8 shows monthly Kuwaiti travel arrivals to the Philippines from 2008 through August 2025. Arrivals fluctuate moderately at first, with a dramatic spike in early 2009 when counts briefly exceed 3,000 before returning to typical levels. From about 2010 to 2019, volumes stay relatively stable, mostly between 300 and 800 arrivals. A vertical line marks January 16, 2020, when the Philippine government imposed a deployment ban on overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to Kuwait via POEA Governing Board Resolution No. 4, Series of 2020; immediately after this date, arrivals collapse to very low levels, reflecting sharply reduced travel. Numbers remain depressed for an extended period, then gradually rise from 2021 onward, with arrivals approaching or occasionally exceeding pre-2020 levels by 2023–2024, though still showing some volatility and intermittent dips.

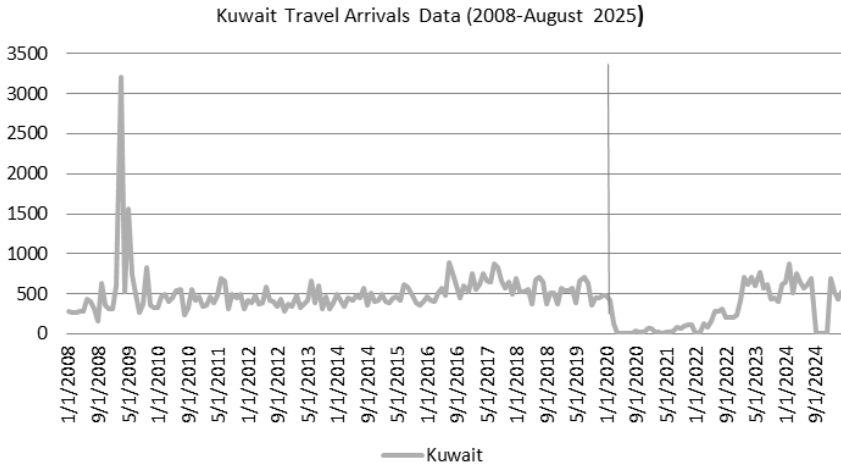


Figure 8. Kuwaiti Travel Arrivals Data (2008- August 2025)

On January 16, 2020, the Philippine government once again imposed a deployment ban on overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to Kuwait through POEA Governing Board Resolution No. 4, Series of 2020. This followed the death of Jeanelyn Villavende in 2019 (Figure 8). The incident renewed urgent concerns about how the bilateral labor agreement (BLA) between the Philippines and Kuwait is being implemented to protect the estimated 260,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, most of whom are household workers.

The January 2020 ban was not an isolated response. It came after a series of high-profile OFW deaths in Kuwait, including those of Joanna Demafelis (2018), Constanca Lago Dayag (2019), Jullebee Ranara (2023), and most recently, Dafnie Nacalaban (2024). Despite ongoing BLA negotiations and institutional reforms, such as creating the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), these tragedies continue to raise serious questions about the effectiveness of current protection mechanisms for Filipino workers in Kuwait.

Henelito Sevilla Jr. (2020), writing for East Asia Forum, notes that the Philippines' 2018 attempt to rescue Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait after Demafelis' death embarrassed the Kuwaiti

government. This led to a diplomatic crisis in which the Philippine ambassador, Renato Villa, was declared *persona non grata* and given a week to leave Kuwait.

More recently, as reported by Marita Moaje of the Philippine News Agency (2025), the deaths of two Filipino workers, Jenny Alvarado, who allegedly died after inhaling smoke from a workplace heating system, and Dafnie Nacalaban, whose body was found after she had been missing for two months, prompted a fresh review of policies, according to DMW Secretary Hans Cacadac.

In response, the DMW now prohibits the deployment of first-time OFWs (those without prior overseas work experience) to Kuwait as a precautionary measure. The agency has also strengthened safeguards such as pre-departure briefings, blacklisting abusive recruiters, and enhancing electronic monitoring systems to better protect Filipino migrant workers from exploitation and harm.

### **South Korea: 2018 garbage crisis**

The South Korea case is treated as a comparative reference point because the diplomatic damage was limited and an apology was issued. The results suggest no sustained decline attributable to the incident beyond broader global disruptions.

Similar to the Canadian garbage controversy, the public grew alarmed that the Philippines was becoming a dumping ground for South Korea's waste. According to a report by Daphne Galvez of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2018), several environmental groups filed complaints with the South Korean Embassy in Manila. During a peaceful protest outside the embassy, the EcoWaste Coalition said it had submitted a letter to Ambassador Han Dong-man, urging the South Korean government to act swiftly to resolve the garbage issue in Mindanao.

After about two years, South Korea removed its waste from the Misamis Oriental ports of Villanueva and Tagoloan. IPEN (2020) notes that the shipments, which arrived in July and October 2018,

were deceptively declared as “plastic synthetic flakes” but were in fact contaminated plastic waste.

Unlike the Canadian case, however, this issue did not receive the same level of nationwide media attention or political drama. In contrast to the Canadian crisis, President Duterte did not personally lead public calls over the South Korean waste shipments. Figure 9 shows South Korean tourist arrivals around the July 2018 incident: July 2018: 127,190; August 2018: 129,734; September 2018: 125,236; October 2018: 122,390; November 2018: 127,935; and December 2018: 174,578.

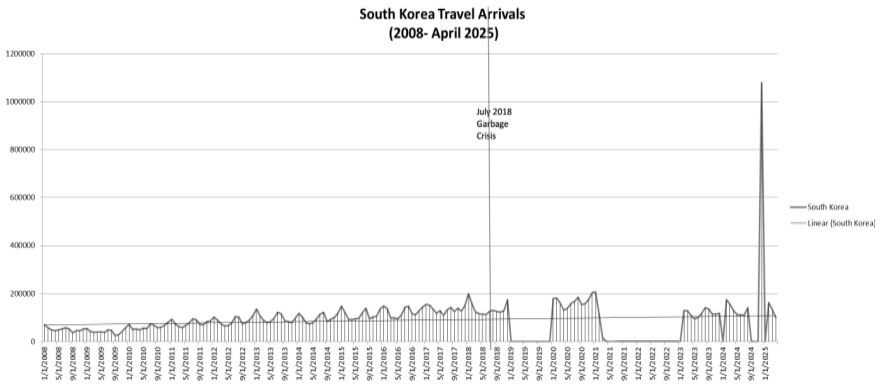


Figure 9. South Korean Tourist Arrivals (2008 to April 2025)

As shown in Figure 10, there is a slight dip immediately after July 2018, followed by normal fluctuations in the subsequent months. The trend line from mid-2018 generally remained stable and only dropped noticeably during the COVID-19 pandemic years, after which arrivals began to rise again, with a more gradual recovery in 2021 as international air travel slowly reopened.

Taken together, these patterns show that tourism flows are politically sensitive but not uniformly fragile. The most substantial short-term declines appear where crises combine three conditions:

high emotional or moral salience (especially deaths), strong official signaling (alerts, bans, sanctions), and delayed or contested apology responses. The results also invite further inquiry into why some markets recover quickly despite unresolved disputes (as seen in parts of the China series) and how media intensity, policy timing, or aviation capacity may interact with apology diplomacy to shape the slope of recovery.

## **Discussion**

The findings are consistent with the claim that international apologies operate as more than symbolic reconciliation. Mattes and Weeks (2025) argue that apologies are instruments of public diplomacy, capable of softening foreign public attitudes and enabling reputational recovery. The Hong Kong and Taiwan cases closely reflect this logic: policy restrictions and public sentiment appear to ease only after apology-linked signals and accountability steps are offered, followed by gradual normalization of arrivals.

The results also align with broader tourism scholarship emphasizing the centrality of image management and branding. Claro et al. (2023) describe destination branding as a preferred soft power tool in tourism. This study extends that view by illustrating that branding alone may not be enough during politically charged crises; apology diplomacy appears to function as a complementary mechanism that helps make branding credible again.

Methodologically, the study's descriptive use of ITSA follows the approach of tourism analyses that prioritize trend interpretation and policy relevance over strict causal claims (Jesus and Samonte 2023). The present results support that tradition by showing clear shifts in direction and magnitude around crisis points without overclaiming statistical causation.

### ***Synthesis of the Results***

Across cases, a coherent pattern emerges: 1) severe security incidents involving foreign nationals (Hong Kong hostage crisis; Taiwan fisherman incident) correspond to the largest immediate drops and to more formal and prolonged restrictions; 2) diplomatic disputes without mass casualty events (Canada garbage issue) appear to produce smaller but detectable declines, with recovery shaped by the pace and visibility of diplomatic repair; 3) incidents disavowed by the Philippine state (Sabah standoff) show short-lived effects, suggesting that perceived responsibility affects both policy responses and traveler sentiment; and 4) rapid restitution or functional equivalents of apology (U.S. Tubataha case) appear to reduce the likelihood of sustained tourism damage.

This synthesis supports the study's central claim that apology diplomacy operates as a "valve" in the osmotic model. It regulates whether the travel flow remains restricted or returns toward pre-crisis trajectories.

### ***Theoretical and Practical Implications***

Theoretically, the findings give applied weight to the Osmosis Model of Tourism Flow and Apology Diplomacy, showing that the "permeability" of tourist mobility can change quickly in response to political shocks and repair signals. The model helps connect abstract soft power concepts to concrete arrival patterns.

Practically, the results suggest that the Philippines' tourism recovery toolkit could benefit from a more explicit policy interface between tourism and foreign affairs. If apology diplomacy can accelerate normalization in high-stakes crises, then recovery strategies may need to move beyond marketing alone and include pre-planned diplomatic coordination pathways—especially for incidents likely to trigger foreign alerts or bans.

### ***Study Limitations***

Several limitations shape how these findings should be read: 1) descriptive focus: the study intentionally does not use significance testing, so results should be interpreted as pattern-based evidence, not definitive causal proof; 2) potential confounders: exchange rates, airline capacity, visa policy changes, and broader geopolitical shifts may also influence arrival trends alongside crisis events; 3) source dependence in case narratives: the qualitative component relies on news reports and official statements, which may vary in framing and completeness; and 4) pandemic disruption and partial-year data: COVID-19 creates a major structural break in the series, and some recent annual totals (e.g., 2024) appear based on incomplete reporting as noted in the manuscript.

Future work could deepen the analysis by incorporating media sentiment tracking, policy stringency indices, or air route capacity data to more precisely separate apology effects from parallel drivers of recovery. A comparative extension to other ASEAN destinations facing similar crises could also test whether this apology-tourism relationship generalizes beyond the Philippines.

### **Conclusion**

This study directly addressed its objective of determining whether and how apology diplomacy shapes foreign tourist arrivals to the Philippines (2008–2025) during major diplomatic crises. Using an osmotic tourism framework and interrupted time-series analysis of Department of Tourism data, the findings indicate that timely, credible public apologies are associated with quicker normalization of tourist flows and improved bilateral sentiment, whereas delayed or absent apologies tend to coincide with prolonged restrictions, negative advisories, and slower recovery toward pre-crisis trajectories. The evidence also suggests that the magnitude and duration of tourism disruptions are more pronounced in diplomacy-centered disputes than in purely security-related incidents, while countries with deeper,

more stable ties to the Philippines may exhibit greater resilience in arrivals even when crises occur.

Several limitations should be noted. The analysis relies on aggregate monthly arrivals and cannot fully isolate apology diplomacy from concurrent influences such as economic cycles, airline capacity changes, media coverage intensity, and broader geopolitical shifts; moreover, crisis episodes vary in severity and policy response, which complicates direct comparisons across cases. Future research should strengthen causal inference by incorporating additional covariates (such as flight frequency, exchange rates, travel advisory timelines, and sentiment measures from news/social media), using comparative multi-country designs across the Asia-Pacific, and applying mixed methods (elite interviews, document analysis) to better assess apology “credibility” and audience reception. Scholars could also extend the framework beyond tourism to examine other non-economic reprisals, such as restrictions affecting migrant workers, international students, or sporting participation, to evaluate whether apology diplomacy similarly functions as a “valve” regulating cross-border flows in other domains.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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