

Understanding Tourists' Motivations: The Case of Al Baha Mountainous Region in Saudi Arabia

Ali Bokhari¹

¹Department of Archeitecture, Faculty of Engineering, Al Baha University

Abstract

Motivations are critical factors in understanding tourists' behaviors in relation to destination choice; they relate to needs, goals, and preferences. Extensive research on this topic has been documented in the literature. However, there are few empirical studies on ecotourist cities in mountainous regions that are facing an increasing number of challenges due to the cost of infrastructure development. Attention to tourists' motivational factors in ecotourist cities is critical for specifying their needs and preferences when drawing up future urban policies to develop ecotourist areas. In this study, the variables that influence tourists' motivations, and their likelihood of revisiting those areas, were analyzed. The principal results show the significant role of accommodation locations and marketing in attracting visitors to ecotourist areas. These findings suggest that private and public sectors should invest in tourists' residential development with a high level of accessibility and views. Moreover, tourist advertisements should be given more attention, especially on social media platforms.

© 2021 The Authors. Published by IEREK press. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of ESSD's International Scientific Committee of Reviewers.

Keywords

tourism planning; planning for mountain areas; tourism investment; ecotourist; tourists' motivations

1. Introduction

Ecotourism is greatly expanding in most countries because of the advantages it offers to the host communities, and the tourists, and the land (Regmi & Walter, 2017). The authors of several studies have recognized the role of ecotourism in cultural preservation, sustainable development, and economic growth (Liu et al., 2011). Visiting heritage and natural conservation sites is the most significant form of modern-day tourism due to its role in enhancing urban and rural areas development (Chi, Cai, & Li, 2017). It not only provides an economic stimulus at the national and local levels but also substantial benefits at the individual level (Dans & Gonzalez, 2018; Hsu, 2019). Therefore, enhancing ecotourist areas has become a major objective for many countries that want to attract international tourists who wish to enjoy their rich local, natural, historical, and cultural points of heritage (Esfehiani & Albrecht, 2018; Ismagilova, Safiullin, & Gafurov, 2015).

Ecotourism in mountainous areas in particular is facing an increasing number of challenges in terms of local and regional development, due to natural hazards including rock falls and landslides and mudflows, and the cost of infrastructure development (Aseres & Sira, 2020; Rivera-Hernández et al., 2018). Therefore, many countries have attempted to create investments in these areas, to optimize the cost benefits, and to promote regional and national tourism development strategies (Sharpley & Telfer, 2014). Enhancing urban development is largely associated with a number of visitors, which has become another objective for many countries to attract more tourists to ecotourist

destinations. Attracting more tourists requires an understanding of their needs and motivations for visiting these areas; this is the objective of many studies (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2020).

The literature shows a growth in the number of investigations of tourists' motivations and behaviors (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014; Regmi & Walter, 2017). However, research conducted to analyze the characteristics of ecotourists and their perceptions toward their visited destinations needs to be strengthened and expanded to manage these tourist destinations in a sustainable way (Abuamoud et al., 2014). Although ecotourism is of high significance in mountainous areas, there is a limited number of comprehensive studies investigating tourists' characteristics and their visiting motivations to devise possible policies for future development meeting tourists' expectations. Thus, the objective of this research was to understand tourists' motivations to visit ecotourist mountainous areas, which extend the current understanding of ecotourism (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Correia et al., 2013; Suhartanto et al., 2020). The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The next part presents the literature review, followed by an overview of selected geographical areas. Next, materials, methods, and data analyses are presented before the results and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Enhancing conditions in rural areas threaten many governments with the challenge of finding new opportunities for income, employment, and means of sustaining the livelihoods of members of the local communities. Rural tourism can be an alternative way for revitalizing communities and enhancing urban development. In relying on a rural area's natural and cultural resources, such as beautiful and versatile landscapes and the traditional lifestyles of indigenous communities, the goal of ecotourism vendors is to provide visitors with the opportunity to take advantage of local heritage and nature's characteristics (Apostolakis, 2003; Lun et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2016; Xie & Shi, 2020). Ecotourist development policies in particular have become part of the vision of many countries. The literature shows a number of studies whose authors have aimed to understand tourists' behaviors and their perceptions toward ecotourist areas, which are strategically driven by policy makers at local, national, and international level (Oviedo-García et al., 2017; Sharpley, 2002). Creating successful ecotourism policies seems particularly important for many countries in maintaining tourism as a key source of natural income by which to thrive (Sharpley & Roberts, 2004).

Ecotourism is a field that is still exposed to several open questions in tourism research (Rivera-Hernández et al., 2018) and it needs further investigation to highlight the challenges that governments experience during tourism policy implementation. This is important to the specific case of ecotourism in mountainous areas (Dunets et al., 2019). Number of ecotourism studies refer to rural areas in general, or studies in the field are only implicitly focused on ecotourist areas. However, rural uplands and mountains offers unique travel experiences due to their diverse natural and cultural environments (Fredman, 2008; Hussain et al., 2019). Additionally, Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005) mentioned that mountainous areas are characterized by numerous distinctive elements including fragility, diversity, difficulty of access, marginality, aesthetics, and niche, which, because of their singularity, they have specific implications for tourism development. They encompass the most extensive array of topography, climate, flora, fauna, and cultural diversity on earth. Mountainous areas suffer from the precariousness of tourism development, which need an integrated approach balancing tourists' needs, the environment and local communities (Godde, 2000).

Mountainous areas more likely to be prototypical regions for analyzing ecotourism development because they are generally characterized by natural beauty and cultural heritage in Saudi Arabia, making them ideal destinations for ecotourists (Jimura, 2016). They also face a number of challenges, such as accessibility and difficult topography, making the implementation of tourism development challenging. Understanding tourists' motivations to visit such locations can enhance the investments and experiences of wise tourists; this will contribute to meeting the needs of both local residents and visitors.

2.1. Tourist Motivations

Tourist motivations have been an objective for tourism research several decades (Antón et al., 2017; Kozak, 2002; Murdy et al., 2018). Motivation theory comes from consumer behavior literature, whose scholars argue that motivations represent internal forces of individuals that lead to their actions and behaviors (Devesa et al., 2010).

Travel motivations are related to human needs that drive a person to participate in particular tourism activities such as swimming, horseback riding, and mountaineering (Yousaf et al., 2018). Thus, motivation has a crucial role in affecting travel decisions and tourists' behaviors (Mansfeld, 1992; Yousaf et al., 2018) because it illustrates why people travel to specific selected destinations, and why they engage in ecotourist activities during their vacations (Mahika, 2011).

One of the most important and widely referenced motivation theories with psychological roots has to do with escaping and seeking (Gnoth, 1997). Crompton (1979) also pinpointed psychological motives including relaxation and exploration, etc. as well as cultural motives including education and novelty. In particular, psychological motives were described as inner motivations influencing individuals, known as person-specific motivations such as the need to escape his/her environment (Heitmann, 2011), while cultural motives or outer motivations were described by destination-specific characteristics. Fletcher et al. (2017) categorized motivation factors into three types, namely: cultural; physical, such as relaxation; interpersonal, such as socializing; and prestige, such as self-esteem and self-actualization. Mehmetoglu (2012) distinguished between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and Park and Yoon (2009) mentioned knowledge, relaxation, adventure, family, travel bragging, and sports as motivational factors for travel. Among the most common motivational factors that have been investigated are self-development, relaxation, and family togetherness (Farmaki, 2012).

Although some researchers have investigated the concept of motivation within the context of tourism (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Antón et al., 2017; Prentice, 2004; Suhartanto et al., 2020), few studies have been conducted to explore tourists' motivations in terms of ecotourism in mountainous areas. A study by the Countryside Commission (1995) identified key visitors' motivations including relaxation, health, and peace and quiet. These results were supported by a research conducted in France (Federation Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles, 1989), whose authors found that tranquility, relaxation, fresh air, and greenery and were the factors driving tourists to visit the countryside.

Categorizing tourists based on their values, activities, or socio-economic characteristics has a critical role in shaping urban policies that must balance local community needs, economic growth, and sustainable development. Frochot (2005) identified three types of ecotourists: active tourists who engage in adventure-oriented activities; gazers, who prefer to relax and enjoy the surroundings; and those who are interested in experiencing rural settings. Furthermore, Devesa et al. (2010) recognized four groups of rural tourists. The first group includes tourists who seek tranquility and interactions with nature; the second consists of tourists interested in the cultural aspects of certain sites; and the third group includes tourists whose activities focus on gastronomy, natural areas, visiting family and friends, or relaxing in their own house. In close agreement with Devesa et al., studies by Yi et al. (2011) and Slee et al. (1997) describe three types of rural tourists, these are: rural-centric tourists who engage in rural-oriented activities; passive rural tourists who participate in classical tourism activities including visiting cultural sites; and those who visit family and friends in the countryside. Molinillo and Japutra (2017) added that tourists can be categorized based on the types of attractions they visit, such as arts-based, heritage sites, music festivals or zoos. In previous studies, scholars have indicated that clustering tourism types is challenging due to the different tourist motivators, which adds to the complexity of identifying which factors create tourism and how our urban policies can enhance tourism. Therefore, within the context of travel to mountain regions, it is imperative that ecotourist motivations are investigated to allow for a clearer understanding of the concept, as well as better urban and regional policies.

2.2. Tourism and Heritage

Drawing on the literature, researchers have investigated the relationship between tourism and heritage to understand the of tourism development in heritage conservation areas. The types of heritage tourists visiting these areas influences the implementation of appropriate tourism policy protecting heritage sites (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). In this regard, Poria et al. (2003) presented a tree type of heritage tourist: The first tourists group who just visit heritage places; the second group who is visiting heritage sites and aware of the heritage attributes and cultural values of these areas; and third group of heritage tourists are those who are believe that heritage site is part of their own experience and their visit is motivated by the heritage values and attributes of the site.

Vong and Ung (2012) investigate heritage tourism in Macau, China, and they have noted four aspects are associated with heritage tourism which are history and culture, heritage interpretation, facilities and services at heritage sites, and heritage attractions. Yan and Morrison (2008) mentioned that it is important to consider what importance to understand the values of heritage tourism and their motivations to visit these types of sites. Moreover, number of researches investigate the relationship between world heritage site properties and tourism. Among others, we can highlight those focused on certain sites of Canada (Donohoe, 2012), Portugal (Remoaldo et al., 2014), Romania (Bucurescu, 2015), Spain (Yousaf et al., 2018), Israel (Poria et al., 2003), China (Yang & Lin, 2014), and Vietnam (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). The significance of enhancing culture and heritage tourists' experiences are strongly attractive for tourists seeking to reinforce the protection of heritage (Poria et al., 2013), particularly for those travelers seeking local authentic tourism experiences and genuine places (Timothy, 2011). Thus, heritage is one of the most important and fastest-growing aspects of tourism these days (Poria et al., 2003).

Tourists decide to visit an ecotourist area that has rich natural and heritage characteristics (Correia et al., 2013). Consequently, these factors must be analyzed and understood because there is a great diversity of heritage sites and each will be affected by different variables (Breakey, 2012). Furthermore, tourist sites are under a strong competition among them to attract more tourists, particularly international visitors (Remoaldo et al., 2014). Local culture and heritage can be attributes that differentiates one site from another and make them more attractive for different type of tourists (Bell, 2010; Bucurescu, 2015). Arrange of places, including cultural and natural sites, makes substantial differences for understanding visitors' needs and consequently providing better management of these areas (Poria et al., 2013). Studying tourists' motivations to visit ecotourist areas in mountainous regions allows for orienting and reinforcing various tourism management policies.

3. Study Area

Surrounded by mountains, the Al Baha region is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in southwestern Saudi Arabia, as it has mild weather in the summer and cool weather in the winter. The population of the region is around 476,000, and its economic basically relies on the agricultural and tourism sectors. With heritage villages such as Zee Ain and Bani Saar, the region enjoys an important focus on cultural tourism (UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015). Zee Ain is an archaeological village that was declared a World Heritage Site. Developed in the sixteenth century, it is more than 400 years old (UNESCO, 2015). The historic villages of Al Khalaf and Al Khalif both contain archeological gems as well as numerous ancient Islamic inscriptions on basalt stone (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2018). Valleys, mountains, plains, waterfalls, and forests contribute to the area's natural beauty. All these features indicate that, at present, the region is one of the best representatives of an ecotourist destination in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East at large. In 2018, over than 1.2 million local trips were made to Al Baha carrying more than 1.5 million tourists to the area with total spending 373 million USD on tourism (Ministry of Tourism, 2019). It becomes an attractive destination for thousands of tourists as a consequence of its rich cultural heritage and local historic importance. Enhancing ecotourism in Al Baha minimizes tourism negative impact upon the local environment and local heritage sites toward more sustainable development.

4. Materials and Methods

To understand tourists' motivations and factors that influenced their decision to visit the Al Baha region, a questionnaire was adapted from previous research for use in this study (Breakey, 2012; Vong and Ung, 2012; Poria et al., 2013; Jin et al., 2016). The survey was designed to analyze two groups of variables: First, the sociodemographic profiles and the principal characteristics of tourists' trips (including trip duration, type of accommodation, and destinations visited) were queried; second, the factors that defined their trip motivations and satisfaction as well as the probability of their interest in revisiting the area were explored. A five-point Likert Scale (1 is not important and 5 is very important) was employed to assess tourists' motivations to visit Al Baha. To evaluate the likelihood of repeat visits to the area and to gain further information, questions with yes or no responses accompanied open-ended questions. At the end of the survey, an open-ended question was used to ask about any constraints that tourists may have experienced during their visits.

The first section of the survey pertained to the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals (e.g., age, gender, educational level, country of origin, income level, and professional category). Next, a series of variables to analyze tourist satisfaction (e.g., hospitality, historic heritage, visitor information points, citizen safety, city cleanliness, and restaurants) were assessed to determine motivations to visit the destination. Finally, logistic regression analysis—using the factors obtained in the factorial analysis as independent variables—was employed to discover the factors increasing the probability that a tourist would revisit the region. The data for the dependent variable of the regression model was obtained from the survey question regarding whether or not respondents were willing to revisit the area. The data for the independent variables were drawn from the factor scores that were obtained from factor analysis.

Before the data were collected, a pilot test was conducted with 30 tourists in the first two weeks of April 2018 to ensure that the survey were appropriately written and designed. A total of 873 surveys were completed in the summer of 2018 and 2019 (i.e. between April 2018 and August 2018, and April 2019 and August 2019) and 743 of them were useable. Convenience sampling was used, as it is common in this type of research in which the surveyed population is available in a pre-determined space and time (Finn et al., 2000). Data were collected from participants in 15 locations, which are the most visited sites by tourists; these included an airport, three main malls in the area, and 12 residential tourism sites (hotels, resorts, and apartments).

4.1. Data Analysis

The sociodemographic profiles of the tourists visiting the Al Baha region were determined first (see Table 1). Next, a factorial analysis of the aspects related to the visit was conducted with varimax rotation as well as an analysis of the internal consistency of the factors (Cronbach's alpha). The Final model employed all factors with reliability greater than 0.5 and have an eigenvalue greater than 1, which were assessed by Cronbach's alpha test (Izquierdo Alfaro et al., 2014). Next, a logistic regression analysis was used to determine the probability of a tourist repeating their trip to Al Baha. It was also used to introduce the factors from the factorial analysis in the regression model as independent variables to determine which ones significantly increased or decreased the cited probability.

Table 1: Respondents' Sociodemographic Characteristics

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Total (%) (<i>N</i> = 743)	
1. Age	<18	16.55
	18–24	19.52
	25–34	30.28
	35–49	21.13
	>50	12.52
2. Educational	No bachelor's degree	34.72
	Graduate diploma	23.55
	Bachelor's degree	31.36
	Post-graduate degree	10.36
3. Employment status	Full-time worker	42.13
	Part-time worker	17.23
	Student	30.96
	Unemployed	9.69

Table 1 Continued

4. Marital status	Single	30.82
	Family without dependent child/children	43.07
	Family with dependent child/children	26.11
5. First time visitor	Yes	37.15
	No	62.85
6. Monthly household income (SAR/month)	<4,999	34.59
	5,000–9,999	29.74
	10,000–19,999	27.19
	>20,000	8.48
7. Willingness to visit again	Yes	69.72
	No	30.28

5. Results

Three factors have an eigenvalue greater than 1 were identified as the most influential factors for trip satisfaction. The 14 statements for visiting motivations were factor analyzed, and items with loadings lower than 0.5 were removed. The remaining 10 items were employed in a factor analysis, generating three factors, which explained 56.8% of the total variance (see Table 2). The first factor, responsible for 25.01% of the total explained variance, comprised three items that reflect the aspects related to culture: cultural activities and shows, heritage buildings, and historic districts. The second factor (21.83% of the variance) grouped the items used to estimate the stay dimension (e.g., views, accessibility to local businesses, ease of public parking). The third and final factor, marketing, explained 17.97% of the variance with two items: media and visitors' information/visitor assistance points. The three groups obtained through the factorial analysis (culture, stay, and marketing) were then used as independent variables in the logistic regression model (see Table 3) to determine which of them was significantly associated with the probability of a repeat visit.

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Tourists' Motivations

Motivational statements	Factor		
	Culture	Stay	Marketing
Cultural activities and shows	0.872		
Heritage building	0.833		
Historic district (e.g. Zee Ain and Bani Saar villages)	0.779		
Views to valleys and mountains		0.821	
Accessibility to restaurants, parks, and local markets		0.780	
Ease of public parking		0.682	

Table 2 Continued

Media			0.679
Visitors' information and visitors' assistance points			0.614
Local business advertisements			0.536
Eigenvalues	2.79	2.10	1.80
Explained variance (%)	25.01	21.83	17.97
Accumulated explained variance (%)	25.01	46.84	64.81
Reliability coefficient	0.75	0.74	0.76

Total variance of factors: 64.81, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO): (0.87); Bartlett sphericity test ($p < 0.001$);
 $N = 743$

The logistic regression model showed results that were statistically significant ($\chi^2[3] = 46.72$; $p < 0.001$); the model explained 43.20% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance, and it correctly classified 68.0% of the cases. The results presented in Table 3 indicate that stay (OR = 3.73) and marketing (OR = 2.57) significantly increased the probability that a tourist would visit the region again. The natural characteristics of the area (e.g., valleys, waterfalls, and forests) were found to truly define the tourists' experiences and certainly increased loyalty to the destination in terms of their intentions for a return visit. Marketing, vis-à-vis the effects of media (especially social media) also significantly increased the probability that a tourist would visit the region again. On the other hand, culture did not have a significant effect ($p = 0.79$). This is curious, since the aspects related to cultural activities (especially visiting a historic district) are usually highly valued when one decides whether or not to visit a certain tourism destination on another occasion. Tourists' preferences not to revisit a historic area during their next visit to Al Baha may have resulted from the poor infrastructure and limited public facilities therein. The results highlight that 76.58% of the tourists would, however, potentially repeat their visit to the Al Baha region.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Analysis

Variables	β	SE	Wald	Odds ratio	95% CI	Sig (p-value)
Constant	1.40	0.53	6.46	-	4.0	0.011
Culture	0.04	0.23	0.03	1.04	0.67 – 1.59	0.785
Stay	1.31	0.23	31.13	3.73	2.35 – 5.95	<0.001
Marketing	0.93	0.10	84.96	2.57	2.11 – 3.16	<0.001

Model: $\chi^2(3) = 46.72$; $p < 0.001$

Nagelkerke R² = 0.432

$N = 743$

5.1. Tourist Accommodations

This research shows that the locations of tourist accommodations has a substantial role to play in attracting tourists to Al Baha. Visitors who had accommodations that featured good views of valleys and mountains and that were accessible to local market/commercial areas were much more likely to revisit the area. Trip duration and marital status can affect tourists' preferred types of accommodation. The results also revealed that the majority of the tourists

preferred more spacious accommodations (e.g., apartments and villas), particularly those who stayed in Al Baha for more than a week. A Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to assess the association between accommodation size (i.e. number of rooms) and trip duration. A statistically significant, positive association was found between accommodation size and trip duration for tourists visiting the Al Baha region ($r_s = 0.67$; $p < 0.050$). The type of preferred accommodation varied according to tourists' marital status. Indeed, single tourists and couples or families without dependent child(ren) preferred to stay in a hotel or apartment near the downtown core, while families with dependent child(ren) preferred to stay in villas or resorts. Therefore, the city council should attract investors to develop different types of accommodations to meet the needs of all potential visitors.

5.2. Marketing, Social Media, and Ecotourist Development

The traditional use of social media is mainly for entertainment or online shopping; however, it also has a large number of possible different practices in everyday life (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media marketing in the tourism industry is increasingly prevalent. Social media affects different aspects of tourism – from tourists' information searches and decision-making behaviors to tourism promotion and tourists sharing their own holiday experiences on various channels (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, Carneiro et al., 2018). Leveraging social media to market tourism products and activities has proven to be an excellent strategy (Amitay et al., 2020). Social media enables tourists to search for information on destinations to visit and to choose the best option among several alternatives (Hutter et al., 2013; Perakakis et al., 2016). The prevalence of social media enhances investment opportunities for local businesses and organizations to increase their profits (McCabe, 2017).

The leaders of many city council regard social media as an essential tool to enhance their domestic tourism, and Tourism Saudi Arabia is no exception. Claims that social media plays a crucial role in holiday planning and booking are mentioned by the increased traffic to tourism websites (Amaro et al., 2016). In this study, tourists were asked if they use any social media applications to make their travel decisions, and if so, which one(s). The findings show that 52% of our sample ($n = 387$) used a social media platform to gain information regarding accommodations, tourist attractions, and local business (e.g. restraints and shops). The statistics presented in Table 4 highlight that tourists seek restaurants and cafés using Instagram and Twitter (50.27% and 27.96% of respondents, respectively), whereas Snapchat aids their visits to parks or heritage areas (66.38% of respondents). Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are all prominent applications in Saudi Arabia, as they give people the opportunity to share experiences and information (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2019). Furthermore, social media influencers are predominantly active on these three platforms and their marketing, when executed properly, is more effective since consumers tend to trust them more than traditional advertising due to the close relationship between consumers and influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Most tourists also considered accommodation reviews on Google Reviews or reservation websites (66.67%). This finding highlights the modern role of social media in marketing to tourists, particularly those in areas with limited advertisements and marketing strategies (e.g., rural areas and ecotourist cities). Social media marketing can be more effective with younger generations who are more likely to use it. Somers' D was run to determine the association between age group and the use of social media among 387 participants. A positive, statistically significant ($d = 0.64$, $p < 0.050$) correlation was found between age group and tourists' use of social media to gain destination information.

Table 4: Tourists' Use of Social Media for Different Purposes

Social media platform	For visiting tourist destinations	Accommodation booking	Local businesses (e.g. restaurants, cafés, and shops)
Instagram	38 (10.73%)	17 (6.37%)	187 (50.27%)
Facebook	15 (4.24%)	10 (3.75%)	4 (1.08%)
WhatsApp	26 (7.34%)	12 (4.49%)	13 (3.49%)
Snapchat	235 (66.38%)	23 (8.61%)	23 (6.18%)

Table 4 Continued

YouTube	5 (1.41%)	5 (1.87%)	4 (1.08%)
Google	15 (4.24%)	178 (66.67%)	34 (9.14%)
Twitter	18 (5.08%)	6 (2.25%)	104 (27.96%)
Others	2 (0.56%)	16 (5.99%)	2 (0.81%)
Total	354	267	372

The findings of this research offer significant practical and policy implications, notably relating to the intensity of social media use by tourists and tourism businesses in ecotourist areas. The results suggest that it is important to market to tourists on social media platforms to attract more of them to the area. According to the findings, tourists and tourism operators were in favor of Instagram and Snapchat compared to other social networking sites, as they are commonly used in Saudi Arabia. Governmental and non-governmental agencies, media, advertisers, and tourism operators should keep an eye on Instagram and Snapchat to remain updated on tourists' activities. Social media has rich data regarding tourists' motivations, perceptions, and behaviors – including their reviews of popular businesses and locations (e.g., restaurants, parks, hotels) in the Al Baha region. To develop the region, governmental and non-governmental agencies should be attentive to local businesses' reviews, as they can affect tourists' decisions.

5.3. Tourism and Local Culture

Heritage culture has an important role in attracting tourists to the Al Baha region. The results of many studies have confirmed that heritage buildings and cultural activities can drive urban and economic growth, not to mention the industry as a whole (Ginting, 2016; García-Hernández et al., 2017). Heritage villages in Al Baha (such as Zee Ain and Bani Saar) have the potential to be developed to enhance public facilities and infrastructure to gain an important source of income through tourism.

In this study it was found that the local culture did not significantly affect tourists' likelihood of revisiting Al Baha. Table 5 summarizes tourists' assessments of the challenges of visiting heritage areas in Al Baha; most notably, these included poor infrastructure and accessibility. Such challenges may reduce the attraction of visiting the heritage areas. One tourist mentioned, "It is hard for an elderly person to walk on a hilly site without any assistance." Another mentioned that "during the summer season, many tourists are visiting the heritage area, but a limited amount of car parking and lack of an alternative mode of transport (such as a bus or train) made [their] experience unpleasant." The availability of public facilities near heritage locations was also highlighted as a key concern. One tourist said that "families with dependent kids need restaurants, cafés, and restrooms when they visit tourist locations, and there are a limited number of these services in heritage locations." Some tourists also mentioned the lack of explanation on the history and culture behind these buildings, including signage and information centers.

Table 5: Tourists' Feedback on Challenges of Visiting Heritage Areas

Challenges	Statements
Accessibility and infrastructure	Limited public parking near heritage buildings
	Roads in poor condition
	Limited tourist coaches to heritage areas
	Poor pedestrian pathways, particularly for elderly and disabled tourists
Public facilities	Limited public services such as restaurants, cafés, and restrooms
	Limited tourist information
	Some areas lack tour guides

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore tourists' motivations to visit ecotourist areas in order to offer an understanding of what attracts them to the Al Baha region. Through a series of modeling exercises, three factors (culture, stay, and marketing) were positively associated with tourists' decisions to visit ecotourist regions. Furthermore, the stay and marketing factors were found to drive tourists to revisit the areas. This research has highlighted the fact that tourists' original preferences for visiting ecotourist areas are primarily driven by local culture, including cultural activities and shows, heritage buildings, and historic villages. However, it was found that tourists often prefer not to revisit heritage buildings and historic districts because of poor infrastructure and accessibility concerns. Limited public facilities also negatively influence tourists' likelihood of revisiting historic locations.

The results also revealed that tourists prefer to visit ecotourist areas because of the hotels and resorts which have good views of the surrounding villages and valleys and that are near local restaurants and shops. Those deciding the location of any new residential development should consider the aforementioned key factors to attract tourists to the region. The government should attract real estate investors to develop different types of accommodations to meet tourists' diverse needs.

The role of marketing was found to be positively associated with tourists' perceptions of ecotourist areas. The effect of social media on the younger generation was particularly strong. It was found that tourists are more likely to use social media sites such as Instagram and Twitter when they are looking for restaurants and cafés, and they use Snapchat to obtain information for public parks or heritage areas. Tourist marketing strategies should integrate these platforms. Moreover, social media sites have rich data reflecting tourists' motivations, perceptions, and behaviors, which should be used by the government and investors during the future production of urban policies to develop the region.

The results from this study have extended the current understanding of tourist motivations (see Albayrak and Caber, 2018; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2020) by examining factors prompting ecotourism in mountainous areas that offer natural cultural experiences, among other advantages. The development of ecotourist cities as attraction point can be largely driven by their culture, facilities and marketing. Cities with rich local, natural, historical, and cultural heritage should invest more in public facilities, tourist accommodation and marketing attracting more tourists to the area. However, insufficient urban development and poor infrastructure can deter potential visitors from visiting these destinations.

As with all research, this study has limitations. The tourist surveys were conducted from April to August (i.e., the months when the city attracts the greatest number of visitors). For a more in-depth understanding of this subject, the remaining months of the year should be considered as well. Future researchers investigating the factors involved in ecotourism might carry out similar studies in other cities to identify common links and differentiating features among visitors across different regions.

References

- Abuamoud, I. N., Libbin, J., Green, J., & ALRousan, R. (2014). Factors affecting the willingness of tourists to visit cultural heritage sites in Jordan. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 9(2), 148-165.
- Agyeiwaah, E., Otoo, F. E., Suntikul, W., & Huang, W.-J. (2019). Understanding culinary tourist motivation, experience, satisfaction, and loyalty using a structural approach. *Journal of Travel Tourism Marketing* 36(3), 295-313.
- Albayrak, T., & Caber, M. (2018). Examining the relationship between tourist motivation and satisfaction by two competing methods. *Tourism management*, 69, 201-213.
- Amaro, S., Duarte, P., & Henriques, C. (2016). Travelers' use of social media: A clustering approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 59, 1-15.
- Amitay, Y., Winoto, T. H., & Wahyoedi, S. (2020). *The Impact of Celebgram Endorsement on Purchase Intention: The Mediating Effects of Customer Attitude and Brand Awareness*. Paper presented at the 8th International Conference of Entrepreneurship and Business Management Untar (ICEBM 2019).
- Antón, C., Camarero, C., & Laguna-García, M. (2017). Towards a new approach of destination loyalty drivers: Satisfaction, visit intensity and tourist motivations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 20(3), 238-260.
- Apostolakis, A. (2003). The convergence process in heritage tourism. *Annals of tourism research*, 30(4), 795-812.
- Aseres, S. A., & Sira, R. K. (2020). An exploratory study of ecotourism services quality (ESQ) in Bale mountains National Park (BMNP), Ethiopia: Using an ECOSERV model. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 23(3), 386-406.

- Baležentis, T., Kriščiukaitienė, I., Baležentis, A., & Garland, R. (2012). Rural tourism development in Lithuania (2003–2010)—A quantitative analysis. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 2, 1-6.
- Bell, V. (2010). Experiencing Heritage at a World Heritage Site: Personal encounters with Hadrian's Wall. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 13(1-2), 167-190. doi:10.1080/11745398.2010.9686843
- Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x %J Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
- Breakey, N. M. (2012). Studying World Heritage Visitors: The Case of the Remote Riversleigh Fossil Site. *Visitor Studies*, 15(1), 82-97. doi:10.1080/10645578.2012.660845
- Briedenhann, J., & Wickens, E. (2004). Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas—vibrant hope or impossible dream? *Tourism management*, 25(1), 71-79.
- Bucurescu, I. (2015). Managing tourism and cultural heritage in historic towns: examples from Romania. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 10(3), 248-262. doi:10.1080/1743873X.2014.968162
- Carneiro, M. J., Eusébio, C., Caldeira, A., & Tourism. (2018). The influence of social contact in residents' perceptions of the tourism impact on their quality of life: A structural equation model. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality*, 19(1), 1-30.
- Chi, C. G.-q., Cai, R., & Li, Y. (2017). Factors influencing residents' subjective well-being at World Heritage Sites. *Tourism management*, 63, 209-222.
- Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Ferradeira, J. (2013). From tourist motivations to tourist satisfaction. *International journal of culture, tourism hospitality research*.
- Countryside Commission. (1995). *Public attitudes to the countryside*. Northampton: Countryside Commission.
- Crompton, J. (1979). An assessment of the image of Mexico as a vacation destination and the influence of geographical location upon that image. *Journal of travel research*, 17(4), 18-23.
- Dans, E. P., & González, P. A. (2018). The Altamira controversy: Assessing the economic impact of a world heritage site for planning and tourism management. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 30, 180-189.
- Della Lucia, M., & Trunfio, M. (2018). The role of the private actor in cultural regeneration: Hybridizing cultural heritage with creativity in the city. *Cities*, 82, 35-44.
- Devesa, M., Laguna, M., & Palacios, A. (2010). The role of motivation in visitor satisfaction: Empirical evidence in rural tourism. *Tourism management*, 31(4), 547-552.
- Donohoe, H. M. (2012). Sustainable heritage tourism marketing and Canada's Rideau Canal world heritage site. *Journal of Sustainable tourism*, 20(1), 121-142. doi:10.1080/09669582.2011.617826
- Dunets, A., Vakhrushev, I. B., Sukhova, M. G., Sokolov, M. S., Utkina, K. M., & Shichiyakh, R. (2019). Selection of strategic priorities for sustainable development of tourism in a mountain region: concentration of tourist infrastructure or nature-oriented tourism. *Entrepreneurship Sustainability Issues* 7(2), 1217-1229.
- Esfehani, M., & Albrecht, J. (2018). Roles of intangible cultural heritage in tourism in natural protected areas. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 13(1), 15-29.
- Farmaki, A. (2012). An exploration of tourist motivation in rural settings: The case of Troodos, Cyprus. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 2, 72-78.
- Federation Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles. (1989). *Les Touristes Français en Espace Rural Analyse Qualitative*. Paris: Federation Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles.
- Finn, M., Walton, M., & Elliott-White, M. (2000). *Tourism and leisure research methods: Data collection, analysis, and interpretation*: Pearson education.
- Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2017). *Tourism: Principles and practice*: Pearson UK.
- Fredman, P. (2008). Determinants of visitor expenditures in mountain tourism. *Tourism Economics*, 14(2), 297-311.
- Fröchet, I. (2005). A benefit segmentation of tourists in rural areas: a Scottish perspective. *Tourism management*, 26(3), 335-346.
- García-Hernández, M., la Calle-Vaquero, D., & Yubero, C. (2017). Cultural heritage and urban tourism: Historic city centres under pressure. *Sustainability*, 9(8), 1346.
- Ginting, N. (2016). How self-efficacy enhance heritage tourism in Medan Historical Corridor, Indonesia. *Procedia-Social Behavioral Sciences*, 234(10), 193-220.
- Gnoth, J. (1997). Tourism motivation and expectation formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 283-304.
- Godde, P. (Ed.) (2000). *Tourism and development in mountain regions*. UK: Wallingford.
- Heberlein, T., Fredman, P., & Vuorio, T. (2002). Current tourism patterns in the Swedish mountain region. *Mountain Research Development*, 22(2), 142-149.
- Heitmann, S. (2011). Tourist behaviour and tourism motivation. In P. Robinson, S. Heitmann, & P. Dieke (Eds.), *Research themes for tourism* (pp. 31-44). UK: CAB International: Oxfordshire.
- Herrero, A., & San Martín, H. (2012). Influence of user's psychological factors on the online purchase intention in rural tourism. *Tourism management*, 33, 341-350.
- Hussain, T., Chen, S., & Nurunnabi, M. (2019). The role of social media for sustainable development in mountain region tourism in Pakistan. *International Journal of Sustainable Development World Ecology*, 26(3), 226-231.

- Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. (2013). The Impact of User Interactions in Social Media on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention: The Case of MINI on Facebook. *Journal of Product Brand Management*, 22, 91-105.
- Hsu, P.-h. (2019). Economic impact of wetland ecotourism: An empirical study of Taiwan's Cigu Lagoon area. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 29, 31-40.
- Ismagilova, G., Safullin, L., & Gafurov, I. (2015). Using historical heritage as a factor in tourism development. *Procedia-Social Behavioral Sciences*, 188, 157-162.
- Izquierdo Alfaro, I., Olea Díaz, J., & Abad García, P. (2014). Exploratory factor analysis in validation studies: Uses and recommendations. *Psicothema*.
- Jimura, T. (2016). World heritage site management: a case study of sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the Kii mountain range, Japan. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 11(4), 382-394.
- Jin, Q., Hu, H., & Kavan, P. (2016). Factors influencing perceived crowding of tourists and sustainable tourism destination management. *Sustainability*, 8(10), 976.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Kozak, M. (2002). Comparative analysis of tourist motivations by nationality and destinations. *Tourism management*, 23(3), 221-232.
- Landorf, C. (2009). Managing for sustainable tourism: a review of six cultural World Heritage Sites. *Journal of Sustainable tourism*, 17(1), 53-70.
- Liu, J., Feng, T., & Yang, X. (2011). The energy requirements and carbon dioxide emissions of tourism industry of Western China: A case of Chengdu city. *Renewable Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 15(6), 2887-2894.
- Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: how message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), 58-73.
- Lun, L.-M., Pechlaner, H., Volgger, M., & Tourism. (2016). Rural tourism development in mountain regions: Identifying success factors, challenges and potentials. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality*, 17(4), 389-411.
- Mahika, E. C. (2011). Current trends in tourist motivation. *Cactus Tourism Journal*, 2(2), 15-24.
- Mansfeld, Y. (1992). From motivation to actual travel. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19(3), 399-419.
- McCabe, M. (2017). Social media marketing strategies for career advancement: An analysis of LinkedIn. *Journal of Business Behavioral Sciences*, 29(1), 85.
- Mehmetoglu, M. (2012). What determines holidaying interest? Extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations. *Journal of social, evolutionary, cultural psychology*, 6(1), 93.
- Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. (2019). *Annual Report*. Retrieved from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: https://www.mcit.gov.sa/sites/default/files/annual_report_eng_v2_0.pdf
- Ministry of Tourism. (2019). *Statistics Summary - Al Baha Province for 2018*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Molinillo, S., & Japutra, A. (2017). Factors influencing domestic tourist attendance at cultural attractions in Andalusia, Spain. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 6(4), 456-464.
- Murdy, S., Alexander, M., & Bryce, D. (2018). What pulls ancestral tourists 'home'? An analysis of ancestral tourist motivations. *Tourism management*, 64, 13-19.
- Nepal, S. K., & Chipeniuk, R. (2005). Mountain tourism: Toward a conceptual framework. *Tourism Geographies*, 7(3), 313-333.
- Nguyen, T., & Cheung, C. (2014). The classification of heritage tourists: A case of Hue city, Vietnam. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 9(1), 35-50.
- Oviedo-García, M. Á., Castellanos-Verdugo, M., Vega-Vázquez, M., & Orgaz-Agüera, F. (2017). The Mediating roles of the overall perceived value of the ecotourism site and attitudes towards ecotourism in sustainability through the key relationship ecotourism knowledge-ecotourist Satisfaction. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 19(2), 203-213.
- Park, D.-B., & Yoon, Y.-S. (2009). Segmentation by motivation in rural tourism: A Korean case study. *Tourism management*, 30(1), 99-108.
- Partalidou, M., & Iakovidou, O. (2008). Crafting a policy framework of indicators and quality standards for rural tourism management. *International Journal of Tourism Policy*, 1(4), 353-367.
- Perakakis, E., Trihas, N., Mastorakis, G., Kopanakis, I., & Venitourakis, M. (2016). Social media as a marketing tool for Greek destinations. *Tourismos*, 11(3).
- Poria, Y., Butler, R., & Airey, D. (2003). The core of heritage tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(1), 238-254.
- Poria, Y., Reichel, A., & Cohen, R. (2013). Tourists perceptions of World Heritage Site and its designation. *Tourism management*, 35, 272-274.
- Prentice, R. (2004). Tourist motivation and typologies. In A. Lew, C. Hall, & A. Williams (Eds.), *A Companion to Tourism* (1st ed., pp. 261-279). Malden, USA and Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Regmi, K. D., & Walter, P. (2017). Modernisation theory, ecotourism policy, and sustainable development for poor countries of the global South: perspectives from Nepal. *International Journal of Sustainable Development World Ecology*, 24(1), 1-14.
- Remoaldo, P. C., Vareiro, L., Ribeiro, J. C., & Santos, J. F. (2014). Does Gender Affect Visiting a World Heritage Site? *Visitor Studies*, 17(1), 89-106.
- Rivera-Hernández, J. E., Pérez-Sato, J. A., Alcántara-Salinas, G., Servín-Juárez, R., & García-García, C. (2018). Ecotourism and rural tourism in the High Mountains Region of Veracruz, Mexico: potencial, challenges and facts. *Agroproductividad*, 11(8), 129-135.

- Saudi Tourism Authority. (2018). The Historic Villages of Al Baha. Retrieved from <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en/do/break-free/explore-al-baha/the-historic-villages-of-al-baha>
- Sharpley, R. (2002). Rural tourism and the challenge of tourism diversification: the case of Cyprus. *Tourism management*, 23(3), 233-244.
- Sharpley, R., & Roberts, L. (2004). Rural tourism—10 years on. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 6(3), 119-124.
- Sharpley, R., & Telfer, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Tourism and Development: Concepts and Issues (Aspects of Tourism)* (2nd ed. Vol. 63). Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications.
- Slee, B., Farr, H., & Snowdon, P. (1997). The economic impact of alternative types of rural tourism. *Journal of agricultural economics*, 48(1-3), 179-192.
- Suhartanto, D., Brien, A., Primiana, I., Wibisono, N., & Triyuni, N. N. (2020). Tourist loyalty in creative tourism: the role of experience quality, value, satisfaction, and motivation. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(7), 867-879.
- Tian, M., Min, Q.-w., Jiao, W.-j., Yuan, Z., Fuller, A. M., Yang, L., . . . Cheng, B. (2016). Agricultural Heritage Systems Tourism: definition, characteristics and development framework. *Journal of Mountain Science*, 13(3), 440-454.
- Timothy, D. (2011). *Cultural heritage and tourism: An introduction* (Vol. 4): Channel View Publications.
- UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2015). Zee Ain Heritage Village in Al-Baha Region. Retrieved from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6031/>
- Vong, L. T.-N., & Ung, A. (2012). Exploring Critical Factors of Macau's Heritage Tourism: What Heritage Tourists are Looking for when Visiting the City's Iconic Heritage Sites. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(3), 231-245. doi:10.1080/10941665.2011.625431
- Xie, P. F., & Shi, W. L. (2020). Elucidating the characteristics of heritage hotels. *Anatolia*, 1-4.
- Yan, C., & Morrison, A. (2008). The influence of visitors' awareness of world heritage listings: A case study of Huangshan, Xidi and Hongcun in southern Anhui, China. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 2(3), 184-195.
- Yi, S., Day, J., Cai, L., & Trends. (2011). Rural tourism demand: duration modeling for drive tourists length of stay in rural areas of the United States. *Journal of Tourism Challenges*, 4(1), 147-168.
- Yousaf, A., Amin, I., & Santos, J. A. (2018). Tourist's motivations to travel: A theoretical perspective on the existing literature.