



VALIDATING THE INFLUENCE OF MEMORABLE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES ON REVISIT INTENTIONS: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING APPROACH

**Nurzehan Abu Bakar¹, Marlisa Abdul Rahim², Nik Alif Amri Nik Hashim²,
Normah Abdul Latip³, Nor Maizana Mat Nawi², Mohamad Pirdaus Yusoh²**

¹*Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA (UiTM), PUNCAK ALAM*

²*Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness,
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA KELANTAN*

³*Borneo Institute for Indigenous Studies (BorIIS),
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH*

Abstract

In response to the growing demand for sustainable experiences, this study aims to examine how Memorable Sustainable Tourism Experiences (MSTE) influence tourists' intention to revisit a destination. Grounded by Kim's (2017) Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) model, this research introduces two additional dimensions, local guide and responsible practices, to better reflect the unique dynamics of sustainable tourism experience. These additions represent the novelty of the study, offering a more comprehensive understanding of what makes memorable sustainable tourism experiences. A structured survey was administered to 233 tourists who participated in sustainable tourism experience. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results revealed that hedonism, local culture, refreshment, and responsible practices significantly influence revisit intention. Interestingly, the role of local guides showed a negative effect, while knowledge, meaningfulness, novelty, and involvement were not statistically significant. This study contributes to the academic discourse by expanding the theoretical model of MTEs to incorporate sustainable features, while also providing practical insights for destination managers seeking to enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty through meaningful, sustainable tourism experiences.

Keywords: Exploratory sequential mixed-method study, Memorable sustainable tourism experience, Memorable tourism Experience, Sustainable tourism, Experience and Revisit intention

³ Corresponding author. Email: nikalifamri@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the travel industry has seen an increase in demand for sustainable tourist experiences (Seeler et al., 2021; Spence et al., 2022). Today's tourists are no longer satisfied with passive sightseeing; instead, they seek meaningful, immersive experiences that allow them to fully engage with their surroundings. Activities such as participating in wildlife conservation, supporting local artists, choosing eco-friendly accommodations, and contributing to local businesses have steadily gained prominence and are now regarded as vital components of a rewarding travel experience (Paulauskaite, 2017; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2021).

This shift provides a significant opportunity for the tourism industry to fully embrace sustainability. Sustainable tourist experiences, when carefully planned and implemented, have the potential to save natural ecosystems, preserve cultural heritage, and promote equitable economic development. In addition, it can also simultaneously increase tourist satisfaction, strengthen emotional ties with destinations, and encourage revisit intention and loyalty towards the destination (Breiby et al., 2020; Moscardo, 2015; Sofronov, 2017).

Despite this great potential, the tourism industry continues to face challenges in delivering MSTE. This is because tourists often struggle to distinguish between genuinely sustainable experiences and those merely marketed with superficial "green" claims, thereby hindering the industry's efforts to promote authentic sustainable tourism experiences (Yusoh et al., 2023; Bausch et al., 2021). Many operators combine sustainability with basic eco-friendly policies, such as minimizing plastic use, while overlooking crucial sociocultural factors, including local community involvement and inclusion in the tourism sector (Gopal, 2023). This restricted approach undermines the essence of sustainable tourism, which requires not only environmental responsibility but also active participation and empowerment of local communities through meaningful employment and decision-making opportunities.

Furthermore, a significant impediment is the lack of a complete and unambiguous framework for understanding and implementing MSTEs. Despite research highlighting the importance of MSTEs in creating perceived value and promoting tourists' revisit intention (Breiby et al., 2020; Rahim et al., 2023), the concept remains poorly defined and inconsistently used. The lack of clarity hinders tourism stakeholders from effectively planning, promoting, and assessing these experiences, resulting in missed opportunities for impactful and memorable offerings (WEF, 2022).

Although research on MTE has expanded in recent years, the exploration of MSTE remains relatively underrepresented in academic literature as scholars are focusing on other type of MTE such as Memorable Gastro-

Tourism Experiences (García Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024), Memorable Heritage Tourism Experience (Sthapit et al., 2024) and memorable wellness tourism experience (Sthapit, et al., 2023). The limited focus on MSTE suggests an opportunity for further investigation into how sustainable practices contribute to memorable tourism experiences.

To address this conceptual gap, the present study extends Kim's (2017) Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) framework by incorporating two sustainability-focused dimensions: local guide and responsible practices. These additions offer a more comprehensive representation of memorable experiences within the Malaysian sustainable tourism context, where cultural interpretation and environmental stewardship play crucial roles.

Hence, this study aims to explore the elements of MSTEs and assess their influence on tourists' propensity to revisit a destination. The findings aim to provide tourism stakeholders with clear directives for the design, management, and promotion of MSTEs, ensuring that these experiences meet tourists' expectations while promoting the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Based on the conceptual gaps identified above, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the key dimensions of memorable sustainable tourism experiences (MSTE) in the Malaysian tourism context?
- RQ2: How do specific MSTE dimensions, particularly local guide and responsible practices, shape tourists' revisit intention?
- RQ3: Which MSTE constructs significantly predict revisit intention for sustainable destinations such as Langkawi Island?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Memorable Sustainable Tourism Experience

The tourism literature has only recently shifted its focus to link sustainability and tourism experiences, with scholars around the world researching both topics independently for years (Breiby et al., 2020). However, the assembly between these two fields remains relatively new and, in many cases, underdeveloped, as underlined by Signori et al. (2019).

Understanding the concept of a sustainable experience has proven challenging, partly due to limited research and the absence of precise definitions (Abdul Latip et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2017; Poudel & Nyaupane, 2013). While several experts have examined this subject, there is no consensus yet on what genuinely characterises a sustained experience. One notable effort came from Breiby et al. (2020), who classified sustainable

experience as "an experience that awakens deep, significant emotions and memories that can stimulate tourists' commitment toward destination sustainability." This definition has laid some groundwork for understanding sustainable experiences, which have since been examined in various contexts, including national park (Obradović, 2022), social tourism (Torres-Moraga, 2021), responsible tourism (Nowacki et al., 2023) and lake tourism (Breiby et al., 2020).

Previous studies have revealed numerous dimensions that contribute to the formation of MTE. Kim (2017) identified 7 experience domains that are likely to affect one's memorable experience, including engagement, hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, and novelty. Building upon this basis, Breiby et al. (2020) highlighted crucial components include interaction with nature, cultural immersion, and emotional connections. In the context of sustainable tourism, Lu et al. (2017) and Hwang & Lee (2019) highlighted that the co-creation of experiences with a local guide as well as responsible practices boosts the memorability and perceived authenticity of the experience.

Finally, scholars in sustainable tourism recommend that tourism suppliers prioritize the design of memorable, sustainable tourism experiences (Zhang, 2022). Doing so not only helps tourism suppliers to preserve a competitive edge but also promotes the destination's sustainability and the value of the whole experience (Lu et al., 2017; Smit & Melissen, 2018; Hashim et al., 2020). When tourists build a meaningful connection with a destination through sustainable experiences, they are more likely to consider returning in the future and spread good word of mouth (Breiby et al., 2020; Shien et al., 2022). For these reasons, sustainable and memorable tourism experiences serve as the core focus of the present study.

Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to a tourist's likelihood of returning to a destination based on their past experiences. Research has consistently shown that positive travel experiences increase the chances of tourists revisiting a destination (Nik Hashim et al, 2019; Breiby et al., 2020; Rahim et al., 2023). Additionally, incorporating sustainable tourism practices helps to create a strong emotional connection with the destination, making tourists more inclined to return (Chen et al., 2020). When a destination aligns with a tourist's personal values, such as environmental responsibility and cultural appreciation, it further reinforces their desire to revisit in the future (Sofronov, 2017; Patwary et al, 2023). Therefore, integrating sustainable practices and memorable experiences into tourism offerings is crucial in fostering lasting impressions and encouraging revisit intention among tourists.

Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between MSTE and revisit intention

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address the limited research setting on sustainable tourism experiences highlighted by Bai et al. (2023), this study adapted a questionnaire based on previous works by Kim (2017) and Hwang & Lee (2019) on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) and sustainable tourism. Specifically, seven variables were drawn from Kim (2017): hedonism, involvement, local culture, refreshment, knowledge, meaningfulness, and novelty. In addition, two dimensions local guide and responsible practices were incorporated from Hwang and Lee (2019) to enhance the sustainability context of the study.

To ensure content clarity and construct validity, the final set of nine variables were pre-tested using expert reviews and cognitive interviews with tourist academics, industry professionals, and survey methodologists. The questionnaire, consisting of 45 items on a 7-point Likert scale, was distributed to 250 tourists who had participated in sustainable tourism experiences in Langkawi Island, with 233 valid responses collected between July and September 2024. The data were then analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS to test relationships between MSTE components and revisit intention. The model showed strong predictive and discriminant validity, offering a comprehensive understanding of how memorable and sustainable experiences impact tourists' intention to revisit Langkawi.

This study complied with institutional research ethics requirements. All respondents participated voluntarily, provided informed consent, and were assured of full anonymity. No identifying information was collected, and the survey procedure received ethical clearance from the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan research ethics process.

RESULTS

Based on Table 1 below, nearly two-thirds (57.5 percent) of the respondents were females, while one-third (42.5 percent) were males. The majority of respondents ($n = 83$, 35.6%) were 31–40 years old, married ($n = 122$, 52.4%), and had a degree ($n = 95$, 40.8%). In addition, most of them had indulged in sustainable experience at least once ($n = 178$, 76.4 per cent).

Table 1: Demographic profiles

Respondent's profile	Classification	Frequency N = 233	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	99	42.5%
	Female	134	57.5%
Age	< 20	15	6.4%
	21–30 years old	46	19.8%
	31–40 years old	83	35.6%
	41–50 years old	58	24.9%
	51 years old and above	31	13.3%
Marital Status	Married	122	52.4%
	Single	102	43.8%
	Others	9	3.8%
Education	Secondary School	34	14.6%
	Form 6	11	4.7%
	Diploma	72	30.9%
	Bachelor's Degree	95	40.8%
	Master	17	7.3 %
	PhD	4	1. %
Frequency of purchasing sustainable experience	Once	178	76.4%
	Twice	46	19.7%
	More than twice	9	3.9%

Source: Primary Data

Measurement model

Table 2 shows the mean scores and reliability of each item and the measurement model. The mean scores ranged from 5.142 to 6.554, while the standard deviation ranged from 0.654 to 1.264. In the measurement model, the loadings, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) were assessed. The loading values should be ≥ 0.5 , while the AVE should be ≥ 0.5 and the CR should be ≥ 0.7 . As shown in Table III, all AVEs and CRs are higher than 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. The loadings were also acceptable since the values are more than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019), which indicates that convergent validity has been established.

Table 2: Measurement model results including loadings, reliability coefficients, and AVE.

Code	MSTE Dimension	Mean	SD	Loading	CA	CR	AVE
	Hedonism			0.872	0.797	0.881	0.715
HE01	I am thrilled to have a new sustainable experience	6.305	0.710				
HE02	I took part in sustainable experience	6.399	0.747				
HE03	I really enjoyed my sustainable experience	6.395	0.763				
	Involvement			0.895	0.863	0.916	0.785
IN01	I actively participated in sustainable experience	6.043	0.939				
IN02	I was interested in interacting with the natural and cultural surroundings	6.120	0.909				
IN03	I enjoyed the sustainable experience offered to me	5.948	1.014				
	Knowledge			0.934	0.926	0.944	0.772
KN01	I gained a lot of information from participating in sustainable experience	5.884	0.980				
KN02	I learned a new culture from participating in sustainable experience/	5.412	1.097				
KN03	I gained a new skill from participating in sustainable experience	5.627	1.132				
KN04	The sustainable experience was exploratory	5.867	1.000				
KN05	The sustainable experience made me more knowledgeable	5.807	1.053				
	Local Culture			0.881	0.865	0.908	0.713
LC01	I had a good impression of the local culture thanks to my sustainable experience	5.674	1.026				
LC02	I had the chance to experience the local culture in a sustainable way	5.562	1.071				
LC03	The local people were friendly to me	5.983	0.963				

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Code	MSTE Dimension	Mean	SD	Loading	CA	CR	AVE
LC04	I participated in local cultural customs and festivals	5.142	1.264				
	Meaningfulness			0.914	0.906	0.930	0.727
ME01	I felt like I did something meaningful when engaging in a sustainable experience	6.009	0.989				
ME02	I felt like I did something worthwhile by engaging in a sustainable experience	5.768	1.047				
ME03	I learned something about myself from this sustainable experience	5.794	1.089				
ME04	I felt like I gained valuable experience from the Langkawi Island trip	5.403	1.089				
ME05	I felt inspired to continue participating in a sustainable experience	6.112	0.853				
	Novelty			0.925	0.922	0.941	0.763
NO01	I had a once-in-a-lifetime experience	5.975	1.139				
NO02	I had a unique experience	5.773	1.102				
NO03	Compared to my previous travel experiences elsewhere, this one was unique.	5.451	1.145				
NO04	I experienced something new.	5.674	1.072				
NO05	I felt like I was in a different world when participating in a sustainable experience	5.391	1.134				
	Refreshment			0.910	0.908	0.932	0.732
RE01	I relieved stress when participating in sustainable experience	6.180	0.855				
RE02	I had a refreshing experience	6.232	0.853				
RE03	I had a peaceful soul from participating in sustainable experience	6.300	0.853				

Code	MSTE Dimension	Mean	SD	Loading	CA	CR	AVE
RE04	I felt revitalised from participating in sustainable experience	6.039	0.886				
RE05	I felt better after participating in a sustainable experience	6.197	0.946				
	Local Guide			0.820	0.774	0.866	0.683
LG01	The local guide was knowledgeable	6.236	0.741				
LG02	The local guide was very helpful	6.554	0.654				
LG03	The local guide was friendly	6.176	0.775				
	Responsible practices			0.776	0.775	0.869	0.690
RP01	The tour company managed the experience in a sustainable way	5.931	0.861				
RP02	The tour company engaged with local communities and promoted socio-economic benefits	5.639	0.828				
RP03	The tour company integrated environmental conservation into the sustainable experience	6.163	0.874				
	Revisit intention			0.897	0.895	0.934	0.826
RI01	I'm looking forward to revisit Langkawi Island.	6.322	0.910				
RI02	I will make a plan to revisit Langkawi Island	5.970	1.109				
RI03	I will make an effort to revisit Langkawi Island.	5.940	1.181				

Source: Primary Data

Subsequently, discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and updated by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). The HTMT values should be ≤ 0.85 for the stricter criterion and the mode lenient criterion should be ≤ 0.90 . As can be seen in Table 3, the HTMT values are all lower than the stricter criterion of ≤ 0.85 ; therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents understood the distinctness of the 9 constructs. Taken together, the validity tests have shown that the measurement items were both valid and reliable.

Table 3: HTMT

	Hedonism	Involvement	Knowledge	Local Culture	Local Guide	Meaningfulness	Novelty	Refreshment	Responsible Practices
Hedonism									
Involvement	0.898								
Knowledge	0.714	0.657							
Local Culture	0.648	0.693	0.841						
Local Guide	0.371	0.251	0.237	0.214					
Meaningfulness	0.796	0.765	0.859	0.719	0.187				
Novelty	0.646	0.601	0.836	0.767	0.281	0.808			
Refreshment	0.844	0.814	0.748	0.65	0.268	0.768	0.608		
Responsible Practices	0.356	0.236	0.315	0.225	0.622	0.275	0.238	0.25	

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Source: Primary Data

Structural model

The structural model in Table 4 depicts the connections (paths) between the constructs in the suggested research model. In general, the model's quality is measured by the strength of each structural path, which should be equal to or greater than 0.1 (Falk & Miller, 1992). Based on the results in Table 4, the R^2 value is more than 0.1. Hence, predictive capability has been established. Additionally, Q^2 confirms the predictive relevance of the endogenous construct. Accordingly, the Q^2 value of 0.334, which is greater than zero, indicates that the model has predictive relevance.

Hypotheses were also verified to determine the significance of relationships between variables. Out of the 9 hypotheses tested, 5 were supported. Hedonism ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < 0.01$), local culture ($\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.05$), refreshment ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.01$), and responsible practices ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.05$) had significant and positive effects on revisit intention. However, local guide had a significant but negative effect ($\beta = -0.118$, $p < 0.05$). The remaining variables (knowledge: $\beta = 0.135$, $t = 1.059$, p -value = 0.290; meaningfulness: $\beta = -0.112$, $t = 1.062$, p -value = 0.289; involvement: $\beta = -0.063$, $t = 0.698$, p -value = 0.485; novelty: $\beta = 0.071$, $t = 0.816$, p -value = 0.415) did not show significant relationships with revisit intention. The negative effect of local guides on revisit intention may be attributed to over-dependence on guides, which can reduce tourists' sense of autonomy and personal discovery (Kuo et al., 2016). This

finding suggests that while guides are essential for providing information, excessive reliance on them may detract from the tourists' ability to create their own memorable experiences.

Table 4: Structural model results showing path coefficients, t-values, p-values, and hypothesis decisions.

Relationship	β	T Values	P Values	Decision
Hedonism → Revisit	0.268	3.149	0.002	Significant
Involvement → Revisit	-0.063	0.698	0.485	Not Significant
Knowledge → Revisit	0.135	1.059	0.290	Not Significant
Local Culture → Revisit	0.233	2.351	0.019	Significant
Local Guide → Revisit	-0.118	2.102	0.036	Significant
Meaningfulness → Revisit	-0.112	1.062	0.289	Not Significant
Novelty → Revisit	0.071	0.816	0.415	Not Significant
Refreshment → Revisit	0.276	2.703	0.007	Significant
Responsible Practices → Revisit	0.149	2.593	0.01	Significant
	R²	Q²		
	0.517	0.334		

Source: Primary Data

DISCUSSION

The present study offers insights into how well MSTE elements impact tourists' intention to revisit Langkawi Island, Malaysia. These elements function through interconnected variables such as psychological engagement (hedonism, refreshment, meaningfulness) enriches emotional and cognitive connections; cultural immersion (local culture, local guides) deepens understanding and appreciation of the destination; learning and discovery (knowledge, novelty) foster curiosity and personal growth; active participation (involvement) strengthens tourists' sense of contribution; and ethical practices (responsible practices) create authentic and impactful experiences. To recapitulate, quantitative surveys was employed in this study to fill important gaps in the literature on how MSTE affect tourist's revisit intention. The quantitative analysis in this study validated the beneficial correlations between hedonism, local culture, local guide, refreshment, and responsible practices with revisit intention. These results suggest that tourists are more likely to return when they experience enjoyment, local culture immersion, excellent local guiding,

relaxation, and sustainable engagement (Muhamad Nor et al., 2024; Baruca & Čivire, 2022; Solís-Radilla et al., 2019; Aziz et al, 2019).

Local culture immersion strengthens tourists' attachment to a destination (Min & Yong, 2021), while skilled local guides enhance satisfaction and revisit intentions (Nandika et al., 2023; Manav & Soybalı, 2020). However, Kuo et al. (2016) caution that excessive reliance on guides may limit personal exploration, an essential element of memorable experiences, which explains the significant negative relationship. Similarly, refreshments play a vital role in tourism satisfaction, with relaxation being linked to higher revisit rates (Damijanec, 2020; Choi et al., 2020). Responsible tourism also fosters fulfillment, reinforcing positive perceptions of a destination and encouraging future visits (Mercadé Melé et al., 2020).

In contrast, knowledge, meaningfulness, involvement, and novelty did not significantly impact revisit intention. While these factors enrich the travel experience, prior studies suggest they do not necessarily drive tourist to re-visits (Lee et al., 2011; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Novelty, for instance, may encourage exploration of new destinations rather than repeat visits (Jang & Feng, 2007). These findings highlight the complexity of sustainable tourism experiences, where not all memorable aspects translate into repeat visits (Da Cruz Andrade et al., 2023). Ultimately, sustainable tourism creates lasting memories, ensuring long-term profitability while preserving destinations for future tourists (Islamiyati & Chairy, 2021).

Theoretical and practical implications

The present study makes a significant contribution to both the theoretical and practical aspects of sustainable tourism by developing the MSTE model. Using structural equation modelling, the research identifies key factors hedonism, local guide, local culture, refreshment, and responsible practices that significantly influence revisit intention, enriching the academic understanding of MSTE. Practically, the study provides valuable insights for destination managers and tourism suppliers, highlighting the importance of incorporating these elements to enhance tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visits.

Limitations and future research

Nonetheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, since the current study was conducted in a specific destination, namely Langkawi Island, the generalisability of the findings to other contexts might be limited. Thus, future studies should consider replicating this study in diverse tourism settings to validate the MSTE model across different destinations. Additionally, the study only focuses on tourists who participated in sustainable experience organised by a local tour operator. Future research may, therefore, employ a comparison

analysis for domestic and international tourists (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), or other characteristics such as travel frequency and type of activity since the results are presumably more interesting to explore. In addition, this study focuses on the positive aspects of MSTE to align with its goal of enhancing sustainable tourism and revisit intention. While negative experiences are important (Hosany et al., 2022; Zainuddin et al., 2023), they were excluded to maintain focus on practical insights for fostering positive tourist experiences. Future research could examine how negative experiences influence the overall memorability of sustainable tourism experience. Lastly, to provide a more interesting insight, future research may also conduct a longitudinal study to assess the enduring impacts of remarkable sustainable tourism experience on tourists' desire to revisit a destination over an extended period.

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