

The Impact of Ecological Sustainability on Tourists' Satisfaction and Revisit Intention: A Case Study in Langkawi, Malaysia

Nik Mohamad Shamim Nik Mohd Zainordin

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan
Kelantan Machang Campus, 18500 Kelantan, Malaysia

An Nur Nabila Ismail

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan
Kelantan Kota Bharu Campus, 15050 Kelantan, Malaysia

Nurhidayah Rosely

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan
Kelantan Machang Campus, 18500 Kelantan, Malaysia

Ayu Kamareenna Abdullah Thani

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan
Kelantan Machang Campus, 18500 Kelantan, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

More concerns regarding the environmental impact are observed as the global travel industry continues to expand. The present study examined the correlation between ecological sustainability, tourists' satisfaction, and the tendency to revisit past destinations to understand the impact of tourists' perceptions regarding the environmental practices in travel destinations on overall satisfaction and subsequent revisit intention. A total of 200 local and international tourists participated in this study. The data collection process was conducted via self-administered questionnaires distributed in Langkawi, Malaysia. The results indicated a significant positive association between ecological sustainability and tourists' overall satisfaction with respective trip experiences. A positive correlation also existed between tourists' perception of travel destinations actively engaging in ecological sustainability practices and the reported satisfaction levels. Moreover, this increased satisfaction level positively impacted tourists' intention to revisit the same destination in the future. The findings provided significant implications with high relevance to both destination planners and policymakers. Implementing and promoting effective ecological sustainability practices could not only enhance the attractiveness of travel destinations but also sustain high loyalty among tourists.

Keywords: Ecological sustainability, tourists' satisfaction, revisit intention, Langkawi, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a significant contributor to the national revenue in various countries worldwide. The industry is frequently considered a crucial sector for economic growth and job

creation, particularly in developing countries. According to the World Tourism Organisation [1], the tourism industry accounts for approximately 10% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and supports one in every 10 jobs globally. Tourism is also the largest income-generating sector in different travel destinations, which indicates a significant contribution to the national economy. For example, tourism is the main source of foreign exchange earnings and employment in island nations, such as Maldives and Seychelles. Moreover, the industry contributes a significant GDP portion and employs a large number of individuals for various roles ranging from hospitality and transportation to retail and entertainment in other countries, such as Spain, Greece, and Thailand. Similarly, the tourism industry contributes significantly to the Malaysian national economy, wherein RM 63.2 billion (4.1%) was contributed to the GDP in 2021 compared to RM53.6 billion (3.6%) in 2020 [2]. In terms of job opportunities, one in every 11 jobs was created by the tourism industry, which amounted to 2.09 million in 2021. As such, tourism positively impacts the national economic growth. Nonetheless, the continued growth of the tourism industry in recent years has led more scholars to highlight relevant drawbacks, especially ecological sustainability [3].

Ecological sustainability emphasises the relationship between human activities and the natural environment, which is the need to balance economic development with ecological preservation [4]. Ecological sustainability promotes the idea of living within the limits of the planet resources with sustainable usage to ensure adequate availability for future generations. Tourism development could negatively impact the environment. The rapid growth of the tourism industry might lead to environmental degradation due to increased pollution, waste, and the strain on local resources, including water, energy, and land [5]. Furthermore, the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems could result. The construction of additional hotels, resorts, and other tourist infrastructure might also engender the destruction of natural habitats and wildlife. Tourism activities, such as transportation and recreation, could contribute to significant climate change through the emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutants [6]. In addition, mass tourism could result in overcrowding, which further strains the limits of local ecosystems and wildlife. Accordingly, the current study sought to evaluate the impact of ecological sustainability issues on tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. The findings could be instrumental to policymakers and practitioners to prioritise sustainable practices in minimising relevant negative impacts on the environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecological Sustainability

Ecological sustainability refers to the responsible usage and management of natural resources to fulfil the needs of the current generation without jeopardising the ability to fulfil the needs of future generations [7]. Ecological sustainability entails environmental protection and reducing the impact of human activities on natural resources, such as air, water, land, and biodiversity. Adopting sustainable practices is essential to minimise the negative impact of the tourism industry. [8] delineated that individuals, businesses, and governments must embrace sustainable practices to decrease waste while preserving existing resources and promoting the usage of renewable energy sources to achieve ecological sustainability. Relevant initiatives encompass reducing energy usage, employing public transportation, recycling and composting garbage, supporting sustainable agriculture, and protecting natural habitats and ecosystems.

Research on ecological sustainability is integral to comprehending the relationship between human activities and the natural environment. The multidisciplinary field involves environmental science, social sciences, economics, and policies. [9] assessed the challenges of sustainable tourism in protected areas and proposed strategies to improve tourism sustainability. The study also underscored the importance of stakeholder involvement and the need for effective governance mechanisms to ensure tourism sustainability. Furthermore, [10] employed the practice theory to investigate the practices of sustainable tourism through sustainable consumption in a national park. Meanwhile, [11] focused on the negative impact of environmentally sustainable behaviours on tourists. Particularly, the study determined whether engaging in environmentally sustainable behaviour would contribute directly and indirectly to emotional exhaustion and unnecessary behaviours.

Sustainable practices, including responsible waste management, conservation of natural resources, and the usage of renewable energy, could contribute to the ecological sustainability of tourist destinations. Tourists would be more attracted to destinations prioritising ecological sustainability and more inclined to recommend the visited destinations [12]. Ecological sustainability seeks to strike a balance between economic growth, social equality, and environmental protection. Specifically, ecological sustainability recognises the importance of environmental health to human well-being and economic growth, in which contemporary decisions would produce long-term effects on future generations.

Tourists' Satisfaction

Tourists' satisfaction refers to the combination of tourists' perceptions before and after a trip. Tourists would be satisfied if the performances corresponded to expectations. Contrarily, dissatisfaction would result when the performances did not correspond with expectations [13]. Hence, satisfaction is a key factor in determining a tourist's revisit intention and recommendation. Tourist satisfaction and ecological sustainability are highly associated as tourists frequently prefer destinations with natural beauty and unique environmental experiences [14]. Tourists would be less inclined to return to or recommend the visited destination if natural resources were not managed sustainably.

Most tourism researchers explored the level of tourist satisfaction in multiple areas, such as dark tourism [15], sustainable homestay tourism [13], heritage tourism [16], and cruise tourism [17]. Comparatively, limited studies were conducted on ecological sustainability. Enhancing ecological sustainability in tourism could contribute to higher levels of tourist satisfaction by providing tourists with high-quality environmental experiences, while also contributing to the long-term preservation of natural resources [18]. Ecological sustainability could be achieved through different approaches, such as implementing sustainable tourism practices, promoting conservation, and educating tourists to reduce environmental impacts.

Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to a tourist's intention to revisit a particular destination in the future. Revisit intention is pivotal to the success of a tourist destination as repeat visitors would contribute significantly to the local economy and assist in promoting the destination through positive word-of-mouth (WOM) [19]. Tourism researchers acknowledged the challenges associated with accurately monitoring visitor behaviour and documenting subsequent visits to a certain destination. Thus, past scholars employed the variable of revisit intention under the

concept of behavioural intention to assess revisit behaviour and predict the revisit rate at a specific destination [20]. [21] explicated that a higher satisfaction level would result when tourists obtained a positive experience at a tourist site. Resultantly, an increased likelihood of revisiting, recommending, and producing positive WOM for the same destination would be observed.

Several factors could influence a tourist's revisit intention, including product or service quality [22], customer services [23] and value for money [24]. [25] elucidated that revisit intention would be generated when tourists were satisfied with the travel experience. High enjoyment levels indicate that tourists simultaneously receive utility and value from the experiences. [25] also explicated that tourists' value perceptions are crucial predictors of increased satisfaction and revisit intention. Additionally, nostalgic emotions might impact the revisit intention after experiencing nostalgia at a travel destination [26]. Tourists would relate to past significant memories to guide the future revisit and recreate the special experience by visiting familiar destinations or meeting familiar individuals.

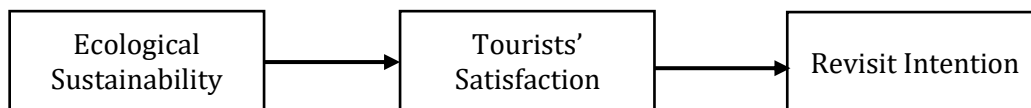


Figure 1: The Current Conceptual Framework.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Data Collection

The present study was conducted in Langkawi, Malaysia by employing a self-administered questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. Participants were contacted and requested to complete a hard copy of the questionnaire, with a total of 200 tourists recruited. Approximately 52% of the respondents were males, with the remaining 48% as females. Most participants were between 25 and 30 years old (49 respondents), followed by 35 to 40 years old (44 respondents). A total of 51.5% of respondents were Malays, followed by Chinese (19.5%) and Indians (9.5%). The largest proportion of international respondents (4.5%) were from China, followed by Singapore and Thailand (2.5%) and Saudi Arabia (2.0%). Table 1 depicts the respondent demographic details.

Table 1: The Demographic Profile of Respondents.

Demographic	Frequency (n = 200)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	104	52.0
Female	96	48.0
Age (years)		
18 – 24 years old	35	17.5
25 – 30 years old	49	24.5
31 – 34 years old	40	20.0
35 – 40 years old	44	22.0
41 years and above	32	16.0
Nationality: Malaysian (n = 161)		
Malay	103	51.5
Chinese	39	19.5

Indian	19	9.5
Nationality: Non-Malaysian (n=39)		
China		
Singapore	9	4.5
Thailand	5	2.5
Saudi Arabia	5	2.5
Indonesia	4	2.0
German	2	1.0
Pakistan	2	1.0
French	1	0.5
Polish	2	1.0
Australian	2	1.0
Dutch	2	1.0
New Zealand	2	1.0
British	2	1.0
	1	0.5

Questionnaire and Measurements

The questionnaire was structured into four respective areas, namely respondent profiles, ecological sustainability, satisfaction, and revisit intention. The dimensions of each construct were derived from multiple previous studies, including [27], [28], [29], [30], [31] and [32]. All items were appraised on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The details for each measurement item are attached in Appendix 1. According to [33], partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is considered more appropriate than covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) for analysing the research model, owing to the lower requirements in terms of the measurement model, sample size, and residual distributions. The PLS-SEM demonstrated superior performance in evaluating complex models, particularly reflective-formative higher-order components [34]. The present study employed the SmartPLS 4 software to estimate the study model and fulfil the research objectives.

RESULTS

Common Method Variance (CMV)

The CMV is generally measured before performing additional analytical tests. According to [35], CMV presence is frequently observed in studies assessing consumer behaviour when the threshold value was exceeded at 40.7%. The current finding indicated a value of 24.32%, which was below the threshold. Therefore, CMV was not an issue in this study.

Measurement Model

The measurement model serves as the initial stage before investigating the structural model. [36] recommended to achieve a factor loading of 0.708 or above. Nonetheless, a factor loading ranging from 0.700 to 0.500 is considered appropriate if the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) achieved higher values. According to [37] the AVE value should exceed the threshold value of 0.500 while the CR value should be higher than 0.700. Table 2 demonstrates that all factor loadings, namely AVE and CR, exceed the minimum thresholds, thereby satisfying the necessary criteria. In addition, the present study assessed discriminant validity by employing the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio. [38] recommended that the HTMT value should not exceed 0.90. Table 3 indicates that all values related to the reflective

items exceed the threshold value. As such, the measurement model contained sufficient discriminatory validity.

Table 2: Reflective Constructs of the Measurement Model.

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
Ecological Sustainability (ES)	G2	0.788	0.708	0.828
	G3	0.836		
	G4	0.906		
	G5	0.841		
	G6	0.904		
Satisfaction (SAT)	H1	0.726	0.727	0.791
	H2	0.638		
	H3	0.828		
	H4	0.846		
	H5	0.854		
Revisit Intention (RI)	I1	0.834	0.713	0.871
	I2	0.872		
	I3	0.834		
	I4	0.869		

Table 3: Discriminant Validity via the HTMT Ratio of Correlation.

	Ecological Sustainability	Satisfaction	Revisit Intention
Ecological Sustainability			
Satisfaction	0.732		
Revisit Intention	0.645	0.780	

Structural Model

The collinearity issue was examined to measure the route coefficient and test the hypotheses before conducting the present investigation. [39] elucidated that the VIF value should be below 5. The constructs in this study fulfilled all the criteria, with ecological sustainability and satisfaction being 2.560. Hence, collinearity was not an issue in this study. The present study also employed route coefficients and bootstrapping techniques for hypothesis testing. Table 4 demonstrates that H1 and H2 are supported. Specifically, significant positive relationships existed between ecological sustainability ($\beta = 0.382$, $t = 11.830$, $p < 0.00$) and satisfaction and between satisfaction ($\beta = 0.521$, $t = 14.020$, $p < 0.00$) and revisit intention.

Table 4: Path Coefficient Assessment.

	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t	p (Decision)	R ²	f ²	Q ²
H1	ES -> SAT	0.382	0.032	11.830	0.000 (Supported)	0.270	0.213	0.156
H2	SAT -> RI	0.521	0.037	14.020	0.000 (Supported)	0.176	0.370	0.068

Note: ES = Ecological Sustainability, SAT = Satisfaction, and RI = Revisit Intention.

The current study determined the predictive accuracy (R^2) to quantify the proportion of the independent construct accounted for by the dependent construct [40]. [39] demonstrated that an R^2 value of 0.75 in the field of social sciences is considered substantial, an R^2 value of 0.50 is categorised as moderate, and an R^2 value of 0.25 is classified as weak. The results revealed that the values for satisfaction and revisit intention were 0.270 and 0.176 respectively, which

indicated a weak level. Moreover, the effect size (f^2) was analysed to quantify the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable.

[41] classified effect sizes into four groups, namely substantial (0.35), medium (0.15), small (0.02), and trivial (< 0.02). Ecological sustainability was discovered to contain a medium effect size of 0.213, which suggested a medium impact. The effect size of satisfaction was 0.370, which postulated a substantial impact on revisit intention. The present study also appraised the predictive relevance (Q^2) through Stone-Geisser's Q^2 metric [42] and [37]. Resultantly, the Q^2 values for ecological sustainability (0.156) and satisfaction (0.069) exceeded zero, thereby indicating that the model achieved adequate predictive relevance and validity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study findings discovered a significant relationship between ecological sustainability and tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. Tourists prefer travel destinations prioritising nature protection and cultural preservation as tourists become more environmentally conscious. Sustainable tourism practices not only enhance tourists' experiences but also ensure the long-term attractiveness and profitability of travel destinations. The present results demonstrated a significant correlation between ecological sustainability and tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. The findings were consistent with [43], which revealed a positive relationship between sustainability and both WOM and revisit intention. [44] also discovered that sustainable practices significantly and positively impacted both customer satisfaction and revisit intention. Thus, ecological sustainability plays a significant role in the tourism business to enhance tourists' satisfaction and potentially foster repeat visits in the future.

The preservation of the natural environment and tourists' satisfaction are highly and positively associated. Sustainable practices improve the overall quality of tourists' experiences, contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural assets, and attract visitors to revisit. Travel destinations focusing on environmental sustainability could attract more tourists while retaining the existing travellers. Tourists are also increasingly interested in acquiring meaningful and ethical travel experiences. As such, the current study contributed valuable insights to practitioners to thoroughly comprehend the impact of ecological sustainability on tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. Practitioners engaged in diverse activities within tourism areas should consider the environmental impact. Negative repercussions would be produced on tourists' overall satisfaction and revisit intention if tourism activities were detrimental to the environment. Furthermore, policymakers should regulate tourism activities to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations for future generations.

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