

# Exploring Memorable Tourism Experiences and Revisit Intentions of Langkawi Island: A Conceptual Model Development

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## Abstract

For many years, Langkawi Island has been known as a tourist paradise because of its sun, sand, and sea (3s) attractions. Making it the best destination for tourists who want to immerse themselves in island life and have unique, memorable experiences. Despite its beautiful setting, many tourists thought Langkawi was dull and uninteresting because there aren't many experiences offered on the island. Furthermore, little study has been conducted to determine travellers' intention to revisit an island in the future based on a Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) model. Hence, a conceptual framework to investigate MTEs and revisit intention is proposed. The findings of this study are significant in assisting tourism stakeholders in strategising tourism experience marketing and contributing to the tourism literature.

## Keywords:

Memorable tourism experience (MTEs); revisit intention; island tourism; island destination

## 1 Introduction

Islands have long been considered as a tourist paradise. The tranquil sea, warm sunshine, beautiful sight and marine life make islands a distinct and intriguing spot for

tourists to enjoy a unique island experience (Alipour et al., 2020). To date, the island has attracted millions of romance seekers, beach lovers, and conventional hedonistic tourists (Mustafa et al., 2020), and tourism have become the island's main economic contribution. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD] (2020), tourism contributes roughly 30% of the island's GDP. Tourism is the driving force behind the development of many islands, producing thousands of jobs and foreign exchange revenues.

Likewise, Malaysia's islands also rely on tourism to support the country's economy. Top Malaysian islands such as Tioman, Langkawi, Redang, and Sipadan have attracted a large number of tourists and contributed significantly to the islands' economic development (Hanafiah, Jasmi, Razali, & Sulaiman, 2019; Chia, Ramachandran, & Ho, 2018). For example, Langkawi has been focusing on tourism since 1990, and up to this day, tourism makes up 70% of the island's GDP (Zainuddin, Zahari, Radzi, Hanafiah, & Ishak, 2018). With its picturesque beaches and spectacular rock formations, the island has a plethora of activities to offer, ranging from beach activities to mangrove kayaking trips, making it the most popular Asian island among tourists from 2015 to 2018, alongside other internationally recognised islands such as Phuket, Bali, and the Maldives (Condé Nest Traveler, 2020).

Despite its popularity, many tourists regarded the island as dull and unattractive as Langkawi did not offer many activities or experiences (Quora, 2021). This is demonstrated by the fact that there are fewer activities and experiences available on online travel marketplaces (Airbnb, 2021; Tripadvisor, 2021) as compared to its similarly ranked neighbouring islands of Bali and Phuket (see Table 1).

Table 1: Numbers of experiences sold by tour operators in online travel marketplace as per July 2021(source: Airbnb & Tripadvisor)

Online platform	Numbers of experiences sold		
	Bali, Indonesia	Langkawi, Malaysia	Phuket, Thailand
Airbnb experience	705	1	9
Tripadvisor experience/ Viator	5960	161	1476

source: Airbnb & Tripadvisor website (2021)

Such worries were also mirrored in Langkawi tourist arrivals. Between 2014 and 2020, Langkawi's tourist arrivals and growth rate were seen to have fluctuated, and it had fallen behind its neighbouring islands like Bali and Phuket (as shown in Table 2).

Table2: Tourist arrivals in Langkawi, Bali, and Phuket from 2014 to 2020

Bali, Indonesia	Langkawi, Malaysia	Phuket, Thailand
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Year	Tourist Arrival	Growth Rate	Tourist Arrival	Growth Rate	Tourist Arrival	Growth Rate
2020	5,646,662	-33.6%	1,802,602	-46%	6,702,396	-86.3%
2019	16,820,249	+5.8%	3,924,326	+7.5%	49,054,753	+2.1%
2018	15,828,464	+8.8%	3,628,951	-1.4%	48,019,195	+5.3%
2017	14,433,372	+5.9%	3,679,158	+1.2%	45,602,422	+7.4%
2016	13,571,617	+17.8%	3,634,517	+0.2%	42,452,892	+2.8%
2015	11,148,935	+8.8%	3,624,149	+0.6%	41,283,511	+11.2%
2014	10,160,945	-0.9%	3,600,511	+5.1%	11,312,037	-0.25%

*source: LADA website, Statistic of Bali Province website & TAT intelligence centre (2021)*

To ensure Langkawi island's economic growth and sustainability, an extraordinary, memorable tourism experience (MTE) is seen as critical to tourism's success (Yu et al., 2019). Since the tourism industry is Langkawi's main economic contributor (Mohd Bakri et al., 2014) and is fundamentally an experience-based industry (Laing et al., 2014; Pine & Gilmore, 1999), creating memorable experience should be viewed as a critical factor in determining the success of tourism and become the primary focus of the islands' tourism supplier. By emphasising on MTEs, tourism suppliers and other tourism organisations can boost the perceived and actual experiences among tourists (Tung & Ritchie, 2011a), attract repeaters (Kim, 2017), seize a market leadership position (Knobloch et al., 2017; Song et al., 2015) gain competitive business advantages and target the ideal tourist market (Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019).

Aside from MTEs role in enhancing tourism businesses' competitiveness, there are relatively limited studies on MTEs in an island setting. Instead, researchers concentrate on other types of tourism, such as cultural tourism (Chen & Rahman, 2018), rural tourism (Loureiro, 2014), national park (Mahdzar & Shuaib, 2016), food consumption among tourists (Tsai, 2016), and Islamic tourism (Mahdzar, 2018). Nonetheless, Kim et al. (2010) note that not all seven elements of MTEs are applicable across a range of destination-specific tourism scenarios. Hence, additional research on MTEs in a different research setting, such as island tourism, is warranted. This paper is organized as follows: First, a literature review on island destinations and MTEs were executed. Based on the content analysis, the conceptual framework for the research is proposed.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Island Destination

Islands have become a popular tourism destination due to the islands' untouched tropical flora fauna, pure white sand beaches, and year-round tropical weather (Mustafa et al., 2020). One of the renowned islands in Malaysia is Langkawi Island. Langkawi Island is a group of 99 islands in the Andaman Sea, around 30 kilometres from the Peninsular Malaysian state of Kedah. Langkawi is famed for its eerie beauty, lush green surroundings, and beautiful beaches. Millions of tourists from all over the world have been captivated by Langkawi's beautiful beaches and warm hospitality. According to data from the LADA website (2020), Langkawi received an estimated 3.9 million visitors in 2019, with an average length of stay (ALOS) of 4.31 days for international tourists and 3.56 days for domestic tourists. As a result of Langkawi's exceptional performance and popularity, the island was named the second most appealing destination in Malaysia, the fourth (4th) greatest island in Asia by Condé Nast Traveller 2018, and the third (3rd) hottest tourism destination in 2018 by Vogue magazine (Lokalocal, 2018; The Star, 2017). This demonstrates that Langkawi is one of the world's top destinations that needs to be unlocked and made more widely recognised.

Langkawi has a varied range of unique experiences that are unknown among tourists owing to their unavailability from online travel marketplaces. Among the incredible experience that the tourist can indulge during island vacation includes swimming with sea turtle or baby sharks, spend a day on a private island, kayak through the mangrove trees, exploring the whole island by jet-skiing, sign-up for parasailing, cliff diving, wakeboarding, surfing and lastly, sunbathing while enjoying panoramic ocean views. The interesting activities mentioned will leave tourists a vivid and unique memory, especially if the activities are staged uniquely.

#### 2.1.1 Memorable Tourism Experience (MTEs)

Today tourist has become more demanding and craves for memorable experiences (TTRWeekly, 2021). They are interested in trying new things, learning about new facts, understanding authenticity and interacting with locals (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). Hence, tourism providers have to go beyond service delivery by staging memorable experiences (Kim, 2017). Staging memorable experiences will help set the tourism provider apart from their competitors and allow them to deliver a unique travel experience (Chen et al., 2020). This is because memorable experiences are more valuable in today's economy than products or services (Zhang et al., 2018). Focusing exclusively on MTEs enables tourism suppliers to retain repeat visitors, strengthen a destination's positioning, and achieve a competitive advantage (Hsu et al., 2016).

Kim et al. (2010) were the first to introduce the concept of MTEs and build a scale-based instrument and a conceptual model for MTEs, and additionally, developed seven aspects of MTEs: hedonism, involvement, knowledge, local culture meaningfulness, novelty, and refreshment. Sthapit (2013) enhanced Kim et al. (2010) model by including

a component named "adverse feeling". Later, Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) added other variables such as surprise and tour guide performance. Additionally, Tung and Ritchie (2011a, 2011b) categorize MTEs in terms of four critical dimensions: expectations, affect, recollection, and consequentiality. Moreover, Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) found seven additional MTE themes, which are as follow: life and culture; local people; shared experiences; personal experiences; perceived uncertainty; perceived novelty; tour operator services; professional guides; and affective emotions.

The current study develops the conceptual framework assessing the impact of MTEs using the Kim et al. (2010) models. The model mentioned was chosen based on a few justifications. First, MTEs are composed of numerous components that are quite comparable. In addition, Kim et al. (2010) pioneered the use of MTEs in tourism research; their model has also been mentioned numerous times in the tourism literature, and multiple studies have effectively validated this scale, such as Sharma and Nayak (2019), Sthapit and Coudounaris (2018) and Zhong et al. (2017). The author has made the extension by expanding each of the MTEs variable within island context to fill in the knowledge gap. The next subtopic will cover the seven components of MTEs (hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge) that will be employed in the current study.

## **2.2 Hypothesis Development**

### *2.2.1 Hedonism and revisit intention*

Hedonism is defined as an individual who seeks physical pleasure and social interaction as a key motivation (Trauer & Ryan, 2005). According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2016), Hedonism has become synonymous with the notion of the 5S: sea, sand, sun, sex, and sangria (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2016). According to Mitas and Bastiaansen (2018), tourism and leisure activities (experiences) are intrinsically hedonistic in nature since the majority of tourism products are 'consumed' by visitors who are always seeking pleasure and happiness while travelling. Visiting island offers a wide range of experiences to pleasure seekers. Among hedonism experience offers include participating in beach-related and watersport activities, enjoying breathtaking sunset while drinking at the beach bar and many more.

Most tourism and leisure scholars agree that hedonism has a favourable impact on satisfaction and revisit intention (Ali et al., 2015; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kim et al., 2010; Mahdzar, 2018; Tsai, 2016; Yu et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2017). For instance, Tsai (2016) found a substantial correlation between hedonism and behavioural intention in the setting of local cuisine, where tourists experience pleasure and delight through sampling local delicacies. Similarly, Yu et al. (2019) reported on the influence of hedonism on revisit intention and that visitors to the park had highly enjoyed numerous ecotourism activities given at Xitou Nature Education Area (XNEA). Based on the argument above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Hedonism has a positive influence on revisit intention

### *2.2.2 Novelty and revisit intention*

Novelty can be defined as originality, newness, and uniqueness. Novelty in Tourism can be defined as tourists seek out a unique culture and lifestyle, trying out new things that are not available to get in their country (Chen et al. 2020). Generally, novelty is one of the popular motivations for individuals to travel and an essential component in tourist experience (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Farber & Hall, 2007). This is because tourists remember new tourism experiences more vividly than other experiences (Kim & Ritchie, 2013; Yu et al., 2019). Among novelty experience that tourist can get while visiting Langkawi includes riding Langkawi's skycab, Camping on top of Sky Bridge and many more.

Numerous study reported that novelty have a significant impact towards revisit intention. For instance, Sthapit (2013) discovered that tourists' need for novelty in Rovaniemi, Lapland has influenced their revisit intention. Another study from Gohary et al. (2018) showed the vital role of novelty-seeking in influencing Iranian eco-tourists in Deylaman and Rig-e-Jen. However, Jang and Feng (2007) discovered a relatively weak link between novelty seeking and revisit intention. Accordingly, given the discussion obtained, the researcher believes the following hypothesis ought to be tested:

Hypothesis 2: Novelty has a positive influence on revisit intention

### *2.2.3 Local culture and revisit intention*

Today tourists have become less interested in having the same generic trip experience. They anticipate having a genuine and detailed ultimate local experience in the country or area they've chosen. Participating in local activities is a growing trend among tourists because it allows them to immerse themselves in the local culture (Kim & Ritchie, 2013). Tourists who actively participate in local cultural activities create deep emotional bonds with the destinations (Wong et al., 2019). Langkawi offers a wide range of historical and cultural tours such as experiencing fishing villages in tuba island, Mahsuri's tomb and indulging in delicious local food.

Several MTE research indicated that the local culture dimension influenced behavioural intention more than other aspects (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Tsai, 2016; Yu et al., 2019). For instance, Tsai (2016) discovered that those who have previously had the opportunity to try out local foods while on vacation are more likely to revisit to the destination. Similarly, Mak, Lumbers, and Eves (2012) revealed that people who have tried something new for the first time and have acquired new cultural or culinary experiences end up building new social ties, making them want to revisit the same destination. Based on the discussion, the researcher proposes the following study hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Local culture has a positive influence on revisit intention

#### 2.2.4 *Refreshment and revisit intention*

Travel creates an unfamiliar emotion that might result in the most significant release and renewal, which can be highly therapeutic (Croce & Perri, 2010). This releasing and rejuvenating experience is called refreshment. According to Rosen and Montevago (2016), a short getaway from everyday activities gives tourists a different perspective on their lives and communities. In addition, refreshment also helps to fulfil tourist psychological needs, avoids boredom, and rejuvenates body and soul. Activities such as sunbathing on the beach, visiting a tourist attraction, indulging in massages on the beach definitely will provide a therapeutic experience to the tourist.

As evidenced in most studies on MTEs, refreshment is a significant MTEs variable that influences tourist behavioural intention and satisfaction (Gohary et al., 2018; Kim & Ritchie, 2013; Tsai, 2016; Yu et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it has also been shown that refreshments have a weak connection to behavioural intentions. (Mahdzar, 2018; Kim et al., 2010; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017). The researcher suggests the following hypothesis based on the discussion above:

Hypothesis 4: Refreshment has a positive influence on revisit intention

#### 2.2.5 *Involvement and revisit intention*

Involvement is a psychographic term in which tourists participate in all stages of the consumer process, including information seeking, service consumption, marketing, decision-making, and procurement (Yeh, 2013). Tourist involvement in travel helps them to recall, recollect, and reconnect with old memories. (Kim et al., 2010). Gao, Lin, and Zhang (2020) believe that tourists who are heavily involved in the tourism industry analyze the tourism products and services more thoroughly. They will therefore also develop a higher level of loyalty.

Few academic studies have paid attention to the relationship between tourists' level of involvement and their behavioral intention. For instance, Lee and Beeler (2009) and Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017), respectively, reported a positive relationship between involvement and satisfaction in festivals, zoos, and museums in Rovaniemi, Northern Finland; however, Lončarić and Dlačić (2018) and Mahdzar (2018) reported a non-significant relationship between involvement and behavioural intention in a summer vacation experience study and Islamic tourism attractions in Shah Alam. As a result of the foregoing discussion, the researcher makes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Involvement has a positive influence on revisit intention

#### 2.2.6 *Meaningfulness and revisit intention*

Meaningfulness is an approach where tourists seek a sense of great value (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Tourists' have begun to seek unique and meaningful travel experiences that also meet their own desires and needs (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015). They're hoping to attain personal objectives, such as strengthening their

interpersonal and relationships development and resolving issues within the family during their vacation. Numerous tourist research has established that meaningfulness predicts satisfaction and behavioural intention (Gohary et al., 2018). For example, as Tsai (2016) reported, tourists enjoy meaningful eating experiences when consuming local food, which boosts their intention to travel. Additionally, Mahdzar (2018) stated that tourists acquire significant, meaningful experiences when they visit Islamic tourism attractions in Shah Alam, Malaysia, impacting their propensity to return again to the destination in the future. Hence, the researcher formulates the following hypothesis as a result of the preceding debate.

Hypothesis 6: Meaningfulness has a positive influence on revisit intention

### 2.2.7 Knowledge and revisit intention

Nowadays, Tourists seek a travel experience that offers new knowledge, skills, and competencies (Yu et al., 2019). According to Otto and Ritchie (1996), tourists also look forward to engaging in activities that allow them to explore their strengths, competencies, talents and interest. Such learning opportunities are viewed as a one-of-a-kind, unforgettable experience that cannot be replicated (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015) And has become the enticing factors that drive tourist to revisit the destination again. Numerous MTE research has demonstrated that knowledge affects satisfaction and behavioural intention (Tsai, 2016; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Gohary et al., 2018). In contrast, several tourism studies indicated that knowledge and behavioural intention had no significant relationship (Kim & Ritchie, 2013; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Yu et al., 2019). Based on the arguments above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 7: Knowledge has a positive influence on revisit intention

The following Figure 1 depicts the MTEs and revisit intention framework adopted from Kim et al. (2010).

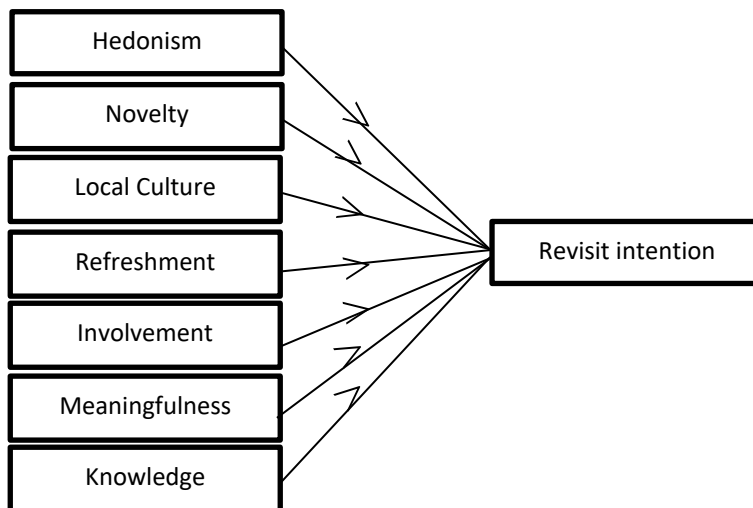


Figure 1: Island MTEs conceptual model adapted from Kim et al. (2010).



### **3 Significance of study**

The proposed model is anticipated to offer value to the existing literature on tourism. The current study site (island tourism) offers a compelling argument for extending the research setting in order to incorporate a valuable theoretical contribution, as no prior research has been conducted in this context. It further helps to become a guideline for future research in several ways. Most significantly, the study serves as a guide to enhance the present topic and the adaptability of the MTEs scale to diverse tourism experiences and situations. Furthermore, this study will also help tourism stakeholders refining their marketing tactics to focus on destination experience rather than destination features. Likewise, the outcomes of this study will allow tourism players to better cater to tourists unique needs and desires by developing memorable experience-based programs and activities.

### **4 Proposed Methodology**

The authors will use a descriptive, causal research design with a cross-sectional survey field for the current study. The researcher will adopt a field study in a non-contrived setting. The researcher will also target 400 tourists who have visited Langkawi island for the past five years using non-probability (judgement sampling). A survey questionnaire will be used to conduct the current study. The survey questionnaire will include multi-item validated scales adopted from Kim and Ritchie (2013) and Kim (2017), to measure each construct in the study. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Windows Version 25 (SPSS 25), and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (SmartPLS) will be use to analyse the data and to answer the research questions.

### **5 Conclusion**

The sun, sand, and sea (3s) attractions on Langkawi island have made it a popular tourist destination for years. Tourists who wish to immerse themselves in unique island life experience will find it in Langkawi island. Despite its picturesque surroundings, many visitors found Langkawi to be boring due to the lack of activities available. Similarly, there has been little research done on whether or not tourists will return to an island in the future based on a Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) model. Thus, a conceptual framework is proposed to examine MTEs and revisit intention among Langkawi tourist. The findings of this study are important in helping tourism stakeholders plan for the marketing of tourist experiences and in advancing the literature in the field of tourism.

## 6 About the Authors

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