

## **Factors that Influence Domestic Tourists' Decision to Visit Nature-Based Tourism Destinations in the Northern Region of Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Nature-based tourism is a growing trend that drives sustainable options within the tourism industry. This study aimed to explore the factors that influence domestic tourists' decision to visit nature-based tourism in relation of six independent variables: nature, escape, activities, novelty, nostalgia, and attractions. A survey through a questionnaire was distributed to domestic tourists who travel to nature-based destinations. The research used descriptive analysis to investigate the demographic visitors that visit nature-based destinations. Regression analysis was used to identify the most popular reason for choosing the factors. The results of this study provide information to industry players and academics on domestic tourists' preferences in nature-based tourism.*

**Keywords:** *domestic tourists' decision, nature-based destination, nature-based tourism*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term "nature-based tourism" refers to a broad category that encompasses aspects of other types of travel, such as ecotourism, adventure travel, sustainable travel, and even cultural travel (Weaver, 2001). The definition of nature-based tourism by Valentine (1992) as the direct pleasure of a relatively untouched natural phenomenon also contains this underlying principle. The level to which tourists' travel experiences are reliant on nature will also influence how much they appreciate it. The author contends that his definition encompasses three different types of activities: those that depend on nature, those that are enhanced by it, and those where the presence of a natural setting is only incidental. It can also be classified as a form of special interest tourism (Agarwal et al., 2018; Trauer, 2006), in which a traveller's special interest influences their decision to plan a trip and inspires them to engage in specific activities (Volgger et al., 2021). Consequently, travel costs for nature-based tourism have increased at a rate of 20 percent yearly, which is five times faster than the global average for all tourism expenditures, based on data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Tourism Malaysia's senior deputy director, Azilina Azni Zainal Abidin, said that the trend of travelling now is that tourists are looking to experience the place and engage in ecotourism activities (New Straits Times, 2022). According to the study by Jennifer Chan (2021), the factors that influence domestic tourists' optional to visit nature-based sites are strongly agreed by domestic tourists due to the avoidance to visit crowded destination places. Similarly, according to the survey that was conducted by Malaysia Tourism Data (2020), most Malaysians strongly avoid traveling to crowded areas, going shopping, and theme park activities. From time to time, factors that influence the decision-making to visit tourist destinations in Malaysia have various perspectives and changes.

According to Malaysia Tourism Data (2020), a survey conducted on domestic travel in Malaysia stated that islands and beaches (76.8%), ecotourism (57.8%), and greenery (45.7%) are listed among the top 10 tourism types that attract tourists to travel domestically in Malaysia. In addition, islands and beaches are the highest percentages besides other attractions. Besides, due to the country's travel restrictions, Malaysian preferences in travel have changed over the past two years (Chiet & Razak, 2021). Therefore, this study is aimed to investigate the factors that influence domestic tourists' decision to visit nature-based tourism destinations in the Northern Region of Malaysia in the current situation. The objective is to determine the most preferred motivational factors among visitors to visit nature-based tourism in the Northern Region of Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Nature-Based Tourism Destination

In the last decade, nature-based tourism has increased in popularity worldwide, and an increasing number of tourists have been visiting national parks and protected areas (Arnegger et al. 2010; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Weaver, 2001). Nature-based tourism is an umbrella term that encompasses multiple alternative tourism types, such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, sustainable tourism, and even cultural tourism (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). Many argue that the increase in nature-based tourism is because modern tourists are more discerning and seek the uncommon, novelty, and thrilling (Machnik, 2013 & Franks, 2015). According to Metin (2019), when examining existing tourism trends through the lens of nature-based tourism, it is undeniable that these trends are building a solid basis for ecotourism, hunting tourism, natural life tourism, and even agricultural tourism. To put it another way, wildlife tourism, ecotourism, and adventure tourism are all examples of nature-based tourism.

Nature-based tourism is defined as activities that are directly dependent on the natural environment (Mehmetoglu, 2007); this means that these activities could not exist without tourism occurring within natural environments with a primary focus on nature and the protection of natural environments (Franks, 2015) and typically occurs in a natural context of both terrestrial and marine that focuses on certain features of the natural environment and is designed to preserve natural regions (Cheung & Fok, 2014). In general, all definitions of nature-based tourism identify this sort of tourism as being tied to the natural world. This suggested that nature-based tourism has a strong relationship with environmental protection and preservation (Cheung & Fok, 2014). Nature-based tourism is traveling to mostly undisturbed places to observe, admire, learn about, and enjoy the natural surroundings (Hultman et al., 2015). Other studies found that nature-based tourism is "any tourism rooted in a natural setting and enjoyed in, around, or for the environment" (Espinoza, 2003, Newsome & Moore, 2002 adopted from Franks, 2015). Malaysia has favourable conditions for ecotourism. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has recognized Malaysia as one of the world's 12 mega-diversity areas, and it is home to 19 national parks in a variety of climates and habitats, making it a great destination for nature-based tourism (Marzuki et al., 2014).

In standings of the study area, the researcher chose the states in the Northern Region of Malaysia which consists of Perak, Penang, Perlis, and Kedah. According to reports, this area was among the top states with the greatest number of domestic travellers in 2021 (Domestic Tourism Survey, 2021). These places are among the most well-liked nature-based destinations that are a hotspot for tourists looking to experience tropical flora and wildlife, which is characterized by old rainforests, exquisite beaches and reefs, amazing natural structures, and unmatched biodiversity.

## Travel Motivations

Travel motivation is seen as an internal drive that stimulates and propels a person to choose a specific destination to obtain the desired rewards and enjoyment (Pyo et al., 1989; Yoon & Uysal, 2005 adopted in Kara & Mkwizu, 2020). The view that motivation plays an essential part in traveling, vacationing, and visiting friends and family. Travel variables are the internal factors at play in humans, manifested as needs, wants, and desires, that cause some people to value a location significantly more than others and affect the tourist locations and activities they choose (Haarhoff, 2018). Motivation occurs when a person wants to fulfil their needs (Ramazannejad et al., 2021) and a desire is then a matter of consciousness (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). Motivation has been defined in terms of a person's psychological needs and desires, as well as an important dimension that influences their behaviour and activities.

Tourist motivation refers to travel in general or a specific choice in particular (Parrinello, 1993), attempting to explain why an individual or group has behaved or is about to act, as opposed to how the event has occurred or will occur (Mehmetoglu, 2007) and as factors that lessen a state of tension, it is the need that motivates an individual to act in a certain way to get the desired fulfilment (Kim & Ritchie, 2012). Motivations for tourism are diverse and multifaceted, occurring at both the individual and aggregate levels of analysis. According to Metin (2019), nature-based tourism is a type of tourism in which people obtain their travel experiences and motivations through sources of nature, it has encountered challenges due to human fatigue and the devastation among those resources.

In the studies of Metin (2019), motivation and attractiveness factors that matching in nature-based tourism are “cultural interest”, “nostalgia”, “risk-taking”, “seeking a healthy life”, “novelty”, “excitement”, “meeting new and interesting people”, “learn about nature”, “relaxation”, “improve the relationship with family and friends”, “return to nature” “stay away from crowded and noise” and “view the scenery”. In Kara & Mkwizu (2020), study found that travel motivation has been clarified into three variables which are “intellectual motivation”, “social motivation”, and “mastery competency motivation” and “stimulus avoidance motivation”. While Chi (2022) studies testified that push and pull motives were the two variables that made up the multidimensional scale used to calculate travel motivation which push motivations are travel for “relaxation”, “escape”, “excitement”, “self-knowledge” and pull motivations are travel for “new culture”, “new place”, “inexpensive to reach area”, and “not too touristy”. To build a conceptual framework for leisure travel motivations, ecotourism is a set of demands that encourage travellers to participate in ecotourism destinations from the perspective of travel motivation (Chi, 2022).

Seyitoğlu (2020), also described the dimensions of travel motivation are “novelty and learning”, “socialization”, “escape and relaxation”, and “self-development”. In addition, from the view of Carvache-Franco et. al. (2022), studies discovered seven factors which are “self-development”, “interpersonal relationship”, “building personal relationships”, “escape”, “reward”, “nature appreciation” and “ego defensive”. When it comes to travel, motivation is connected to a list of requirements that encourage someone to take part in tourism activities (Park & Yoon 2009). Hence, for this research, the motivational factors had been adapted from Carvache-Franco et. Al (2019), which contains six motivational factors which are “nature”, “escape” “activities”, “novelty”, “nostalgia”, and “attractions”.

## **Nature**

The 'high' motivation for nature tourists were to learn about nature, be physically active, meet people with similar interests, acquire new outdoor abilities, and see as much as possible in the available time (Cheung & Fok, 2014). The presence of natural attractions liberates individuals from urban existence. The most significant factor for the nature portion of the study is appreciating nature which explained that the factors are “to be close to nature” and “to learn about nature (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022). While according to Metin (2019), the factors of return to nature also described “viewing scenery” and “return to nature” as a motive for visitation. Nature as motivational factors in this study included “to see endangered species”, “to see animals” and “to see plants” also “to take photos of animals” and “to take photos of plants”. According to Carvache-Franco et. al (2019), the study found that nature was the third highest among the six others factor. Therefore, nature factors were examined and had a significant and positive impact on the decision to visit nature-based destinations.

## **Escape**

Based on Crompton (1979), escape is one of the most stated responses motivational was a brief change of surroundings. The study by Carvache-Franco et al. (2022), suggests that “get away from daily stress”, “get away from crowds of people”, “escape routine”, and “avoid interpersonal stress” way key in the escape factor. Seyitoğlu (2020) also discovered that a “relax mentally”, “get fresher” and “get away from the routine of everyday life” were the factors in escape and relaxation factors. In addition, Metin (2019) noted that escape is defined as a “being away from crowds and noise”, “relaxation”, and enhance family and friend affinity”. Stimulus avoidance motivation are the variables tested that contain similar meaning with the other studies mentioned (Kara & Mkwizu, 2020). This study evaluates the relationships between motivational factors and intention to visit with substances of “routine vacation” and “find some relaxation”. Consequently, escape factors were observed and had a significant and positive impact on the decision to visit nature-based destinations.

## **Activities**

The subcategories of activities include “to attend conferences”, “to attend events”, and “hiking”. Mehmentonglu (2007), the four primary heading components of the study are “visiting historical/cultural activities”, “challenging nature-based activities”, “relaxing nature-based activities”, and “pleasure-based activities”. These variables represent travel or vacation activities. Additionally reported in Xu & Cha (2016), activities can be measured as an exploratory factor that consists of “outdoor activities”, “travel with family and friends”, tranquil rest areas” and under "fun activities," mention "perfect climate" and a “clean environment”. Activities are considered crucial factors that are preferred by domestic tourists to visit nature-based destinations.

## **Novelty**

Novelty in general gives the meaning of new things or experiences. Novelty meant novel, although it did not always imply completely original information. The novelty came from experiencing something first-hand as opposed to just hearing about it. In addition, novelty is a desire to seek out new and different experiences through pleasure travel as motivated by a need to “experiencing new different things”, “introspection”, and “experiencing excitement” (Metin, 2019). The same meaning was claimed by Seyitoğlu (2020), Kara & Mkwizu (2020) and Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) where the novelty consists of “to see a new place”, and “experience new different things” with the addition of “learn more about nature and cultures” and “develop knowledge”. This factor is acknowledged as the most preferred factor among the other factors.

## **Nostalgia**

The concepts of "family time," "park visits from childhood," "to experience animals," and "different species" are all associated with nostalgia. Furthermore, Crompton (1979) adds that prestige also encompasses personal reasons, such as visiting places for "old times' sake", "enhancement of kinship relations", "exploration and evaluation of self", and "facilitation of social interaction". According to Carvache-Franco et al. (2022), nostalgia has the same definition as interpersonal relationships which described the "reflect on past memories", "strengthen the relationships with family", reminiscing about the past, "feel belong to the place", and "think about good times from the past". The nostalgia factor has a positive relationship with the intention to visit nature-based destinations.

## **Attractions**

Accommodation, park branding, locale climate, and "grew up with the park" are all attractions. According to Kim et al. (2006), "attractions" is a significant travel motivation. The ease with which a tourism destination's market can be improved depends on how many attractions it offers. According to Lee et al. (2004), event attractions are a major driver of visitor motivation because they allow people to "enjoy special events", "see new and different things", "enjoy festival mood", and "enjoy a unique atmosphere Intriguing "cultural attractions," "historical attractions," and "beautiful scenery or natural attractions" are also considered to be attractions (Lee et. al., 2004 & Carvache-Franco et al. 2022). The attractions factor has a positive relationship with the intention to visit nature-based destinations.

## **Travel Intentions**

Usually, the aim of a traveller can anticipate their conduct. When trying to understand the human mind, the intention is occasionally thought to be more useful than the behaviour. Day (1969) said that intentional measures are frequently more successful than behavioural measures in eliciting customers' mindsets since people may purchase items because of convenience, lack of alternatives, and financial incentives rather than true preferences. An individual's belief in their behaviour in a specific situation is their aim. The model theory of planned behaviour which Fan et al. (2022), used to characterize travel behavior with travel intention, defines travel intention as a strong desire to travel. The term "intention to travel" or "travel intention" in the context of travel refers to tourists' expected likelihood of visiting a certain location within a certain time frame (Noh, 2006). It is particularly significant since it influences both the choice of place and traveller characteristics including the age of life, age, role, and prior travel experience (Hashim et al., 2018).

Visitors who are interested in nature-based tourism have intentions that are reflected in their readiness to pay as well as in their views towards environmental awareness, conservation efforts, and expectations of nature-based tourism (Huang & Liu, 2017). The emotional connection people have with places can have a significant impact on their behaviour and goals (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020). Since it's important to know and understand what influences tourists' loyalty, or their good intentions towards a location, behavioural intentions constitute a crucial problem in the tourism industry (Mohaidin et al., 2017). According to Piramanayagam et al. (2020), the most useful behavioural intents to assess are the intention to return and the desire to promote a destination to others (Chen et al., 2020). Additionally, it is recognized that personal views that result from previous experiences influence travel intention (cognitive and emotional). Because a person's travel intentions might change because of both internal and external influences. Preferences, rules, and regulations lay the foundation for significant shifts in this behaviour, particularly in the age of the new normal.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The aim is to identify the relationship between motivational factors and the intentional decision to visit nature-based destinations in the Northern Region of Malaysia and be able to characterize the features of the variables of interest in current circumstances. The research approach for this study used a quantitative method which involved large-scale survey research by using the questionnaire method. The time horizon for this study used was cross-sectional where the data was collected just once and followed by the period that has been set. Moreover, the subject matter will be individuals which are domestic tourists in the study area. The research design of this study illustrates to determine which factors most influence the decision-making of domestic tourists in choosing the nature-based destination. In this study, one dependent variable which is the intention decision of domestic tourists to visit nature-based destinations adapted from Chi & Pham (2020), and six independent variables that are considered motivational factors adapted from Carvache-Franco et. al (2019) which are nature, escape activities, novelty, nostalgia, and attractions. Hence, to describe the relationship between a dependent variable and an independent variable, the descriptive study has been chosen in this study. Consequently, it aids in identifying and describing the elements that motivate the Northern Region of Malaysian domestic tourists to travel to nature-based destinations. A proper statistical method has also been used to determine whether the hypothesis can be accepted. The statistical approach provides a deeper comprehension of the connections between the variables.

### **Population & Sampling of the Study**

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the domestic tourism survey for the year 2021 in there are 13.9 million domestic tourists that visit the Northern Region of Malaysia. Population refers to a collection of people or things that have at least one trait in common and from which information can be gathered and analysed. In this study, the population will be focused on domestic tourists that come and visit Perak, Penang, Perlis, and Kedah. The representative sample was chosen among domestic visitors based on the total annual of visitors in the Northern Region of Malaysia in the year 2021. To collect the data for this study, convenient sampling was used that involves the domestic tourists that visited to nature-based tourism destinations in Malaysia's Northern Region. In a non-probability sampling method called convenient sampling, units are chosen for the sample based on how easy they are to access for the researchers to collect the data. Thus, the sample size which adapted from the study of Krejcie & Morgan (1970), where 384 samples were collected for this study.

### **Data Collection Method**

The information required for the research can be gathered from a wide range of sources. It can be done by reading relevant books, white papers, technical papers, websites, project focus groups, conducting interviews, and handing out questionnaires. The primary data for this study was gathered through 384 sets of questionnaires that will be distributed to the respondents by using an online survey in the Northern Region of Malaysia. This research utilizes a primary research method where an online survey was generated through an online platform, Google Forms. It is more suitable and fast as now everyone is already exposed to technology and familiar with assessing the platform. Refer to collected data for purpose of reviewing the previous study to get a better understanding of the research topic. Several secondary data have been used for this study. Secondary data that was used in this study included journals, articles, books, and the internet. The questionnaire consisted of three sections i.e., sections A, B, and C. The measurement and scale that was used in this study were nominal scales and ordinal scales. Section A of the survey asked five questions about the visitor's gender, age, household income, degree of education, number of visits, and travel mode. Education level and total household income, and education were operationalized as categorical variables. scales. Nominal scales were used in this section as they involved multiple choices answers. In section B, there are six elements that affect domestic visitors. Twenty-one questions were used to elicit the attributes that were sought, and a 5-

point Likert scale was used to assign scores to each of the attributes. We questioned respondents about their motivations and the factors that influence their choice of natural-based tourist destinations. Questions about nature, escape, activities, novelty, nostalgia, and attractiveness made up the motivating elements. The most popular variables were then questioned and appraised using Likert scale techniques. Section C of the questionnaire consisted of dependent variables and detailed information to investigate the intention in making the decision to visit the nature-based destination in the northern region of Malaysia. Ordinal scales were utilized in section B and section C because Likert scales were involved.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for Windows Version 10 was used to analyze the data. All the returned questionnaires underwent initial editing and verification. In this study, three levels of analysis were performed. Statistics from a descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics made up the first level. Second, the regression statistical method was used to determine the nature of the relationship between the variables which is the most popular reason visitors choose to come.

## FINDINGS

The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27. The respondent's profile was underlined first, then the outcomes of the data collection and statistical methods used were examined, presented, and interpreted as follows.

### Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the items in the questionnaire was verified by computing Cronbach's Alpha. George and Mallery (2003), suggested the following rules of thumb for evaluating alpha; Excellent (> .9), Good (>.8), Acceptable (>.7), Questionable (>.6), Poor (>.5), and Unacceptable (<.5). In addition, Nunally (1978) stated that the minimum alpha can be 0.6 for the early stage of research. The set of items is said to be reliable if Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.6 or higher. Table 1 shows the results of the reliability test of all the items in the variables.

Table 1: Reliability test results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Nature	.928	5
Escape	.748	2
Activities	.741	3
Novelty	.935	2
Nostalgia	.696	3
Attraction	.824	4
Dependent Variable: Intention	.955	4

Based on the result of the reliability test, for an independent variable, Cronbach's Alpha for nature factor was 0.98 for 5 items, the escape factor was 0.748 with two items, the activities factor was 0.741 with three items, the novelty factor was 0.935 with two items, nostalgia factor was 0.696 with three items and attraction factor was 0.824 with four items. Moreover, the independent variable for the intention of tourists to visit nature-based destinations shows that Cronbach's Alpha was 0.955 with four items. Based on the result, all the variables have achieved a value that is more than 0.6. As a result, it was determined that all the variables had adequate reliability.

## Respondent's Profiles

Respondents in Table 2 were required to answer questions about their demographics using a google form as part of the survey instrument-filling process. Gender, marital status, age, education, household income, travel time, travel frequency, and travel mode are among the demographic details. The demographic profile is meant to provide a summary of the respondents who take part in the study.

**Table 2: Demographic factors of tourists that visit nature-based destinations.**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	168	42.9
Female	224	57.1
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	302	77.0
Married	88	22.4
<b>Age</b>		
Under 25 years old	189	48.2
25-34 years old	170	43.4
35-44 years old	13	3.3
45 years old and above	20	5.1
<b>Education</b>		
Tertiary education	355	90.6
Secondary education	33	8.4
Primary education	4	1.0
<b>Household income</b>		
RM1,200 or less	91	23.2
RM1,201-RM2,500	110	28.1
RM2,501-RM 5,000	109	27.8
RM5,001-RM7,000	42	10.7
RM7,001 and above	40	10.2
<b>Travel time</b>		
Weekends	74	18.9
Weekdays	19	4.8
Holidays	161	41.1
Free time	138	35.2
<b>Travel frequency</b>		
Below 2 times	102	26.0
2-4 times	174	44.4
4-6 times	62	15.8
Above 6 times	54	13.8
<b>Travel mode</b>		
Individual	30	7.7
Family	215	54.8
Friends	137	34.9
Package by employer	10	2.6

The main aim of this study is to determine the factors that influence domestic tourists' decision to visit nature-based destinations. Based on the result of a descriptive analysis of demographic revealed that the biggest percentage of respondents from young adults ranging from age 18 to 34 years old preferred to travel to nature-based destinations. This is probably due to their early desire to participate in physically demanding activities like hiking, camping, and other extreme sports. In addition, most of



the respondents travel to a nature-based destination at least from 2 to 4 times a year which is reasonable depending on their free time and holidays. This outcome demonstrates that most young adult respondents adore traveling to places with a natural setting, which is consistent with the trend changes in preferences of tourist destinations nowadays.

### Regression Analysis

According to Bluman (2018), the coefficient of determination, or  $r^2$ , is a value between 0 and 1 inclusive. The least-squares regression line cannot explain any variation if  $r^2$  is equal to zero. The regression line in the dependent variable's least-squares analysis will explain 100% of the variation if  $r^2=1$ . Results of multiple linear regression analysis on the most preferred motivational factors and the intention decision of tourists to visit nature-based tourism in the Northern Region of Malaysia are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Regression analysis result**

Model	r	$r^2$	Adj. $r^2$	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
Predictors: (Constant), Nature	.594 <sup>a</sup>	.353	.351	.72043	212.734	<.001
Predictors: (Constant), Escape	.576 <sup>b</sup>	.332	.330	.73199	193.840	<.001
Predictors: (Constant), Activities	.450 <sup>c</sup>	.202	.200	.80002	98.777	<.001
Predictors: (Constant), Novelty	.664 <sup>d</sup>	.441	.439	.66982	307.252	<.001
Predictors: (Constant), Nostalgia	.493 <sup>e</sup>	.243	.241	.77936	125.030	<.001
Predictors: (Constant), Attraction	.534 <sup>f</sup>	.285	.284	.75705	155.830	<.001

The table shows the result of the linear regression test on the independent variables to determine the most preferred factors that may influence the intention of domestic tourists to visit nature-based destinations. The result test on independent variables; where by nature factor ( $r^2=.353$ , Adj.  $r^2=.351$ ,  $F=212.734$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Escape factor ( $r^2=.332$ , Adj.  $r^2=.330$ ,  $F=193.840$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Activity factor ( $r^2=.200$ ,  $F=98.777$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Novelty factor ( $r^2=.441$ , Adj.  $r^2=.439$ ,  $F=307.252$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Nostalgia factor ( $r^2=.243$ , Adj.  $r^2=.241$ ,  $F=125.030$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and Attraction factor ( $r^2=.285$ , Adj.  $r^2=.284$ ,  $F=155.830$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Based on the regression thumb rules, the researchers can see from the result of the analysis, that the highest percentage of the relationship for the novelty factor is 44.1%, followed by the nature factor is 35.3%, the escape factor is 33.2%, the attraction factor 28.5%, the nostalgia factor is 24.3% and the lowest is the activities factor which is 20.2%. Based on the research objective, the researchers want to determine the most preferred motivational factors among visitors to visit nature-based tourism in the Northern Region of Malaysia. As the result, it shows that the highest percentage associated with the motivation factor that influences domestic tourists to visit nature-based in the Northern Region of Malaysia is the novelty factor and the lowest is the activity factor. The contribution of this research lies in the confirmation that novelty is the most important motive to visit nature-based destinations and a new trend in the tourism industry.

### DISCUSSION

The study demonstrates a correlation between motivational factors with six factors and intention to visit nature-based destinations. From the hypothesis, the researcher wants to know if there is a significant relationship between motivational factors and the intention to visit nature-based destinations. In line with the hypothesis, the result shows that all six independent variables reported a positive correlation

with moderate rank where there is a significant relationship between the independent variables (nature, escape, activities, novelty, nostalgia, and attractions) and the intention. Therefore, it was expected that the motives to visit nature-based destinations in the Northern Region of Malaysia are similar with some studies.

Research by Carvache-Franco et. al (2019) confirmed that the motives with the highest value were escape, followed by nostalgia and nature. Seven motivational variables were identified; "self-development," which is associated with self-improvement, accounted for most of these components in ecotourism, subsequently "interpersonal relationships" and "building personal relationships". This study explained that tourists visit nature-based destinations to get to know themselves deeply with find a new perspective on life. However, contrary to this study, the result shows that the highest value is novelty, followed by nature and escape. The motives that remain from other research are escape and nature. The findings of this study were similar with Kara and Mkwizu (2020), the findings indicated that tourists were motivated to travel with the intention of discovering and learning new things. In addition, Seyitoğlu (2020) revealed that "novelty and learning" were the variables that most foresee the satisfaction and loyalty of tourist motivation and followed by "escape and relaxation" and "socialization". Indeed, Mehmetonglu (2007) discovered that the first trip purpose, "novelty and learning," was crucial, following the second, "a contrast to everyday life."

One of the key measures in the findings is to observe the most preferred motivational factors among the six factors. The study revealed that the most preferred factors are a "novelty". Therefore, seems that people travel to escape from routine also find some relaxation and go to nature to heal by seeing and taking photos of flora and fauna. The novelty illustrated that people come to nature-based destinations to explore new destinations and also socialize with friends. This study provides new insight into the relationship between motivational factors and the intention to visit nature-based destinations. The findings of this study imply that different locations and travel intentions resulted in different motivations to visit nature-based destinations tourism. Due to their varying levels of tolerance for tourism experiences, travellers are typically drawn in diverse ways to various tourist destinations. Generally, some people look for locations that might offer an adventurous lifestyle, others consider destinations where they can escape from their daily routines (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022).

As this research is looking more into the motivational factors, the expansion of theoretical implication that can be explored is about risk perception and crisis management. From here, the theoretical implications may extend to understanding how tourists perceive risks associated with nature-based tourism, including environmental concerns, safety, and health considerations. In future, this could involve exploring the impact of factors such as destination hygiene, healthcare facilities, and the perceived risk of diseases. The practical applications of understanding the factors that influence domestic tourists' decisions to visit nature-based tourism destinations are wide-ranging and can have a significant impact on destination management, marketing, and stakeholders. From the findings, tourism destinations can offer marketing and positioning by highlighting unique natural attractions and experiences to the tourists. This might include guided nature tours, eco-friendly accommodations, and adventure activities that align with identified influencing factors. Besides, the destinations could consider seasonal variations and plan events or activities that align with the preferences of domestic tourists. For instance, promoting bird-watching events during migration seasons or outdoor festivals during favourable weather conditions can attract more visitors.

Next, practical applications of the research could encourage the collaboration with stakeholders. The destination may foster collaboration between government bodies, private enterprises, and local communities to create a unified approach to destination management. This can involve coordinated marketing efforts, conservation initiatives, and infrastructure development. By involving the local communities in tourism planning and development, it ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably. Engaged and empowered communities can contribute positively to the overall tourism experience, making destinations more attractive to domestic tourists.

This study has limitations in association with the data used. Based on the result in examine the most preferred motivational factors among six independent variables, the indicated percentages are not too different from each other. This is because the collected data were mostly from the hikers and campers that visit the study area in the Northern Region of Malaysia by online survey, respondents may be biased and not be representative for an overall questionnaire. Another limitation is that this study did not test the attribute items for each variable. Thus, for future studies, in order to understand why the stated percentage in the findings is not significantly different from each other, the researcher must focus on the motivational factors. Motivational factors and intention to visit nature-based destinations should be separately examined by each attribute to obtain more useful and accurate information.

## **CONCLUSION**

To sum up, the primary objective of this study is to determine the most preferred motivational factors among visitors to visit nature-based tourism in the Northern Region of Malaysia. As a result, the novelty factor has a higher percentage of correlation with the motivational factor behind domestic tourists' decisions to visit nature-based attractions in Malaysia's Northern Region, while the activity factor has a lower percentage. Hence, it shows how this study has contributed to the affirmation of novelty as the major reason people visit natural-based destinations and as a new trend in the tourism industry. Additionally, the fact that this study's results demonstrate that the activity factor is currently the least factor in tourists' decisions to travel for nature-based tourism offers fresh insights to the travel industry. For instance, travel agencies can create a package vacation that includes a variety of exciting activities at the local destinations to promote and entice the domestic tourists to visit the nature-based tourism. Furthermore, since nature-based tourism destinations are becoming more popular, it is crucial for Malaysia's tourism industry authorities to develop effective strategies to promote it well to tourists. As an industry that depends on wildlife habitat conservation, nature-based tourism offers incentives to local governments and landowners to act. It encourages conservation by elevating the importance of the natural areas that remain left. Given the growing importance of nature tourism to the country's economic growth, motivation must have been exerted to preserve the area's last remaining natural areas for animal and wildlife enthusiasts. Due to Malaysia's rich biodiversity, there is hope that the tourism industry would develop and attract more tourists to discover the country's beauty of nature.

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## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

Wan Sarah, W.S, Farah Nadiah, R. and Nur Faza Atiqa, F. conceived and planned the analysis. They all carried out the experiments and data preparation. Siti Amalina, M.Y. planned and carried out the analysis. Ellail Ain, M.A. contributed to the interpretation of the results. Siti Amalina, M.Y., Ellail Ain, M.A and Mohd Khairulanwar, M.Y. took the lead in writing the manuscript. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis, and manuscript.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has

not been submitted for publication nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

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