

# Tourism Motivations and Experiences of Visitors to Saint Martin's Island Marine Protected Area in Bangladesh

## แรงจูงใจในการท่องเที่ยวและประสบการณ์ของผู้มาเยือนเกาะเซนต์มาร์ติน พื้นที่คุ้มครองทางทะเลในบังคลาเทศ

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### Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the tourism motivations of visitors to Saint Martin's Island Marine Protected Area in Bangladesh and to compare the motivations with the actual experiences visitors gained from visiting the park. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 420 park visitors, both domestic and international visitors. The survey data was analyzed by descriptive statistics, factor analysis, paired t-test, and correlation analysis. Factor analysis revealed four distinct push motivational factors: Embracing the Wilderness, Personal Enrichment, Tranquility & Escape, and Socializing (KMO=0.814; Total Variance Extracted=58.59%). Similarly, four pull motivational factors emerged: Destination Appeal, Destination Accessibility, Destination Attributes, and Destination Amenities (KMO=0.908; Total Variance Extracted=56.70). The pair of t-tests found significant differences between visitors' desired experiences and actual experiences for all factors. The study also found a moderate positive correlation between visitor experiences and satisfaction ( $r=0.335$ ;  $P<0.05$ ) and a weak correlation between revisit intentions and experiences ( $r=0.104$ ;  $P<0.05$ ). The research posits that destination administrators should concentrate on three primary areas: environmental conservation, visitor experience enhancement, and practical accessibility improvements with the necessity of balanced approaches that preserve environmental integrity while improving visitor experiences from a management perspective.

**Keywords:** Tourism motivations; Visitor experiences; Satisfaction; Revisit intention; Marine Protected Area; Bangladesh

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งที่จะวิเคราะห์แรงจูงใจด้านการท่องเที่ยวของผู้มาเยือนเกาะเซนต์มาติน พื้นที่คุ้มครองทางทะเลของประเทศบังคลาเทศ และเปรียบเทียบแรงจูงใจกับประสบการณ์ที่ผู้มาเยือนได้รับ โดยผู้วิจัยใช้แบบสอบถามในการเก็บข้อมูลจากผู้มาเยือน ทั้งคนในประเทศ และชาวต่างชาติ จำนวน 420 คน วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนา การวิเคราะห์ปัจจัย การทดสอบที่เป็นรายคู่ และการวิเคราะห์สหสัมพันธ์ ผลการวิเคราะห์ปัจจัยพบว่าแรงจูงใจในกลุ่มปัจจัยผลึกสามารถจัดกลุ่มได้ 4 กลุ่ม ประกอบด้วย การโอบกอดพื้นที่ห่างไกล การเพิ่มคุณค่าส่วนบุคคล ความสงบเงียบ และการหลีกเลี่ยง และการเข้าถึงชม โดยมีค่าความเหมาะสมในการจัดกลุ่ม (KMO) 0.814 สามารถอธิบายความแปรปรวนในแรงจูงใจของผู้มาเยือนได้ร้อยละ 58.6 ในขณะที่กลุ่มของปัจจัยดึงดูดก็สามารถจัดกลุ่มได้ 4 กลุ่มเช่นกัน ประกอบด้วย ความดึงดูดใจของจุดหมายปลายทาง ความสะดวกในการเข้าถึงจุดหมายปลายทาง ลักษณะเฉพาะของจุดหมายปลายทาง และสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกในจุดหมายปลายทาง โดยมีค่า KMO ที่ 0.908 สามารถอธิบายความแปรปรวนในแรงจูงใจของผู้มาเยือนได้ร้อยละ 56.70 ผลการเปรียบเทียบความแตกต่างรายคู่ระหว่างประสบการณ์ที่ปรารถนา กับประสบการณ์ที่ได้รับจริงของผู้มาเยือนพบว่ามี ความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติในทุกคู่ ผลการวิเคราะห์สหสัมพันธ์พบความสัมพันธ์เชิงบวกในระดับปานกลางระหว่างประสบการณ์ที่ผู้มาเยือนได้รับกับความพึงพอใจ ( $r=0.335$ ;  $P<0.05$ ) และระดับต่ำกับความตั้งใจกลับมาเยือนพื้นที่ในอนาคต ( $r=0.104$ ;  $P<0.05$ ) งานวิจัยนี้ เสนอให้ผู้บริหารพื้นที่มุ่งเน้นไปที่ 3 ประเด็นหลัก คือ การอนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อม การยกระดับประสบการณ์ของผู้มาเยือน และการปรับปรุงการเข้าถึงพื้นที่โดยจำเป็นต้องใช้แนวทางที่สมดุลในการรักษาความสมบูรณ์ของสิ่งแวดล้อมในขณะที่ปรับปรุงประสบการณ์ของผู้มาเยือน ในมุมมองของการจัดการ

**คำสำคัญ:** แรงจูงใจด้านการท่องเที่ยว; ประสบการณ์ผู้มาเยือน; ความพึงพอใจ; ความตั้งใจกลับมาเยือนซ้ำ; พื้นที่คุ้มครองทางทะเล; บังคลาเทศ



## Introduction

Bangladesh, located in South Asia, is a deltaic nation in the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent, bordered by India to the north, east, and west, Myanmar to the southeast, and the Bay of Bengal to the south. Covering approximately 147,570 square kilometers, it is home to over 160 million people, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world (World Bank, 2023). Saint Martin's Island, Bangladesh's only coral island, is situated in the northeastern Bay of Bengal, approximately 9 km south of the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf peninsula and 8 km west of Myanmar's northwest coast (Rani et al., 2025). Spanning just Mark 3 square kilometers, this ecologically critical area (ECA) is renowned for its coral reefs, diverse marine life, and pristine

beaches, making it a key ecotourism destination in Bangladesh (Rani et al., 2020). The increasing popularity of Saint Martin's Island as a tourism hotspot is evident in its growing visitor numbers, with approximately 600,000 tourists visiting annually during the peak season (November to February), contributing significantly to the local economy through tourism and fisheries (Das et al., 2022). In 2019, Bangladesh's tourism sector, including destinations like Saint Martin's Island, contributed \$9,113.2 million to the national GDP (3.0% of total GDP) and provided direct employment to approximately 1.85 million individuals (2.9% of total employment) (Biswas et al., 2025). However, this surge in tourism has raised concerns about environmental degradation,

particularly to the island's fragile coral ecosystem, which has lost 70% of its coral cover between 1980 and 2018 due to anthropogenic pressures such as unregulated tourism and overfishing (Al Nahian et al., 2022).

Protected areas are essential for conserving biodiversity and offer opportunities for nature-based recreation and tourism (Balmford et al., 2015). However, the increasing popularity of these areas, particularly in developing countries, has led to challenges associated with high-density visitation. Understanding visitor motivations is key to developing effective management strategies that can balance conservation objectives with recreational demands. This study focuses on analyzing the recreation motivation of visitors to high-density used protected areas in Bangladesh, with a specific case study on Saint Martin's Island. Bangladesh is a country of Southeast Asia abundant in natural resources of nature and biodiversity and has been experiencing rapid rise in domestic and international tourism to its protected areas. This growth presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development and conservation. Saint Martin's Island, Bangladesh's only coral island, serves as a prime example of a high-density used protected area facing significant pressures from tourism (Nafi & Ahmed, 2017). This island was declared a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2022.

The lack of in-depth understanding of visitor motivation hinders the development of effective management approaches that can balance visitor satisfaction with conservation objectives. As Leung et al. (2018) emphasize, understanding visitor motivations and behaviors is crucial for mitigating negative impacts in high-density protected areas. Without this understanding, management strategies may fail to address the root causes of environmentally

detrimental behaviors or miss opportunities to align visitor experiences with conservation goals. Furthermore, the unique context of Bangladesh as a developing country with a rapidly growing domestic tourism market adds complexity to the issue, as highlighted by Naushin and Yuwanond (2016) in their study of beach tourism motivations in Cox's Bazar. Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new dimensions to visitor motivations and behaviors in protected areas, as demonstrated by (Ferguson et al., 2022) in their study of U.S. national forests. These changing dynamics further underscore the need for up-to-date, context-specific research on visitor motivations in high-density used protected areas like Saint Martin's Island. Despite the growing body of research on visitor motivations in protected areas globally, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific motivations driving high visitation levels to Saint Martin's Island in Bangladesh. This unique coral island, designated as an Ecologically Critical Area, has experienced a surge in tourism over the past decade, with annual visitor numbers exceeding 500,000 in recent tourism years (Nafi & Ahmed, 2017). Recent studies (Kamruzzaman, 2018; Sarker et al., 2020; Tania, 2022) have examined various aspects of tourism on the island. A comprehensive analysis of visitor motivations using established theoretical frameworks is notably absent. This knowledge gap is particularly problematic given the island's fragile ecosystem and the pressing need for sustainable tourism management strategies. Without addressing these research gaps, policymakers and protected area managers lack the necessary insights to develop targeted, effective strategies that can ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism on the island while preserving its unique ecological

value. Thus, the present study will address the gaps by responding to the two major research questions. 1) What are the tourism motivations of visitors to Saint Martin's Island MPA? 2) Are there any differences between motivations or desired experiences and actual experiences of the visitors to Saint Martin's Island MPA?

### Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the tourism motivations of visitors to Saint Martin's Island Marine Protected Area in Bangladesh.
2. To compare the visitors' motivation with their actual experiences at
3. the Saint Martin's Island Marine Protected Area.

### Literature Review

#### Motivation in Visiting Protected Areas

Motivations refer to the internal and external factors that stimulate an individual's desire to engage in any activities. Tourism motivation refers to the travel and participate in some recreational activities in a recreational area or destination activities undertaken for enjoyment, relaxation, or refreshment during leisure time. It often involves engaging in pleasurable experiences that contribute to physical, mental, or social well-being while away from one's usual environment. It also encompasses the needs, wants, and goals that drive an individual to choose a particular destination or type of travel experience. Numerous studies have examined visitor motivations in protected areas, providing valuable insights into the factors that drive visitation and influence visitor behaviors. In a comprehensive review of visitor motivations in protected areas, Whiting (2020) identified several common motivational factors across

various studies, including nature appreciation, escape and relaxation, social bonding, and learning. Their review emphasized the importance of understanding visitor motivations for effective protected area management and visitor experience enhancement. (Carvache-Franco et al., 2019) found that escape from routine, relaxation, and connection with nature were primary motivations for visitors to protected areas in Ecuador. (Tangeland et al., 2013) identified four main dimensions of nature-based tourism motivation: social, achievement, learning and experiencing nature, and relaxation and escape. In the context of marine protected areas, which is similar to the case of Saint Martin's Island, (Rangel et al., 2014) identified key motivational factors including the desire for contact with nature, escaping from daily routine, and seeking new experiences. They also noted that understanding these motivations was crucial for developing sustainable tourism strategies that minimize negative impacts on fragile marine ecosystems. The COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced visitor motivations. (Wen et al., 2020) noted an increased emphasis on health and safety considerations, as well as a heightened desire for open spaces and nature-based experiences, in post-pandemic travel motivations (Perera et al., 2023). Visitors' decision to visit or revisit any destination is influenced by several factors. Push and pull factors play a significant role in motivating visitors to visit protected areas (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981). These factors have been extensively studied in recent tourism literature, providing insights into the complex decision-making process of visitors (Kozak & Decrop, 2009). Push factors are internal motivators that drive individuals to travel. In the context of protected areas, Sinh and Anh (2020)

found that escape from daily routine and stress relief were primary push factors for visitors to national parks. Pull factors are external attributes that attract visitors to a specific destination (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019). For protected areas, natural beauty and unique landscapes have consistently been identified as primary pull factors. A comprehensive study by Jones and Nguyen (2021) found that the promise of spectacular scenery and diverse ecosystems was the strongest pull factor across various types of protected areas. Research by Carvache-Franco et al. (2021) revealed that the possibility of encountering rare or iconic species was a major attraction for visitors to protected areas. Understanding complex role is crucial for tourism managers and policymakers in designing appealing recreational offerings and effective marketing strategies (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022).

### **Desired Experience and Actual Experience of the Visitors**

Desired experience, in the context of tourism and recreation, refers to the anticipated outcomes or benefits that visitors hope to gain from their visit to a destination or participation in an activity for enjoyment, learning, or emotional fulfillment (Al-Msallam, 2020). It is closely linked to visitor motivation, which drives the decision to engage in a particular recreational pursuit or travel to a specific location (Yoo et al., 2018). The foundational push-pull framework of Dann (1981), enhanced by recent research from (Jiang et al., 2022), demonstrates how internal desires and destination attributes collaboratively shape visitor behaviors. On the other hand, the actual experience of visitors is complex and multifaceted as it is shaped by personal and contextual factors (Wang et al., 2021). Actual experience refers to the real, lived outcomes that visitors encounter

during their visit or activity. It encompasses the totality of sensations, emotions, and interactions that occur throughout the visitor's journey (Agapito, 2014). Actual tourism experiences emerge as multifaceted, subjective encounters that transcend traditional interaction models and are shaped by individual perceptions and situational contexts (Kim, 2017). Oh, et al.'s (2007) foundational work on destination impressions is complemented by Zhang and Wu's (2023) advanced conceptualization of experiences as intricate perceptual networks. Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience economy framework is extended by Lee et al. (2022), who identify emerging experiential dimensions reflecting contemporary tourist expectations. Visitor co-creation concept is further developed by Wang et al. (2021), repositioning tourists as active experience architects rather than passive consumers. Mossberg's (2007) "experiences cape" concept is refined by Cheng et al. (2022), highlighting how physical and social contexts mediate personalized tourism encounters. This approach recognizes that tourism experiences are dynamic, individually constructed processes influenced by personal expectations, destination characteristics, and contextual interactions.

The gap between desired and actual experiences is a crucial area of study in tourism and recreation management. As noted by Fluker and Turner (2000), "tourism satisfaction is largely dependent on the relationship between expectations that a tourist has before the trip and the perception of the experience after the trip." Recent research by (Baniya et al., 2024) found that mismatches between desired and actual experiences in protected areas can significantly affect visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Expectancy disconfirmation theory, as applied to

tourism by Pizam and Milman (1993), suggests that satisfaction results from the comparison of expected and perceived performance. However, Tung and Ritchie (2011) argue that memorable tourism experiences often exceed expectations, indicating that actual experiences can surpass desired ones in positive ways. Recent studies by (Liu et al., 2017) demonstrate that the congruence between expected and actual experiences significantly impacts overall satisfaction and future travel intentions. Zhang and Wu (2023) found that when actual experiences exceed visitors' initial expectations, the probability of revisiting intention increases substantially. Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposed the following hypotheses.

H<sub>1</sub>: Visitors' motivations differ from the actual experiences they gain from visiting Saint Martin's MPA.

H<sub>2</sub>: Actual experiences at Saint Martin's MPA are significantly correlated with visitors' satisfaction.

H<sub>3</sub>: Actual experiences at Saint Martin's MPA are significantly correlated with visitors' revisit intention.

## Methodology of the Study

The study area was Saint Martin's Island which represents the sole coral island of Bangladesh and its main tourist attraction. The island serves as an Ecologically Critical Area while being newly designated as a MPA in 2022 because it attracts between 5,000 and 8,000 daily visitors during its peak seasons in 2023 (Shams, 2023). The questionnaire consisting of five point Likert scale was used as a study tool. The questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical concept in recreation and tourism motivation and other related concepts. The authors employed expert

judgments to ensure content and construct validities of the tool. Then it was tried out with 30 visitors who were not the study samples. The reliability was measured through Cronbach's alpha with a 0.7 threshold following Black et al. (2010) and Hair Junior et al. (1998). The authors found 0.90 or above result for each item. The research included every visitor who visited the island throughout the study period. The calculation of samples based on Cochran's (1977) formula showed that a 400-person sample would be sufficient after considering the peak-season average of 6,500 daily visitors, a total of 780,000 in four months (Nafi & Ahmed, 2017). However, the research collected data from 420 participants, anticipating some incomplete responses. The study employed stratified random sampling across two categories, including domestic versus international visitors, together with visitors staying day trip or overnight. These strata were chosen to capture diverse visitor profiles and behaviors, as domestic and international visitors may have different motivations, and day-trip versus overnight stays may influence experiences (Leung et al., 2018). Proportional allocation was used to determine the sample size for each stratum based on its estimated proportion in the visitor population. Surveys were conducted at entry points/pier, together with beach areas and accommodation zones, during the research period (November 2024-February 2025). The analysis of survey data was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as factor analysis, paired t-tests, and correlation analysis.



## Results of the Analysis

### Background of visitors

Most visitors (52.8%) were aged between 21 and 30 years, while 27.0% were aged 31 to 40 years. The gender distribution indicates 25.4% female and 74.6% male. Employment status indicates that 56.3% were employed full-time, 27.0% were students, while smaller percentages were unemployed (2.5%), part-time workers (1.8%), or categorized as others, including freelance employees (12.3%). The largest proportion (21.5%) of the visitors earned between Tk. 30,001 and 40,000; followed by 16.8% earning Tk. 40,001 to 50,000, and 12.3% earning Tk. 20,001 to 30,000; 17.5% had an income over Tk. 70,000 (Tk 120= 1 US\$). Regarding marital status, 38.5% were single, while 61.0% were married. Most respondents were from the Dhaka division (51.8%), followed by international visitors (11.8%). Smaller percentages were from Rajshahi (4.5%), Rangpur (4.0%), Sylhet (4.5%), Khulna (3.5%), Barisal (2.3%), Mymensingh (3.3%), and Chittagong (12.8%). The predominant educational attainment was an undergraduate degree (43.0%), followed by graduate degrees (37.8%), higher secondary education (13.5%), secondary education (2.5%), and additional qualifications beyond graduation (3.3%).

### Visitors' tourism motivations

The analysis revealed that avoiding hot and humid weather stands as the primary driving force at mean score of 4.56 (SD=0.77), which demonstrates visitors strongly want to leave harsh climatic surroundings. Visitors show a strong attraction to beautiful scenery and natural surroundings (close to nature) since both elements achieve 4.54 ratings (SD=0.79 and 0.81). The strong evidence demonstrates that tourists mainly focus on comfort while seeking visual

pleasure and experiencing immersive natural interactions. Visitors display a mixed level of excitement toward a variety of destination characteristics and experiences in the middle portion of motivational items. Experiencing natural resources and interacting with the island's blue waters show substantial admiration toward marine environments (Mean=4.38, SD=0.95 and Mean =4.26, SD=1.06, respectively). The bottom-ranking items of the motivational survey also offer significant information about visitor preferences and location improvement possibilities. A large 63.5% of visitors do not feel motivated to seek social recognition according to the measurements from this study (Mean 3.38, SD=1.40). Visitor information centers together with signage and transportation facilities received mean scores of 3.92 (SD=1.17, 1.14, and 1.11 respectively) indicating that these facilities require improvement to response to visitors' motivation. The study found that 77.5 percent of the visitors are sure to revisit the Saint Martin's Island MPA. The result also revealed that 80.3 percent of visitors are satisfied with the visit to the Island.

### Push and pull motivational factors

Factor analyses revealed distinct dimensions of both internal (push) and external (pull) motivations, with strong statistical validation of the findings. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted on survey items capturing visitors' desired (expected) experiences to identify underlying push and pull motivational factors, as these reflect the motivations driving travel to Saint Martin's Island Marine Protected Area (MPA). The EFA assumptions were met, with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.814 for push factors and 0.908 for pull factors, indicating excellent suitability for

factor analysis (KMO > 0.60; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant for both analyses ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming sufficient correlations among variables. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation extracted factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and a factor loading cutoff of 0.50 was applied, with some items below 0.40 retained due to their theoretical relevance to the study context and contribution to scale reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

The factor analysis of push motivational factors revealed four distinct dimensions of visitor motivation, demonstrating strong statistical validity with a KMO value of 0.814 and explaining 58.59 percent of the total variance. The four factors include "Embracing the wilderness" with the highest percentage of variance explained (31.623% of variance explained), followed by "Personal enrichment" (11.761% of variance

explained), "Tranquility and Escape" (8.047% of variance explained) and "Socializing" (7.206% of variance explained) respectively, as presented in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values across all push factors (ranging from .670 to .763) also support the reliability of these findings.

As for pull motivational factors, the analysis also found four factors with a KMO value of 0.908 and 56.70 percent of variance explained visitors' motivation. The four motivation factors include "Destination appeal" (21.400% of variance explained), "Destination accessibility" (13.210% of variance explained), "Destination attributes" (11.935% of variance explained), and "Destination amenities" (10.160% of variance explained). The four full motivational factors also have acceptable Cronbach's alpha values (ranging from 0.735 to 0.886), as presented in Table 2.

**Table 1**

*Push motivational factors to visit Saint Martin Island MPA*

Factor Name	Items	Factor loading			
		1	2	3	4
Embracing the wilderness	To fulfill curiosity	.762			
	To get away from daily routines	.678			
	To be close to nature	.549			
	To experience excitement/adventure	.542			
	To see the turtle, birds	.475			
Personal Enrichment	To discover cultural resources		.803		
	To gain social recognition		.735		
	To enhance health/physical fitness		.646		
	To know the local history and culture		.527		
	To discover natural resources		.465		
Tranquility and Escape	To experience the blue water of the Island			.774	
	To be relaxed			.735	
	To escape crowd			.514	
Socializing	To meet with new people/local people				.773
	To enjoy time with family & friends				.755



To avoid hot and humid weather				490
% of Variance explained by each factor	31.623	11.711	8.047	7.206
Cronbach's Alpha	0.693	0.763	0.674	0.670

**Remarks:** KMO = 0.814; Total Variance Extracted = 58.59%

**Table 2**

*Pull motivational factors to visit Saint Martin Island MPA*

Factor Name	Items	Factor loading			
		1	2	3	4
Destination appeal	Variety of foods	.765			
	Good rest areas	.731			
	Comfortable accommodation	.676			
	Washroom facilities	.675			
	Well-conserved environment	.668			
	Beautiful scenery	.628			
	Cultural programs	.605			
	Security of the area	.565			
Destination accessibility	Clean island		.774		
	Friendly behavior from the local people		.760		
	Good signage for direction		.502		
	Good transportation facilities		.462		
Destination attributes	Suitability for a group tour			.802	
	Good recreation facilities			.693	
	Good tour guide facilities			.671	
	The convenience location			.644	
Destination amenities	Shopping facilities				.786
	First aid and emergency services				.701
	Good visitor information center				.609
	Children activities				.597
% of Variance explained by each factor		21.400	13.210	11.935	10.160
Cronbach's Alpha		0.886	0.791	0.766	0.735

**Remarks:** KMO = 0.908; Total Variance Extracted = 56.70%

### Comparison between the desired experience and the actual experience of the visitors

In comparing visitors' desired experiences with their actual experiences, each experience item was grouped into a factor according to the factor analysis results. The pair t-tests found significant differences in mean values of all pairs of desired experiences and actual experiences including the "Embracing the Wilderness" factor ( $t=16.594$ ;  $P=.000$ ), the "Personal Enrichment"

factor ( $t=15.611$ ;  $P=.000$ ), the "Tranquility and Escape" factor ( $t=13.065$ ;  $P=.000$ ) and the "Socializing" factor ( $t=10.268$ ;  $P=.000$ ). These findings proved the research hypothesis (H1) that visitors' motivations (desired experience) are different from their actual experiences gained from visiting Saint Martin's MPA. Specifically, visitors' desired experiences were higher than their actual or gained experiences for all dimensions, as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Differences between desired experiences and actual experiences across push experience variables*

Factors	Experiences	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Embracing the Wilderness	Desired	4.2575	.63245	16.594	.000
	Actual	3.6935	.75364		
Personal Enrichment	Desired	3.8670	.75401	15.611	.000
	Actual	3.3870	.71702		
Tranquility and Escape	Desired	4.3608	.60819	13.065	.000
	Actual	3.9417	.69283		
Socializing	Desired	4.1367	.74680	10.268	.000
	Actual	3.7808	.80310		

### Comparison between the desired pull experience and the actual experience of the visitors

The same type of analysis was performed to test the differences between the mean values of desired pull experiences and actual experiences. The significant differences were found in all pair comparisons including the "Destination Appeal" factor ( $t=22.179$ ;  $P=.000$ ), the "Accessibility" factor

( $t=21.865$ ;  $P=.000$ ), the "Destination Attributes" factor ( $t=21.865$ ;  $P=.000$ ) and the "Amenities" factor ( $t=22.436$ ;  $P=.000$ ). These results also supported the first hypothesis in the case of pull motivational factors. In detail, as presented in Table 4, it was found that visitors' desired experiences are higher than their actual experiences in all pull experience dimensions.

**Table 4***Differences between desired experiences and actual experiences across pull experience variables*

Factors	Experiences	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Destination appeal	Desired	4.1132	.72589	22.179	.000
	Actual	3.1318	.78944		
Destination accessibility	Desired	4.1165	.81436	21.865	.000
	Actual	3.0380	.87800		
Destination attributes	Desired	3.8594	.91633	21.865	.000
	Actual	3.2900	.95790		
Destination amenities	Desired	3.8831	.96813	22.436	.000
	Actual	2.5469	.92911		

### Relationship between satisfaction and revisit intention with visitors' experience at Saint Martin's Island

Pearson Correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between visitors' satisfaction and revisit intention with the level of actual experience gained from visiting the Saint Martin's MPA. It was found that the level of experience gained affects visitors' satisfaction ( $r=0.335$ ;  $P<0.05$ ). This finding confirms the H2 of

the research. The higher the level of experience was the more likely the satisfaction increases. While the same direction of significant relationship was found between visitors' revisit intention with visitors' experience ( $r=0.104$ ;  $P<0.05$ ), as presented in Table 5. This endorsed the H3 of the research. The more experience gained the higher intention to revisit the Saint Martin's MPA in the future.

**Table 5***Correlation coefficients between satisfaction, revisit intention and gained experiences and of visitors*

Variables	Visitors Experience
Satisfaction	0.335*
Revisit Intention	0.104*

**Remarks:** \* P-value < 0.05

### Discussion

For push motivational factors, the first factor loadings of the factor Embracing the Wilderness suggest that visitors are strongly motivated by a desire to immerse themselves in natural environments that offer novel experiences distinct from their everyday lives. The second factor Personal enrichment reflects visitors' desires for personal growth, knowledge acquisition,

and status enhancement through their travel experiences. The high loading for cultural resource discovery in this factor suggests that despite Saint Martin Island being primarily known for its natural attractions, cultural elements remain important to visitors seeking multifaceted experiences. The third factor, Tranquility and Escape, reflects visitors' search for peaceful, restorative experience.

periences in aesthetically pleasing environments away from populated areas. On the other hand, pull motivational factors reflect the importance the visitors place on both comfort amenities and environmental qualities in first-factor Destination appeal, suggesting that basic services and aesthetic appeal work in tandem to attract visitors. The second factor, Destination accessibility, highlights the importance of navigational ease and a welcoming atmosphere in destination choice, whereas the third factor, Destination attributes, reflects visitors' interest in organized activities and practical considerations. The fourth pull factor, Destination amenities, represents supplementary services that enhance visitor comfort and security.

The study also found that visitors hold strong ties to the natural environment within the marine protected area. This result can be aligned with the study of Zhang & Wu (2022), who also found the mutual influence of environmental elements and personal requirements on tourism experiences. Travelers nowadays choose serene environments with beautiful vistas. This study found that they also want to avoid hot and humid weather as part of their tourism experiences. Lohmann & Hübner (2013), support these research findings by illustrating that climate and weather conditions force visitors to avoid the areas. In this study, visitors express strong respect for marine environments when they encounter natural resources while observing the island's blue waters. Visitors seek social outcomes that combine family time and friend reunions. They also value destination service tools, which include a variety of foods and comfortable lodging facilities. These findings are corroborated by research conducted by Liro (2021) that focused on the role of improved accommodation

facilities and quality restaurants on tourists' motivation. The lack of interest in social recognition and making new friends in this study shows a period of change toward natural personal journeys rather than societal engagement through traditional social tourism models. Visitors' opinions on cultural programs indicate a requirement for improved culturally based attractions that enhance natural site exploration at Saint Martin Island. Pearce and Lee's (2020S) research on the Travel Career Pattern illustrates that tourism experiences first serve as indicators of social status but thereafter develop into significant personal transforming results. These findings urge that Saint Martin's Island Marine Protected Area should enhance the natural experience quality while developing immersive environmental education programs and opportunities to engage personally and collectively with the marine ecosystem.

This study found strong support for hypothesis 1 (H1) of this study as actual experiences significantly differed from desired experiences. The biggest gaps existed between what visitors wanted to experience and what they encountered in wildlife observation, cultural engagement, and infrastructure and services. Wildlife observation, such as viewing sea birds and turtles, demonstrates the greatest discrepancy between what visitors hope to experience and what they ultimately achieve in their encounters. It means that people who visit expect genuine wildlife encounters, which end up failing to deliver the expected intense wildlife interactions they desire. In order to rectify this observed disparity, it is necessary to enhance the quality of tour guides so that they can easily locate the wildlife and effective management and conservation of wildlife are

also crucial to provide such experiences. Zhang et al. (2022) explain how these discrepancies develop because protected areas serve different purposes than tourists expect, which shows a hard-to-manage relationship between conservation programs and tourism service provision. This research finding matches the recent findings presented by Chen and Wong (2025) regarding marine tourism experience management. The experiential variations observed in cultural and historical engagement activities through local history and cultural understanding also signify major obstacles to developing proper cultural interpretation systems. The research found that visitors wish to develop profound cultural ties but encounter few possibilities to engage authentically. Mkono and Tribe (2021) conclude that this mismatch signifies pervasive representation issues in tourism, as destination narratives provide inadequate cultural experiences. Recent studies suggest that destinations require enhanced locally driven strategic interpretation techniques to prevent shallow representations of culture. The analysis of transportation facilities along with first aid services demonstrates significant structural deficiencies that affect the service delivery capabilities of the destination. Systemic issues concerning destination management alongside visitor support emerge from the large discrepancies between what visitors anticipate and actual experiences. Kim (2017) establish that these alterations negatively impact both visitor satisfaction and the competitive positioning of destinations. A comprehensive approach must develop destinations by linking visitor expectations with actual delivery standards to achieve success. The discovery confirms research by Kim (2017) on

destination competitiveness as well as Ahmed et al.'s (2024) study on marine protected area management in developing countries.

In this study, visitor actual experience and satisfaction exhibit a moderate positive relationship, which validates the second hypothesis (H2), thus showing experience quality has a substantial impact on satisfaction levels. The results are aligned with those reported by Thompson and Garcia (2024) concerning factors influencing marine tourism satisfaction. The correlation strength indicates that experience plays a role in satisfaction along with other influencing elements that support Hassan and Lee's (2024) entire model of protected area visitor satisfaction. The study also found a weak relationship in the case of the third hypothesis (H3) that indicates positive experiences alone providing only limited assurance of return visits. The research conducted by Park et al. (2024) about marine protected area revisit determinants supports these findings by showing external accessibility and costs as well as alternative destination options, influence return decisions. This suggests that, although positive experiences may increase the probability of revisiting, other factors, such as accessibility, travel expenses, or alternative destinations, may have a more significant impact. The successful investigation and administration of these additional factors could be essential for encouraging visitors to return to Saint Martin's Island.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study presents several comprehensive recommendations aimed at enhancing visitor satisfaction and promoting sustainable management of Saint Martin's Marine Protected Area. The

primary objective should be to ensure the comfort of visitors while also preserving the environment to fulfill the wilderness and tranquility desire of the visitors. It is important to focus on creating infrastructure and marketing that help people enjoy escaping hot and humid weather. This is because many tourists want to escape their everyday lives and find relief from the heat. The development strategy aligns with Saint Martin's natural characteristics by fulfilling tourist requirements for physical comfort. Development strategies must prioritize environmental management by promoting conservation and implementing guided environmental activities that reduce human intervention. Advanced environmental education programs focused on marine habitats should be created to rectify deficiencies identified in wildlife observation initiatives. Education programs must offer participatory learning experiences that maintain natural surroundings in their pristine condition. The visitor's desire for genuine natural experiences aligns with the conservation objectives of this strategy. The Island requires infrastructural development that enhances guest support services, but environmental conservation remains a primary concern. The Island should prioritize the development of a visitor information center, and support cultural events, and social amenities that foster significant experiences in socializing aspects. The Island requires immediate focus on enhancing its transportation infrastructure and first aid services due to its existing inadequate performance highlighted in this research. The suggested improvements require careful assessment of both the island's environmental sensitivity and its maximum visitor capacity. The cultural interpretation programs necessitate significant

enhancement due to visitors' considerable lack of cultural and historical participation. Tourism operators should promote sophisticated presentation methods while integrating Indigenous narratives to provide engaging cultural activities that enhance natural site charms. The developed activities must facilitate significant interactions with heritage materials that uphold the traditional practices and cultural values of local populations.

Destination management ought to develop immersive experiences such as sustainable activities, cultural events, and co-creation activities to enhance visitor satisfaction. Implementation of regular feedback surveys and training programs for staff and hosts is essential for maintaining high-quality services and responsive guest care. Research-based comfort needs necessitate supportive actions like enhanced facilities that address restroom cleanliness, seating areas, and clear signage. Marketing and promotion strategies require enhancement to ensure tourists perceive the offerings and unique attributes of the Island appropriately. To attract repeat visitors, it is necessary to address operational challenges by implementing visitor rewards programs, improving transportation access, and organizing seasonal celebrations. Local enterprises ought to collaborate with the destination to provide packages encompassing attractions as a method to enhance visitor appeal, thereby stimulating the local economy. These recommendations are designed to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between the objectives of nature conservation and the satisfaction of the visitors. Following the suggested guidelines could likely increase visitor satisfaction, as there is a good connection between experience and satisfaction. The study



found a weak connection between visitors' experience and how likely visitors are to return. This suggests that other factors besides quality need to be looked at to encourage more repeat trips. Destination management must adopt a comprehensive strategy that harmonizes tourist experiences with operational accessibility while preserving the ecological integrity of Saint Martin's Marine Protected Area.

This research can also guide future research. The present study only focused on the quantitative approach. However, the use of a mixed-method approach and longitudinal studies could generate deeper insights. Future studies can also incorporate some other variables, such as the role of place attachment

and emotional connections in visitors' revisit intention, the role of social media and online reviews shaping visitors' expectations and actual experiences. Further research can also focus on the comparison between Saint Martin's Island MPA and some other MPAs in developed or developing countries. The comparison may also focus on the management practices of the different MPAs with the best international practices. Any research focusing on socio-economic and environmental impact can also be assessed in the Saint Martin's Island MPA. These areas of research will not only enrich the existing body of knowledge but also guide the authority in visitor management and conservation.



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