



*Corresponding author: Ade Parlaungan Nasution, Program Studi Ilmu Manajemen, Program Pascasarjana Universitas Labuhanbatu, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

E-mail: adenasution@ulb.ac.id

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ecotourism: Examining the Driving Factors of Revisit Intention in Nature-Based Tourism in Labuhanbatu

Ade Parlaungan Nasution¹, Muhammad Yasir Arafat Pohan², Fadzil Hanafi Asnora³

¹ Program Pascasarjana Universitas Labuhanbatu, Labuhanbatu, Indonesia,

^{2,3}Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis Universitas Labuhanbatu, Labuhanbatu, Indonesia.

Abstract: This research aims to analyze the factors influencing tourists' revisit intention to nature-based tourism destinations in Labuhanbatu Regency, which has great potential for ecotourism development but faces challenges in fostering tourist loyalty. Using a quantitative approach with the Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method, this study examines the influence of tourist satisfaction, perceived destination sustainability, and destination image on revisit intention. The results show that all three variables have a positive and significant effect on revisit intention, with destination image as the strongest predictor, followed by tourist satisfaction, and perceived destination sustainability. The findings indicate that to increase revisit intention, destination managers need to focus on three main aspects: improving the quality of the tourism experience to create satisfaction, building and strengthening destination image through effective branding strategies and marketing communication, and implementing and communicating tangible sustainable tourism practices. This research provides theoretical contributions by integrating various theoretical perspectives (expectancy-disconfirmation theory, image formation theory, and theory of planned behavior) in the context of Indonesian ecotourism, and provides practical implications for Labuhanbatu tourism stakeholders in designing sustainable and competitive nature-based tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Ecotourism, Nature-Based Tourism, Tourist Satisfaction, Labuhanbatu.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nature-based tourism or ecotourism has become one of the fastest-growing tourism segments in various parts of the world. Ecotourism not only focuses on natural beauty but also prioritizes principles of sustainability, environmental preservation, and local community empowerment. Labuhanbatu Raya, with its abundant natural wealth such as tropical forests, rivers, and hilly areas, has great potential to be developed as an attractive ecotourism destination. This potential includes biodiversity, beautiful natural scenery, and local wisdom that can be a unique attraction for tourists.

Despite its significant potential, the development of ecotourism in Labuhanbatu Raya still faces various challenges, one of which is how to encourage tourists to have the intention to



revisit. Revisit intention is an important antecedent in measuring the success of a tourism destination because it indicates the level of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The quality of the tourism experience is a major factor influencing revisit intention. A pleasant experience, positive interaction with the natural environment, and adequate services can create strong memories for tourists. In addition, a study by Moon & Han, (2019) shows that tourist satisfaction derived from authentic and memorable experiences has a significant influence on their decision to revisit the destination.

In addition to the tourism experience, the perception of destination value is also a crucial factor. Destination value includes aspects of benefits perceived by tourists compared to the costs incurred, both financially and emotionally. According to research by Cater et al., (2020), tourists tend to have the intention to revisit if they feel they get high value from their visit, such as stunning natural beauty, environmental education, and unique cultural experiences.

Destination image is also no less important in influencing revisit intention. A positive image of a destination can increase its attractiveness and build a good perception in the minds of tourists. A study by Afshardoost & Eshaghi, (2020) shows that a strong destination image, encompassing visual, cultural, and ecological aspects, has a direct influence on tourist loyalty. This indicates the importance of effective marketing strategies to build and maintain a positive image of the Labuhanbatu ecotourism destination.

Furthermore, environmental and sustainability factors are also important considerations in ecotourism. Tourists are increasingly aware of environmental issues and tend to choose destinations that prioritize sustainable tourism practices. Research by Ritpanitchajchaval et al., (2023) confirms that commitment to environmental preservation and ecosystem sustainability has a positive impact on tourists' revisit intention, especially in nature-based destinations.

Labuhanbatu Raya, with its largely unexplored natural wealth, has great opportunities to develop sustainable ecotourism. Good management, supported by empirical research on factors influencing revisit intention, can be a strategic foundation for designing tourism development policies and programs in this region. This will not only increase the number of tourist visits but also encourage local economic growth and environmental preservation.

Referring to the explanation above, it is necessary to conduct research on the driving factors of revisit intention in nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu Raya. This research is in line with the National Research Master Plan (RIRN) 2017-2045, specifically on the research topic of Tourism Research Development and poverty alleviation. This research is also in line with the study area in the Renstra of Labuhanbatu University, which is on the issue of productive economy.

2. Literature Review

In the context of nature-based tourism, several key variables play an important role in determining tourists' intention to revisit a destination. These variables include the quality of the tourism experience, tourist satisfaction, perception of destination value, and destination image. This study aims to analyze the relationship between these variables and their impact on revisit intention.

The quality of the tourism experience is a primary factor influencing tourist satisfaction *wisatawan* Nasution et al., (2023). A positive experience can increase satisfaction and encourage revisit intention. A study by Chen et al., (2022) shows that high-quality tourism experiences contribute to tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. Furthermore, research by Dewi et al. emphasizes the importance of valuable experiences in the context of sustainable tourism, which can attract a higher market segment Dewi et al., (2022). The quality of the tourism experience is also closely related to destination image, where a good experience can strengthen a positive image in the minds of tourists (Luvsandavaajav et al., 2022).

Tourist satisfaction is the result of the experiences they have during their visit to a destination. Research by Jeong et al. shows that tourist satisfaction is greatly influenced by the destination's image and the quality of the experiences they have (Jeong et al., 2019). In this context, satisfaction includes not only emotional but also cognitive aspects, where tourists evaluate various components of the destination they visit (Kanwel et al., 2019). Furthermore, research by Cater et al. confirms that tourist satisfaction significantly contributes to their intention to return, indicating that a satisfying experience can create loyalty to the destination (Cater et al., 2020).

Perception of destination value relates to how tourists assess the benefits they gain from their visit compared to the costs incurred. Research by Kanwel et al. shows that the perception of destination value is positively related to tourist satisfaction, which in turn affects revisit intention (Kanwel et al., 2019). In the context of nature-based tourism, perceived value can include environmental, cultural, and unique experiential aspects offered by the destination (Sriboonlue, 2023). Therefore, destination managers need to understand and enhance this perceived value to attract more tourists.

Destination image is the overall impression tourists have of a place, formed by experiences, information, and communication received. A positive image can increase satisfaction and revisit intention. According to research by Yen et al., destination image plays an important role in promoting positive word of mouth (WOM), which can attract more visitors (Yen et al., 2022). Additionally, research by Ali et al., (2021) shows that a good destination image can increase tourist attachment to the destination, contributing to loyalty and revisit intention. A strong image can also be an effective marketing tool in attracting new tourists (Kuswardani et al., 2023).

The relationship between the quality of the tourism experience, tourist satisfaction, perception of destination value, and destination image is complex and interconnected. Research by Xue et al., (2022) shows that a good tourism experience can enhance destination image and satisfaction, which in turn increases revisit intention. Furthermore, research by Istiqomah et al. emphasizes the importance of destination attributes in shaping image and satisfaction, which contributes to revisit intention (Istiqomah et al., 2023). Thus, Destination managers need to focus on improving the quality of destination experiences and image to increase tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

This research differs from previous studies by focusing more deeply on the interaction between tourist satisfaction, sustainability perceptions, and destination image in the context of nature-based tourism. While previous research tended to separate these variables, this study attempts to integrate all variables into a single comprehensive analytical model.

3. Research Method and Materials

To achieve the objectives of this research, the method/design used is a quantitative approach aimed at testing predetermined hypotheses, which is deductive (J. F. Hair et al., 2010). The unit of analysis for this research is at the individual level, specifically the community of Labuhanbatu who own oil palm plantations. The data type is cross-sectional. Cross-sectional data is a type of data that captures a phenomenon at a single point in time (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The sample for this research consists of people in Labuhanbatu Regency who have visited nature-based tourist destinations in Labuhanbatu Regency. The sample size was determined using the maximum likelihood estimation method, with a suggested data count of 100 to 200 samples.

The data analysis technique used in this research employs SMART PLS to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a type of multivariate analysis in social sciences that includes multiple regression analysis to explain the relationship between independent and dependent variables, latent constructs, and their manifestations in complex models, which can be estimated or tested together (Sarstedt et al., 2023).



4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

The data used in this study is primary data obtained through two methods, namely online surveys and direct surveys of respondents. According to Neuman, (2014), surveys can observe field events by measuring using symbolic content to reflect, document, or represent abstract constructs.

Table 1. Questionnaire Return Rate

Description	Amount	Percentage
Questionnaire	103	100%
Inappropriate questionnaire	9	8,8%
Analyzable questionnaire	94	91,2%

Table 1 shows the number of respondents who completed the questionnaire via the distributed link. The total number of respondents who completed it was 103, a relatively small number due to demographic factors such as education level, which influenced respondents in filling out the questionnaire. Some respondents found it difficult to understand the meaning of the questions, thus not completing the questionnaire.

4.1.1. Outer Model Testing

The analysis method used in this study to analyze data is SEM PLS using SMART PLS 3 software. In the outer model testing section, several aspects need to be analyzed, namely validity testing, which consists of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability.

Table 2. Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Tourist Satisfaction	Destination Sustainability Perception	Destination Image	Revisit Intention
KW1	0.891	0.485	0.536	0.522
KW2	0.854	0.382	0.415	0.496
KW3	0.876	0.48	0.471	0.557
KW4	0.845	0.359	0.37	0.487
KW5	0.862	0.373	0.435	0.541
PK1	0.307	0.745	0.528	0.336
PK2	0.441	0.776	0.576	0.471
PK3	0.377	0.838	0.549	0.433
PK4	0.399	0.838	0.557	0.512
PK5	0.405	0.836	0.586	0.496
CD1	0.444	0.444	0.651	0.421
CD2	0.452	0.549	0.828	0.606
CD3	0.275	0.574	0.716	0.41
CD4	0.447	0.524	0.817	0.476
CD5	0.352	0.58	0.821	0.48
NC1	0.433	0.533	0.48	0.75
NB2	0.568	0.366	0.445	0.845
NB3	0.504	0.396	0.589	0.827
NB4	0.528	0.475	0.493	0.816
NB5	0.415	0.52	0.547	0.819

Based on Table 2 above, it can be seen that all items have met the existing prerequisites, meaning that these items are able to explain the research variables well. If the loading value has a correlation with other constructs, the correlated items can be removed, because these items cannot explain the research variables well. Research items can be said to be valid if their loading value ranges from 0.4 to 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Results with Fornell Larcker Criteria

Construct	Tourist Satisfaction	Destination Sustainability Perception	Destination Image	Revisit Intention
Tourist Satisfaction	0.866			
Destination Sustainability Perception	0.482	0.807		
Destination Image	0.516	0.692	0.77	
Revisit Intention	0.603	0.566	0.631	0.812

Table 4. Result of Reliability Testing

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Tourist Satisfaction	0.916	0.937	0.749
Destination Sustainability Perception	0.867	0.903	0.652
Destination Image	0.826	0.878	0.593
Revisit Intention	0.87	0.906	0.659

Table 4 shows the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. Based on the table, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are greater than 0.70. Thus, it can be said that all constructs in this study are reliable and consistent when used as a measure over time.

4.1.2. Inner Model Testing

Inner model testing aims to test path relationships and research hypotheses. In this study, testing was conducted to examine the three hypotheses by looking at the path coefficient (β) and the significance of the p-value.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test Results

Constructs	Path Coefficient	P Values
Tourist Satisfaction -> Revisit Intention	0.338	0.005
Destination Sustainability Perception -> Revisit Intention	0.163	0.023
Destination Image -> Revisit Intention	0.350	0.031

Based on the results of the path relationship above, it is known that all items used in this study have reached the lower limit of the loading value, so it can be said that these items can be used as a measuring tool and can be tested further.

4.2. Discussion

This research aims to analyze the factors influencing tourists' revisit intention to nature-based tourism destinations in Labuhanbatu Regency. Based on the analysis using the SEM-PLS method, all three hypotheses in this study were accepted, indicating that tourist satisfaction, perceived destination sustainability, and destination image significantly influence revisit intention. This discussion section will interpret these findings in depth by linking them to relevant literature, theoretical and practical implications, and the specific context of nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu Raya.



The Influence of Tourist Satisfaction on Revisit Intention

The research results show that tourist satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on revisit intention with a path coefficient of 0.338 ($p = 0.005$). This finding confirms the first hypothesis and is consistent with various previous studies that emphasize the crucial role of satisfaction in shaping tourist loyalty (Jeong et al., 2019; Kanwel et al., 2019).

Tourist satisfaction in the context of Labuhanbatu ecotourism reflects cognitive and affective evaluations of their experiences during visits to nature-based tourism destinations. A path coefficient of 0.338 indicates that a one-unit increase in tourist satisfaction will increase revisit intention by 0.338 units, assuming other variables are constant. Although tourist satisfaction is not the strongest predictor in this research model, its influence remains substantial and statistically significant at a 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$).

This finding supports the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, which states that satisfaction is formed when the actual performance of a product or service exceeds consumer expectations (Oliver, 1980). In the context of nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu, satisfied tourists are those who feel that their experiences from the natural beauty, local cultural authenticity, to the quality of service meet or even exceed their expectations. Research by Nasution et al., (2023) also confirms that high-quality tourism experiences contribute significantly to tourist satisfaction and the intention to return.

Furthermore, in the context of ecotourism, satisfaction does not only stem from hedonic aspects such as pleasure and relaxation, but also from eudaimonic aspects such as environmental learning, nature conservation, and interaction with the community. Dewi et al., (2022) emphasize the importance of valuable experiences in the context of sustainable tourism, which can attract a higher market segment and create deeper satisfaction.

However, it should be noted that although tourist satisfaction has a significant influence, its path coefficient (0.338) is lower than that of destination image (0.350). This indicates that in the context of nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu, the factors of perception and destination image play a slightly more dominant role compared to actual satisfaction. This phenomenon can be explained by cognitive dissonance theory, where tourists tend to align their perceptions with a previously formed positive image, even when the actual experience is not entirely satisfactory (Festinger, 1957).

The practical implication of this finding is that managers of nature-based tourism destinations in Labuhanbatu need to focus on improving the quality of tourist experiences holistically. This includes improving accessibility and basic infrastructure such as roads to tourist locations, parking areas, and sanitation facilities, as well as developing authentic and educational tourist attractions and activities, such as trekking, bird watching, or conservation education programs.

4.2.1. *The Influence of Tourist Satisfaction on Revisit Intention*

This study found that destination sustainability perception has a positive and significant influence on revisit intention with a path coefficient of 0.163 ($p = 0.023$). Although this path coefficient is the lowest among the three predictors, its significance at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) indicates that sustainability perception remains an important factor that cannot be ignored in the context of nature-based tourism.

This finding aligns with global trends where tourists are increasingly aware of environmental and sustainability issues. Research by Ritpanitchajchaval et al., (2023) confirms that commitment to environmental preservation and ecosystem sustainability has a positive impact on tourists' revisit intention, especially in nature-based destinations. In the context of Labuhanbatu, sustainability perception includes how tourists assess nature conservation efforts, waste management, local community empowerment, and environmentally friendly tourism practices.

The relatively low path coefficient value (0.163) can be interpreted from several perspectives. First, it may reflect that the awareness and concern of local tourists (Labuhanbatu community) regarding sustainability issues are still in the developing stage. Unlike international tourists or tourists from developed countries who tend to be more sensitive to environmental issues, domestic tourists in Indonesia may still prioritize other aspects such as natural beauty, accessibility, and affordable prices. Research by Sriboonlue, (2023) shows that the perception of destination value in the context of nature-based tourism includes environmental, cultural, and unique experience aspects, but the relative weight of each aspect can vary depending on the demographic and psychographic characteristics of tourists.

Second, a low coefficient can also indicate that sustainability practices in Labuhanbatu's nature-based tourist destinations are not yet fully visible or well-communicated to tourists. If tourists cannot clearly observe or understand the sustainability efforts made by destination managers or local communities, their perception of destination sustainability will be weak, and its impact on revisit intention will be limited.

Third, in a theoretical context, this finding can be explained through Ajzen, (1991) theory of planned behavior, which states that behavioral intention is influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this case, although tourists have a positive attitude towards sustainability (as indicated by the significant influence), other factors such as actual satisfaction and destination image have a greater weight in shaping revisit intention. This suggests that in the hierarchy of tourist decisions, sustainability aspects are in an important position but not the most dominant.

Nevertheless, the statistical significance of this relationship indicates that there is a segment of tourists who genuinely care about sustainability and consider it in their decision to revisit. This segment, although perhaps still a minority, represents a very potential market because they tend to have higher purchasing power, be more loyal, and be more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth (Pohan et al. 2025).

4.2.2. The Influence of Destination Image on Revisit Intention

Destination image was found to have a positive and significant influence on revisit intention with a path coefficient of 0.350 ($p = 0.031$), making it the strongest predictor in this research model. These findings confirm the third hypothesis and are highly consistent with extensive literature on the crucial role of destination image in tourism marketing (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Ali et al., 2021; Yen et al., 2022).

Destination image is a comprehensive mental representation of a place, formed from a combination of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person has about that destination (Crompton, 1979). In the context of nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu, destination image includes tourists' perceptions of natural beauty, environmental authenticity, unique flora and fauna, local wisdom, and the overall quality of the destination as a tourist spot.

The dominance of destination image as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.350$) indicates several important things. First, it shows that in the context of nature-based tourism, tourists' perceptions and expectations are often as important or even more important than actual experiences. This phenomenon is consistent with image formation theory, which states that destination image is formed through various sources of information (organic, induced, and autonomous) before a visit, and this image then influences the experience during the visit and post-visit evaluation (Gunn, 1972).

Second, these findings underscore the importance of effective marketing communication in shaping and maintaining a positive destination image. Research by Yen et al., (2022) shows that destination image plays a vital role in promoting positive word of mouth (WOM), which can attract more visitors. In the digital and social media era, destination image is not only shaped by official promotions from destination managers but also and even more strongly by

content shared by tourists through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and travel blogs.

In the specific context of Labuhanbatu, the image of nature-based tourism destinations is still in the formation and strengthening stage. As a relatively new and not widely known destination, Labuhanbatu has both opportunities and challenges in building a strong and positive image. The opportunity is that with the right strategy, Labuhanbatu can position itself as a unique ecotourism destination with characteristics that differentiate it from other destinations in North Sumatra or Indonesia in general. The challenge is how to effectively communicate these unique qualities and values to the right target market with potentially limited resources.

However, it is important to note that destination image is a fragile asset and can be easily damaged if not managed properly. Negative incidents such as environmental pollution, conflicts with local communities, or poor service can quickly spread through social media and damage a painstakingly built image. Therefore, reputation management and crisis management are important competencies that destination managers must possess.

4.2.3. Integration of Findings and Research Model

Overall, this research model is able to explain the variance in revisit intention well, as indicated by the R-squared value that can be calculated from the structural model. The three predictor tourist satisfaction, perceived destination sustainability, and destination image collectively contribute significantly to shaping tourists' intention to revisit nature-based tourism destinations in Labuhanbatu.

The pattern of influence found shows that destination image ($\beta = 0.350$) and tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.338$) have a relatively balanced and dominant influence, while perceived destination sustainability ($\beta = 0.163$) has a more moderate but still significant influence. This pattern indicates that in the context of nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu, tourists make decisions to revisit based on a combination of cognitive and affective evaluations of their experience (satisfaction), overall perceptions of the destination's quality and characteristics (image), and assessments of sustainability aspects and environmental responsibility (sustainability perception).

These findings have important theoretical implications. First, this research strengthens the argument that revisit intention in the tourism context is the result of a complex multi-dimensional evaluation process, not merely a function of one or two factors. Second, this research shows that in the context of ecotourism or nature-based tourism, traditional factors such as satisfaction and image remain dominant, but sustainability factors are also beginning to play an increasingly important role, although still of a smaller magnitude.

Third, this research provides empirical support for the integration of various theories that have often been used separately in tourism research, namely satisfaction theory (expectancy-disconfirmation theory), destination image theory (image formation theory), and pro-environmental behavior theory (theory of planned behavior). This integration shows that in the context of modern tourism, especially nature-based tourism, tourist decisions cannot be adequately explained by only one theoretical perspective, but rather require a more holistic and integrative approach.

5. Conclusion

This research makes an important contribution to understanding the factors influencing tourists' revisit intention to nature-based tourism destinations in Labuhanbatu Regency. The finding that tourist satisfaction, perceived destination sustainability, and destination image all significantly influence revisit intention provides clear guidance for tourism stakeholders in designing effective and sustainable development strategies. Labuhanbatu Regency has great potential to become a leading ecotourism destination in North Sumatra, with abundant natural wealth and unique authentic local culture. However, to realize this potential,



commitment and collaboration from all parties government, destination managers, businesses, local communities, and academics are needed to develop tourism that not only provides memorable experiences for tourists but also provides economic benefits for the community and contributes to environmental preservation.

The development of nature-based tourism in Labuhanbatu must be based on sustainability principles that ensure future generations can also enjoy the natural beauty and cultural richness that exists. With the right strategy, consistent implementation, and continuous evaluation, Labuhanbatu can become a successful ecotourism development model, proving that tourism can be an instrument for nature conservation, community empowerment, and balanced and sustainable economic growth. Finally, this research is expected not only to provide academic contributions but also to provide real practical benefits for tourism development in Labuhanbatu Regency. Hopefully, the results of this research can be a reference and inspiration for tourism stakeholders in making decisions and designing better strategies for a brighter and more sustainable future for Labuhanbatu tourism.

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