

Enhancing Revisit Intention Through Tourist Experience: The Role of Attraction and Accessibility in Special Interest Diving Tourism in Likupang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates how attraction and accessibility influence revisit intention through the mediating role of tourist experience in the context of special interest diving tourism. As one of Indonesia's designated super-priority destinations, Likupang offers immense potential for sustainable marine tourism, yet research on its revisit dynamics remains limited. A quantitative survey was conducted among 150 diving tourists using convenience sampling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) was employed to assess the relationships. The results indicate that both attraction and accessibility have significant positive effects on tourist experience, which strongly mediates revisit intention. The findings underscore the importance of experiential quality in forming tourist loyalty, especially in niche markets such as scuba diving. Practical implications are provided for destination developers and policymakers.

KEYWORDS: Special Interest Tourism; Revisit Intention; Tourist Experience; Diving Tourism; Accessibility; Attraction; Likupang

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism development has increasingly shifted from mass-oriented consumption toward experience-centered and special interest travel, driven by tourists seeking authenticity, immersion, and personal meaning. Within this paradigm, scuba diving tourism has emerged as one of the most experience-intensive forms of Special Interest Tourism (SIT), relying heavily on environmental quality, sensory engagement, and emotional fulfillment.

Indonesia, as a global marine biodiversity hotspot, possesses substantial potential for diving tourism. Likupang, located in North Sulawesi, has recently been designated as a super-priority tourism destination, positioning it as a strategic node for sustainable marine tourism development. Despite this designation, destination competitiveness cannot rely solely on natural resources. Sustaining tourist loyalty particularly revisit intention requires an in-depth understanding of how destination attributes are translated into memorable tourist experiences.

Existing international tourism studies emphasize that destination attributes alone are insufficient to generate loyalty unless they are perceived experientially. However, empirical evidence examining the mediating role of tourist experience in special interest diving tourism, particularly in emerging destinations, remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating how attraction and accessibility influence revisit intention through tourist experience in the context of Likupang's diving tourism.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Special Interest Tourism & Diving

Special Interest Tourism (SIT) refers to tourism motivated primarily by specific activities or interests rather than by general leisure (Trauer, 2006). Diving tourism represents a mature SIT segment characterized by high involvement, environmental sensitivity, and experience dependency (Garrod & Gössling, 2008). In the modern context, Stebbins (2024) categorizes diving as a form of "serious leisure," where participants seek a "career" in their hobby, making them more critical of destination quality than mass tourists. Recent scholarship by Ratih and Noer (2024) further emphasizes that in marine-based SIT, the value of the trip is determined not just by the activity, but by the "transformative potential" of the encounter with the marine ecosystem. Divers evaluate destinations based on underwater biodiversity, visibility, safety, and experiential uniqueness. This evaluation process has become increasingly complex; according to Suparno et al. (2025), the modern diver's decision-making is heavily influenced by "tourist engagement," where the physical attributes of a site like Likupang must be translated into deep emotional and cognitive connections during the dive to ensure a lasting impact. Suparno et al. (2025), the modern diver's decision-making is heavily

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2.3 Destination Attributes

Attraction encompasses both natural and experiential elements that stimulate tourist interest, including marine biodiversity, reef conditions, and underwater landscapes. Accessibility reflects transportation convenience, travel time, and infrastructure quality. International studies consistently demonstrate that these attributes significantly shape destination evaluation, yet their behavioral effects are often indirect. Destination attributes are increasingly recognized as the multidimensional foundation that shapes the competitive landscape of modern tourism. According to Wiyata et al. (2025), destination attributes such as unique attractions and safety directly stimulate positive emotions, which serve as the primary catalyst for creating Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE). This is further supported by the findings of Zebua et al. (2025), who emphasize that while attractions remain the most dominant factor (36.7%) in driving customer value, physical and digital accessibility (31.5%) act as critical functional enablers that determine the seamlessness of the tourist journey. Furthermore, a systematic review by Ilhamalimy et al. (2024) highlights that in the post-pandemic era, the synergy between these attributes—specifically the blend of natural beauty and reliable infrastructure—is what bridges the gap between initial visitor satisfaction and long-term revisit intention. Collectively, these recent studies suggest that for a destination to foster loyalty, it must transition from providing basic facilities to staging an integrated environment where superior attractions and effortless accessibility co-create a lasting psychological impact on the traveler.

2.4 Tourist Experience

Tourist experience is conceptualized as a holistic psychological response arising from interaction with destination attributes. Drawing on the experience economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), memorable tourism experiences foster emotional attachment and long-term behavioral intentions. Empirical studies increasingly recognize experience as a mediator linking destination attributes to loyalty outcomes.

Laela (2024) emphasize that in highly competitive destination environments, Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) is not merely a transient state of satisfaction but a crucial mediating factor that links destination service quality to revisit intention. "The conceptualization of the tourist experience has transitioned from a mere service encounter to a multidimensional psychological process that serves as the primary engine for destination loyalty. Recent research by Chen (2025) argues that the modern tourist experience is an inherently subjective phenomenon, shaped by the interaction between the visitor's sensory perceptions and the destination's symbolic meanings. This is further elaborated by Liu et al. (2025), who emphasize that the quality of these experiences is rooted in 'experientialization' and 'emotionalization,' where cognitive evaluations of destination attributes are processed through emotional filters such as enjoyment and memorability. Moreover, Laela (2024) demonstrates that this internal processing acts as a critical mediator; high-quality destination services do not directly guarantee loyalty but must first be converted into a 'Memorable Tourism Experience' (MTE) to trigger a positive revisit intention. Collectively, these studies suggest that the tourist experience in niche markets like diving is a transformative process where the destination's physical environment must align with the traveler's emotional expectations to foster long-term behavioral commitment.

2.5 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention represents a tourist's willingness to return to a destination and is widely used as an indicator of loyalty. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), positive experiential evaluations significantly increase revisit intention, particularly in high-involvement tourism such as diving. Octavia et al (2025) highlight that in the post pandemic era, tourist experiences synergize with online reviews to shape sustainable loyalty. The significance of revisit intention in the tourism industry has undergone a paradigm shift in recent scholarly discourse. According to a systematic literature review by Rahayu and

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Santoso (2024), the primary drivers of tourist loyalty have evolved from mere functional satisfaction toward a greater emphasis on emotional connectivity and personalized engagement. This shift is further validated by a meta-analysis conducted by Pratama et al. (2025), which demonstrates that Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) exert a significantly stronger influence on revisit intention than traditional variables such as pricing or promotion, particularly within niche special interest sectors. Specifically in the context of marine-based tourism, Nguyen and Wong (2024) establish that the synergy between environmental aesthetics (attraction) and ease of navigation (accessibility) serves as the fundamental cornerstone for creating positive visitor memories, which ultimately dictates the long-term commitment of tourists to return to a destination."

2.6 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of this study is rooted in the Mediated Relationship Framework, which posits that physical destination attributes do not directly generate loyalty. Instead, they must be transformed through the psychological and emotional lens of the visitor to create a lasting impact.

1. Independent Variables (Exogenous Constructs)

- **Destination Attraction:** Defined as the "core pull factor." In diving tourism, this refers to marine biodiversity and underwater landscapes. Sharafuddin et al. (2024) state that for nature based SIT (Special Interest Toursim), natural attributes are the primary catalysts for high level emotional engagement.
- **Accessibility:** Representing the "functional enabler." Unarto et al. (2023) highlight that while accessibility is a logical factor, its seamlessness significantly reduces "travel friction," allowing tourists to focus more on the experiential aspects of the trip.

This study proposes that:

- Attraction positively influences tourist experience
- Accessibility positively influences tourist experience
- Tourist experience positively influences revisit intention
- Tourist experience mediates the relationship between destination attributes and revisit intention

2.7 Hypothesized Relationships (Path Analysis)

1. **Attraction → Experience:** Based on Suparno et al. (2025), unique natural attractions in water-based tourism directly trigger sensory and cognitive engagement.
2. **Accessibility → Experience:** Following Unarto et al. (2023), ease of access positively influences the overall perception of the destination's hospitality, thereby enhancing the experience.
3. **Experience → Revisit Intention:** As established by Ratih & Noer (2024), a deep emotional connection and high engagement during the activity are the strongest predictors of a diver's commitment to return.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire distributed to 150 scuba divers who visited Likupang. Convenience sampling was applied due to the niche nature of the target population. Measurement items were adapted from established international scales and assessed using a five-point Likert scale.

Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS, which is suitable for predictive models and exploratory research in emerging tourism contexts.

4.1 Outer Model Results

The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity. All items showed satisfactory **factor loadings above 0.70**, indicating strong convergent validity. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) also surpassed the recommended thresholds (CR > 0.70; AVE > 0.50), confirming internal consistency.

Variable	Indicator	Loading	Status
Attraction	Unique underwater features	0.82	Valid
Accessibility	Easily reachable from the city center	0.79	Valid
Tourist Experience	Satisfaction with the diving experience	0.88	Valid
Revisit Intention	Willingness to return for diving in Likupang	0.90	Valid

Inner Model Results

The **structural model** (inner model) was evaluated using path coefficient and significance values. All proposed paths were statistically significant.

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Path	Coefficient	p-value	Significance
Attraction → Tourist Experience	0.44	0.001	Significant
Accessibility → Tourist Experience	0.37	0.003	Significant
Tourist Experience → Revisit Intention	0.69	0.000	Significant

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4.3 R-Square (R²)

- **R² for Tourist Experience** = 0.61
- **R² for Revisit Intention** = 0.48
- These values indicate that attraction and accessibility explain **61% of the variance** in tourist experience, and tourist experience explains **48% of the variance** in revisit intention.

DISCUSSION

The findings reinforce the growing consensus in international tourism literature that experience is the primary mechanism through which destination attributes influence loyalty. In special interest diving tourism, physical attributes such as biodiversity and accessibility are necessary but not sufficient conditions for revisit intention. Instead, their value lies in how they shape emotional, cognitive, and sensory experiences.

This study extends SIT research by providing empirical evidence from an emerging destination, thereby contributing to the geographical diversification of tourism studies, which have traditionally focused on developed markets.

In diving tourism, Revisit Intention is not just about returning to the same spot, it is about “Brand Loyalty” to a destination’s ecosystem.

Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE): Recent research by Laela (2024) confirms that For divers a revisit is triggered when the experience exceeds the “functional” (the dive itself) and becomes “emotional” (a sense of belonging to the marine environment).

The Mediation Effect: As shown in your SEM PLS results, the destination attributes (Attraction and Accessibility) do not directly “force” a diver to return. Instead, they must first be processed through the Tourist Experience filter. If the experience is high quality, it creates a “memory footprint” that leads to the intention to return (Octavia et al., 2025).

Attraction (0.44) is the strongest “Hook”, The Tourist Experience is the “Glue” that makes the tourists want to return. This aligns with the Experience Economy Theory (Pine & Gilmore), which posits that businesses (and destinations) must transition from “delivering services” to “staging experiences”.

5.1 Conclusion

This study confirms that tourist experience plays a central mediating role in shaping revisit intention within special interest diving tourism in Likupang, Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that destination attraction and accessibility do not directly generate tourist loyalty, but instead exert their influence through the quality of experiences perceived by divers.

Empirical results from the SEM-PLS analysis reveal that attraction has the strongest effect on tourist experience, indicating that underwater biodiversity, visual uniqueness, and natural authenticity remain the primary emotional triggers for divers. Accessibility functions as a critical supporting factor by reducing travel friction and enhancing overall comfort, allowing tourists to focus on immersive experiences. Tourist experience, in turn, shows a strong and significant influence on revisit intention, confirming its role as the psychological mechanism that converts destination attributes into long-term behavioral commitment.

The study contributes theoretically by extending Special Interest Tourism (SIT) and Experience Economy Theory into the context of emerging marine destinations. Practically, it highlights that sustaining competitiveness in super-priority destinations such as Likupang requires a shift from resource-based development toward experience-oriented destination management.

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C. RECOMMENDATIONS / SUGGESTIONS

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to one destination and uses convenience sampling. Future research is encouraged to:

- Compare multiple diving destinations (e.g., Likupang–Bunaken–Lembeh)
- Incorporate additional variables such as destination image, perceived value, or environmental attitude
- Apply longitudinal designs to observe actual revisit behavior

Policy Implications

- Local governments and tourism authorities should integrate experience-based indicators into destination performance evaluation, ensuring that super-priority tourism development aligns with sustainability and visitor loyalty objectives.

Theoretical Implications

- This study extends the application of **SIT theory** in marine-based tourism by validating how micro-level factors (attraction, accessibility) shape macro-level outcomes (loyalty behavior).
- The inclusion of **tourist experience as a mediator** enhances the explanatory power of traditional revisit intention models.

Managerial Implications

- Destination planners should continuously improve infrastructure and access, such as roads, boats, and signage, to ensure convenience.
- Tourism operators should curate high-quality underwater experiences including reef preservation, safety, and guided interaction to foster deeper emotional engagement.
- Marketing campaigns should highlight not only what Likupang offers visually, but also how it “feels” to be there emphasizing immersion, personalization, and connection with nature.
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- Destination managers should prioritize the preservation and enhancement of underwater attractions, including coral reef conservation, marine biodiversity protection, and dive-site zoning, as these elements form the emotional core of the diving experience.
- Infrastructure and accessibility improvements such as road quality, harbor facilities, transportation connectivity, and clear directional signage must be continuously upgraded to minimize travel barriers and improve perceived convenience.
- Diving operators are encouraged to design experiential packages that emphasize emotional engagement, safety, personalization, and environmental interpretation, transforming diving activities into memorable and meaningful experiences.
- Destination marketing strategies should shift from purely visual promotion toward experiential storytelling, highlighting immersion, exclusivity, and emotional connection with the marine ecosystem

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