



Drivers Influencing Customers' Visitation Patterns to Ecolodges: A Case Study of Cross River State, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

The natural habitat is unprecedentedly experiencing a detrimental impact on the hospitality industry globally; hence, alternative practices such as ecolodges have become inevitable eco-friendly tourism options. However, there is a shortage of quantitative evidence of the drivers influencing customers' visitation to ecolodges, particularly OMR and CRNP in Cross River State, Nigeria. Drivers influencing customer visitation and attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit were investigated in this study. A convenience sampling technique was employed to administer a structured questionnaire to the 635 tourists who have spent at least a night at the studied ecolodges. Descriptive statistics and correlation tests were used for the data analysis. From the results, better consideration of new destinations, alluring cultural and historical landmarks, and enjoying local life and customs were some notable influential push factors. The pull factors were enjoying good physical amenities, landscape and wildlife conservation, exploring, and learning about nature.

Keywords:

Customer Attractions,
CRNP,
Ecolodges,
Motivation Factors,
OMR.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a veritable mechanism for commerce, industry recovery, and prosperity (Oladeji *et al.*, 2022). This is based on the notion that the tourism sector makes a substantial contribution to global economies, resulting in welcoming surroundings that influence and entice tourists to travel. Tourism is a wealth creation, empowerment, employment generation, and opportunity tool if properly harnessed (Aslan, 2014; Wu & Wu, 2019). According to Wendt *et al.* (2022), tourism is a societal, cultural, and socioeconomic phenomenon in which an individual undertakes to travel outside his local environment and stay at least a night for business, pleasure, or other purposes in less than a year. To address the needs of its clients who have journeyed far from their residences, the industry of hospitality provides a wide range of services, including housing, food, drinks, and various additional services. That explains why the hotel business is booming, accounting for more than 10 percent of global gross domestic product (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2017). Likewise, the hotel business has grown in prominence as a result of the rapid global growth over the past few years. The hospitality business is a multibillion-dollar economy that depends on leisure and vacation availability, spendable income, and overall consumer happiness (Anwar, 2017). According to the research conducted by Stranjancevic & Bulatovic (2015) and Rasoolimanesh *et*

al. (2016), the number of guests and preference for services relating to hospitality tend to outpace what conventional hotels and restaurants offer. This raises a concern for top managers about whether the standard of services and products matches the needs of consumers and, more importantly, to what extent they meet or exceed patrons' desired expectations. According to Shamsudin *et al.* (2019), the hotel business naturally prioritises client happiness because, customers are influenced to visit ecolodges for a variety of push and pull reasons.

In the study undertaken by Kukoyi and Ijose (2023) that examined recreation and holiday practices among manufacturing company employees in Nigeria, the average number of periods available outside of work, the availability of leave, funding, and accessibility to recreational facilities were known variables that influence the desire to engage in recreational activities. To this end, Schlesinger *et al.* (2020) acknowledged that consumers use their perceptions of characteristics to evaluate the offer and quality of service provided throughout visitors' stay in a place. In this setting, a positive connection might boost a consumer's commitment and improve their willingness to return (Gbenga & Osotimehin, 2015). Contentment thus becomes an urgent concern for all firms seeking to develop and maintain competitive advantages in the evolving business climate (Bhakane, 2015), with revisit intentions being a particularly powerful aspect.

Keeping satisfied consumers is profitable for any business to thrive; thus, a successful hospitality business is dependent on comprehension of the essential variables that govern client satisfaction because it is a critical component of the business's long-term benefit (Khuong & Quyen, 2016; Kara & Mkwizu, 2020).

The foregoing explains why Ecolodge focuses on various ways to set itself apart from conventional hospitality by offering products that are attractive to consumers looking for increased satisfaction in an environment that is demanding and unstoppable in terms of market competition and customer demands (Bhakane, 2015). It also pays consideration to ecological consciousness in implementing learning principles (Han, 2021) that foster visitation to ecotourism destinations. Furthermore, Salleh *et al.* (2013) investigated how pleased Malaysian visitors were with their journeys. They discovered that the country's breath-taking terrain, distinct customs, and culture, as well as the welcoming demeanour of its inhabitants and the warm reception provided, attract tourists. Lee *et al.*'s (2014) study of eco-tourist motivation and revisit intention in South Korea found that rest, pressure release, and knowledge seeking were important variables in tourists' repeated returns.

Similarly, Mutanga *et al.* (2017) investigated tourists' motives for visiting Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou and Matusadona National Parks, as well as their satisfaction with the sights they witnessed while taking part in wildlife tourism. According to the study, tourists visit the national parks for a variety of reasons, including seeking information, appreciating and admiring the ecosystems, and having an emotional attachment to nature. Again, Njagi's *et al.* (2017) study on 'Understanding the travel motive among young travellers in Kenya: the 'push' and 'pull' paradigm' investigated 132 visitors at Nairobi National Park. Using descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the data collected, the survey showed that the most influential driving factors were enjoyment, novelty, adventure, and relaxation. Likewise, beautiful landscapes, exciting weather, an unusual setting, the availability of outdoor and indoor sporting facilities, and camping options were identified as the top factors enticing young tourists to Kenya.

According to Hsu *et al.* (2009), push drives explain travel intents, whereas pull motives explain why people prefer certain destinations for visits. Uysal *et al.* (2009) push-pull dynamics in travel decisions are often applied in many research studies. 'Push' denotes the underlying motivation for tourists to search for and select indefinite tourism destinations. Liu's (2019) thesis proposes that push motivation is a socio-psychological component that encourages tourists to discover new sites and participate in tourist-related events. Karamehmedović (2018) described 'push travel motivation' as a subconscious urge that encourages an individual to go on a leisure vacation. The push element can be regarded as a form of innate

drive. Motivation is a psychological need and a strong desire to attain one's goals (Karamehmedović, 2018; Liu, 2019). Regarding the foregoing, Shahane and Fernandes (2015) stated that the primary motivators driving consumer decision-making regarding destinations are relaxation and pleasure. Sung *et al.* (2016) found explanations for why travellers choose to travel to Taiwan; these included travel for leisure, enlightenment, escape, shopping, culture, attractions, sporting facilities, and seeing wildlife and flora. Furthermore, Liu *et al.* (2021) concurred that visitors to national parks do so for the scenic setting, an opportunity for leisure, an opportunity for socialisation, exhibitions, and the necessity of avoiding family and urban intrusions. Harahsheh *et al.* (2020) asserted that the need for social connections and status is what drives tourists to travel. Furthermore, Fung and Jim (2015) identified three elements that affect visitors' behaviour, which include heritage, natural ambience, social factors, and accessibility. According to Kwan *et al.* (2010), learning new things, experiencing the outdoors, or experiencing a different culture are the main reasons eco-tourists go on trips.

Cohen *et al.* (2014) and Harahsheh *et al.* (2020) noted that a variety of destination features draw tourists. In the opinion of Awaritefe (2004), there exist key variables that impact the inclination to choose a specific tourist location, such as self-actualization, viewpoint, leisure, recreational activities, cultural background, and learning. Some essential factors that should be taken into account while choosing a tourist destination include attractiveness, quality of services, safety and security, amenities and facilities, accessibility, and locational considerations. The study conducted by Erol *et al.* (2023) revealed that natural characteristics, which include flora and wildlife, eco-activities, and the local way of life, were some identified destination characteristics that motivated visitation to ecolodge. According to Sumanapala *et al.* (2015) and Ban *et al.* (2022), the ecolodge's environmental and cultural features were two of its main lures for visitors. Ji *et al.* (2023) reported that extrinsic elements such as weather and the length of the shoreline at tourist locations have a significant role in influencing tourists' decisions to visit a certain place. A safe destination with a positive reputation, a welcoming host community, a range of offerings, natural attractions, cuisine, and culture are examples of pull factors that can lengthen visitors' stays, boost spending, and encourage the desire to return (Harahsheh *et al.*, 2020). According to Kassean and Gassita (2013), the primary draw factors are the distinct temperature, the breathtaking terrain and landscape, the distinctive flora and animals, and the cultural proclivity of the people.

Oyunchimeg and Gantuya (2021) concurred that a variety of variables, which may be classified as "push" or "pull" factors, encourage travellers to stay in lodges or other

locations. Fundamentally, the factors that urge people to travel are thought of as internal forces or intrinsic motivations. They include longings for leisure, adventure, relaxation, and escape from the daily stresses of the workplace, as well as a yearning to go beyond the sense of isolation that permeates present conduct. Therefore, the constructs influencing tourist visitation may be regarded as forces that urge individuals to undertake travel, highlighting people's socio-psychological wants. Nonetheless, a destination's amenities, such as products and services, housing, dining options, prices, facilities, and appealing and unique design, are usually what entice visitors. Using the characteristics found in the hospitality framework, researchers (Karamehmedović, 2018; Liu, 2019) have additionally examined promotional components that are more physiologically and emotionally oriented. When ecolodge managers and developers employ these components, they can appeal to more tourists. Push factors that are appropriately understood and applied by site developers might acceptably result in a pull, mostly from extrinsic components.

Although, push factors are not directly related to destination qualities, they may make it possible for pull factors to be activated. Consequently, it is expected that tourist destinations will make an effort to meet the expectations of patrons concerning prices, amenities (such as lodging, food, and recreational facilities), and, more importantly, the standard of services and goods provided. This suggests that to meet the demands and desires of its clients, destination management may occasionally need to improve the services they offer. In light of this, Imoagene *et al.* (2021) noted that 'push' is a crucial factor in determining why tourists choose to stay at ecolodges. This is because, as motivation is tied to holidaymakers' needs, goals, and interests, it is essential for assessing their behaviour, particularly in destination selection. Most significantly, there are many different and intricate reasons why visitors engage in tourism, and

these reasons are more complicated as a result of innovation. This means that to assist visitors in having more rewarding, joyful, and memorable experiences, there should be a consistent and continuous study on factors influencing customer visitation patterns and the reasons behind them (Atuk *et al.*, 2020; Shen *et al.*, 2020). As reviewed above, extensive research on the factors influencing tourist visitation patterns has been documented in tourism-related literature but is quantitatively inadequate, with particular reference to OMR and CRNP as ecolodges. A convenient sampling technique was adopted to investigate the drivers influencing customers' visitation patterns and approaches to promoting customers' revisit intentions. Tourists' drive and visitation patterns are essential to assessing tourists' behaviour, choices, and needs. This study examines the drivers influencing customers' visitation patterns to ecolodges in Cross River State, Nigeria. These influential factors that drive tourists are paramount if ecolodge operators must sustain and hold on to their customers for repeat patronages. The investigators bridged the methodological and locational gaps through the following research questions:

1. Are there drivers influencing customers' visitation patterns? And
2. What are the attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit ecolodges in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Hypothesis (H_0): There is no relationship among the drivers influencing customers' visitation patterns and attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

For this investigation, Obudu Mountain Resort (OMR) and Cross River National Park (CRNP) were the two selected ecolodges in Cross River State (Figures 1 and 2).

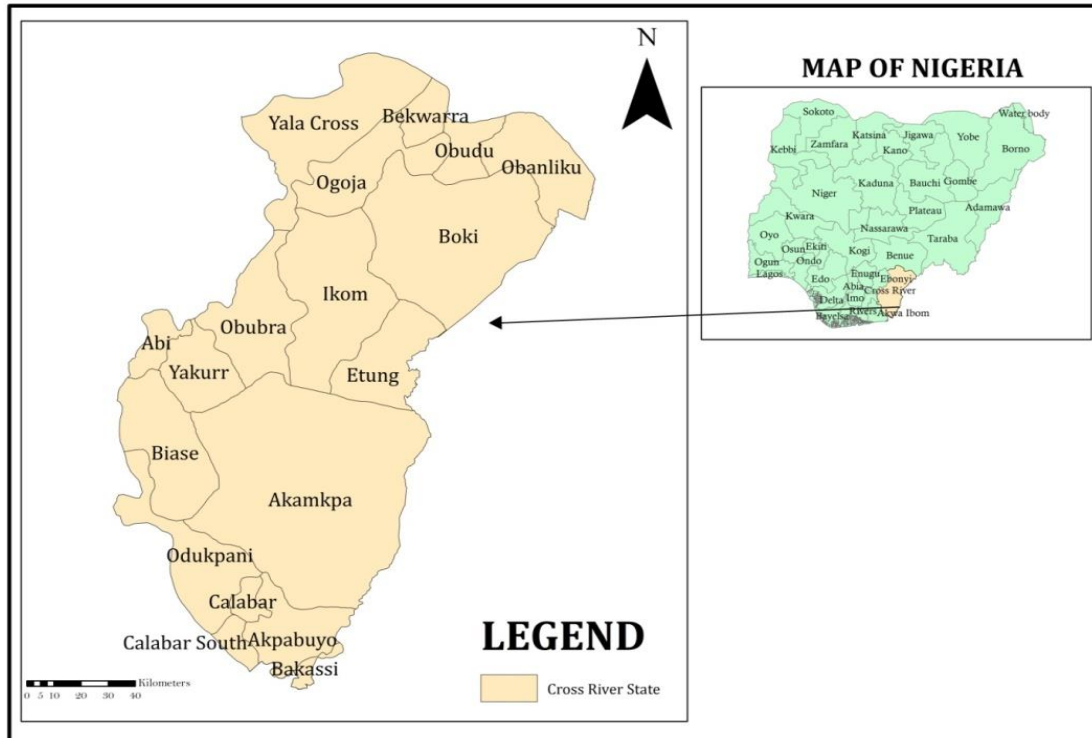


Figure 1: Study Area depicted on the Map of Nigeria.

Source: Ministry of Lands and Housing, Cross River State

Obudu Mountain Resort (OMR): Its origin is found in the Scottish rancher Mr. Caughley, who travelled across the mountain ranges for the first time in 1949 with another rancher, Mr. Hugh Jones, and returned in 1951 (Amalu, et al., 2012). It is located in Cross River State, 110 kilometres east of Ogoja and 65 kilometres north of Obudu Town. Its northern boundary is shared with Cameroon on a somewhat level plateau of the Oshierigde in the Sankwala Mountains, in Obaniliku Local Government Area (Figure 2). OMR's dimensions are around 134 square kilometres, with a surface area of 104 square metres, and an elevation of 5,200 feet (1,576 metres) above sea level. Located between longitudes $90^{\circ}22'0''$ and $90^{\circ}22'45''$ East and latitudes $60^{\circ}21'30''$ and $60^{\circ}22'30''$ North, it has a warm temperate climate that provides landscapes of undulating grassland and Montana woodland. Ugwukah and Obomanu (2020) claimed that it is a location of exquisite beauty, astounding panoramas, and wonderful serenity.

Cross River National Park (CRNP): This national park is located in Cross River State. The two separate parts of Oban and Okwangwo were founded in 1988 and 1991, respectively. The park's northern and central portions

include over 4,000 square kilometres of mostly humid tropical rainforests, and its riverine zones are interspersed with mangrove-dominated wetlands. As stated by Nneji *et al.* (2021), one of the parks' constituent regions is Guinea-Congo. CRNP features a closed canopy with occasional trees that reach heights of 40 to 50 metres. The Oban Hills Division is located at $8^{\circ}35'0''\text{E}$, $5^{\circ}25'0''\text{N}$, and 8.58333°E , 5.41667°N , respectively, with a total area of 2,800 square kilometres. The division is the sole biologically protected region in the Republic of Cameroon, along with Korup National Park. In the same vein, according to Ogunjobi *et al.* (2010), coordinates 9.23333°E , 6.28333°N , and $9^{\circ}14'00''\text{E}$, $6^{\circ}17'00''\text{N}$ are the locations of Okwangwo division (previously known as Boshi, Okwangwo, and Boshi Extension Forest Reserves). The division is surrounded by over 920 square kilometres of land and is 150 to 1,700 metres above sea level. It is separated from the Oban region in the southwest by the Obudu plain, which is bordered by the Mbe Mountains Community Forest (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2015). The Obudu Plain has around 50 square kilometres of discontinuous rainforest.

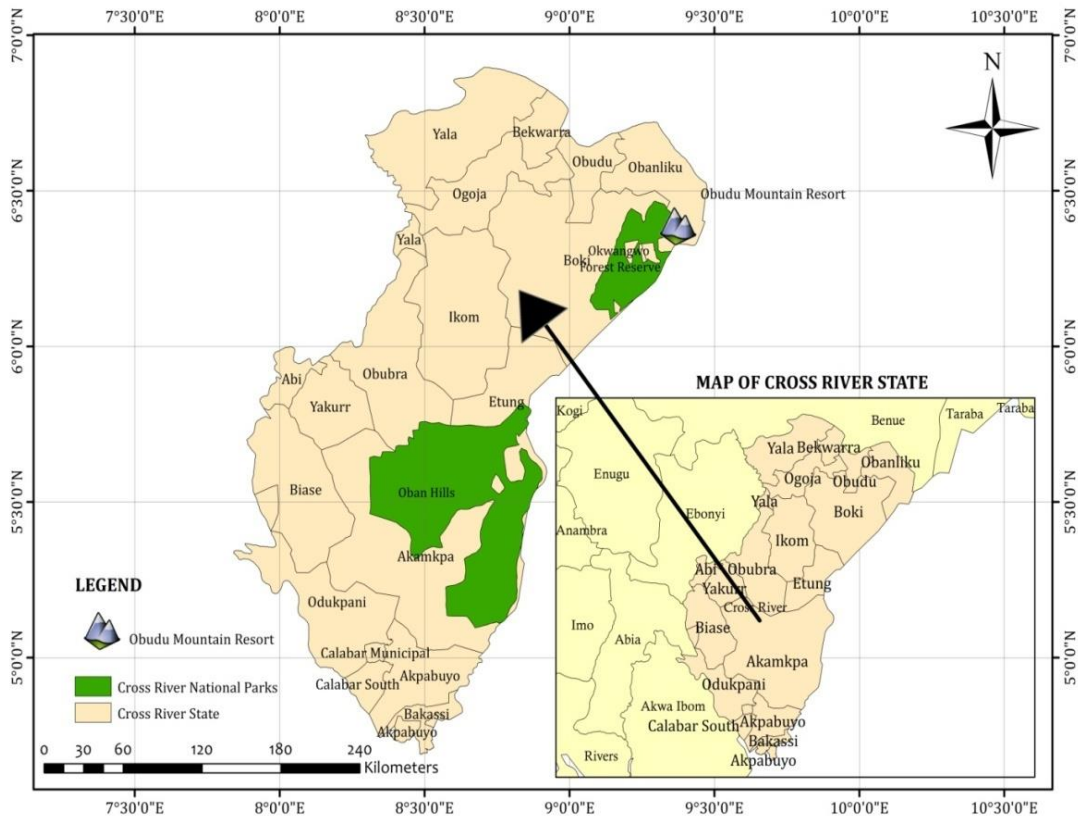


Figure 2: Map showing Obudu Mountain Resorts and Cross River National Park.
 Source: Ministry of Lands and Housing, Cross River State

Information for this research came from primary and secondary sources. The principal data was gathered through a structured questionnaire social survey of the employees and visitors of CRNP and OMR, and participatory observation. In contrast, data from secondary sources included current relevant data from the

selected ecolodges documentation and Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. A total of five years of visitors to OMR and CRNP who must have stayed at least one night in the selected destinations make up the survey population for this study (Table 1).

Table 1: Tourist influx to OMR and CRNP (2019-2023)

Year	Foreign OMR	Domestic OMR	Foreign CRNP	Domestic CRNP
2019	4,385	10,230	12	583
2020	3,932	9,173	8	1,280
2021	2,100	9,473	23	199
2022	2,267	11,955	10	812
2023	2,472	11,196	34	1,864
Total	14,156	53,027	87	4,738

Source: Field Survey

Identification and unit classification of the research population were necessary components of the sampling frame. According to Ozturk (2014), the reason behind this is that researching a whole population is typically too costly or time-consuming. The OMR front office desk

and the CRNP head office in Akampa, Oban division were, the places where the five-year (2019-2023) tourist influx data was gathered. In Table 2, the study's sample frame is presented.

Table 2: Sampling frame of the tourists (2015-2019)

Year	OMR	CRNP
2019	14,615	595
2020	13,105	1,288
2021	11,573	222
2022	14,222	822
2023	13,668	1,898
Total	67,183	4,825

Source: Field Survey

The sampled units were found to be excessively huge for this investigation; thus, the researchers took an average of the sample units. The following method was used to get the mean of the study population:

The mean of the population = μ and is given by

$$\mu = \frac{\sum X}{N} \dots\dots (1)$$

Where Σ is the summation, X represents the individual population in the group, and N is the number of items in the group (equation 1).

Population mean for five years of influx of tourists to the study area

i. OMR

Solution:

Sum X values = 7183

$67183 \div 5 \text{ years} = 13437$

ii. CRNP

Solution:

Sum X values = 4825

$4825 \div 5 \text{ years} = 965$

In this study, the Taro Yamane 1967 formula

$$(n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}) \dots\dots (2);$$

was updated by Anwuri and Nzei (2022) using finite sample sizes to evaluate the method applied to determine the sample size as shown below:

N is the total population of tourists, e is level of precision (0.05), and n is the sample size. Imputing the relevant data into formula 2; the sample size for tourist influx to OMR

was 388 and CRNP was 283, accounting for a total of 672 participants.

Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was employed in both locations to distribute the questionnaire and gather the data (Hapsari, 2018; Simpson *et al.*, 2020). Respondents who were over the age of eighteen and had stayed at least one night in the ecolodge between July 2023 and December 2023 were selected as the survey's focus group. When guests arrived at the ecolodge, they were given a survey to fill out by one of the research's investigators through the educated front desk staff on the requirements for the study. Even in cases where a room had many visitors, one questionnaire was administered. Respondents completed the survey and left it in an enclosed container at the checkout desk.

To evaluate and understand the results from the personal observation survey and support the quantitative information obtained, participatory observation using tour guides was used to capture occurrences and people's behaviours. Essentially, to also gain access to the facilities and have first-hand knowledge of the hospitality products and services offered and the calibre of services provided at each location, the researchers made two trips to the two locations and stayed at each ecolodge for two weeks.

Table 3: Questionnaire Administration

S/No	Survey Destination	Questionnaire Administered	Questionnaire Retrieved	Questionnaire not Retrieved	Percentage Retrieved (%)	Percentage Not Retrieved (%)
1	Cross River National Park	283	266	17	94	6
2	Obudu Mountain Resort	388	369	19	95	5
Total		671	635	36	95	5

Source: Field Survey

Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS, 25.0) was deployed to analyse the data obtained at Univariate (descriptive: weighted mean) and Bivariate (Spearman Rho) rank correlation test levels, and to validate, or

otherwise of the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no relationship among the drivers influencing customers visitation and attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit the study area. A weighted mean

(WM) statistic of the drivers influencing customer visitation was conducted to verify the impact level of the drivers influencing ecolodge visitation. A researcher can weigh each impact size by the number of samples used in the experiment if they are given a collection of effect proportions (Rukhin, 2009). To analyse the data gathered, a 5-point Likert scale (from Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5) was used (Table 5), and the results were ranked from one denoting a low level of agreement, to five signifying high agreement. Thus, a mean score greater than 3.5 is considered to be a strong positive impression, whereas a weighted value less than 3.5 indicates a weak impression. From Somocor (2017), the following decision was adopted: SA= Strongly Agreed (4.50-5.00), A= Agreed (3.50-4.40), M= Moderate (2.50-3.4), D= Disagreed (1.50-2.40), SD= Strongly Disagreed (<1.00-1.50).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Weighted mean and Spearman Rho rank correlation analysis were used to present the results of the relationship among the drivers influencing customers' visitation to the chosen ecolodges. The average response distribution to each of the "push" and "pull" motivational elements is shown in Tables 4 and 5. Based on their shared characteristics with pull factors (pleasure-seeking), destination traits, and culture (push factors), items related to the factors were categorised into four key components. As a result, the first construct stands for the

cultural component, which entails discovering new locations, going to historical and cultural landmarks, and experiencing local traditions. The second construct outlines three things that are related to relaxation: avoiding the demands of work, feeling at home away from home, and being physically and emotionally rejuvenated. In contrast, the pull factors are represented by the third and fourth constructs. Consequently, the third construct is called "destination attributes," and it comprises three components: making use of excellent physical facilities, seeing the preservation of the environment and animals, and visiting locations where one feels safe. The fourth construct is pleasure-seeking, which includes pursuing adventure, learning new things, and exploring nature, as well as enjoying entertainment and good times with other travellers who have similar interests.

As demonstrated by Table 4, the respondents concurred that they go to ecolodges for a variety of reasons, including to visit historical and cultural sites (WM =4.00, SD =1.23), to expand their knowledge of new places (WM =4.05, SD =1.26), and to experience the local way of life (WM =3.86, SD =1.20). Moreover, the research findings indicate that participants visited OMR and CRNP primarily to unwind, feel emotionally and physically rejuvenated (WM of 4.01, SD = 1.16), experience a home-away-from-home feeling (WM = 3.87, SD = 1.24), and primarily to escape work-related stress (WM = 3.66, SD = 1.34).

Table 4: Drivers influencing ecolodge visitation pattern (Push Factors)

Culture	SA	A	M	D	SD	Weighted sum	Weighted mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Increase knowledge of new places	234	166	48	48	49	2573	4.05	1.26	Agreed
Visit Historical and cultural sites	278	220	44	42	51	2537	4.00	1.23	Agreed
Enjoy local life/custom	230	233	62	71	39	2449	3.86	1.20	Agreed
Relaxation	SA	A	M	D	SD	Weighted sum	Weighted mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Feel home away from home	258	186	93	52	48	2455	3.87	1.24	Agreed
Emotionally and physically refreshed	285	200	45	84	21	2549	4.01	1.16	Agreed
Escape from the pressures of work	232	164	97	78	64	2327	3.66	1.34	Agreed

Note: SA= Strongly Agreed (4.50-5.00), A= Agreed (3.50-4.40), M= Moderate (2.50-3.40), D= Disagreed (1.50-2.40), SD= Strongly Disagreed (1.00-1.50)

Source: Field Survey

From Table 5, the visitors strongly agreed that landscape and wildlife conservation was one of the destination's attributes that drew them in (WM =4.26, SD =0.96), and also agreed that they are drawn to enjoy good and physical amenities as a destination attribute, which accounted for (WM =4.04, SD =1.33). Again, WM = 4.11, and SD = 1.14 represented the people who said they visit locations where they feel safe. Another pull factor (WM of 4.52, SD = 0.75) that was largely agreed upon by

respondents was the desire for pleasure. They were drawn to the place in search of adventure, education, and natural exploration. Similarly, participants acknowledged that they visit the ecolodges to be amused and have fun (WM =3.95, SD =1.15), and they also consented to socialising with other travellers who share their interests for pull-pleasure seeking variables (WM =3.96, SD =1.08) to OMR and CRNP.

Table 5: Attractions influencing ecolodge visitation pattern (Pull Factors)

Destination Attributes	SA	A	U	D	SD	Weighted sum	Weighted mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Enjoy good physical amenities	349	132	46	48	60	2567	4.04	1.33	Agreed
Landscape and wildlife conservation	318	234	32	35	16	2708	4.26	0.96	Agreed
Go to places where one feels safe	313	182	61	52	27	2607	4.11	1.14	Agreed
Pleasure Seeking	SA	A	U	D	SD	Weighted sum	Weighted mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Have fun and be entertained	255	222	55	78	25	2509	3.95	1.15	Agreed
Mix with fellow tourists with similar interest	245	220	75	88	7	2513	3.96	1.08	Agreed
Seek adventure, learn and explore nature	393	208	16	9	9	2872	4.52	0.75	Strongly Agreed

Note: SA= Strongly Agreed (4.50-5.00), A= Agreed (3.50-4.40), M= Moderate (2.50-3.40), D= Disagreed (1.50-2.40), SD= Strongly Disagreed (1.00-1.50)

Source: Field Survey

Table 6 shows the results of the relationship between the drivers influencing customers’ visitation to the study area. The following variables were analysed using the Spearman Rho rank correlation test: feeling at home away from home (HOMAWAY), loving local life and customs (CUSTOM), visiting historical and cultural sites (HISCULT), discovering new locations (DISCO), and being mentally and physically refreshed (REFRESH).

Others include getting away from work-related stress (STRESS), enjoying physical amenities (AMENIT), conserving the environment and wildlife (CONSERV), visiting safe havens (SAFE), engaging in pleasurable activities (ENJOY), meeting new people and sharing interests (INTERES), seeking adventure, learning new things, and exploring nature (ADVENT).

Table 6: Result of the relationship between drivers influencing customers’ visitation to selected ecolodges in the study area

Drivers Influencing visitation	Spearman Rho Correlation Test					
	DISCO	HISCULT	CUSTOM	HOMAWAY	REFRESH	STRESS
DISCO	1.000	0.499**	0.377**	0.425**	0.343**	0.204**
HISCULT		1.000	0.343**	0.284**	0.335**	0.155**
CUSTOM			1.000	0.425**	0.379**	0.223**
HOMAWAY				1.000	0.462**	0.276**
REFRESH					1.000	0.369**
STRESS						1.000

Drivers	Influencing	DISCO	HISCULT	CUSTOM	HOMAWAY	REFRESH	STRESS
AMENIT							
CONSERV							
SAFE							
ENJOY							
INTERES							
ADVENT							
visitation							
DISCO		0.307**	0.256**	0.324**	0.359**	0.186**	0.286**
HISCULT		0.417**	0.338**	0.279**	0.362**	0.326**	0.247**
CUSTOM		0.315**	0.372**	0.271**	0.328**	0.342**	0.292**
HOMAWAY		0.400**	0.350**	0.362**	0.503**	0.212**	0.269**
REFRESH		0.445**	0.350**	0.369**	0.445**	0.303**	0.379**
STRESS		0.330**	0.191**	0.558**	0.467**	0.232**	0.245**
AMENIT		1.000	0.310**	0.337**	0.485**	0.249**	0.376**
CONSERV			1.000	0.273**	0.348**	0.352**	0.412**
SAFE				1.000	0.453**	0.304**	0.313**
ENJOY					1.000	0.317**	0.366**
INTERES						1.000	0.377**
ADVENT							1.000

**Correlation significance at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey

The correlations between the push and pull drivers influencing visitation to the chosen ecolodges are shown in Table 6. The Spearman Rho test coefficients of connection between seeking solace from work-related stress and visiting safe havens were statistically significant ($r_s = 0.558$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, $r_s = 0.503$, $p < 0.05$, and $n = 671$ were estimated as the relationship between having fun and being amused as a pull factor and feeling at home away from home as a push component. Also, the correlation between visiting historical and cultural sites and learning new locations as push factors reveals a statistically significant positive correlation ($r_s = 0.499$) at $P < 0.05$. Additionally, a positive relationship ($r_s = 0.485$) was shown to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) between enjoying decent physical amenities and having fun and being amused. Once more, an additional test accounted for a positive correlation between having fun and being amused as a pull factor and escaping the stresses of work as a push factor, with $r_s = 0.467$ statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

The relationship between feeling at home away from home and experiencing both physical and emotional renewal revealed a statistically significant positive coefficient ($r_s = 0.462$, $P < 0.05$). This suggests that clients are psychologically and physically rejuvenated in the study area because they feel at home away from home. A positive correlation coefficient ($r_s = 0.453$) that was statistically significant at $P < 0.05$ also existed between visiting areas where one feels secure, having fun, and being amused. This demonstrates that travellers in the study region visit locations where they feel comfortable having fun and being entertained.

To verify the coefficient of this relationship, the value of χ^2 -score was obtained from the SPSS analysis, and a decision was taken by comparing the calculated and tabulated values of χ^2 at 0.001 degree of freedom.

The test equation is as follows:

$$t = r * \text{Sqrt} [(n-2) / (1-r^2)] \dots \quad (3) \text{ (Kothari, 2011),}$$

where $n = 635$ and r is the value obtained from SPSS analysis.

From Hypothesis (H_0), there is no relationship among the drivers influencing customers' visitation and attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit the study area.

Thus, substituting equation 3;

$$r = 0.558 \text{ (Spearman Rho Correlation Test Table 8),}$$

$$r^2 = 0.133$$

$$\text{from equation 1, } t = 0.558 * \text{Sqrt} [(635-2) / (1-0.131)]$$

$$t = 0.558 * \text{Sqrt} (633) / (0.689)$$

$$= 0.558 * \text{Sqrt} (918.7)$$

$$= 0.558 * \text{Sqrt} (918.7)$$

$$= 0.558 * 30.31$$

$$t = 16.92$$

The critical value of 't' from the t-score table at 0.01 degree of freedom is 2.58. Thus, since the calculated value (16.92) is higher than the table value (2.58), H_0 is rejected to accept H_1 , that is, there is a significant relationship between the drivers influencing customer visitation and attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit the study area.

Discussion

The results show coefficients of the relationships between the drivers (push factors) influencing customer visitation and attractions (pull factors) to advance customer willingness to revisit the study area. A Spearman-Rho

correlation test reveals that consumers' desire to get away from work-related stress is a push factor that encourages them to visit generally quiet locations where they will not worry about their safety (pull factor). Accordingly, the correlation ($r_s = 0.503$, $p < 0.05$, $n = 671$) found between the pull factor of enjoying oneself and being amused and the push factor of feeling at home away from home suggests that travellers go to ecolodges to unwind, feel protected, and get away from their routine jobs. This aligns with the study of Shahane and Fernandes (2015), who found that the key motivators driving consumer decision-making regarding destinations are relaxation and pleasure. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) positive correlation coefficient ($r_s = 0.499$) between visiting historical and cultural places and having a better comprehension of recently created locations. This suggests that tourists visit locations with a wealth of historical and cultural landmarks to enhance their knowledge of other locations; in other words, the more frequently they visit locations with a rich past and culture, the more comprehensive their knowledge of new locations grows. This conforms to Sung *et al.* (2016), who found explanations as to why travellers choose to visit Taiwan; these included travel for leisure, enlightenment, escape, shopping, culture, attractions, sporting facilities, and seeing wildlife and flora. Additionally, Kwan *et al.* (2010) agreed that learning new things, experiencing the outdoors, or making contacts with a different culture were the main reasons eco-tourists go on trips.

It was also discovered that enjoying nice physical amenities, having fun, and being amused had a positive correlation coefficient ($r_s = 0.485$) that was statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This reveals that the provision of high-quality physical facilities was responsible for the ability of guests to enjoy entertainment at the ecolodge. This agrees with the results of Oladeji *et al.* (2022), who found that because Oke Idanre Hills has physical amenities and infrastructure available, a higher proportion of tourists participate in climbing and other recreational activities. Again, the correlation test carried out reveals a statistically significant positive connection ($r_s = 0.467$) between the variables representing the pull and push factors' enjoying yourself, being entertained, and escaping from work demands. The correlation indicates that being away from work-related stressors enhances the likelihood of enjoying yourself and being amused at the eco-lodge. This finding is in tandem with the investigations undertaken by Harahsheh *et al.* (2020) and Liu *et al.* (2021) that the need for socialisation, exhibitions, the necessity of avoiding family and urban intrusions, and social connections and status were drivers that influenced tourists to travel. Feeling at home away from home and being physically and emotionally rejuvenated have a positive correlation that is statistically significant at $P < 0.05$, with a coefficient of $r_s = 0.462$. This indicates that patrons feel both physically and

emotionally rejuvenated in the study area as they experience a home away from home.

Furthermore, the statistically significant positive correlation coefficient that existed between having fun and being amused and visiting areas where one feels safe reveals that travellers in the study area visit locations where they feel comfortable having fun and being entertained. Karamehmedović (2018) and Liu (2019) alluded to the fact that products and services and physiological and emotional orientation bring about having fun, being entertained, unwinding, and engaging in leisure as some of the things that drive tourists to travel. The result also established that a statistically significant relationship existed between the push and pull variables affecting consumers' incentives to visit the selected locations. According to this study, the top drivers (push factors) were culture (increase knowledge of new places, visit historical and cultural sites, and enjoy local life and customs) and relaxation (feel home away from home, emotionally and physically refreshed, and escape from the pressures of work) that influence tourist visitation to ecolodges in the study area. Similarly, the attractions (pull motivators) included destination attributes (enjoy good physical amenities, flora and fauna protection, and go to areas that exude a sense of security) and pleasure-seeking (have fun and be entertained, mix with fellow tourists with similar interests, and explore and learn about the natural habitat). The abovementioned is in consonance with the studies of Shahane and Fernandes (2015), Njagi *et al.* (2017), Mutanga *et al.* (2017), and Simpson *et al.* (2020) on the push drivers and pull attractions that influence eco-tourist visitation patterns and revisit intentions.

Additionally, the statistically significant relationship between the drivers influencing consumers' desire to visit and get attracted to the selected ecolodges was revealed by the Spearman Rho correlation test at $p < 0.001$. A comparison of the computed value of χ^2 (16.92) and the tabulated value from the t-score table of χ^2 at 0.001 degrees of freedom is 2.58. This necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H_1), that is, there is a significant relationship between the drivers influencing customer visitation and attractions to advance customer willingness to revisit the study area. In agreement, Imoagene *et al.* (2021) and Oyunchimeg and Gantuya (2021) noted that drivers and attractions are crucial factors that explain why tourists choose to stay at ecolodges. Moreover, Ji *et al.* (2023) concurred that extrinsic elements at tourist locations have a significant role in influencing tourists' decisions and attracting them to visit a certain place.

CONCLUSION

Ecolodges and other alternative types of tourism are necessary for eco-friendly travel because the damaging effects of the mainstream tourism sector on the

environment are increasingly becoming evident. Therefore, researchers have observed drivers and attractions as the push-pull motives influencing tourist decisions and choice of destination. However, the reasons for tourists' participation in tourism vary and are complex as a result of innovation and locational characteristics calling for regular evaluation to boost satisfaction, retain customer loyalty, and sustain tourism assets and industry. Despite the extensive studies on the factors that motivate tourists' visitation to various destinations, a methodological and locational dearth was observed regarding the drivers influencing customers' visitation patterns to OMR and CRNP ecolodges in particular. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was used to quantitatively examine the influential drivers inspiring tourist visitation. The study's findings showed that respondents' top drivers (push factors) were culture and relaxation, and the attractions (pull motivators) included destination attributes and pleasure seeking. The above-identified drivers and attractions that pull and push tourists to the selected ecolodges, and if the pull motivators are improved upon customer's loyalty and revisit, they are assured in OMR and CRNP ecolodge destinations. The findings may assist operators, professionals, and policymakers in thoroughly understanding and following up on tourists' self-motivation, perceptions, and attractions to facilitate optimal planning and management, patronage, eco-friendly environmental practices, and public-private partnership interventions. A comprehensive database on the growing popularity of eco-friendly getaways would be provided by further research on a framework that considers customer satisfaction as an intervening factor and revisits intention towards eco-friendly destinations using a mixed-methods research technique.

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