



# The antecedents of memorable tourism experiences: The development of a scale to measure the destination attributes associated with memorable experiences



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- This study explored destination attributes that facilitate the formation of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs).
- A 10-dimensional construct (i.e., local culture, variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, quality of service, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure) found to affect individuals' MTEs.
- A scale instrument to measure each of the determinants of MTEs is developed.

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## ABSTRACT

Providing visitors with memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) is important for achieving success in the highly competitive tourism marketplace. To support destination managers, this paper developed a scale instrument that conceptualizes the attributes of destinations associated with MTEs. Following a rigorous scale development procedure, this study identified a 10-dimensional construct that affects MTEs. The data support this dimensional structure of the attributes of destinations affecting MTEs and the internal consistency and the validity (i.e., content, construct, convergent, and discriminant) of the scale. The theoretical and managerial implications of the study's results are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Destination attributes, an amalgam of the different elements that attract travelers (Lew, 1987) to a destination, are critically important for several reasons. First, tourists compare the attributes of destinations when selecting a specific destination. Specifically, the ability of a destination to attract visitors depends on its perceived ability to provide individual benefits. For example, tourists choose a destination with attributes that the tourists find important (Turner & Reisinger, 1999). Previous research has identified important tourism-related attributes and/or examined attributes that support the performance of tourism (e.g., Assaf & Josiassen, 2012). Second, the attributes of a destination significantly influence the formation of the image of the destination. According to Crompton (1979), the image of the destination is “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a

destination” (p. 18). This image significantly affects tourists' behaviors (e.g., Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005). Previous researchers have studied the various aspects of the attributes of destinations in relation to the destinations' images. For example, studies have focused on identifying the specific attributes of destinations that influence the formation of the image of the destination. Some studies have shown that although the image of the destination is one of the strongest influences on future behavior, tourists' experiences at a destination affect the formation of tourists' image of the destination (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004; Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012). Thus, individuals may change their perceptions of the destination after the trip based on these on-site experiences. Tourists' experiences at the destination are a more powerful driver of future behavior because these experiences determine customer satisfaction and memorable experiences.

Tourists initially attracted by a destination's attributes engage in tourism-related activities and/or travel within the destination. The attributes then become experiential components, which affect the formation of visitors' experiences. Given the importance of the experiential component of a destination's attributes, it is important

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to deliver pleasantly memorable tourism experiences (MTEs). For example, [Tung and Ritchie \(2011\)](#) noted that the critical role of a destination manager is to “facilitate the development of an environment (i.e., destination) that enhances the likelihood that tourists can create their own MTE” (p. 3). For this reason, destination marketers are under pressure to develop effective tourism programs that deliver MTEs, but the managers lack the practical guidelines to achieve their goal.

In previous MTE studies, researchers have discussed the components of MTEs (e.g., [Kim, 2010](#); [Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012](#); [Tung & Ritchie, 2011](#)). [Kim, Hallab, et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Kim, Ritchie, et al. \(2012\)](#) suggest that seven experiential factors (i.e., hedonism, novelty, knowledge, meaningfulness, involvement, local culture, and refreshment) lead to strong memorability. The previous MTE model shed light on experiential factors in MTEs. However, previous research has not explicitly discussed the way in which MTEs can be delivered from a practical point of view. One problem in the extant tourism literature is a lack of information on the attributes of a destination that affect the formation of MTEs. Such information would increase the understanding of MTEs and of the managerial practices necessary to deliver fulfilling MTEs. The aim of this study is to identify the attributes of a destination that will potentially provide MTEs. More specifically, the objective is to develop a valid and reliable framework for assessing the attributes of a destination associated with MTEs. The results of this study can be expected to contribute to the previous literature by examining the antecedents of MTEs and the consequences of satisfactory MTEs. This study also contributes to the field by providing practical information that will enable destination managers to be better prepared to deliver MTEs. To identify and understand the destination attributes that strongly affect MTEs and lead to strong memorability, this paper begins by reviewing the existing literature concerning memory and MTE.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. The psychology of memory

To better understand the components of MTEs and the manner in which these experiences affect individuals and potentially lead to memorability, the researcher reviewed the literature on memory. The following sections include a general discussion of memory. The primary objective is to capture widely accepted research conclusions that are deemed applicable to understanding the memorability of the experiences of tourists. More specifically, I focus attention on a consideration of autobiographical memory, its general features and the process of its formation. In addition, the factors that affect memory formation and retention are examined. With these factors in mind, the discussions follow the order of semantic and autobiographic memory and the influences on memory performance.

#### 2.1.1. Semantic and autobiographical memory

Memory can be categorized into semantic or episodic memory. [Tulving \(1979\)](#) suggests that semantic memory is related to knowledge, whereas episodic memory is related to autobiographical memory. In the context of tourism, visitors' stored memory or the knowledge of destinations, such as the images and attributes of the destination, is semantic memory, whereas an individual's memory of his/her tourism experience is autobiographic memory. However, these two categorizations are considerably interdependent because semantic memory is generally derived from episodic memory. For example, people use semantic memory to store new information or concepts from their experiences, and episodic memory then supports and underpins the semantic memories.

Moreover, the events encoded in episodic memory are normally interpreted against a background of semantic knowledge. When such foreknowledge is lacking, remembering suffers ([Bartlett, 1932](#)). From this discussion, it should be noted that although an individual's memory of tourism-related experiences is autobiographic memory, both semantic and autobiographic memory play a role in the memorability of previous tourism-related experiences. Considering that not all tourism experiences are ultimately transformed into ones' memories ([Kim, Hallab, et al., 2012](#); [Kim, Ritchie, et al., 2012](#)), it is particularly important to know which specific factors or contexts affect memory. Psychologists have found that different factors play an integral role in the formation of autobiographical memories, such as emotion and familiarity ([Rubin, 2005](#); [Wood & Conway, 2006](#); [Zimmerman & Kelley, 2010](#)). The following section specifically discusses several influences on memory performances, including memory formation, retention, and retrieval.

#### 2.1.2. Influences on memory performance

Memory researchers have consistently reported that when people are asked to recollect previous experiences from their lives, the experiences recalled most frequently are those that are emotional in nature (e.g., [Davis & Schwartz, 1987](#); [Dudycha & Dudycha, 1933](#); [Kihlstrom & Harackiewicz, 1982](#); [Waldfoegel, 1948](#)). Contextual information, such as where and when an event occurred, is remembered less with the passing of time. Researchers have also suggested that the pleasantness and the emotionality of personal events assist in the recall of these events (e.g., [McGaugh, 2004](#); [Wood & Conway, 2006](#)). In corroborating this notion, tourism researchers who studied post-tourism experiences found that although study participants could not vividly recall experiences such as where they went and when they returned home, the participants could remember affective feelings from their trip, such as being sociable, pleasant, happy, irritated, guilty, sad, or worried ([Larsen & Jenssen, 2004](#); [Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003](#)). [Wirtz et al. \(2003\)](#) found that although research participants remembered significantly more positive emotions experienced during their vacation than negative ones, the participants recalled both types of emotions. Acknowledging the significant influence of affect on memory, researchers have examined how emotions prompted by an event are related to the subsequent memories of that event. Substantial evidence indicates that individuals remember emotional information accurately and vividly (e.g., [Dewhurst & Parry, 2000](#); [Kensinger & Corkin, 2003](#); [Zimmerman & Kelley, 2010](#)). Researchers suggest that the emotionality of an event motivates an individual's information processing and is associated with a deliberate effort to remember the emotionally laden event — “I will remember this” ([Zimmerman & Kelley, 2010](#)) — and enhanced confidence at retrieval, even when that confidence is not warranted.

In addition to the influence of emotionally arousing stimuli, some researchers have reported the influence of familiarity on memory (e.g., [Cox & Cox, 1988](#); [Reder, Donavos, & Erickson, 2002](#)). For example, [Cox and Cox \(1988\)](#) indicate that high-frequency (or more familiar) stimuli positively affect stimuli evaluations and therefore, recall and attitude are generally favorable under familiar conditions. Consistent with this notion, [Pan \(2011\)](#) suggests that the frames of tourism TV commercials should be familiar, nostalgic, and/or provide a sense of déjà vu to make them more memorable. However, other researchers refute the effects of familiarity on memory by arguing that distinctiveness yields superior memory (e.g., [Reder et al., 2002](#)). These researchers note that if the familiarity of an event is high, it is deemed uninteresting and is not deeply encoded. Conversely, if the novelty factor of an event is high, all facilities of the memory system are employed to implant the new event. Furthermore, some researchers contend that unfamiliar,

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