

Nature-Based “Satoyama” Tourism Satisfaction Model: An Examination of Motivation as a Mediator in Domestic and International Tourists in Japan

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Abstract

This research examines whether the tourists’ culture affects their motivation and satisfaction when visiting nature-based tourism (NBT) destinations in Japan. An analysis was conducted in order to examine the mediating effect of motivation on the correlation between tourist group (domestic and international tourists) and their satisfaction from a nature-based tourism experience in Japan. Data from 181 domestic and 177 international tourists was collected via a questionnaire survey in two locations: Kayabuki no Sato in Miyama, and Ogimachi in Shirakawa-go. While domestic travelers are Japanese, international travelers are a varied group from over twenty countries, mostly from the East Asian region. The participants filled a motivation as well as a satisfaction questionnaire and sample was done randomly. Results verify the hypothesis that motivation highly influences the satisfaction from the visit, and it fully mediates the correlation between the tourist group and satisfaction, when Japanese tourists show lower satisfaction and motivation compared to international tourists. A further analysis of the results highlights the differences in the push factors between the domestic and international tourists, as well as the high number of elder domestic tourists. Proposals for better tourist retention strategies for local authorities and stakeholders were presented based on the findings.

Keywords

Nature-Based Tourism, Satoyama, Dimensions of National Culture, Japan, Comparative Study

1. Nature Based Tourism (NBT) in Japan

The differences between tourists of different countries in their perception of tourism were large studied (Haahti & Yavas, 1983; Batra, 2008; Stone & Nyau-pane, 2019). The perception of different factors of the tourism experience creates various expectations, which in turn, affect the satisfaction from the visit. In the case of Nature-Based Tourism (NBT) in Japan, it is expected that the social, and cultural background of the visitors will greatly influence the satisfaction during the visit, as found in various previous studies. Hence, the satisfaction is expected to be different between the domestic Japanese tourists and international tourists. Moreover, the cultural background is also a key factor in realizing the motivation to visit a tourism destination or purpose in the first place, and is greatly different from one culture to another, as many studies have shown in the past (Brown, 2005). However, the role of motivation in the tourists' satisfaction is not yet to be studied, nor any comparison between domestic and international tourists' motivation and satisfaction towards NBT experience in Japan. This article focuses on the cultural influence over the motivation and satisfaction of nature-based tourists in Japan and aims to shed light on the best practices for the NBT industry in Japan.

NBT is an umbrella term that refers to the destination choice of visitors (Boo, 1990) and their activities in the destination (Sung, Morrison, & O'leary, 2000). In recent years, NBT has received high recognition as being beneficial for personal, communal, and environmental purposes. It was found to increase travelers' well-being, support local communities' income, and develop conservation consciousness (Hartig et al., 2014; Frumkin et al., 2017; Wolsko, Lindberg, & Reese, 2019). Consequently, many countries have set goals to promote NBT. While domestic tourism plays a significant role in Japan's NBT, in recent years, inbound tourists have also started to show greater interest in participating in this form of tourism (Fujita et al., 2017). Tourism choices as destination preferences, length of stay and activities to participate in represent not only the individual but also their culture. Therefore, to understand tourism trends and NBT in particular, it is important to first comprehend the tourists' cultural background and how it affects their motivation. Both the international and domestic tourists' motivation and satisfaction from the experience and the differences between the two groups in these realms have been little studied in Satoyama settings. While previous studies found that satisfaction is created, to some extent, by motivation (Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008; Oh & Lee, 2017), however did not investigate the cultural formation of drives that influence tourists to participate NBT, this research aims to clearly portray the international and domestic tourists' perspectives while participating in an NBT experience in Japan, examine the differences in satisfaction level between them, and inspect the motivation as a mediator between the tourist group and the satisfaction. These measurements should be beneficial for policy makers and tourism managements institutions to make better strategies for destination promotion.

In Japan, a country with over 70% forest land and a large number of agricul-

tural villages that face depopulation (Furukawa & Tomokiyo, 2003), Agricultural Village-Stay Leisure Law was implemented in 1995. This law promoted touristic activities in rural areas, such as weekend-stays at farms (*shūmatsu nōhaku*), day-trips for agricultural experiences (*higaeri nōgyō taiken*), and local shops on rural road-sides (*michi-no-eki*). In 2007, Nature-Based Tourism was adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) as a fundamental part of the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan (Chakraborty & Asamizu, 2014). The focus of NBT in Japan, from the government's point of view, is to promote agricultural villages and maintain the rural landscape, known in Japan as "Satoyama". Rural communities responded positively to this new trend of tourism, as it helped them protect villages from the effects of urban migration, aging, and decreased agricultural profitability (Hasan, 2017). Some farming households registered as *minpaku* (rural house-stay) to encourage visitors to stay longer and provide them with a new experience. Eventually, it helped the locals create an extra source of income.

While the hosts' motivation is clear, the tourists' motivation is also an important factor for the success of NBT. The latter is important to understand travel behavior. The motivation of Japanese people traveling to Satoyama areas is found to be related to their perception of the beauty of the trees in rural landscapes (Chen, Nakama, & Zhang, 2017), and since the 1980s, a sense of nostalgia to the countryside in the light of high economic growth and massive urbanization (Hasan, 2017). However, international visitors may not have a similar sense of nostalgia for the Japanese rural landscape and might visit Satoyama destinations for different reasons. It has been evident in the past that international and domestic tourists had different interests when visiting the same destination in Japan (Maeda et al., 2018), yet the researches done on the difference between these two groups are limited. Shapoval et al. (2018) refer to international tourists' interest in Japan's rural landscape when they determined that the motivation of these tourists to return to Japan would be driven by the activities they were expecting from future visits, one of which is to visit acclaimed natural beauty. Still, the motivation of international tourists to visit Satoyama destinations could not be dismissed by only referring to their interest in acclaimed natural beauty. While attractions and amenities, access and mobility, destination marketing, and institutional factors as government tourism policy and international conditions are considered to be important factors of the inbound tourism development in Japan (Henderson, 2017), it seems that the motivation of inbound tourists to participate in NBT has not been examined sufficiently. Let alone, their satisfaction from this experience. The assumption that inbound tourists' will differ in their motivation and satisfaction from domestic tourists' relies on previous work that highlighted the differences in domestic and inbound tourists' perception of the same NBT destination (Stone & Nyaupane, 2019).

When discussing the differences between domestic and inbound tourists in motivation and satisfaction, it is unavoidable to look into culture as a fundamental element that shapes the consumer-behavior. A number of studies at-

tempted to investigate the differences in social behavior between different cultures (for example, Hall & Hall, 1987; Triandis, 1989), when the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1991) are one of the most widely used framework, and was found successful in distinguishing different cultures and their respective behavior. The framework consists of six dimensions; Power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long/short term orientation, and indulgence/restraint (Hofstede, 2011). The Japanese culture was found high in collectivism (in opposed to individualism), masculinity (in opposed to femininity), uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation compared to most other cultures discussed (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). As individuals that share the same culture are expected to also share similar attributes of consumer behavior, it is likely to find similarities in Japanese tourists' evaluations for tourism experience. Such similarities were found in previous studies in tourists of the same country regarding their perception of the destination, their activities, demographic profile, and their satisfaction level (Richardson & Crompton, 1988; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Armstrong et al., 1997). While culture is undoubtedly a fundamental element in tourists' motivation and satisfaction generation, looking into these elements' formation process will provide more comprehensive insights to understand tourists' NBT evaluation.

The formation of tourists' motivation, their perception of the tourism experience (the event), and eventually the effect are described in detail in Gnoth (1997) study. Although the framework does not intend to focus on the correlation between motivation and satisfaction specifically and explicitly, it can be argued that the satisfaction is one of the aspects of the effect formed by the tourism experience. According to Gnoth's framework, motive leads to an objective situation, which is influenced by values and perceptions, that together form the motivation. Therefore, the precursors to the motivation formation are key elements in the subjective experience of tourism. Then, the attitudes and the effect, which includes tourist's satisfaction, are not only an outcome of the motivation, as some studies attempted to address (Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Ibrahim & Gill, 2005; Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010), but also of the motivation precursors such as values and perception, two elements that are integrally influenced by the individual's culture.

Following Gnoth (1997) framework it is expected that cultures with different values and perceptions will have different motivation towards the same tourism experience. Later, it would also lead to differences in satisfaction evaluation, as seen in Stone & Nyaupane (2019). When discussing Japanese tourists, attributes as service quality, responsiveness, and being on time were discussed as important drivers when assessing satisfaction (Donthu & Yoo, 1998). However, in accordance with the suggestion that motivation plays a significant role in determining the tourists' satisfaction, an examination of the correlations between the tourists' group and satisfaction should be done when controlling the dimension of their motivation to visit the destination. Without such examination, it will be impossible to determine the impact of the tourist group (domestic versus in-

bound) over the tourism experience satisfaction.

While a better understanding of NBT trends is needed (Cope, Doxford, & Probert, 2000), and as values, beliefs, and decision-making processes are shaped by national cultures (Hofstede, 1991), the differences between domestic and international tourists who visit Satoyama destinations and their satisfaction levels should be studied in light of their initial motivation to visit the destination. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of NBT visitors' behavior, and examine cultural differences between Japanese and non-Japanese visiting Satoyama areas, it is essential to look into Japan's NBT travelers' satisfaction while examining if they have had different motivations to visit the destination, and distinguished satisfaction levels from their experience. In order to do so, an examination of the correlations between the tourist group (domestic versus international) and the satisfaction level should be done when the motivation is set as a mediating factor.

2. Research Methodology

To examine the differences between domestic and international tourists in their motivation and satisfaction level, data was collected in convenient sampling via a questionnaire survey. The first part of the questionnaire examined the demographics and travel experience of the participants. Thereafter, tourism motivation and tourism satisfaction questionnaires followed. The measurement of the motivation to travel was carried out by examining the push and pull factors. The push factors are the internal drives that "push" the individuals to travel, while the pull factors mainly relate to the destination's attributes (Dann, 1981; Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). The tourism motivation questionnaire had 26 items: 13 push items were adapted from earlier tourism motivation studies (Kim, Guo, Wang, & Agrusa, 2007; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Zhang & Peng, 2014), while some were adjusted for this current study and its setting. The same adaptation was applied to 13 pull items from Zhang & Peng (2014), similarly, some were adjusted for this current study. Tourists' satisfaction level was examined using 27 items: 26 items corresponded with the motivational items, as conducted in previous studies that examine the correlations between tourism motivation and satisfaction (Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991). Item number 27 was added to measure the general satisfaction from the hosts, based on a previous study showing this item was found independent from motivation factors (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010). Both questionnaires had 5-point Likert scale items: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Questionnaires were distributed in three languages: English, Japanese, and Chinese. Both the Japanese and Chinese versions were cross-translated to English to minimize translation mistakes and misunderstandings. The questionnaires were distributed in two NBT Satoyama locations in Japan during December 2019 and January 2020: Ogimachi in Shirakawa-Go, Gifu Prefecture, and Kayabuki no Sato in Miyama, Kyoto Prefecture. The questionnaires were distributed for two days in each location. In Shirakawa-Go, the research-

er asked visitors who waited for the bus to fill the questionnaire in random sampling, and in Miyama, the researcher together with a group of five students were asking visitors to fill the questionnaires near the village's parking. A small present (hand-warming bags or candy) was handed to all participants after filling the questionnaires as an act of gratitude; however, participation was done voluntarily.

3. Findings

373 questionnaires were collected: 85 in Shirakawa-go, and 288 in Miyama, however, only 358 questionnaires were valid for analysis. The group size of the sample is balanced with 181 domestic tourists and 177 international tourists. Most of the respondents traveled from other East Asian countries including Taiwan (70), China (39), Hong Kong (20), Indonesia (8), and seven other Asian countries (24). 16 respondents traveled from non-Asian countries, including Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, and West-European countries. Together with the domestic group, data consists of participants traveling from 20 different countries.

Gender was balanced with 180 females, 176 males, and 2 “not disclosed”. Age groups were also balanced with between 16 and 40 participants in every age group. However, there were more senior Japanese (age 60 and above) in the Japanese sample.

To examine the validity of the motivation and satisfaction questionnaires, exploratory factor analyses have been conducted (see **Table 1** and **Table 2**). Factor analysis explains 47.90% of the variance of the motivation questionnaire and 53.68% of the variance of the satisfaction questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient resulted in a robust value for the final motivation questionnaire (.905), as well as for the satisfaction questionnaire (.927). 18 out of 20 items found to be a part of either of the three factors in the motivation questionnaire had their parallel satisfaction item in the same factor out of the three satisfaction factors. These two items, “shop the local products” and “enjoy the local culture” did not load to any satisfaction factor as their loading is lower than .5.

Then, to examine if a given motivation factor predicts the parallel satisfaction factor, three linear regressions were conducted. In the first regression, the dependent satisfaction factor “nature & locality” was regressed to the parallel motivation factor “nature & locality”. The model was found significant [$F(1.356) = 370.698, p = .00$] and explains 50% of the variance (see **Figure 1**). The regression of the dependent satisfaction factor “people and activity” was also found significant with the parallel motivation factor [$F(1.356) = 41.862, p = .00$], and explains 10% of the variance. Lastly, the dependent satisfaction factor “experience” was found significant with the parallel motivation factor [$F(1.356) = 47.732, p = .00$], and explains 11% of the variance. Therefore, all motivation factors were found as predictors of their parallel satisfaction factors. In these three regressions the motivation factors were found as predictors of the parallel satisfaction factor. As the motivation was higher, the satisfaction was higher.

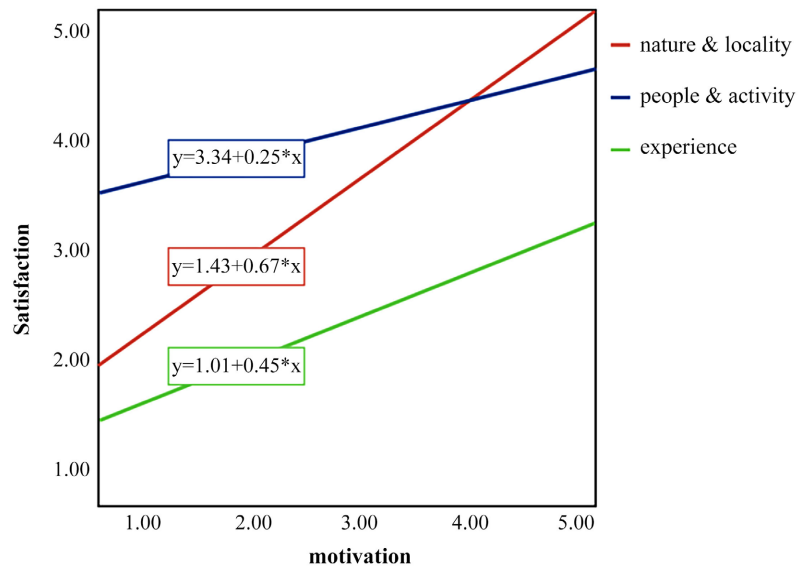


Figure 1. Linear regression of the satisfaction factors regressed to the motivation factors.

Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis for the motivation questionnaire.

	Nature & locality	People & activity	Experience
Experiencing natural environment	.782		
A place with good atmosphere	.759		
Enjoy scenery of rural Japan	.709		
A peaceful and safe place	.676		
Suitable for travel with family/friends	.637		
Experiencing rural culture	.634		
Visiting the mountain side	.627		
Enjoy the local culture	.614		
Trying local food	.558		
Shop local products	.530		
Scenery viewing	.524		
Place for future living		.797	
Visiting friends/relatives		.745	
Meeting new people		.723	
Fulfilling my dream		.624	
Outdoor activities		.527	
Having more travel experience			.718
Experiencing something different			.705
Broaden my knowledge			.680
Visiting a new place			.632
% of variance	21.49%	13.54%	12.87%
Cronbach's alpha	.887	.792	.757

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis for the satisfaction questionnaire.

	nature & locality	people & activity	experience
Enjoy travel with family/friends	.768		
Being in a peaceful place	.725		
Natural environment in the location	.689		
The atmosphere in the location	.688		
Enjoy being with family/friends	.650		
Rural Japan scenery in the location	.616		
Visiting the location	.604		
Resting and relaxing	.602		
Cultural aspects of the location	.587		
Viewing the scenery	.576		
Treatment received by the host	.516		
Having no stress and pressure	.509		
Food in the location	.501		
Visiting the mountain	.500		
Visiting friends/family		.786	
Meeting new people		.769	
Place for future living		.761	
Outdoor activities		.604	
Achieving what I wanted for a long time		.539	
A new experience			.746
Experiencing something different			.717
Broaden my knowledge			.690
Visiting a new place			.670
Feeling excitement			.562
% of variance	23.41%	16.30%	13.96%
Cronbach's alpha	.911	.833	.812

The research question, whether motivation is a mediator between the tourist group and satisfaction, was then examined. R^2 of the regression model for the satisfaction of the tourist group, mediated by the motivation level is 60%. Motivation fully mediates the effect of domestic/international on satisfaction ($p < .000$). The confidence interval for the motivation variable does not contain 0 (out of 2000 samples, the effect is found between $-.1308$ and $-.3474$), therefore, the mediator is significant (see **Table 3** and **Figure 2**). Hence, there is no significant difference between the satisfaction level of each group (domestic and international tourists) if motivation is set as a mediator. Then, the motivation of the domestic tourists is lower than the international tourists' motivation, hence, the domestic tourists' satisfaction is lower as well.

Table 3. Regression model for predicting satisfaction by tourist group, mediated by motivation.

Independent variable	Dependent variable							
	Motivation ¹				Satisfaction ²			
	Direct effect		Indirect effect		Total effect			
	b (SE)	P	b (SE)	p	b (SE)	95% bootstrap CI (n = 2000)	b (SE)	p
group, 1 = domestic 0 = international	-.2927 (.0575)	.00	-.0185 (.0402)	.6458	-.2329 (.0511)	-.3408; -.1374	-.2513 (.0599)	.00
motivation			.7955 (.0358)	.00				

¹ R² = .0679; p = .00; ² R² = .6016; p = .00.

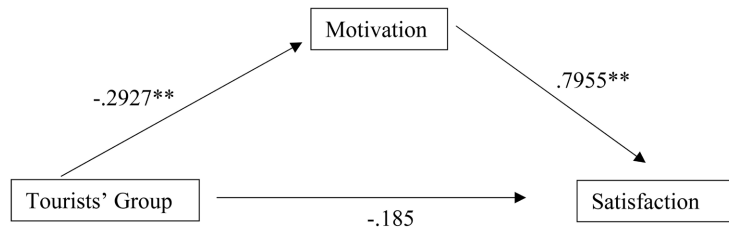


Figure 2. Regression model for predicting satisfaction by tourist group, mediated by motivation. Domestic tourists = 1, international = 0. ** < .001.

4. Discussion

Results support the conjecture that the motivation fully mediates the correlation between the tourist group and the satisfaction level. The satisfaction level of Japanese tourists coming to Satoyama is significantly lower than the satisfaction of international tourists, however, this correlation is largely dependent on the motivation of the tourist group. Arguably, since the overall motivation of the Japanese tourists was lower to begin with, their satisfaction from the visit was found to be lower as well. These results support the assumption that motivation is an integral variable in which satisfaction from NBT tourism and the differences between domestic and inbound tourists cannot be fully understood without its examination.

Tourists' motivation was divided into three factors: nature and locality, people and activity, and experience, which were found, in turn, significantly correlated to the same three factors of satisfaction. Hence, we can confidently state that the satisfaction presented by the participants in this study is a direct outcome of their motivation before visiting the Satoyama destination.

Significant differences between domestic and international tourists were found both in the motivation to visit the NBT destination and the satisfaction they had when visiting as expected according to the cultural differences indicated in Hofstede studies (1991, 2001; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Furthermore, these results are consistent with other studies that have reported the positive correlation between NBT visitors' motivation and satisfaction (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010), and the differences in tourist gaze between domestic and in-

international tourists visiting NBT destinations (Stone & Nyaupane, 2019). In this research too, consistency was found between the satisfaction factors and the factors that motivated tourists to visit the destination in the first place.

The differences found between the domestic and international tourist groups are assumed to originate in the values and perception differences between the Japanese and inbound visitors'. Assuming these two elements form the motivation, as indicated in Gnoth (1997) framework, and given that the motivation levels significantly differed between the two groups, it is argued that the motives of the two groups were divergent to begin with. These differences, in motives and later in values and perception, are assumed to be the effect of cultural differences.

Apart from the theoretical framework, there might be more explanations to the differences between the two groups both in the motivation as well in the satisfaction level. First, the fact that the motivation of international tourists was recorded as higher than the domestic tourists can be attributed to the notion that the most important push motivation factor for overseas travel is "relaxation and pleasure-seeking", as it was found continuously in different studies (Dann, 1977; Brewer, 1984; Kozak, 2002; Jönsson & Devonish, 2008). While Japanese tourists traveling to Satoyama destinations might have lower expectations regarding the relaxation and pleasure their visit will result in, motivation items such as "Resting and relaxing" and "Having no stress and pressure" are expected to rank lower than those of international tourists. The second explanation could be found in the notion that Japanese NBT visitors are traveling not only to achieve enjoyment but also for learning and communing (Krag & Prebensen, 2016), which are motivation factors that the current study did not explicitly investigate. In a future study, in-depth interviews should be conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of more motivation factors that push and pull Japanese tourists to visit Satoyama destinations.

A third explanation relates to the differences between the elderly age groups in the domestic and international tourist samples. There were 37 domestic participants aged 60 and older, but only 4 participants in this age group among international tourists, while group size was 181 for domestic and 177 for international tourists. Some researchers suggest that physical, psychological, and socioeconomic changes that this generation tends to go through affect their motivation and behavior, and eventually may result in differences between elderly tourists and the younger generation in the way they interpret the meaning and importance of their travel experience (Ryu, Hyun, & Shim, 2015: p. 326). Comprehensive research examining the older generation's motivation push factors, with a similar framework to the research conducted by Xu & Chan (2016), could better investigate this suggestion. Concentrating on the moderation effect of the motivation push factors, as done in Xu & Chan (2016) research, could better investigate this explanation suggestion.

5. Conclusion

In this study, domestic Japanese tourists who visited Satoyama destinations were

compared to international tourists from various countries. Some traveled from Western countries, and others from East Asian countries. Although differences between countries in the Western and Eastern regions are not underestimated, similarities might be found as well (as in Choi & Chu, 2000). In order to find more specific segments and comprise dimensions of motives for each nationality, a larger sample of each nationality is advisable. Such research would assist local authorities and stakeholders in developing better tourist retention strategies through the investigation of both domestic and international tourists' needs in Satoyama destinations, and in meeting specific interest fields and needs for each nationality. Furthermore, since the use of nationality and/or country might face criticism of generalizing nations, as mentioned by Dann (1993), it is also suggested to examine differences between domestic and international tourists when studying the perception of the destination in different age groups and genders. Also, it is important to note that the correlation between motivation and satisfaction can also be mediated or moderated as seen in the past (Battour et al., 2017; Lin & Chuang, 2021). As the focus of the Japanese tourism industry is shifting from the iconic destinations, like Tokyo and Kyoto, to more experience-based tourism (Andonian et al., 2016), such a study would help those who plan the marketing strategy for NBT destinations in Japan, to attract not only Japanese but also international tourists.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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