Factors that Affect Domestic Tourists Intentions in choosing a destination: A case of Saudi Arabia

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Tourism is among the key economic sectors across many countries. Tourism is defined as social, cultural and economic activity involving movement of people to various destinations for reasons such as leisure or business. According to the World Trade Organization (2011), tourism involves "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". Tourism has become a crucial driver of socio-economic growth globally as it creates employment, foreign revenue and expansion of other businesses like travel and hospitality as well as infrastructure development (UNWTO, 2015). There has been more focus on international tourism while domestic tourism has not been researched in great length. According to Huybers, (2003) and Pierret, (2011), expenditure from domestic tourism is higher than that of inbound tourism. In determining which factors influence the choice of a destination, it is important to understand that destination is more than just a product but it comprises of so many concepts (Buhalis, 2000). Choosing a destination is affected by various factors like psychological, available amenities, price, and attractiveness, personal social and cultural. Many studies have been conducted to analyse relationship between consumer behaviour and consumer decision making (Hsu et al., 2009; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Moutinho, 2005; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Chen and Chen, 2010; Al-Tarawneh, 2012; Schiffman et al., 2014). However, the research focusing on the factors that affect destination choice among domestic tourists in Saudi Arabia is significantly limited.

The government of Saudi Arabia has invested in expanding the domestic tourism in the kingdom as a way of promoting another source of revenue and reduce the country’s reliance
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on the oil sector. In 2015, the country generated SR, 124,914,581,000 as revenue from tourism related activities which include amusement parks and theme parks, recreation facilities, creative arts, among several others (General Authority for Statistics, 2018). It is predicted that domestic tourism will witness a 40% surge by 2020 (Khan, 2017). Through partnerships between the public and private investors, Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) has been working on enhancing domestic tourism through development of new destinations and diversification of services offered to increase revenue from domestic tourists (Oxford Business Group, 2018). Al Ahsa is one of the largest governorates in Saudi Arabia. The name is derived from Ahsa which means the sound of water underground. The governorate has the biggest oasis globally and also has the world's largest oil fields. Some of the travel destinations that support domestic tourism within the region include; Hafouf National Museum, Al-Qara Hill and Ibrahim Palace.

1.2 Background of the study

The government of Saudi Arabia through the Saudi commission for Tourism and Antiquities (2018) is making huge investment to promote the tourism sector. The government aims to support activities which enhance the tourism activities with the country. For a long period, the country has been dependent on the oil sector, but the huge threats such as international oil crisis and the economic crisis have influenced the government’s decision to diversify the country’s economy. Saudi Arabia has an extensive Area with diverse geographical regions. The country is divided into 13 provinces, and each manages their own economic activities. In every country, promoting domestic tourism has significant impact on the economy including generating employment, generating wealth as well as ensuring prosperity of the community (Albughuli, 2011). Although Saudi Arabia is relatively undeveloped in the tourism sector, the country has major prospects in promoting the sector. The General Authority for
Statistics, (2018) indicated tourism as a major sector, to diversify the economy and reduce country’s reliance on the oil sector, a source of employment. According to the authority, only 38.9% of the country’s population is employed, with 786,511 youths of 15 years and above in 2017. This is in line with the country’s anticipated economic growth (Reddy, 2017).

International tourists account for the bigger percentage of the country’s tourism, despite the country’s rapidly growing middle and upper income class, which form potential domestic tourists. In 2016, over 18.6 million international tourists visited the kingdom, which was a growth from 19.99 million from those who visited in 2015 (Statista, 2018). Major tourist attraction sites include the religious tourism, from the high number of tourists who visit the country’s religious sites and business tourism, which is concentrated in the country’s biggest capitals. Other sectors which are major attraction sites include entertainment, from the country’s theme parks especially for the younger population (Saudi commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2018). This is one the major reasons why the government is stepping up campaign’s to promote domestic tourists. Since 2006, the domestic tourism sector in Saudi Arabia has been growing a steady growth as indicated in figure 1. Below.

Figure 1: growth of domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia (source, NCB tourism report, SCTA, 2011)
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Majority of the domestic trips are leisure trips followed by religious purposes and visit to friends, with the spending on leisure trips significantly higher than other purposes (SCTA, 2011). The rise of domestic tourism sector, which has been largely undeveloped can be attributed to the improving standards of living across the kingdom as a result of increased income, and the efforts by the government to diversify the country’s economy.

1.2.1 Saudi Arabia’s vision 2030

The development of tourism sector is one of the country’s vision 2030. The vision is to make the country an investment powerhouse, as hub in connecting three continents (vision 20130, 2018). According to Saudi Arabia, crown prince who is also the chairman of the council of economic and development affairs, vision 20130 is an ambitious blue print that defines the goals and ambitions of the country. The vision is divided into pillars, and one of the pillar is Saudi Arabia becoming the heart of the Arab countries and the Islamic world. The other pillar is turning the country into an economic powerhouse, by diversifying the country’s economy to reduce the overreliance on the oil sector to create a sustainable and diverse economy (Saudi Arabia vision 2030, 2018). The tourism sector forms of the potential sectors, which are targeted by the government to achieve its ambitious plan. Unfortunately, several emerging trends such as global terrorism, economic crisis in the western countries who form the largest percentage of the country’s international tourists pose a significant challenge to the growth of the tourism sector (Albu, 2016). The domestic tourism sector therefore is a critical approach to promote the industry among these challenges.

Therefore, this study is significant in evaluating the factors that influence the choice of destination for the domestic tourism, which can provide important information in developing effective strategies and policies to promote the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia.
1.3 Problem statement

The increasing value of domestic tourism across the globe has created the need by various institutions and companies across the sector to understand different factors related to the sector, which provide information to understanding its consumer behavior. Among these information is an understanding of factors which influence the choice of a destination by a domestic tourist (Adomaitienė & Seyidov, 2017). However, lack of such information is a setback developing appropriate policies that are essential to ensure sustainable growth of the sector. In addition, limited information on consumer preferences in the domestic tourism sector is a challenge marketing strategies to promote the sector. Currently, most of the limited research in the Saudi Arabia and the entire of the Middle East region focuses on the international tourism sector, as the domestic sector is regarded among the least developed tourism regions in the world (Damanhoury, 2016). This is an indication that there is a need for more research to provide information on the country’s and entire Middle East region’s rapidly expanding domestic tourism sector.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the current study is to analyze factors influencing decision-making of local tourists in choosing destinations in Saudi Arabia.

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To examine factors that influence selection of a destination by local tourists
2. To disclose the core of tourism destination;
3. To define the relationship between tourists’ behavior and selection of destination choices.
4. To suggest a plan that will help increase the rate of domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia.
5. To develop a plan maximizing on domestic tourism for Al-Ahsa governance in Saudi Arabia.

1.6 Research Questions and Hypothesis

There is a close relationship between desire to travel and intentions. The research will try to answer the following questions;

1. Is there any relationship between desire to travel and destination choice?

   **Hypothesis:** there is a significant relationship between desire for travel and choice of destination.

2. How does the attractiveness of the destination affect tourists’ decision in selecting travel destination?

   **Hypothesis:** The more the attractiveness of the travel destination, the high the chances of tourists making decisions to visit it.

3. To what extent does economics affect destination choice and intention by domestic tourists in Saudi Arabia?

   **Hypothesis:** There is a correlation between economics and domestic’s tourist choice of visiting a destination in Saudi Arabia.

4. What is the relationship between travel destination choice in Saudi Arabia domestic tourism and environments?

   **Hypothesis:** There is no significant relationship between travel destination choice in Saudi Arabia for domestic tourism and environment.

5. What role do the media play in influencing domestic tourist’s choice for a destination?

   **Hypothesis:** The media plays a significant role in influencing the choice of a destination for domestic tourism.
6. Does image affect destination choice by domestic tourists in Saudi Arabia?

**Hypothesis:** Image has an impact on the choice of destination by domestic tourists.

7. How do facilities influence domestic tourists’ decision on destination selection in Saudi Arabia?

**Hypothesis:** Facilities have a huge impact on the domestic tourist’s decision on the choice of a destination in Saudi Arabia.

1.7 Scope of study

The scope of study is Saudi Arabia, eastern region in Al-Ahsa governorate. The study targets to recruit 100 randomly selected Saudi Arabian domestic tourists from several tourist sites in a cross-sectional descriptive study that uses self-administered questionnaire to collect data.
CHAPTER TWO-LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will evaluate various existing academic resources on the topic of unethical behavior by organization and the resulting impacts. The relationship between unethical decisions by various companies and consumer reaction pertaining to such decisions will be examined. This chapter helps in identification of information gaps that exist so the research paper can aim at bridging those gaps. Literature review is important as it helps clear any existing doubt with regards to the research question.

2.1 Comparison of factors affecting domestic tourists’ choice of destination in Europe, Middle East and Saudi Arabia

2.2.1 Domestic tourism in Europe

Statistics show that domestic tourism in Europe brings in more revenue as compared to international tourism. Domestic tourism spending has exhibited a steady positive growth from 2014 to 2017 and this trend is expected to continue in future. In 2017, the spending from domestic tourism in Europe was recorded at 958 billion Euros and experts expect the spending to reach 1120 billion Euros by 2027 (Statista, 2017). Out of 4 tourism trips, 3 are domestic while only one is outside Europe (Demunter, & Dimitrakopoulou, 2011). Demunter, & Dimitrakopoulou, further states that 59% of all the long trips in Europe were domestic tourists, the
Most tourists within Europe prefer touring in the neighboring countries within the continent with just a few exemptions. The 3 main destinations by European tourists are Spain, Italy and France which totaled 44.8% in 2015. According to Aguayo, (2005), foreign tourism to Europe has continued to decline in comparison to the domestic tourism. This is also acknowledged by Skanavis, & Sakellari, (2011), who acknowledges that domestic tourism in the Europe experienced a rapid growth and economic value, proving a base to counter the seasonal challenges associated with international tourism.

Factors affecting choice of destination for domestic tourism in Europe.

Proximity is identified as one of the key factors that influence destination choice. Most domestic tourists in Europe choose destinations near to home. This one of the contributing factors to the growth in the domestic sector in Europe. Another factor is attractiveness of the destination depending on the needs of the tourist. Most of the tourists look for destination which offer the best experience for just relax, personal security and safety and accommodation were factors domestic tourists in Europe considered in their choice for destinations (Seyidov &
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2.2.2 Domestic tourism in Middle East

Middle East is a being a largely Muslim region and so most of domestic tourism within the region is founded on religion. For instance, every year on the 12th month, over 3 million domestic tourists visit Mecca in Saudi Arabia for the Islamic pilgrimage called The Hajj (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2011). Domestic travel for business purposes is common and developed in most countries within the region. Domestic tourism within the region is motivated by events like business, visiting friends/relatives, need to find healing and religion (Boniface and Cooper, 2012). According to the world travel and tourism council (2017), tourism in Middle East contributed 3.3% of the regions GDP. The Middle East has been ranked as one of the most diverse markets in the last few years across the globe, a key factor which has attracted international arrival to the region.

Factors affecting Destination choice by domestic tourists in the Middle East

One of the factors that affect choice of destination is pricing. According to Dana (2009), a study done on one of the middle east countries-Jordan revealed that domestic tourists compare prices of different holiday destinations and select the most affordable. Also, social factors affect destination choice because some of the domestic tourism is founded on visiting friends and relatives in another region within the Middle East (Dana, 2009). Religion is identified as another factor influencing destination choice as many Muslims from Middle East travel to places like Mecca for religious purposes.
2.2.3 Domestic Tourism in Saudi Arabia

This will be the focus of this research proposal. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries in the Middle East and factors affecting destination choice might be closely related to the above. One of the factors is attractiveness of the destination. This is supported by the efforts put in by government and private investors to create more attractive tourism destinations as well as support various festivals in various parts of the nation such as Riyadh, Tabouk, Jizan, Qurayat, Taif etc. to provide cultural, recreational, social and heritage events (Mirza, 2015). A significant number of Tourists seek travel destinations outside the kingdom, and the government is making major efforts to increase the spending of these tourists on domestic tourism (Amer Hani Al-Kassem, 2013).

According to the Amer Hani Al-Kassem, A. (2013), the domestic tourism has developed and established itself without heavy investments and commercialization associated with the international terrorism. Despite being a unique country with a unique destination, a considerable potential of the domestic tourism remains unutilized. However, with the significant efforts by the government, Saudi Arabia domestic market is estimated to grow by 40% by the year 2020 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). This is due to the growth of the internal trips within the kingdom influenced by government led investment aligned with the country’s vision 2030. For instance, the government has partnered with the country’s airline to promote tourism to the country’s historic sites, creating awareness of the domestic tourisms, which has also spiked another growth with other sector’s related to tourism such as tourism.

2.2 Understanding Destination

Various studies agree that there is a gap in researching tourists’ decision-making processes with respect to destination choice and this area is growing by attracting the attention of the researchers. Such studies include (Goodall 1991; Hanefors and Mossberg 1998).
In order to define the scope of this paper, it is important to understand the meaning of domestic tourism and destination since the research will focus on the factors affecting destination choice by domestic tourists within Saudi Arabia. According to (Buhalis, 2000; Hsu et al., 2009; Blasco et al., 2014), destination is defined in terms of geographical areas. However, (Hsu et al., 2009; Smallman and Moore, 2010; Blasco et al., 2014) gives a different understanding of a destination which is said to be a product or rather a brand. According to these scholars, destination could mean a distinctively complex product or a collection of products and services encompassing various things like the cultural and natural attributes of an area, area’s climate, structure and infrastructure. From the perspective of the customer, destination is seen as a service environment that facilitates the general experience (Blasco et al., 2014). Additionally, Holloway et al. (2009) suggests that the term destination could be used to mean attraction thus making the two words (destination and attraction) synonyms. According to this scholar, any site which stimulates people’s desire to travel there, then that is a tourist attraction as much as it is a travel destination. For example if an individual has heard or reads about the Kingdom Centre Tower located in Riyadh and is motivated to travel there and see it, then that particular feature is both an attraction site as well as a destination. In this paper, destination will be viewed in its entirety rather than just a geographical location in order to incorporate all the needs of the tourists in our study.

According to authors like (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986; Mill and Morrison, 1992; Buhalis, 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003 and Holloway, et al., 2009) travel destination for tourists comprises of many different elements. These elements can be categorized into three groups a; primary (activities, physical settings and social/cultural attributes), secondary (catering and shop- ping), and additional elements (accessibility and touristic information) (Verbeke,
1986). Buhalis (2000) on the other hand proposes six significant components of a destination that will influence tourists’ decisions regarding it as: attractions, accessibility, available packages, activities, amenities and ancillary services. Holloway et al. (2009) however reduces these six to only three components claiming that accessibility, amenities, and attractions are the key factors that determined if a destination will be selected by tourists. According to Moutinho (2005), factors relating to a destination that will determine if tourists will select it include attractions, amenities, cost, information, travel opportunities and travel arrangements.

2.3 Types of tourism destinations

There is a close relationship between the destination selected and the intentions for travel. This is supported by Holloway, et al. (2009) who gives different types or categories of tourism as; religious tourism, cultural tourism, shop- ping tourism, events tourism, sports tourism, gastronomic and other attractions tourism. Smith (1989) classifies five different forms of tourism which also represent the five types of tourism destinations as: cultural, historical, ethnic, recreational and environmental tourism (destinations.) Cultural, historical, environmental and recreational tourism destinations. According to Buhalis (2000), tourism destinations are classified based on the key attractive features. Under this view, tourism destinations categories include: seaside, urban, rural and alpine destinations.

2.4 Consumer behavior and decision-making in tourism destination

It is evident that travel motivation and tourists’ behavior play a crucial part in destination choice (Djeri et al., 2007; Hsu et al., 2009; Van Vuuren and Slabbert, 2011; Decrop and Kozak, 2014; Blasco et al., 2016). It is thus important for tourist companies in Saudi Arabia to understand this in order to attract domestic tourists and serve them in the best way possible. Since emotional factors plays a part in tourism destination decision making, it might be a
challenge to understand the topic of consumer behavior as (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007) states. Authors like (Van Vuuren and Slabbert, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014 and Schiffman et al., 2014) explain consumer’s behavior as the combination of consumers attitude, activities, decisions, ideas and experiences while searching, buying or using a certain product/service.

If there is continuous interaction between various environmental and personal variables, then that represents tourists behavior (Hsu et al., 2009; Smallman and Moore, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014) and Slabbert (2011) Selecting a tourism destination is also affected by demand (Al-Tarawneh, 2012). In most cases, tourists in Saudi Arabia compare different alternatives before making a destination choice (Hawkins et al., 1995; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). According to Djeri et al. (2007) there are four basic phases involved while a tourist is making a destination choice namely; introspective, retrospective, prospective and prescriptive.

2.4 Core stages in tourism destination choice

Crompton and Um (1990) points out that tourism destination choice is not a thoughtless act but it actually involves three stages. Stage one involves development of awareness, two involves disposition of various destinations and lastly the actual decision from the alternatives identified in stage two.

2.5 Internal and external factors

When tourists are making a decision regarding travel destinations, there are various internal factors that are identified as key influencers. These factors include desire to escape, relax, and rest, prestige, adventure, social interactions, health and fitness. Furthermore, there are also external factors that influence tourists’ destination choice such as destination attractiveness, available resources, expectations and perceptions of tourists (Hsu et al., 2009). Additionally, personal, social, cultural psychological factors also affect decision making.
although they can be manipulated by marketers of tourism destinations as highlighted by Kotler et al. (2006).

2.6 Tourist destination’s motivational factors (Pull and push)

Crompton (1979) established a research area to understand push and pull factors related to motivation of tourists towards certain destinations. Later, other researchers carried out similar researches in different regions like Germany, France, UK, Japan and Iran. Push motives are concerned with the need to escape from daily environment so as to relax, discovery, social and family interactions. On the other hand, pull motivational factors are ignited by the destination itself thus include historical sites and scenic attractions. Push and pull motivation may arise from certain features of a travel destination (Dann, 1977). Push factors are thought to establish the desire for travel while pull factors explain the actual destination choice as stated by (Bindu & Kanagaraj, 2013).

Nine factors have been identified as those which push domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia (Bogari, 2002). The identified factors include; Economic, interest, Family togetherness, Cultural value, Knowledge, Utilitarian, Social, Convenience of facilities, Economic and relaxation. On the other hand, push factors identified include; activity, safety, beach, nature, historical, leisure, budget, social class and cultural. Various studies contradict on whether push or pull factors relate to travel motivation. According to Witt & Wright, (1992) push factors are more closely related to travel motivation while Pearce, (2013 b) has opposing views that travel motivation is related to pull factors.

Marketers of tourism destinations focus on which factors will result in tourists making an actual decision to visit a certain destination. By determining desires, it is possible to predict the best features that will attract tourists and enhance their satisfaction as (Mahika, 2011) opines.
In order to make decision on the destination choices, often tourists need to gather information about different travel destinations and make the right informed decision after evaluating and comparing them. There have been contributions by different scholars like (Wahab et al. 1976; Mathieson and Wall 1982; Gilbert 1991; Moutinho, 2000; Weaver and Oppermann 2000) looking into this issue and they have prepared various models that clarify how prospective tourists collect and assess destination related information to help them in making their decisions regarding destination choice.

Family is another factor that is said to influence decision making. Al-Askar and Al-Hmod (2000) states that in Saudi Arabia, the travel decision for Saudi families is first determined by husbands desire then wife desire and lastly children desire. In Islam societies, the family is a "human social group whose members are bound together by the bound of blood ties and/or marital relationships" (Abdul-Ati, 1998, p. 110).

2.7 Research on variables of the current study.

An analysis model carried out by Mohamad, & Jamil, (2012), identified the desire to travel as crucial decisions in determining tourists destinations. However, the author acknowledges that choice for the destination for a tourist is a complex process influenced by many factors. Similarly, Chetthamrongchai, (2007), identifies the desire to travel as driving force on why people travel. The desire to travel is to fulfill their psychological desire or biological need and tourists fulfill this desire by traveling to their preferred destinations. Seyidov & Adomaitiene, (2016) also notes that desire to travel is a major attribute of domestic tourism in making decision on their destination of travel. This is also acknowledged in a study carried out by Hanlan, Fuller, & Wilde, (2005), who identified that desire to travel and motivation as major factors which influenced the tourist’s choice of destination. However, there is no research which
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evaluates the impact of the desire to travel and its influence on the choice of tourist’s destination in focus, to the Saudi Arabia domestic travel industry, a research gap which this study seeks to fulfill.

One of the factors that influence the tourist’s choice of travel destination include attractiveness of the destination. According to study carried out by Pallavicini (2017), the attractiveness of a tourist and its influence on the choice of the tourist destination has been a debate among researchers in the field of tourism. According to the author, attractiveness of the tourist destination depended on a tourist beliefs, feelings and opinion, and varied across one tourist to another. These factor, which define the attractiveness of a place have the power to influence the tourist’s destination choice. This is acknowledged by Blazeska, Milenkovski, & Gramatnikovski, (2015) who add that the quality of a destination increases its attractiveness. Hence attractiveness of the place is a major driving force in influencing the tourist’s choice of destination.

A study carried out by Bédiová, & Ryglová, (2015) to evaluate the impact of a SKI resort attractiveness as an influencing factor influencing customers choice found that attractiveness of a destination influenced a range of other factors such as satisfaction in visiting palace, and had a significant influence on the customer’s choice of the tourist destination. The same was identified to be true by Awuah, & Reinert, (2011), who likened attractiveness of a tourist destination choice as evaluating the quality of the service or product, which has a significant factor in influencing a tourist’s decision. Ranabhat, (2015), demonstrates the rising level terrorism which affects an attractiveness of a place, as having a major impact on the Saudi Arabia tourism sector in the post 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, no study evaluates the impact of the factor as applicable in the Australian domestic case, a research gap in which this study seeks to fill.
The same is true for other variables including the availability of the resources and the environment of a place. Djeri, Armenski, Tesanovic, Bradić, & Vukosav, (2014), note that the availability of facilities determines the quality of a place, and therefore influences the consumer behavior. Destination with adequate facilities are more preferred by scientists. Another factor considered by the tourists is the affordability of the facilities, their accessibility and safety, which vary depending on the tourists needs. Hence, facilities is an attribute which has the power to influence the decision of the tourist when choosing a decision. This is acknowledged by Fratu, (2011) who identifies environment and the quality of as major factors, with an influence on consumer behavior. Studies focusing specifically in the Saudi Arabia domestic tourism are limited, a research gap which the current study seeks to address.
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Appendix

Appendix 1: questionnaire

**Part 1**

- demographic characteristics
  
  i) Age
  
  ii) Gender
  
  iii) Marital status
  
  iv) Education
  
  v) Income
  
  vi) Occupation

- Trip characteristic:
  
  i) Length of the trip/tour
  
  ii) Source of information
  
  iii) Reason for travelling/tour

**Part 2**
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- Destination preference (please the most influencing factor on your choice of travel/tour destination)
  
i) Personal traits
  
ii) Destination amenities
  
iii) Environmental features
  
iv) Destination attraction
  
v) Economic factors
    
- Does environmental/ climatic condition influence your choice of travel destination?
  
- Does personal security and safety influence your choice of travel destination?
  
- What is the impact of outdoor activities in the choice of your travel destination?
  
- Does local/historical events influence your choice of travel destination?
  
- What impact does travel cost and accommodation prices have in your choice of travel destination?
  
- Do you consider diversity of accommodation when choosing your travel destination?
  
- How do the places you have visit before impact your choice of travel destination?
  
- Does information on accommodation and other important things influence the choice of your travel destination?
  
- How likely are you to visit new places over the places you have visited before?
  
- When choosing a travel destination, would you consider a place with outdoors activities or other recreation activities over a place to just relax?
Do you consider hospitality of the local people a factor when choosing travel destination?