

Tourist Satisfaction as a Pathway between Quality Tourism Experience and Revisit Intention in Nepal

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Nepalese Journal of Hospitality
and Tourism Management
Vol. 7 No. 1 March 2026

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Received: January 18, 2026
Revised: February 16, 2026
Accepted: March 18, 2026
Published : March, 2026

Abstract

This study examined role of quality tourism experience in shaping both tourists' satisfaction level and their intention to visit again. Descriptive and causal research designs were used in this study. To obtain quantitative data about international visitors to Nepal who had stayed a minimum of five nights, a cross-sectional survey was administered to collect data from 437 valid responses. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling were then used to analyze the data and examine direct, indirect, and mediating relationships among the variables. Results indicate that the quality of the tourist experience significantly influenced tourists' revisit intention, while there is no mediating effect between tourists' satisfaction level on this relationship, nor is there a relationship between tourists' satisfaction with the experience and repeat visit. Traditional satisfaction factors - such as residents' hospitality, and the role of intermediaries - contributed to overall satisfaction, but have little impact on revisit intention. The conclusion is that for destinations like Nepal where experience is the key driver of tourism, intrinsic quality attributes associated with the cultural, adventure and natural tourism experiences are greater motivators for return visitation than general service satisfaction. Based on this conclusion, tourism strategies should focus on enhancing the experiential attributes, rather than just enhancing the quality of traditional service offerings. These findings shows that satisfaction, as the main mediator in the traditional model of the relationship between service quality and loyalty, is in fact only one path of many, through which experiential factors can influence tourist behaviour.

Keywords: Hospitality, Nepal tourism, quality experience, tourist satisfaction,

How to cite this paper:

Puri, R. K., & Subedi, M. (2026). Tourist satisfaction as a pathway between quality tourism experience and revisit intention in Nepal. *Nepalese Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 7(1), 35-44. <https://doi.org/10.3126/njhtm.v7i1.92132>

Introduction

Nepal's economy relies heavily on tourism as a major contributor to job creation and foreign income and a source of growth for the economy overall. Tourism accounted for \$358.9 billion (NPR 2.7 billion) of total GDP in 2023, which translates into around 1.19 million total jobs, or 15.2 percent of all jobs in Nepal. In addition to employment, tourism also generated 6.6 percent of GDP in Nepal. Tourism's economic importance continues even as the country slowly recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 had an unprecedented disruptive impact on the tourism sector of Nepal. International visitor arrivals to Nepal dropped from approximately 1.2 million visitors in 2019 to slightly more than 150,000 visitors in 2021. However, the tourism sector has continued to show remarkable resilience as evidenced by large, steady increases in total annual visitor arrivals since 2021, exceeding one million visitors in 2023 ([Nepal Tourism Board \(NTB\), 2024](#)). Therefore, the recovery of total visitor arrivals supports tourism as an essential strategic sector that is helping Nepal's slow-growing economy recover from the negative impacts of COVID-19. The accommodation and food services sectors experienced the highest rate of economic growth (21.84 percent) of any economic sector in Nepal due to the strong multiplier effect of tourism ([Nepal Rastra Bank, 2024](#)). Much of Nepal's competitive advantage in tourism stems from the country's remarkable natural and cultural assets; among them, eight of the fourteen tallest mountains in the world (over 8000 meters), a wide variety of trekking opportunities and tourism activities, and a significant amount of biodiversity conserved in over 20 national parks that comprise almost 25% of the entire country. Additionally, the country is home to major world religions (such as Hinduism and Buddhism) and likewise possesses some of the most culturally significant sites in the world, such as Lumbini, Pashupatinath Temple, Janakpur, and Muktinath ([NTB, 2024](#)), making Nepal one of the top destinations in the world for adventure, spirituality and nature-based tourism. Together, these elements represent the backbone of Nepal's ability to attract international visitors and promote its tourism industry. However, with markets becoming more competitive around the world, the ways in which a destination is defined will no longer be solely through natural resources and cultural heritage; aspects associated with the quality of the experience for tourists and the level of satisfaction experienced by tourists will become more significant in determining how competitive a destination is in the future. As indicated in previous studies ([Chen & Tsai, 2007](#); [Cole & Scott, 2004](#)), satisfaction of a tourist is determined from their evaluation of services received (post-consumption) and the level of satisfaction experienced by tourists greatly impacts their future behavioral intentions (positive word-of-mouth and revisit intentions) regarding a destination they have previously visited. Therefore, if the quality of services consumed by a visitor is viewed positively, the likelihood that they will develop a loyal relationship with the destination will increase through the relationship that exists between visitor satisfaction and destination loyalty.

Although Nepal has huge potential for tourism and encouraging recovery, there are still many quality-related issues for the tourism industry that impact tourist satisfaction and willingness to return. The quality of tourism development and service has been inconsistent

across regions. Urban areas tend to offer a higher level of service and infrastructure such as Kathmandu and Pokhara, however, rural and remote areas of Nepal where many of the main tourism activities take place tend to offer poor quality of facilities and services, erratic levels of service delivery and weak regulatory oversight (NTB, 2024). This results in a negative impact on the overall quality of the tourism experience and ultimately impacts the value perception for tourists. One of the most significant issues facing Nepal is lack of human resource quality. Most of the workers at tourism establishments in the rural and remote areas of Nepal are at a very low educational and skill level in terms of their ability to provide quality service. This limited range of skills has a negative impact on the quality of service provided to customers during service encounters, and impacts the ability to provide consistent service resulting in lower customer satisfaction levels (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Accommodation quality also varies greatly (basic teahouses to luxury hotels) and is not covered by a standardized system for monitoring and inspecting establishments at regular intervals. Therefore, the quality of service provided by accommodations to their customers are unpredictable which results in a low level of confidence for tourists in terms of reliability of their experience (WTTC, 2024). There are also many other issues impacting customer satisfaction including food safety and hygiene issues, immigration service issues and the overall cleanliness of the destination. Inadequate oversight on food safety, delays in visa issuance, and environmental concerns have poor first impressions of visitors and how they feel about their entire experience within Nepal (NTB, 2024). These issues are opposed to the goals of national frameworks like the Tourism Policy (2008) that emphasize the need to improve quality, satisfaction of visitors, and the ability for visitors to return. Many authors have consistently demonstrated that a quality tourism experience increases visitor satisfaction, which in turn leads to an increased intention to return (Zeithaml et al., 1996; Cole & Scott, 2004). However, there are very few studies that examine the mediating relationship between quality tourism experience and revisit intention for visitors to Nepal. Without this, there is a limitation for policymakers and practitioners when attempting to formulate evidence-based strategies focusing on improving service quality and building destination loyalty. The overall purpose of the research is to understand quality tourism experiences influence on visitor satisfaction and revisit intentions for visitors to Nepal.

Literature Review

In recent times, there is an increasing focus within tourism research upon the quality of the tourist experiences provided by tourism goods and services. There has been a shift towards viewing quality as encompassing all elements of the tourist's experience rather than simply the quality of service provided. The concept of quality is based on dynamic interactive experiences between the tourist, the service provider, the community in which the services are received and delivered, and their physical environment. Cultural, time and place influences are integral to how the quality of the experience is created (Jennings, 2006). When viewing quality from this perspective, tourists are viewed as the co-producers of quality, as both the quality of service received from the service provider influences the quality of the experiential value created by the visitor. Although both are involved, the visitor's quality of experience is affected by their expectation of the level of service they expect to receive, their emotional reaction while they are receiving that service, and the

way that service has been delivered to them based on the context of where and when it was delivered (Crompton & Love, 1995). Experiential quality can be viewed as the combination of service attributes provided by the service provider and the service attributes brought with them by the tourist. The components of experiential quality can be broken down into both technical and functional components related to the service delivery system (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002). Both technical and functional components of the service delivery system represent inherently subjective and emotional processes (Chen & Chen, 2010). Empirical findings suggest that a high-quality tourism experience positively impacts experiential value, destination image and satisfaction by the tourist (Wu & Li, 2014); hence, the quality of the tourist's experience must ultimately influence their satisfaction and form the basis for future evaluations of their experiences after they have returned from their travels.

In regard to tourism research, experiencing satisfaction by the tourist is an essential factor impacting a destination's competitiveness, visitor loyalty will increase and retaining tourists to return. The concept of experiencing satisfaction is supported using Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) where a comparison is made between each tourist's pre-travel expectations and their actual experiences while they travel to a destination. If a tourist has a positive disconfirmation, this means that they had a more positive experience than what was expected which results in a feeling of satisfaction. Conversely, if a tourist's experience was less than what they expected they experience a negative disconfirmation and they feel emotions or a sense of dissatisfaction. Satisfying a tourist is not only based on the cognitive evaluation of the entire tourism experience but also includes the emotional and attitudinal responses of the entire tourism experience (Rust & Oliver, 1994).

There's extensive research that shows that when a tourist is satisfied with their tourism experience, they will return to that destination, recommend it to others, and develop tourism loyalty (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Most importantly, when a tourist is satisfied with their experience, they become less price sensitive and help build a good reputation for destinations creating sustainable long-term competitiveness for the destination (Anderson et al., 1994). Recent studies further clarify how to build positive emotional connections with tourists through providing memorable experiences and quality of services can enhance a tourist's satisfaction and increase their intent to be a repeat visitor (Muhammad et al., 2025).

In the field of tourism, revisit intention is a critical behavioral outcome because it indicates the willingness of tourists to return to a destination and maintain long-term demand for that destination. Numerous studies have found that satisfaction is one of the most significant predictors of revisit intention (Gössling, 2002). Furthermore, retaining satisfied customers is more cost-effective than acquiring new customers, making satisfaction-driven loyalty an important strategic objective (Ratih & Noer, 2024). Additionally, there are several theoretical constructs that suggest revisit intention is also influenced by other factors, including prior experience, travel motivation, attitude, and perceived constraints, all of which contribute to satisfaction as a central evaluative mechanism (Liu et al., 2019).

Theoretical constructs that provide strong foundational explanations for these connections include Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980). Flow theory explains how immersive and intrinsically motivating

experiences enhance enjoyment and satisfaction, while expectancy disconfirmation theory explains how level of congruence between expectations and actual experiences will influence satisfaction and future loyalty behaviors. Empirical studies have shown that flow-enhancing, and expectation-exceeding, experiences have a positive impact on both satisfaction and revisit intentions (Yang et al., 2024).

While there is quite a lot of previous research connecting experience-based quality, visitor satisfaction, and intent to return, there are still gaps in our current knowledge base when it comes to these areas of study. Most of the past studies were conducted in developed/Western locations with different cultural/ geographical norms than other parts of the world; therefore, many studies do not provide the cultural context needed for an international comparison across multiple cultural backgrounds. In addition, researchers tend to focus on the existence of a direct effect between service delivery (or experience) quality and visitor satisfaction versus viewing satisfaction as a mediator through which service (or experience) quality leads to intent to return. There has been little research on how satisfaction serves as a vehicle for establishing intent to return to a destination in less researched areas like Nepal.

Methodology

A quantitative research approach was used to conduct this study on the relationships between quality tourism experience, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention in Nepal, using both descriptive and causal research designs. The cross-sectional design allowed the researchers to capture tourists' perceptions at one time in order to analyze the relationships between the three key constructs based on recent travel experiences. The total number of tourists who came to Nepal in 2024 was 1,147,567; therefore, these tourists made up the target population for this study. The researchers used purposive sampling to select respondents to participate in the study. Tourists who had been in Nepal for at least five days and had visited more than one destination were included to provide adequate information to evaluate their tourism experiences. The minimum sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1967) formula; therefore, approximately 400 respondents needed to participate in the study with a 5% margin of error. To account for non-response, the researchers distributed over 600 questionnaires; this resulted in 437 valid questionnaires available for analysis.

The data collection procedure involved utilizing a structured questionnaire that contained validated scales from previous tourism studies that have already been established. As defined by Tatoglu et al. (2002), Chen and Tsai (2007), and Liu, Yao, and Fan (2019), quality tourism experience was represented using scales adapted from each of these studies. Tourist satisfaction was assessed using a 14-item scale based upon Tian-Cole and Scott (2004), and the measure of intention to return was derived from Tian-Cole and Scott (2004), with 5 items being used in that measurement. Using SPSS and Smart PLS, the data were analysed for both descriptive statistics to summarise the data and correlation and regression to assess relationships between variables and test the mediating role of tourist satisfaction. Reliability of the scales measured with the use of Cronbach's alpha produced results above acceptable levels.

Results/Findings

Measurement Model Assessment

Following established SEM guidelines, indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined (Hair et al., 2019). Outer loadings indicate that most items load strongly on their intended constructs, with the majority exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). A few quality tourism experience indicators show loadings slightly below 0.70; however, they were retained because overall construct reliability and AVE values remained satisfactory, which is acceptable in established scales (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1

Reliability and Validity

Construct	Indicator Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	HTMT
Quality Tourism Experience	0.56 – 0.83	0.900	0.917	0.526	0.331
Revisit Intention	0.69 – 0.91	0.896	0.924	0.711	0.331
Tourist Satisfaction	0.71 – 0.84	0.953	0.957	0.612	0.085

As defined by SEM principles by Hair et al. (2019), the variables were evaluated for indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The outer loadings indicate that the majority of items load highly on their intended constructs with most of them exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). A small number of the quality tourism experience indicators had a loading lower than 0.70; however, they were retained as both the overall construct's reliability and the average variance extracted (AVE) were satisfactory, which is an accepted practice on established measurements/scales (Hair et al., 2019).

Structure Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesized relationships among Quality Tourism Experience (QS), Tourist Satisfaction (TS), and Revisit Intention (RE) through bootstrapping procedures.

The results showed that the quality of the tourism experience had a strong and statistically significant positive effect on tourists' intention to revisit Nepal, with a path coefficient of 0.322, a t-value of 8.359, and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that tourists who perceive higher-quality experiences, including well-managed adventure activities, cultural engagement, and safety measures, are more likely to plan a return visit.

According to the study's results, the degree of travel experience enjoyed by travelers will affect their intention to revisit Nepal. The results revealed a strong and statistically significant positive association between the perceived quality of the travel experience and the intention to return to Nepal, with a path coefficient of .322; t value equal to 8.359; $p < .000$.

Figure 1
Path Analysis

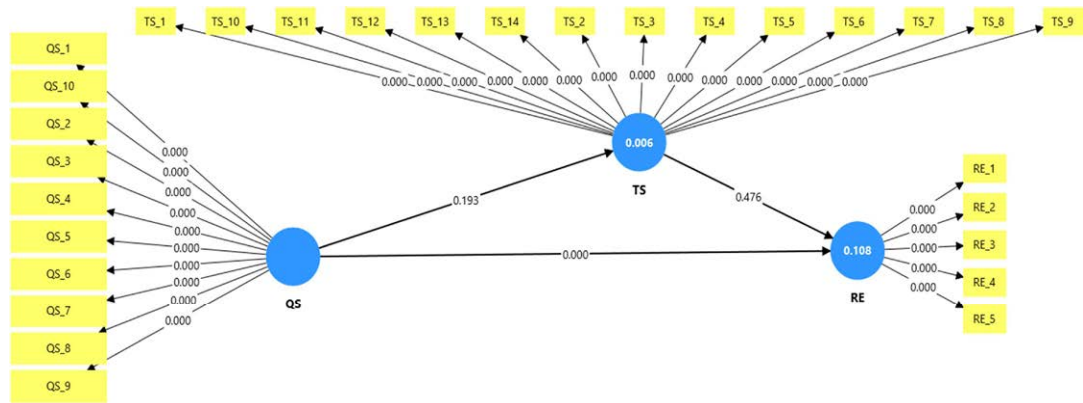


Table 2
Structural Path and Mediation Results

Hypothesized Path	B	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Result
QS → RE	0.322	8.359	< 0.001	[0.238, 0.391]	Supported
QS → TS	0.079	1.303	0.193	[-0.215, 0.136]	Not Supported
TS → RE	0.049	0.712	0.476	[-0.188, 0.130]	Not Supported
QS → TS → RE (Indirect)	0.004	0.568	0.570	[-0.015, 0.012]	No Mediation

Therefore, travelers will have a greater likelihood of planning another visit when they experience high-quality travel experiences such as well-managed adventure activities, cultural interaction, and safety measures.

Discussion

A study was done on Nepal to examine quality tourism experience affects on satisfaction level of tourist leading them to come back again. The study found several relationships between quality tourism experience, tourist satisfaction, and returning to visit again; many of the findings reflected what has been previously found in past studies, but some findings differed from previous studies. The study found that the quality tourism experience was a positive predictor of whether tourists want to return to a destination to visit again since the analysis revealed a direct effect of the quality tourism experience (path coefficient = 0.322; t-value = 8.359) on the probability of a tourist returning to take another trip to the same destination. The results are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of overall quality tourism experience on repeat tourism loyalty and visiting the same destination(s) again (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Cole & Scott, 2004). In line with Echtner (1991), the present study’s results indicate that positive perceptions that tourists have about the various attributes; natural beauty, adventure opportunities, and cultural attractions) of a tourist destination directly influence the likelihood that those tourists will return again to visit the same destination(s) regardless of the various other evaluative criteria such as satisfaction.

However, the study did not find any significant effect(s) of the quality tourism experience on tourist satisfaction (path coefficient = 0.079, t-value = 1.303), which contradicts both traditional models of service quality and satisfaction, which indicate that higher experience quality leads to more satisfaction (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996; Kim et al., 2010). In Nepal, it is possible that the tourism experience is distinguished by unique aspects of tourist experience, in which inherent value and enjoyment derive from things unique to Nepal (such as adventure, cultural immersion or scenic beauty) rather than consistency of service experience (e.g., lodging, food and beverage or service quality). As such, the results of this study suggest that there was little (0.049) direct effect that satisfaction had on the probability of a tourist returning to Nepal, with a t-value of 0.712, indicating that satisfaction alone is not enough to motivate repeat visitors to Nepal as an experience-oriented travel destination. Additionally, there appears to be very little (coefficient of 0.004; t-value of 0.568) indirect influence of the quality of the overall tourism experience on returning to Nepal via satisfaction. These results are inconsistent with the mediation role of satisfaction found in studies such as Tian-Cole and Scott (2004) and Um, Chon and Ro (2006), where satisfaction acts as a mediator between service quality and intent to return to a destination. The results of this study suggest that tourists' intentions to return to Nepal are primarily derived from the overall quality and uniqueness of the tourism experiences they have in Nepal and less from overall satisfaction for services and amenities. This finding aligns with observations made by Kwortnik and Thompson (2009), that tourism experiences characterized by adventure and cultural immersion can generate repeat visits without requiring satisfaction as a mediator.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study is to determine whether the perceived quality of the tourist experience correlates with satisfaction and the intention to visit again in Nepal. Results indicated that the perceived quality of the experience had a significant impact on the intention to visit again but that tourist satisfaction did not mediate or directly affect the intention to visit again. Other factors affecting satisfaction included hospitality and intermediaries (agents); however, the impact of these factors on the intention to return was marginal. In an experience-destination context, the intrinsic quality of the tourist experience was the major factor driving loyalty, rather than the general satisfaction of tourists.

Theoretical Implications

The study's results are contrary to traditional theories that suggest satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. The researchers discovered that only experiential quality can drive customers to return to an adventure or cultural tourism destination. The research is evidence that satisfaction is highly influenced by the context of the adventure and cultural tourism. The research establishes that revisit intentions to a destination are largely influenced by destination attributes.

Practical Implications

In the case of Nepal's tourism industry, creating distinguished and enjoyable experiential elements such as outdoor activity options, cultural connections, feeling safe, and ease of transportation to sites are more critical than trying to improve overall service levels.

Training (and hospitality) and also major groups of support services that play an important role in encouraging repeat visits are secondary to the experiential qualities. Marketing of the tourism product needs to be targeted on these distinctive experiential qualities to develop destination loyalty.

Limitations and Future Research

The research methodology relies on one cross-sectional survey of international tourists staying longer than average, so the results cannot be generalized to a wider point in time or a wider group. Future research should use a longitudinal design (showing how respondents' travel and/or recreation habits change over time) and should include domestic and shorter-duration tourists. Also, the researchers recommend using qualitative techniques to gather information on the motivations that drive tourism to areas of high interest/appeal. Inclusion of explicitly identified factors influencing loyalty such as level of safety, level of sustainable resources, and emotional connection to a culture's historical and cultural authenticity will also allow researchers to clarify the role of those factors in the making of loyal customers.

Declarations

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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