




## Destination characteristics influence domestic tourists' decision to choose a destination: Empirical study in Phu Yen-Vietnam

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### ABSTRACT

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The study aims to assess how destination characteristics affect site selection behavior, and visitor loyalty, thereby identifying motivating and limiting factors to make recommendations to guide destination policies. The characteristics of the destination are one of the factors affecting the choice of travel destination for tourists. However, each location must identify outstanding features to exploit to create a comparative advantage in attracting tourists toward sustainable development. Drawing upon consumer behavior theory, this research explores the factors that shape tourists' destination choices. These factors include internal factors (motivational drivers) and external factors (encompassing the destination's appealing characteristics). Data was obtained from a questionnaire given to tourists who had traveled to Phu Yen between June and August 2023. Data collected from 226 visitors selected using convenience sampling techniques was processed and analyzed using Smart-PLS software. The research results show that destination characteristics, including tourism resources and infrastructure, positively influence tourists' self-motivation to learn about the culture and history here. We suggest that tourism managers and businesses should enhance tourism in Phu Yen to attract new tourists and encourage them to return. It is crucial to focus on promotion to make visitors aware of Phu Yen's unique characteristics and to improve infrastructure to make it easier for tourists to access services.

**Contribution/Originality:** This research contributes to expanding the scope of consumer behavior theory application in the tourism sector. The study also contributes to the understanding and identification of factors engaging tourists' choices regarding a destination with great potential for sustainable tourism development, specifically Phu Yen, a central province in Vietnam.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a travel destination is an important decision for travelers because it affects the value of experience and satisfaction that visitors expect to receive after each trip. Each tourist destination has its own unique characteristics in terms of culture, landscape, cuisine, and recreational activities (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Travel is an opportunity for travelers to discover new things, broaden their horizons, improve their understanding of the world, and create beautiful memories. Choosing the right destination will help visitors make the most of the right time and budget, satisfying their personal preferences and needs.

The behavior of tourists choosing destinations while traveling is a topic that attracts the attention of researchers, management agencies, and organizations in the fields of tourism, management, and marketing. The characteristics of the destination are one of the factors that attract tourists and serve as the basis for making

decisions about where to travel. The study of destination selection decisions is divided into 3 main research directions. The first approach follows a five-stage decision-making process: (1) recognizing travel needs and desires, (2) seeking and evaluating relevant information, (3) making travel decisions, (4) preparing and experiencing trips, (5) assessing post-trip satisfaction (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). These studies focus on identifying and evaluating the factors that influence decisions at each stage. In the second direction, the approach is divided into personal subjective factors (personal characteristics, roles, motivations, and attitudes), and objective factors such as availability of locations, programs, services (Availability of facilities and services), and quality of facilities and services (Chapin, 1974). The 3<sup>rd</sup> research direction, based on behavioral theory, holds that a tourist's decision to choose a destination is the result of a cognitive and attitude process that leads to intention and decision-making. Current research trends involve in-depth studies that delve into the specific analysis of each group of factors, aiming to enhance awareness of each impact factor. In Vietnam, there are several published studies on this topic, but most of these studies only focus on analyzing the competitiveness or destination image of a locality (Nguyen Van, Do, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2021) without exploring the problem of deciding on the specific destination of each tourist group (Van, Viet, Le Tien, & Thu, 2019).

Phu Yen is one of the destinations attracting domestic tourists, with strong growth in recent years. According to data from Phu Yen Tourism Department, in 2022, the number of tourists reached 2.2 million, 5.9 times more than in 2021 and up 20.2% compared to 2019 (before the outbreak of Covid-19). The number of domestic visitors reached 1.8 million, accounting for 81.8% of the total number of tourists. In the first 9 months of 2023, the total number of tourists reached 2,532,000, reached 105.5 %-year plan, up 57% over the same period. Whereas the number of domestic visitors was 2,074,000, accounting for 81.9% total number of tourists. Tourism revenue reached 3,741 billion VND, reaching 120.6 %-year plan, up 87% over the same period. The number of domestic visitors to Phu Yen in recent years (<https://phuyen.gov.vn>, 2023). The significant increase demonstrates the allure of this destination. Domestic tourism plays an important role in developing Phu Yen tourism. Although Phu Yen is a tourist destination with the potential to attract domestic as well as international tourists. For further development, it is necessary to conduct research from the perspective of visitors to identify the highlights and what attracts them to Phu Yen.

According to the author's knowledge, research on this topic for tourist destinations in Phu Yen is limited and each study has certain contribution values according to the limited scope of research. The studies mainly apply the theoretical framework of consumer behavior in tourism to understand and explain the basis of travelers' choice of destination. Therefore, in this study, the author assesses the characteristics of a specific destination that influence domestic tourists' choice decisions, using a framework based on consumer behavior theory.

The research questions are as follows: are there specific factors of the destination that affect tourists' intention to travel to Phu Yen? And how do these factors affect travelers' intentions?

To answer these research questions, quantitative methods are used. Data was collected through questionnaires sent to tourists who have traveled to Phu Yen through 2 channels: surveying visitors to Phu Yen through tour operators, and travelers using services at restaurants and hotels in Phu Yen.

## 2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

### 2.1. Tourist Destinations

Tourism is a specific, spatial-oriented activity. The traveler leaves their habitual residence to go to a specific location in order to satisfy their needs according to the purpose of the trip (Larsen, 2008).

Travel destinations are defined as places where there are elements that attract visitors and provide necessary services to visitors during their stay. A tourist destination defined by the World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO) is a geographical area of space where tourists stay at least one night, including tourism products, services provided,

tourism resources that attract visitors, administrative boundaries to manage, and image recognition to determine competitiveness in the market" (UNWTO, 2007).

Tourists define a destination as a geographical region where they find technical facilities and services that meet their needs. A tourist destination is a place that we can feel by geographical borders, political borders, or economic borders with attractive tourism resources, capable of attracting and meeting the needs of tourists. We can classify tourist destinations according to the following basic levels or scales: (1) large-scale destinations are destinations of a territory or at the continental level, such as Southeast Asia, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, etc.; (2) macro destinations are destinations at the level of a country; (3) Micro destinations include regions, provinces, cities, districts, even one commune or town, etc. (Cooper, 2008).

This study examines a tourist destination as an integrated product or brand that includes many constituent factors, such as weather and climate conditions, infrastructure, facilities or superstructures, services, and natural or cultural features, to provide an experience for visitors. Natural disasters such as climate, landscape, cultural-historical architectural works, etc., and man-made factors such as hotels, transportation conditions, technical facilities, and recreational activities contribute to its composition (Mike, 2007).

## 2.2. Consumer Behavior Theory in Tourism

Consumer behavior theory is a discipline in the field of microeconomics that focuses on the study of how consumers make decisions to buy and use products and services. This theory aims to explain what factors influence consumer behavior and predict consumer behavior in the future. Factors influencing: In addition to benefits, many other factors influence consumer behavior, including the price of products and services (a determinant of consumer shopping); consumer income (determines their ability to pay for products and services); personal preferences (affecting the type of products and services that consumers choose); Perception of products and services (influencing consumers' purchasing decisions); Social impact: Impact from family, friends, colleagues, etc. also affects consumer behavior.

Every marketing activity, including the tourism business, requires a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. Understanding and capturing consumer behavior in tourism is significant in developing new products and services for businesses and the tourism industry. To accomplish this problem, managers and researchers of tourism consumer behavior need to find out the influential factors as well as the extent of their influence on consumer behavior in tourism so that there are appropriate impacts on each factor, and a group of factors to stimulate tourists to consume more tourism products.

Past research has defined tourist intention as the likelihood that someone says they will engage in a specific tourist behavior. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, people with a stronger intention to do something are more likely to do it (Ajzen, 1991). The importance of understanding tourist intentions persists due to the correlation between positive intentions and tourist loyalty. Many tourism studies have focused on what factors influence this intention. Recent research has looked at factors that influence a visitor's decision to visit a place for the first time or return, as well as their willingness to recommend the destination to others (Rajaratnam, Nair, Sharif, & Munikrishnan, 2015).

Identifying factors influencing tourism consumer behavior not only helps researchers and managers better understand the needs of tourists in their decisions to buy tourism products but also their post-purchase decisions. Post-purchase decisions usually involve assessing satisfaction with the quality of travel services in destinations as well as travel return plans, and intentions to introduce others to travel. This is one of the important contents to help tourism business managers at different levels understand how to have appropriate policies to attract new tourists, and build their loyalty.

### 2.3. Proposed Research Model

There are two main categories of factors that influence tourist destination choices: motivational factors and psychological factors. Motivational factors, also called pull factors, are the specific aspects that attract tourists and fulfill their needs. These include a destination's image, the services it offers, and its entertainment options. Psychological factors include a tourist's environmental concerns, travel motivations, the influence of word-of-mouth recommendations, and their existing knowledge, preferences, and past travel experiences (Pestana, Parreira, & Moutinho, 2020). Additionally, other elements like information sources about destinations, planning trip considerations, and financial constraints can also play a role in the decision-making process of destination selection. It is important to note that research often focuses on specific sets depending on the study's factors and context, as no single study can explore every influence at once.

#### 2.3.1. Internal Factors: The Motivation that Motivates Visitors

Travel motivation closely influences the attitudes and intentions of tourists. Motivation is considered a key factor influencing tourist choices when selecting destinations. It's essentially an internal drive that pushes travelers to take action in pursuit of specific goals and desired experiences (Chang, 2014). According to the study, motivation acts as a psychological force that shapes tourist behavior by manipulating how they perceive and understand their environment. Furthermore, understanding travel motivation is not just useful for explaining tourist behavior in general, but also specifically for predicting their revisit intentions. Tourism motivation serves as the driving force behind vacations and revisiting destinations. Motivation is the most important factor for understanding tourist behavior and predicting revisit intentions (Chang, 2014). Thus, this study proposes that a strong intrinsic desire to learn and explore a destination will be a key motivator for travelers to choose a satisfying location. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The desire to explore the destination will motivate visitors to choose a destination.*

*H<sub>1.1</sub>: The desire to explore the values of cuisine and entertainment in the destination motivates visitors to decide on the choice of destination.*

*H<sub>1.2</sub>: The desire to explore the history and culture of the destination motivates visitors to decide on the choice of destination.*

#### 2.3.2. External Factors: Characteristics of Tourist Attraction Destinations

The characteristics of the destination are the biggest influencing factor in the choice of travel, as confirmed in many existing studies (Pandey & Joshi, 2021). The factors identified included factors: price, size, and accommodation services, a destination near the sea, a destination near the center, distance from the destination to the airport, the distance of accommodation facilities, shopping outlets, activities at the destination, health-related issues, and security factors (Pandey & Joshi, 2021). The provision of high-quality services has been identified as an important factor that brings about the success of tourism industry. Therefore, there is a relationship between quality service, and tourist satisfaction, which in turn leads to destination loyalty. Tourism resources and infrastructure, quality of services and tourism environment are considered important components of the destination characteristics that this study focuses on (Pan, Rasouli, & Timmermans, 2021). Therefore, the hypothesis of the study is:

*H<sub>2</sub>: The characteristics of the destination are the factors that attract visitors.*

*H<sub>2.1</sub>: A good tourist destination's infrastructure will attract visitors to choose that destination.*

*H<sub>2.2</sub>: Good service quality of a tourist destination will attract visitors to choose that destination.*

*H<sub>2.3</sub>: The tourism environment of a good tourist destination will attract visitors to choose that destination.*

*H<sub>2.4</sub>: The tourism resources of a diverse tourist destination will attract visitors to choose that destination.*

The **Figure 1** illustrates the research model proposed for this study based on the hypotheses stated. It depicts the causal relationships of independent variables (factors influencing tourists' destination choice decisions) to the

dependent variables (destination choice - DS). We divide the factors influencing DS into two groups: The first group comprises variables related to personal motivation, including two variables: Discover Food, Entertainment (DFE), and Learn about History and culture (LHC). The second group consists of destination characteristics, including four variables: Infrastructure (I), Quality of Service (QS), Tourism Environment (TE), and Tourism Resource (TR).

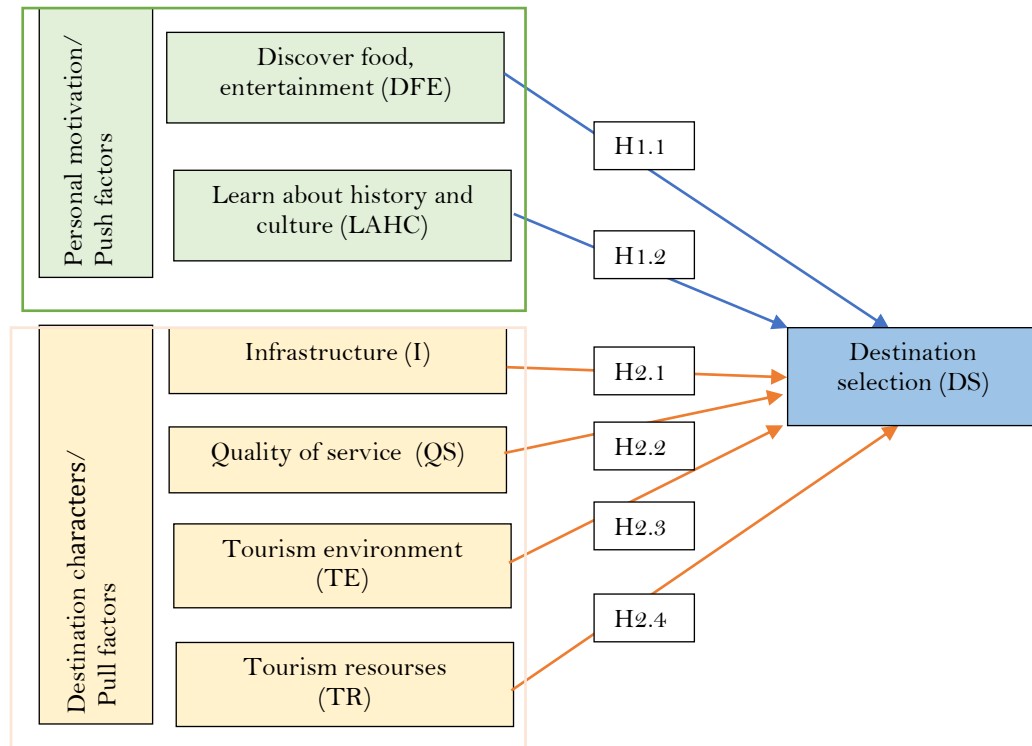


Figure 1. Research model.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data Collection Methods and Scales

The research team is randomly selected the study's sample by reaching out to tour operators, restaurants, and hotels location in Tuy Hoa city, Phu Yen province, for domestic tourists who are traveling in Phu Yen in the summer of 2023.

Determine sample size: according to Hair to perform quantitative analysis studies, the sample size must be at least 100 – 150 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). There are also other authors who argue that the critical sample size should be 200 (Beerli & Martin, 2004). With a representative and effective sample selection criterion, this study chose to calculate the sample size when the whole is unknown. We calculate the expected number of surveyed samples using the following formula: he number of samples expected to be surveyed is calculated according to the formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where (p = 0.5; z = 1.96 corresponds to a confidence level of 95%; e = 0.07 corresponds to an allowable error of 7%). This implies that surveying a minimum of 196 samples is necessary.

We built the data collected through the survey questionnaire from a scale of factors influencing travelers' choice of destinations inherited from the study of Mutinda and Mayaka (2012). In addition to the introduction to the purpose of the survey, the survey also includes 2 parts: part 1 collects information about demographic characteristics; Part 2 collects information on the level of agreement of each scale of factors affecting the choice of Phu Yen destination of tourists to Phu Yen. Part 2 questions use a scale of 5 Likert with level 1 being very

disagreeable and level 5 being very agreeable. The questionnaire was completed in 2 stages: Phase 1 mock interview with 10 visitors was followed by feedback on clarity and understandability to complete the questionnaire; phase 2 interviews with 300 tourists in Tuy Hoa.

### 3.2. Data Analysis Methods

This study uses the PLS-SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) fractional squared linear structure modeling method to validate research hypotheses and proposed research models (Hair et al., 2019). Because PLS-SEM is not demanding on sample size and standard distribution of research data. Data obtained from travelers is encrypted and processed on SPSS 20.0 software and analyzed on Smart PLS 3.0 software. The PLS-SEM method of choice for relationship testing.

We evaluate the reliability and value of scales that measure concepts in the model. For reflective scales, composite reliability (CR) is used to assess reliability. Factor loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are used to evaluate the convergence value of the scale. In addition, the Fornell and Larcker are applied to measure the distinguishing value of the resulting scales.

To evaluate structural models in PLS-SEM, this paper uses two evaluation criteria: coefficients of determination (denoted R<sup>2</sup>), and statistically significant path coefficients. The R<sup>2</sup> value of the dependent variable is a measure of the explanatory ability of the independent variables for the fluctuation of the dependent variable in the model based on the sample dataset. The greater the value of R<sup>2</sup>, the greater the degree of interpretation of the independent variables for the dependent variable.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1. Characteristics of the Survey Sample

The data used in the analysis from 226 valid samples collected from 300 travelers reached between June and August 2023, were categorized by a group of criteria of gender, age, income, and hometown. Table 1 displays detailed sample characteristic information.

Table 1. Survey form information.

Criteria		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	135	59.73
	South	91	40.27
Age	Under 30 years old	77	34.07
	From 30 years old to 50 years old	93	41.15
	Over 50 years old	56	24.78
Average income per month	Under 15 million VND	57	25.22
	From 15 million to 30 million VND	135	59.73
	Over 30 million VND	34	15.04
Hometown	Northern	91	40.27
	Central	75	33.19
	Southern	60	26.55
Total		226	100.00

### 4.2. Measurement Model Evaluation Results

The composite measurement model consists of four variables using the outcome scale and one variable using the causal scale that is checked by running the PLS Algorithm. The results of the measurement model analysis are shown in Figure 2, Table 2, and Table 3.

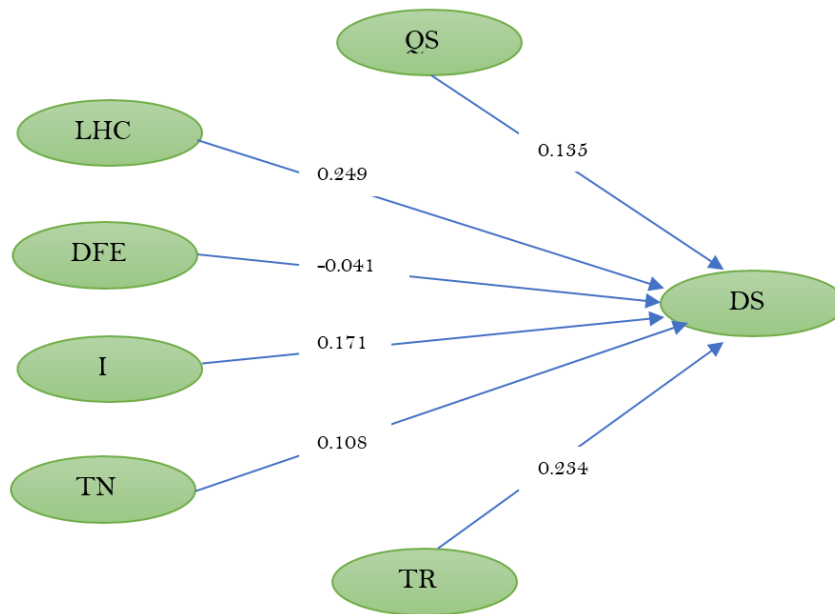


Figure 2. Results analysis of measurement model.

Figure 2 illustrates the estimated relationships between the underlying variables in the model. The figure presents regression coefficients that quantify the impact these variables have on each other. Specifically, it focuses on the coefficients that represent the influence of the six independent variables on the dependent variable, which reflects the decision to choose a tourist destination.

*Reliability rating:* the results in Table 2 show that the indicators of intrinsic consistency as assessed by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and aggregate confidence coefficient (CR) of the underlying structures are both greater than 0.7. Thus, the measurement model meets the requirement of intrinsic consistency and reliability. Moreover, the scales used have ensured reliability because the index of single factor load (Outer loading), of all factors is greater than 0.7. This suggests that the scales used in the study are appropriate to take further steps (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Evaluation of reliability and convergence of measurement models.

Factor name	Code	Cronbach's alpha	Load factor (Outer loading)		Synthetic reliability (CR)	Total extract variance (AVE)
			Min.	Max.		
Discover food, entertainment	DFE	0.814	0.913	0.914	0.915	0.843
Learn about history and culture	LHC	0.894	0.950	0.952	0.950	0.904
Infrastructure	I	0.815	0.917	0.920	0.915	0.844
Quality of service	QS	0.861	0.729	0.851	0.900	0.644
Tourism environment	TE	0.785	0.905	0.910	0.903	0.823
Tourism resources	TR	0.803	0.899	0.927	0.910	0.834
Destination selection	DS	0.866	0.875	0.903	0.918	0.788

#### 4.2.1. Convergence Assessment

To assess the degree of convergence of the underlying structure, the authors selected the quotation variance index (AVE). A variable is evaluated to have a good degree of convergence when the change in the underlying variable explains at least 50% of the variation in the observed variable or otherwise has a coefficient of extract variance greater than 0.5. The resulting variance quoted by each variable is shown in Table 2. The index of convergent values is greater than 0.5 and ranges from a value of 0.788 to a value of 0.905. Thus, the scales in the model satisfy the requirement of convergent values.



4.2.2. Differentiation Assessment

We used the method of Fornell and Larcker (1981) to determine and evaluate the differentiation of the scales used in the model. The data analysis results in Table 3 show that the square root coefficient of the total variance extracted by all factors is greater than the other correlation coefficient. Thus, the proposed factors achieved differentiation by standards for subsequent studies by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion differentiating values calculator.

Factors name	QS	DFE	I	DS	TE	LAHC	TR
QS	0.802						
DFE	0.558	0.918					
I	0.760	0.569	0.918				
DS	0.660	0.391	0.601	0.888			
TE	0.712	0.427	0.586	0.648	0.907		
LHC	0.688	0.418	0.583	0.701	0.726	0.951	
TR	0.727	0.466	0.609	0.711	0.774	0.847	0.913

Note: Discover food, entertainment (DFE); Learn about history and culture (LAHC); Infrastructure (I); Quality of service (QS); Tourism environment (TE); Tourism resources (TR); Destination selection (DS).

Based on the above results, it can be concluded that the scales used in the research model have satisfied reliability, convergence value, and differentiation value. Therefore, all scales will be used for analysis in the equation structure model.

4.3. Results of Structural Model Evaluation

The structure model is Bootstrap tested with a return pattern of N = 500 to specifically estimate the relationship between the underlying variables. Figure 3 provides detailed information about the degree of association between factors in the model. Two metrics characterize each relationship: p-value: indicates the reliability of the relationship, with a p-value smaller than 0.05 the statistical significance level, indicating a statistically significant relationship. Beta index: is a measure of the strength and direction of the relationship. A positive Beta value indicates a positive relationship, while a negative Beta value indicates a negative relationship.

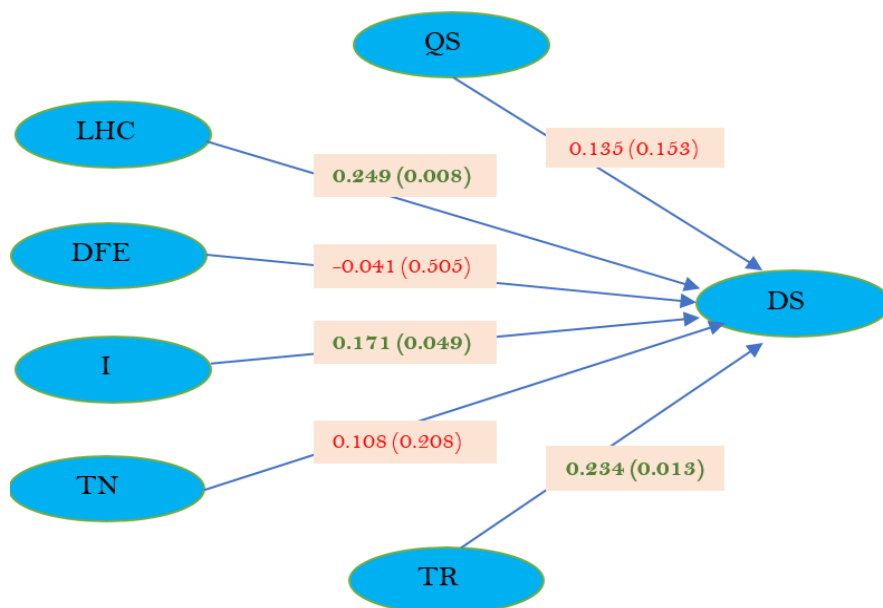


Figure 3. Results of structural model analysis.



The path coefficient value for the endogenous latent variable is used to analyze the model at a 5% significance level. For all bootstrap model, the PLS-SEM model test results provide standard mean and error values for each path coefficient. P-values are used to represent the statistical significance of relationships in the structural model.

The results of the Bootstrapping Structural Model test are shown in Table 4. The results show that 3 variables in the proposed model have a direct impact on the decision of visitors to choose a place with a significance level of less than 0.05. With an adjusted R-squared value of 0.575, this means that the study model explains 57.5% of the variability of Phu Yen destination selection decisions and is explained by impact-independent variables, including the variable belonging to the traveler's internal motivation as the desire to explore, learn about local history and culture, and 2 elements of the characteristics of the destination: infrastructure and tourism resources.

Table 4. Structure model bootstrapping results table.

Path	Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values	Decisions
DFE-> DS	H1.1	-0.041	-0.036	0.062	0.667	0.505	Reject
LHC-> DS	H1.2	0.249	0.257	0.093	2.672	0.008	Accept
I-> DS	H2.1	0.171	0.169	0.087	1.975	0.049	Accept
QS-> DS	H2.2	0.135	0.135	0.095	1.431	0.153	Reject
TE -> DS	H2.3	0.108	0.106	0.086	1.260	0.208	Reject
TR -> DS	H2.4	0.234	0.229	0.094	2.489	0.013	Accept

Thus, the accepted hypotheses include hypothesis H1.2. The desire to learn more about the culture and history of the destination motivates visitors to decide on the choice of destination; hypothesis H2.1 A good tourist destination's infrastructure will attract travelers to choose that destination; and hypothesis H2.4 a diverse travel destination's tourism resources will encourage visitors to choose that destination. These hypotheses are accepted with a 95% confidence rating. As for the H1.1 hypothesis; H2.2 and H2.3 are rejected.

#### 4.4. Results of Analysis and Discussion

Through the table of research results, the motivation from individuals to want to learn about the culture and history of tourists is the factor that has the biggest impact on the decision to choose a destination for domestic tourists, with a beta factor of 0.257 and a P-value of 0.008. This is consistent with previous studies by Mutinda and Mayaka (2012) and Pestana et al. (2020). When customers are highly motivated, they will decide to go where they have chosen. Moreover, Phu Yen stands out from other destinations due to its unique cultural and historical features. When visitors come here, they can explore and learn about the roots of Vietnamese writing, and the unique culture of the Cham people.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest influencing factor is the tourism resource factor, which has a positive and statistically significant influence on domestic travelers' decisions to choose a destination with an impact of 0.299 and a P-value of 0.013 less than 0.05. The results of this study are also consistent with previous studies. The natural and man-made features of a destination's tourism resources attract visitors. This means that destinations with abundant such as beautiful landscapes, historical sites, typical architectural works, unique cultural features, beautiful enjoying spaces, cultural characteristics, gastronomy, etc. will attract visitors to visit and experience. Phu Yen, is a coastal province in Central Vietnam, famous for its pristine beaches, fine white sand, and majestic mountains. It also owns many tourism resources abundant and diverse tourism resources (such as Ganh Da Dia Island, Hon Yen Island, Vung Ro Bay, Da Bia Mountain, Swallow Tower, Dai Lanh Cape can satisfy the diversity needs of tourists. This result shows that these are the strong characteristics of the locality that need to be promoted, along with enhanced information science for tourists, where easy travel will motivate visitors to choose. Moreover, at the destination,

there are accommodation facilities that ensure the prescribed standards to bring comfort, safety, and satisfaction to visitors who will also have a higher chance of being selected. Good tourism infrastructure will help attract tourists, improve the quality of tourism services, and boost the local economy. In order to develop tourism destinations, tourism infrastructure needs to be implemented in a planned, synchronous, and suitable way to the characteristics of each locality and updated according to trends. smart and sustainable infrastructure. Smart tourism infrastructure is a new trend in tourism development, using information technology to improve the quality of tourism services and tourist experience. Sustainable tourism infrastructure is a type of infrastructure developed based on the principles of environmental protection and efficient use of natural resources.

In addition to the above three factors that have had a positive and statistically significant impact, promoting the choice of tourists, the remaining factors have an impact, but in the context of research at a particular tourist destination, there are not enough grounds to confirm the relationship between these variables. In other words, visitors who decide to travel to Phu Yen are not necessarily motivated by the desire to explore the cuisine of this area or come here for entertainment. Tourists also do not appreciate the quality of tourism services provided in Phu Yen and the tourism environment here. This result shows that in the coming time to develop local tourism, Phu Yen also needs appropriate and synchronous solutions to enhance these characteristics.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study looked at the factors influencing travelers' decisions to choose a travel destination. Experimental evaluation with visitors to Phu Yen has shown that 3 factors influence this decision are internal motivating factors and external pulling factors. In particular, emphasizing the characteristics of the destination contributes to influencing tourists' decisions to identify strengths and weaknesses from which to develop strategies to attract tourists to suit the local context. Research results show that tourists choose to come to Phu Yen because of its attractiveness in terms of cultural and historical characteristics; attraction from diverse tourism resources; and attraction from convenient infrastructure for tourists. In addition, in order to develop tourism towards smart tourism and sustainable tourism, Phu Yen also needs to improve the tourism environment and the quality of local tourism services.

This study contributes to showing the current situation and orientation toward improving local tourism development from the objective perspective of tourists. Destinations can enhance their understanding of the needs, wants, and factors that drive visitors to make their own choices, thereby developing an effective targeting strategy. This research also expands the consideration of behavioral theory for tourism-specific products and focuses on the impact of destination characteristics on travelers' decisions. However, this study looked within a limited range of destinations in a province in central Vietnam and studied only with domestic visitors, so the possibility of extrapolation to other destinations is limited. Further research directions could include exploring other destinations, considering a destination as a region, or conducting research with groups of international travelers to gain deeper insights.

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**Transparency:** The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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This Appendix 1 illustrates the measurement scales for the variables used in the research model. There are 6 independent variables and 1 dependent variable. The dependent variable is the tourist's decision to choose a destination. The independent variables include 2 main groups: 2 variables measuring personal motivation factors - motivating factors; and 4 variables are factors belonging to the characteristics of the destination - pull factors.

## Appendix 1. Variable's measurement scale.

Latent variables	Measurement scale	Latent variables	Measurement scale
Discover food, entertainment (DFE)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This destination has attractive entertainment activities - DFE1</li> <li>2. This destination has unique local cuisine - DFE2</li> </ol>	Quality of service (QS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This destination has good tour guide services- QS1</li> <li>2. This destination has good quality services - QS2</li> <li>3. The accommodation services at this destination meet my needs - QS3</li> <li>4.The local restaurants are rated as having good quality - QS4</li> </ol>
Learn about history and culture (LHC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This destination has many attractive cultures - LHC1</li> <li>2. This destination has many attractive historical places - LHC2</li> </ol>	Tourism environment (TE)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The climate at this destination is pleasant - TE1</li> <li>2. This destination has great ecological attractions - TE2</li> </ol>
Infrastructure (I)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This destination has a convenient transportation infrastructure - I1</li> <li>2. This destination has good public amenities - I2</li> </ol>	Tourism resource (TR)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This destination has beautiful and diverse landscapes - TR1</li> <li>2. This destination has pediatric products - TR2</li> </ol>
Destination selection (DS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In general, I am satisfied with my trip to Phu Yen - DS1</li> <li>2. I will recommend others to visit Phu Yen - DS2</li> <li>3. I will continue to visit Phu Yen in the future - DS3</li> </ol>		

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