



# Factors Affecting Ecotourism Development - Tourists' Decision to Choose a Destination

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**Abstract** *Choosing an ecotourism destination is essential in tourism consumption behaviour. Research on the factors influencing destination choice decisions is necessary for a market receiving tourists because it provides an objective view of what tourists seek in destinations. The study aims to build a model and identify factors influencing choosing an ecotourism destination. Research data was collected in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. In the questionnaire survey, 1000 visitors answered the questionnaire directly. The data collection process takes place from February to April 2024. The research method used is empirical testing, which includes data descriptive statistics, scale testing, analysis of the appropriateness of the measures factors, and structure testing researched by SPSS 20 and AMOS 24 software. The study's findings include six factors influencing the decision to choose an ecotourism destination: natural and unique environment, environmental protection, local culture, experiential activities, safety and comfort, and prices and costs. From the study's findings, several topics are discussed regarding developing ecotourism programs that focus on exploring and experiencing the beauty of nature. It is recommended that localities should create tourism programs and promote tourist destinations to develop sustainable ecotourism that brings dual benefits to both the local community and tourists.*

**Keywords:** *Factor Influencing, Ecotourism Destination, The Decision to Choose, Vietnam, Mekong Delta*

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become popular with everyone. It is a critical economic sector that brings substantial financial resources to many countries and territories worldwide (Nguyen, 2022). Meanwhile, competition between destinations is increasingly fierce, and tourists have more opportunities to choose their favourite destinations or products and services (Pham & Khanh, 2021). Researching tourists' needs, desires, and behaviour based on their assessment of a particular tourist destination is necessary (Huong et al., 2024).

Many choices often determine tourists' destination selection behaviour. That means that tourists will decide on the best or most suitable destination based on information related to the destination and their memories (Thi Khanh & Phong, 2020). This choice often goes from consulting and evaluating to committing to prioritizing the choice. At the same time, the entire selection is based on one's memories or experiences

and the tourist's perception or recognition (Negacz, 2021).

In recent years, Vietnamese tourism has increased, with the number of international and domestic visitors increasing. Vietnam tourism is increasingly known worldwide, and many domestic destinations are considered favourite addresses. Tourism has impacted the economic structure; tourists have visited attractions and consumed Infrastructure, and technical facilities have been implemented (Meleddu & Pulina, 2016). The consumption of tourism products has created many jobs for the local community; it contributes to the reproduction of human labour and raises awareness of environmental protection (Wondirad, 2019).

Ecotourism is environmentally responsible tourism, where tourists visit places where the environment is preserved (Wondirad et al., 2020). Ecotourism promotes improving the lives of local people and preserving culture. Ecotourism tourists look for natural areas and clean environments; tourists want to research and observe landscapes, wild

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animals, and plants and participate in picnic activities (Khanh & Long, 2023) in the ecotourism area. Ecotourism brings environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits to local communities; it provides the best long-term solution to the need to protect the environment and promote natural diversity of local nature and culture (Agung et al., 2015).

The Mekong Delta region is located downstream of the Mekong River, with a dense network of rivers and canals, forming a large delta. The Mekong Delta has a diverse and unique ecosystem, from marine ecosystems, islands, estuaries, wetlands, mangrove forests, and delta islands (Hai et al., 2023). Many biosphere reserves, national parks, and nature reserves have high biodiversity and are among the rarest in the world. From the above facts, it can be understood that the Mekong Delta region has unique natural and cultural features of a large flooded ecological zone and is rich in potential for ecotourism development. This paper identifies and analyzes the factors affecting tourists' decisions to choose ecotourism destinations in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The study aims to provide a scientific and practical basis for helping managers and tourism businesses improve service quality, develop sustainable ecotourism, and meet tourists' needs and expectations (Castanha et al., 2024).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism is tourism in areas with well-preserved natural ecosystems to enjoy the landscape, flora, fauna, and existing cultural values. Ecotourism focuses on the level of human responsibility for the environment; it is tourism that minimizes environmental degradation caused by tourism and prevents negative impacts on ecology and culture (Dey et al., 2020). Ecotourism contributes to the sustainable development of the tourism environment and the rights of local people (Ahmadi et al., 2015). We can understand ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.

Ecotourism is a type of tourism that explores and protects the environment. It brings exciting experiences to tourists and aims towards conservation and sustainable development. Tourism activities are designed not to damage the environment while promoting protective and restorative measures (Deng & Zhang, 2020). Visitors are encouraged to participate in cultural activities and experience the lifestyle and culture of the local people. Ecotourism is an opportunity to increase awareness of the value of the natural environment, local culture, and sustainable ways of living (Xiang & Yin, 2020).

Participating in ecotourism includes many activities, such as mountain climbing, hiking, scuba diving, cycling, and

other extracurricular activities. Ecotourism activities often involve exercise and outdoor activities, helping to improve visitors' health and physical fitness (Pengwei & Linsheng, 2018). Ecotourism often encourages using local and sustainable services, helping generate income for local communities and reducing negative environmental impacts (Yu et al., 2020). Ecotourism is not only a way to relax and explore but also an opportunity to benefit from the beauty of nature and culture while contributing to environmental conservation and the sustainable development of the local community (Beall et al., 2021).

Currently, the types of tourism in the Mekong Delta are pretty diverse and rich, including ecotourism in typical wetland ecosystems; River tourism associated with craft villages, experiencing people's lives; Cultural tourism associated with festivals; Beach resort tourism associated with sports and tourism associated with border gates (Huang et al., 2022). Among the types of tourism mentioned, ecotourism is given priority for development based on natural elements and a culture rich in the identity of wet rice civilization. Ecotourism is a global trend because it aims for sustainable development, contributing to environmental protection, and responding to climate change in the Mekong Delta.

Ecotourism is a specific type of tourism that educates people about environmental and natural protection (Castellanos-Verdugo et al., 2016). Ecotourism in the Mekong Delta invests in infrastructure, embellishing and preserving landscapes and natural resources to serve tourists. The diversification of tourism products and services is innovated to attract tourists. The tourism team is professional, highly qualified, and friendly. Ecotourism destinations in the Mekong Delta have preserved natural features and protected landscapes. Many outdoor recreation areas are designed to protect resources, and local festivals and events are associated with the culture of the community.

The Mekong Delta, Vietnam's ecotourism destination, has unique natural tourism resources and high biodiversity (Hai & Ngan, 2022). It is located in nature reserves, capable of being exploited to serve tourists' needs for sightseeing, research, and learning and raising awareness of the natural environment. Deciding to choose Ecotourism can be a great decision with many worthwhile benefits. Ecotourism offers the opportunity to experience naturally beautiful, strange, and unique places, contributing to the protection and conservation of the natural environment and helping to reduce the negative impact of tourism on ecosystems. Ecotourism provides opportunities to exchange and interact with local communities. It is an excellent opportunity to enjoy quality time with family and friends, building memorable memories (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020). Additionally, Ecotourism will support sustainable development by using local and sustainable services, which helps strengthen the

local economy and ensure sustainable development for the community (Paudel Khatiwada et al., 2017). Therefore, studying the factors that influence the decision to choose an ecotourism destination is an issue of concern.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH STRUCTURE

### Theoretical Framework

Ecotourism has been recommended for many economic benefits and to promote environmental protection. However, tourism studies have shown that ecotourism is facing difficulties due to tourists' unwillingness to choose destinations (Constantin et al., 2022). Therefore, the factors influencing tourism's choice of ecotourism destinations are being examined.

Research has examined the direct and indirect effects of environmental beliefs, nature-based destination image, and time perspective on tourists' attitudes toward ecotourism (Thi Khanh & Phong, 2020). Positive and significant effects of time perspective, environmental beliefs, and nature-based destination image on ecotourism attitudes. Environmental beliefs are found to have direct and indirect effects on ecotourism attitudes (Turekulova et al., 2022). Their indirect impact is conveyed through nature-based destination images. Thus, tourists attracted to locations with natural environments and environmental beliefs are more likely to engage in ecotourism than other types of tourism by influencing their investment in their attitude (Roseta et al., 2020).

Ecotourism development is based on awareness of environmental conditions, conservation orientation, and interest in local culture. The existence of community interaction is a guarantee for the sustainable development of ecotourism. Local community participation and factors affecting ecotourism management should be analyzed from many directions (Kia, 2021). Efforts to empower local communities in ecotourism destinations should be improved. The right step will be to educate the local community to understand their rights and the regulations governing ecotourism in the area. A lack of knowledge and information will cause problems and disturbance in local communities, hindering the purpose of ecotourism (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021).

The study by Rahman et al. (2023), built on the stimulus-response model of buyer behaviour, showed that destination image, travel motivation, and perceived risk are associated with ecotourism. Destination image and tourism motivation statistically impact ecotourism destination selection, emphasizing destination selection criteria as an essential determinant of sustainable tourism (Rahman et al., 2023).

In Vietnam, Ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing types of tourism because of attention to environmental issues and sustainable development. In recent years, Ecotourism in the Mekong Delta has received the attention of many tourists. Tourist satisfaction and analyzed factors affecting tourist satisfaction at some ecotourism locations; there were nine measurement variables. Used include infrastructure, accommodation facilities, vehicles for sightseeing, food, shopping, and entertainment services, security, order and safety, tour guides, prices of services, environmental education and landscape conservation work, and benefits ecotourism brings to the community (Teeroovengadum, 2019). Ecotourism destinations should ensure the requirements and principles of ecotourism during development.

Researchers have tested the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioural control affecting tourists' destination selection intentions and behaviour. Attitude, subjective norms, and behavioural control positively impact tourists' intention to choose a destination (Pham, 2019). Behavioural control and intention positively impact tourists' destination selection behaviour. Several tourists choose to vacation on weekends; their stay is short and mainly ends their trip during the day. Tourist information shows that tourism programs at destinations are monotonous, and tourism products are duplicated between destinations, so tourists have short stays (Carrascosa-López et al., 2021).

Motives for travel are family and friends, entertainment and relaxation after hard working days, gaining knowledge and discovering new things; and travel motivations are travel plans, financial issues, destination characteristics, personal safety, and destination information that affect tourists' choice of tourist destination in Da Lat city Southeast visitors. Six factors, including Travel Motivation, Destination information, Destination image, Attitude, Subjective standards, and Perceived behavioural control, affect the decision to choose a destination. The factor of perceived behavioural control has the most substantial impact on domestic tourists' intention to select a destination (Tseng et al., 2019). There are differences in the intention to choose a tourist destination among tourists of different ages, occupations, education levels, and incomes.

Pham (2024) believe that the situation of security, order, and social safety should be stabilized; culinary diversity stabilizes service prices; improve the quality of human resources interpretive environmental education; develop infrastructure for tourism; use tourism resources appropriately; promote tourism advertising and promotion; Investing in developing facilities to serve tourism. Choosing a tourist destination is vital to tourism consumption behaviour (Taye et al., 2019). For a market that receives ecotourism tourists, research on the factors that influence the decision to choose a destination is necessary because it provides a clearer view for tourists

about the tourism they are looking for (Li et al., 2021). Searches for ecotourism include the state of security, social order and safety, Cuisine, Service prices, Human Resources, Interpretive environmental education, Infrastructure for tourism, Travel resources, Tourism advertising and promotion, and tourism facilities ((Pham, 2024).

According to the research findings by Slathia and Chauhan (2022), choosing an ecotourism destination depends on seven factors, including Destination image, customer outreach activities, participant group references, ecotourism knowledge, or ecotourism barriers. The factors related to ecotourism knowledge strongly influence tourists' decision to choose an ecological destination (Slathia & Chauhan, 2022). The specific characteristics of the tourist group are indicated to help the national park management board determine the level of investment and segment the tourist market, thereby effectively building ecotourism products. Promoting the image of a destination to tourists is a factor that influences tourists' choice decisions (Lee et al., 2023). When tourists receive much information and knowledge about ecotourism, they choose ecological destinations.

## Hypotheses

Ecotourism brings many benefits to tourists and local communities. Considering the factors influencing the decision to choose an ecotourism destination helps tourism develop sustainably, ensuring the best tourist experience. We can hypothesize: (H) What factors influence choosing an ecotourism destination?

The natural and unique environments of ecotourism are destinations with unique natural features that retain the environment's pristine nature (Koshy et al., 2022). Tourists are often interested in exploring destinations with beautiful and unique natural environments such as forests, seas, lakes, mountains, and caves (Pham, 2024). These natural environments allow visitors to enjoy, relax, and better understand the value of environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. Hypothesis (H1) Does the unique and natural environment factor affect tourists' decision to choose an ecotourism destination?

Environmental protection of ecotourism is essential to ensure that tourism destinations and activities do not harm the natural environment (Pham, 2024). Environmental protection helps protect rare flora and fauna and preserves tourist destinations' pristine and beautiful nature for tourists and future generations (Slathia & Chauhan, 2022). Tourists choose ecotourism in destinations with good environmental protection policies and tourism activities that do not harm the environment (Khanh & Long, 2023). Hypothesis (H2) Does the Environmental Protection factor affect tourists' decision to choose an ecotourism destination?

Ecotourism is an opportunity to learn about local culture. Destinations with unique cultures and opportunities to interact with local communities are popular (Pham, 2019). By interacting with and respecting local culture, ecotourism provides an immersive travel experience and contributes to the development and conservation of local communities (Pham, 2024). Hypothesis (H3) Does local cultural factors affect tourists' decisions to choose an ecotourism destination?

Experiential activities are essential to ecotourism, helping visitors experience and enjoy nature in a close and joyous way (Castanha et al., 2024; Thi Khanh & Phong, 2020). These extracurricular activities bring unique and exciting experiences, help visitors connect with nature, and contribute to protecting the natural environment, an essential factor in choosing a destination (Slathia & Chauhan, 2022). Hypothesis (H4) Does the experiential activity factor affect tourists' decision to select an ecotourism destination?

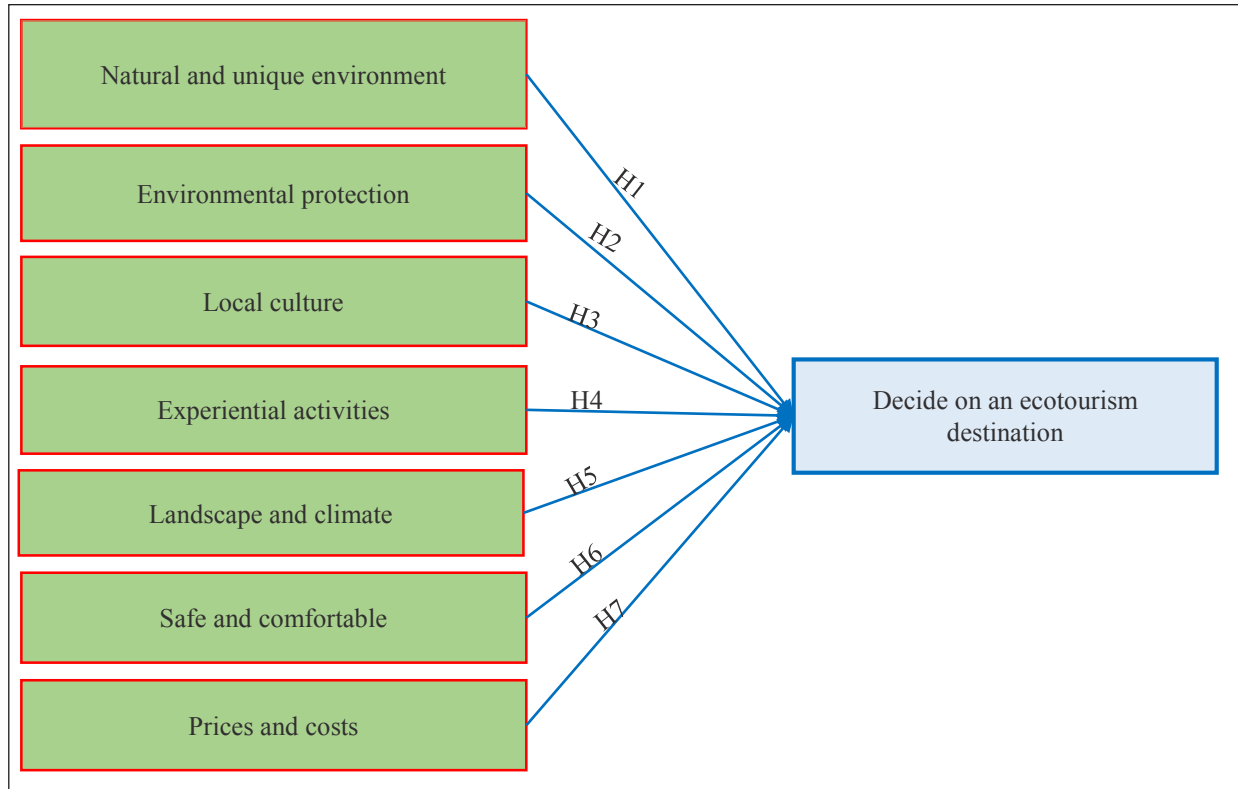
The landscape and climate create a beautiful backdrop and influence visitors' feelings and experiences (Castanha et al., 2024). Landscape and climate are two indispensable elements in the ecotourism experience; they are essential to visitors' emotions and memories of their trip (Koshy et al., 2022). Hypothesis (H5) Do landscape and climate factors affect tourists' decision to choose an ecotourism destination?

Safety and comfort are factors to consider to ensure travellers' safe and comfortable travel experience. They help create a positive and memorable tourist ecotourism experience (Pham, 2024). Safe and comfortable ecotourism must be considered, especially when tourists travel long distances or to difficult places (Kia, 2021). Hypothesis (H6) Do safety and comfort factors affect tourists' decision to choose an ecotourism destination?

Prices and costs of ecotourism vary depending on location, type of travel, season of the year, and level of amenities and services (Pham, 2019; Slathia & Chauhan, 2022). Ecotourism is suitable for many travellers, clearly defining their budget and choosing destinations and activities that fit their budget (Rahman et al., 2023). Although many people are willing to pay high prices to experience ecotourism, price is still important. Hypothesis (H7) Do Price and cost factors affect tourists' decision to choose an ecotourism destination?

## Research Structure

Build a research structure based on available theoretical and research frameworks. The research structure is proposed in the model of factors affecting choosing an ecotourism destination, including natural and unique environment, environmental protection, local culture, extracurricular activities, landscape and climate, safety and comfort, and prices and costs. The research structure is shown in Fig. 1.



Source: Authors, 2024.

**Fig. 1: Research Structure**

Observed variables in the research structure of factors affecting the decision to choose an ecotourism destination are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Observed Variables in Research Structure**

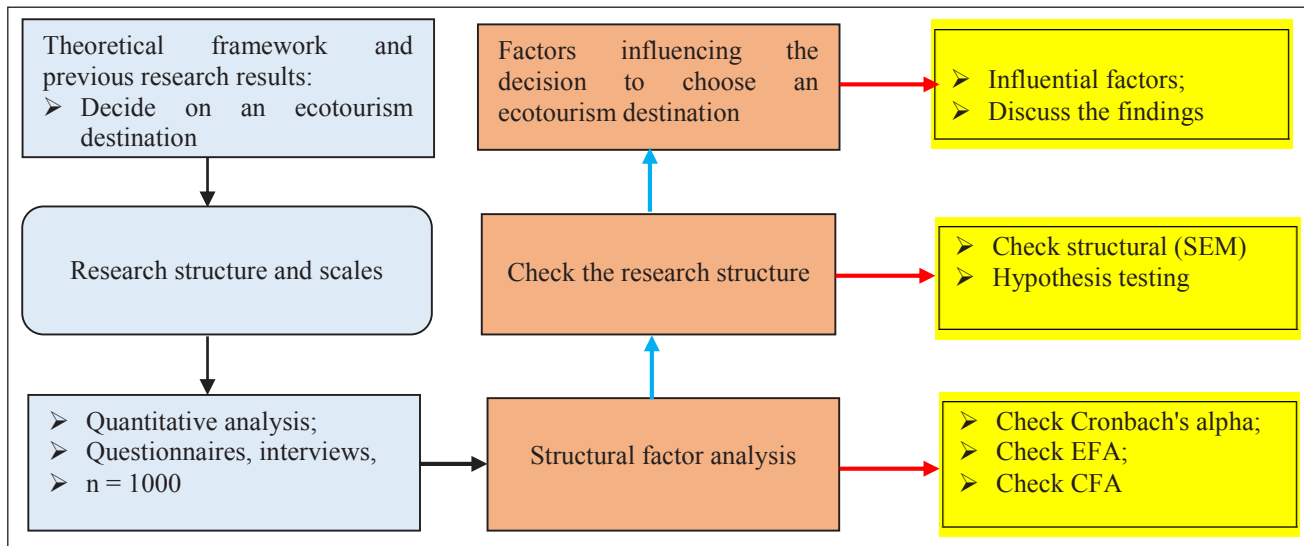
Factors in the Research Structure	Encode	Observed Variables	Sources
Natural and unique environment	NAUE	(1) There are primary forests with biodiversity; (2) The ecosystem attracts many tourists; (3) Quiet space; (4) Has diverse terrain; (5) Attract tourists who want to explore natural beauty; (6) Discover flora and fauna.	Koshy et al., 2022; Pham, 2024
Environmental protection	ENPR	(1) Encourage recycling and reduce the amount of waste generated; (2) Use clean means of transportation; (3) Create nature reserves and conservation areas; (4) Use renewable and clean energy sources; (5) Create a sustainable source of income from tourism; (6) Use products of sustainable origin.	Pham, 2024; Slathia & Chauhan, 2022; Khanh and Long, 2023
Local culture	LOCU	(1) Visitors can learn about the culture, history and traditions of the local community; (2) Tourists buy goods and handmade products from local people; (3) Participate in festivals, traditional festivals and cultural events; (4) Tourists integrate into local culture; (5) Experience unique culture; (6) Visit craft villages.	Pham, 2019; Pham, 2024
Experiential activities	EXAC	(1) Explore natural terrain by walking through the forest; (2) Camping in natural areas; (3) Explore nature reserves such as national parks; (4) Observe birds in natural environments; (5) Enjoy the view from above; (6) Participate in activities such as planting trees and preserving animals.	Castanha et al., 2024; Thi Khanh & Phong, 2020; Slathia & Chauhan, 2022
Landscape and climate	LAAC	(1) Diverse and rich landscape; (2) Pleasant climate helps visitors feel comfortable; (3) Stable weather; (4) Temperature changes little during the year; (5) Favorable seasons for experiential activities; (6) Many beautiful seasonal scenes.	Castanha et al., 2024; Koshy et al., 2022

Factors in the Research Structure	Encode	Observed Variables	Sources
Safe and comfortable	SAAC	(1) The ecotourism destination is safe for tourists; (2) Necessary medical services for tourists; (3) Experienced and trained tour guides; (4) Accommodation facilities such as hotels are guaranteed; (5) Safe means of transportation for ecotourism; (6) Support for tourists in case of emergency.	Kia, 2021; Pham, 2024
Prices and costs	PRAC	(1) Compare costs between destinations; (2) Tourism experience activities; (3) Costs may change depending on the season of the year; (4) Accommodation locations and utility services; (5) Cost depends on the scope and duration of the trip; (6) Additional costs such as transportation, meals, and shopping.	Pham, 2019; Slathia & Chauhan, 2022; Rahman et al, 2023
Decide on an ecotourism destination	DOED	(1) Ecotourism destinations have interesting sightseeing activities; (2) This ecological destination because this type is suitable for interests; (3) Ecotourism destinations have prices and costs; (4) Choose an ecotourism destination.	Pham, 2024; Slathia & Chauhan, 2022

Source: Authors compiled from evaluation studies, 2024.

## METHODOLOGY

The research methods used included descriptive data statistics, structural scale test, factor fit analysis and research structure test. The steps taken in the study are shown in Fig. 2.



Source: Authors, 2024.

Fig. 2: Flowchart of Research Methodology Steps

## Research Area

Tourism in the Mekong Delta region has developed dramatically recently, achieving vital results and positively contributing to socio-economic development. It affirms the region's tourism brand to domestic and foreign tourists, promoting the development of other industries and fields. According to statistical reports on the tourism industry's business results, in 2020, Vietnam welcomed 16,497.00 thousand domestic tourists and 4,187.20

thousand international tourists; in 2021, Vietnam welcomed 78,083.80 thousand domestic tourists and 7,213.89 thousand international tourists; and by 2022, Vietnam had welcome 60,453.24 thousand domestic tourists and 3,149.47 thousand international tourists. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry has been affected, but it is showing signs of recovery (General Statistics Office, 2024). Ecotourism destinations surveyed include Tan Lap Floating Village in Long An province; Thoi Son ecotourism area in Tien Giang province; Gao Giong ecotourism area in Dong

Thap province; Tra Su Cajuput forest ecotourism area in An Giang province; Phu Quoc Island in Kien Giang Province; Mui Ca Mau National Park in Ca Mau province.

### Research Data Analysis

Identify the factors that influence the decision to choose an ecotourism destination. Based on the theoretical framework, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire included 53 Likert-type items, seven demographic scales, and seven scales to measure the factors influencing the choice of ecotourism destination. Data collection took place from February to April 2024.

The Likert scale ranged from 1 to 5 and was used to measure the respondents’ opinions on the measures of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree and (5) strongly agree. Visitors answered the questionnaire directly. The questionnaire was distributed to 1,000 tourists travelling to the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, for ecotourism. A total of 975 valid responses were collected. The survey responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 20 and AMOS version 24 software.

The study of factors affecting the decision-making of ecotourism destination selection was carried out according to the following steps: demographic descriptive statistics, scale reliability test, structural factor analysis, using linear structural model (SEM) to test the hypothesis of factors affecting the decision-making of ecotourism destination selection; determining the influence Factors in the decision to choose an ecotourism destination.

### RESULTS

Analysis of seven demographic scales in the survey area is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Sample**

Characteristics of the Survey Sample	Visitor Replied	Percentage
1. Survey area	975	100%
Long An	162	16.6
Tien Giang	143	14.7
Dong Thap	137	14.1

Characteristics of the Survey Sample	Visitor Replied	Percentage
An Giang	190	19.5
Kieng Giang	171	17.5
Ca Mau	172	17.6
2. The gender	975	100%
Male	497	51.0
Female	478	49.0
3. Visitor	975	
Domestic	605	62.1
International	370	37.9
4. Occupation	975	100%
State employees	72	7.4
Company leadership	99	10.2
Researchers	90	9.2
Business staff	216	22.2
Technical staff	64	6.6
Teacher	172	17.6
Freelance labor	112	11.5
Other	150	15.4
5. Age (years)	975	100%
< 30	233	23.9
30 - 40	219	22.5
40 - 50	186	19.1
> 50	337	34.6
6. Education	975	100%
Master or PhD	62	6.4
College or Bachelor	266	27.3
Professional diploma holders	220	22.6
Other	427	43.8
7. Monthly income (million VND)	975	100%
< 10	192	19.7
10 - 20	260	26.7
20 - 30	186	19.1
> 30	337	34.6

Source: Authors analyzing survey data, 2024, n=975.

Table 3 examines the research structure of factors affecting ecotourism destination selection decisions. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the scale was > .8, and the overall correlation coefficient was > 3. It shows the appropriateness of the scales in the structural model (Cronbach, 1951).

**Table 3: Testing the Scales in the Structural Model**

Factors in the research Structure	Encode	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation Range	Mean
Natural and unique environment	NAUE	6	.915	.642 - .871	2.933
Environmental protection	ENPR	6	.889	.630 - .828	3.357
Local culture	LOCU	6	.906	.597 - .904	3.662
Experiential activities	EXAC	6	.967	.850 - .913	3.087
Landscape and climate	LAAC	6	.864	.559 - .807	3.356
Safe and comfortable	SAAC	6	.936	.677 - .904	4.018
Prices and costs	PRAC	6	.961	.841 - .900	3.585
Decide on an ecotourism destination	DOED	4	.933	.791 - .904	3.761

Source: Authors analyzing data by SPSS, 2024, n = 975.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to study structural scales. The test results show that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is 0.848. Bartlett's test of sphericity, significance value = .000 ( $< .05$ ); Eigenvalue is 1.313 ( $\geq 1$ ); Cumulative factor loadings are 74.904% ( $\geq 50\%$ );

EFA analysis showed that the structure was appropriate (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). Therefore, all seven structural factors were retained in the research model (Hair et al., 2010), as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EXAC5	.931							
EXAC6	.928							
EXAC3	.909							
EXAC4	.902							
EXAC1	.900							
EXAC2	.876							
PRAC4		.969						
PRAC3		.964						
PRAC5		.959						
PRAC6		.943						
PRAC2		.833						
PRAC1		.738						
SAAC5			.940					
SAAC6			.937					
SAAC1			.889					
SAAC4			.868					
SAAC2			.764					
SAAC3			.729					
NAUE5				.876				
NAUE6				.861				
NAUE3				.814				
NAUE4				.809				
NAUE1				.732				
NAUE2				.696				
LOCU5					.918			

	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
LOCU3					.857			
LOCU2					.722			
LOCU1					.669			
LOCU4					.645			
ENPR6						.888		
ENPR5						.840		
ENPR4						.806		
ENPR3						.746		
ENPR2						.717		
ENPR1						.696		
LAAC6							.890	
LAAC5							.816	
LAAC4							.803	
LAAC3							.733	
LAAC2							.709	
LAAC1							.675	
DOED2								.791
DOED4								.767
DOED1								.720
DOED3								.636

Source: Authors analyzing data by SPSS, 2024, n = 975.

The results of the rotation matrix in Table 4 show that 46 observed variables are divided into eight factors. All observed variables had factor loading coefficients > .5

(Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Therefore, all seven elements were retained in the study structure (Doll et al., 1994).

**Table 5: Test Results Reliability and Convergence**

Factor Construct	Encode	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)
Experiential activities	EXAC	.948	.755	.077	.998
Prices and costs	PRAC	.956	.786	.038	.997
Safe and comfortable	SAAC	.928	.689	.088	.997
Natural and unique environment	NAUE	.914	.645	.268	.953
Local culture	LOCU	.902	.620	.203	.003
Environmental protection	ENPR	.888	.577	.149	.943
Landscape and climate	LAAC	.865	.526	.022	.923
Decide on an ecotourism destination	DOED	.936	.785	.268	.948

Source: Authors analyzing data by SPSS, 2024, n = 975.

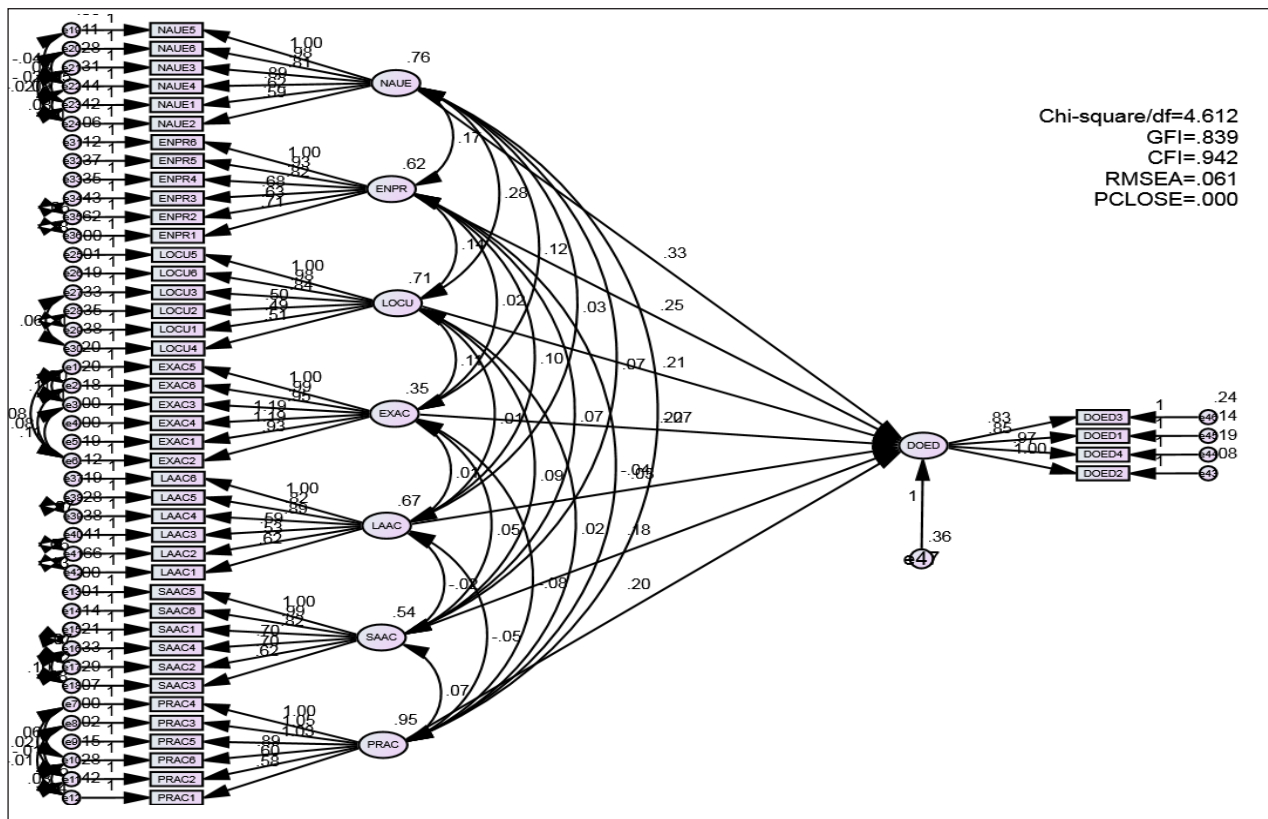
The structure of the factors influencing the decision to choose an ecotourism destination. It shows Chi-square/df = 4.612; GFI = .839; CFI = .942; RMSEA = .061; PCLOSE = .000, which represents model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The

results of testing the linear model of factors influencing the decision to choose an ecotourism destination are shown in Table 6 and Fig. 3.

**Table 6: The Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose an Ecotourism Destination**

Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose an Ecotourism Destination	Estimates	Sig	Standardized Estimates	Information
Experiential activities ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.221	.000	.155	Accepted
Prices and costs ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.203	.000	.234	Accepted
Safe and comfortable ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.180	.000	.157	Accepted
Natural and unique environment ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.328	.000	.338	Accepted
Local culture ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.211	.000	.211	Accepted
Landscape and climate ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.185	.295	.184	Not Accepted Yet
Environmental protection ---> Decide on an ecotourism destination	.251	.000	.234	Accepted

Source: Authors analyzing data by AMOS, 2024, n = 975.

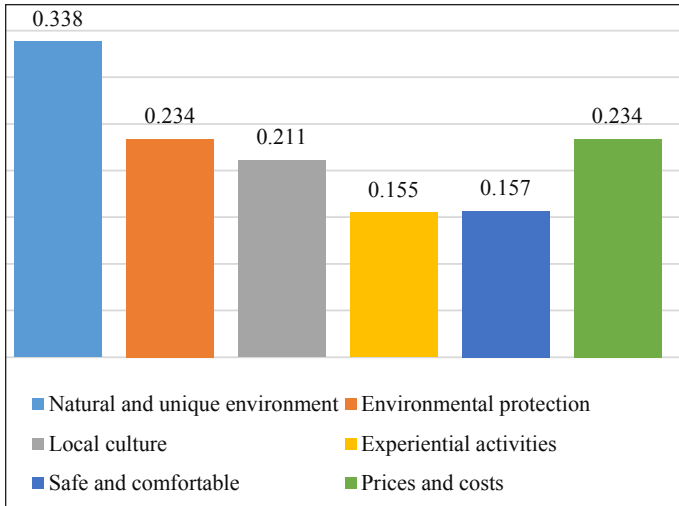


Source: Authors analyzing data by AMOS, 2024, n =975.

**Fig. 3: Results of Structural Test of Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose an Ecotourism Destination**

The results of the standardized regression coefficient are shown in Table 6. The factors influencing the decision to choose an ecotourism destination, and Fig. 4. Level of factors influencing. It shows factors influencing choosing an

ecotourism destination, including NAUE = .338, ENPR = .234, PRAC = .234, LOCU = .211, SAAC = .157, EXAC = .155.



Source: Authors analyzing data, 2024, n = 975.

**Fig. 4: Level of Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose an Ecotourism Destination**

## DISCUSSION

*Test Hypothesis (H):* The study’s findings show that six factors influence the decision to choose an ecotourism destination: the Natural and unique environment, Environmental protection, Local culture, Extracurricular activities, Safety and comfort, and Prices and costs.

*Test Hypothesis (H1):* The influence of natural and unique environments on choosing an ecotourism destination is .338. We should develop beautiful natural environments and, at the same time, promote ecotourism. We should conserve and restore declining natural environments, including forests, grasslands, oceans and lakes. Regenerating the natural environment is about protecting organisms and landscapes and creating the basis for ecotourism (Khan et al., 2022). Tourism infrastructure, such as resorts, tunnels, and transportation facilities, must be developed sustainably. Train and educate tourism staff, local communities and visitors on preserving the natural environment (Tuan et al., 2023).

*Test the Hypothesis (H2):* Environmental protection influences the decision to choose an ecotourism destination of .234. To develop ecological protection and, at the same time, promote ecotourism, we should create and manage conservation areas, national parks, and other areas that have ecological value. Localities should have sustainable environmental management plans to protect precious natural environments (Lu et al., 2016). Develop ecotourism activities such as forest exploration, trekking, and wildlife observation tours. Local authorities should organize educational and training programs to raise awareness about

protecting the natural environment for tourists and local communities (Heshmati et al., 2022). Create informational materials and guides to educate visitors on behaving environmentally responsibly (Ngan et al., 2023).

*Test Hypothesis (H3):* Local culture’s influence on the decision to choose an ecotourism destination is .211. Using local culture to develop ecotourism helps preserve cultural heritage and creates unique travel experiences for visitors (Faizal et al., 2017). We should organize traditional events and festivals such as the rice harvest, boat racing, or folk festivals. Encourage visitors to participate and experience local life and culture. Develop cultural tours and design tours to explore local culture, including visits to villages, towns, or historical and cultural experiences, meeting with residents, learning and participating in traditional cultural activities. Support the development of establishments that produce and consume local cultural products such as handicrafts, jewellery, and local specialities. Incorporating local culture into ecotourism development, we preserve culture and create a diverse visitor travel experience while helping local communities develop sustainable development.

*Test Hypothesis (H4):* Experiential activities influence the decision to choose an ecotourism destination by .155. By organizing extracurricular activities, ecotourism can become diverse and attractive while creating opportunities for visitors to explore and enjoy the natural environment. We can arrange visits to national parks and nature reserves, helping visitors better understand local ecosystems and conservation efforts. It offers activities like wildlife viewing and plant tours to stimulate curiosity and understanding of biodiversity. Combine extracurricular activities with cultural experiences, culinary experiences, and local tours to create diverse and engaging travel programs (Ronizi et al., 2020). Create flexible and customized tour packages to suit each traveller’s needs and preferences, organizing programs that pass through unique natural areas such as forests, waterfalls, lakes and rivers (Pham, 2024).

*Test Hypothesis (H5):* This test hypothesis tests the linear structure of the model of factors affecting the decision to choose an ecotourism destination. The data analyzed for the Landscape and climate factors showed that the Sig value of the LAAC scale = .295 (> .05) was removed from the model.

*Test Hypothesis (H6):* Safety and convenience influence the decision to choose an ecotourism destination by .157. Safety and comfort are essential factors in developing ecotourism. Tourists want an experience that is close to nature and convenient and safe (Lu et al., 2016). We should maintain transportation, electricity, water and telecommunications infrastructure to ensure comfort for visitors (Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2016). They provide emergency medical care, rescue services, and travel insurance to ensure visitors’ safety in all cases. Besides, amenities such as Wi-Fi, mobile

phones, personal hygiene, and laundry services are provided to enhance guests' comfort. We should strictly manage waste collection and treatment to protect the natural environment (Satrya et al., 2023). Use technology to improve the traveller experience and convenience, including online booking, travel guidance through mobile applications, and convenient payment systems (Hermawan et al., 2019).

*Test Hypothesis (H7):* Price and cost influence the decision to choose an ecotourism destination by .234. Ecotourism can develop sustainably at reasonable prices and costs, bringing economic and social benefits to local communities and tourists. Develop high-value travel packages combining many activities and services at reasonable prices (Jun, 2016). Ensure travel packages bring valuable experiences to visitors by providing unique activities close to nature. There should be cooperation between local businesses and service providers to reduce costs and increase community.

## CONCLUSION

The hypothesized research was tested on scales showing the appropriateness of the factors in the structure. The findings have verified the model of factors affecting the decision to choose an appropriate ecotourism destination. Six factors influence the decision to select an ecotourism destination: the natural and unique environment, environmental protection, local culture, experiential activities, safety and comfort, and prices and costs. Therefore, the results achieved in the study have met the set goals.

Discussions have been suggested to help policymakers and businesses understand the relationship between factors influencing choosing an ecotourism destination. Increasing awareness about environmental protection helps minimize the negative impacts of tourism. Encourage environmentally responsible tourism programs, assisting tourists to understand the value of preserving the natural environment. We should make price management in tourism transparent, providing clear information about prices and costs to tourists. Safety and comfort create lovely and meaningful visitor experiences, contributing to sustainable tourism development. Ecotourism is a topic that countries around the world are interested in developing. The findings in this study may serve as a basis for researchers to conduct further, large-scale studies. Researchers should collect many samples over large areas for comprehensive evaluation.

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