

Article

Predictive Motivations in Satisfaction and Loyalty in Sustainable Coastal and Marine Destinations: Galapagos National Park, Ecuador

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Abstract

Studying sustainability in marine and coastal tourism within national parks is essential to balance visitor use with the conservation of fragile ecosystems and biodiversity. In this context, the Galápagos Archipelago is a major coastal and marine destination in Ecuador, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The aim of this empirical study was (i) to identify the principal motivational dimensions in sustainable coastal and marine destinations; (ii) to determine which motivations significantly predict tourist satisfaction in these contexts; and (iii) to establish which motivations influence loyalty in sustainable coastal and marine destinations. The research was conducted in situ, obtaining 407 valid questionnaires. Multiple regression analysis and exploratory factor analysis were applied. The results reveal six motivational factors: learning; heritage and nature; sun and beach; sports; authentic coastal experience; novelty; and social interaction. The motivation that most strongly predicts satisfaction is heritage and nature, followed by novelty. Likewise, the motivation that most strongly predicts loyalty is heritage and nature, with additional influence from sun and beach and sports motivations. These findings provide practical guidance for the development of sustainable destination management plans and contribute to the academic literature on sustainability, satisfaction, and loyalty in coastal and marine tourism contexts.



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1. Introduction

Coastal and marine tourism encompasses tourism activities developed in shoreline and ocean environments, where beaches, coastal landscapes, marine biodiversity, and ocean-based recreation constitute the central attraction for visitors. While coastal tourism typically includes land–sea interactions such as sun-and-beach leisure, waterfront accommodation,

and coastal cultural experiences, marine tourism focuses more specifically on activities that occur in direct contact with the sea, including diving, sailing, wildlife observation, cruising, and other nautical practices. From an academic perspective, these modalities are understood as interconnected components of broader socio-ecological systems in which economic development, community livelihoods, and environmental conservation converge. For instance, [Hall \(2001\)](#) argues that coastal tourism should be analyzed as a dynamic system shaped by spatial planning, environmental pressures, and global mobility patterns. Likewise, [Orams \(1999\)](#) highlights that marine tourism generates significant economic opportunities but also requires careful management due to the ecological fragility of marine ecosystems. More recently, [Higham and Miller \(2018\)](#) emphasize that sustainable governance frameworks are essential to balance growth, climate change adaptation, and biodiversity protection in coastal and marine destinations. Consequently, coastal and marine tourism can be conceptualized as a strategic and multidimensional segment of the tourism industry, characterized by strong experiential value, economic relevance, and pressing sustainability challenges.

The Galápagos Islands (Ecuador) represent one of the most emblematic destinations for coastal and marine tourism worldwide due to their exceptional biodiversity, high level of endemism, and globally recognized conservation status. As a protected area and living laboratory of evolution, the archipelago attracts visitors seeking unique marine experiences such as snorkeling, diving, wildlife observation, and nature-based cruises, all developed under strict environmental regulations. Its tourism model demonstrates how coastal and marine tourism can generate significant economic benefits while operating within sustainability frameworks that prioritize ecosystem protection, scientific research, and community involvement. Consequently, Galápagos serves as a benchmark for balancing marine tourism development with conservation imperatives in fragile island environments.

To manage sustainable destination management plans, it is necessary to have information about motivations. These play a fundamental role in decision-making ([Yolal et al., 2015](#)), as they represent the underlying needs that drive people to participate in tourism activities ([Swanson & Horridge, 2006](#)). In sustainable destinations, visitor satisfaction plays a pivotal role in enhancing the overall tourist experience while fostering more environmentally responsible behaviors. From this perspective, [Lu et al. \(2017\)](#) argue that positive emotional responses significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction and shape subsequent behavioral intentions. Similarly, [Ouyang et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Lu et al. \(2017\)](#) report that satisfaction is closely associated with affective states such as awe, loyalty, and joy, reinforcing its emotional dimension ([Yan & Jia, 2021](#)). Likewise, loyalty is reflected in a traveler's intent to revisit a destination, share positive experiences through word-of-mouth, and develop a sense of satisfaction based on their favorable experiences ([Tanford & Jung, 2017](#)).

Research on motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty is essential in sustainable coastal and marine tourism because it clarifies why visitors choose a destination, how they assess their experiences, and whether they intend to return or recommend it. Understanding motivations helps align tourism offerings with sustainability values, while measuring satisfaction reveals whether experiences meet expectations in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Loyalty indicators, such as revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth, provide insight into the long-term viability of sustainable strategies. Together, these variables support evidence-based management that balances economic performance with conservation and community well-being.

Understanding tourist motivations and identifying which motivational dimensions predict satisfaction and loyalty are essential for the sustainable management of coastal and marine destinations. Tourist motivations explain why individuals choose a destination and shape their expectations before the visit, while satisfaction and loyalty determine critical

post-visit behaviors such as revisit intention, destination recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth, which are fundamental for the long-term competitiveness of tourism destinations (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Tanford & Jung, 2017). Although previous studies have examined motivations in conventional coastal destinations and specific marine tourism activities (Solis-Radilla et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2024), limited evidence exists regarding which motivational dimensions most strongly predict satisfaction and loyalty in sustainable coastal and marine destinations located within marine protected areas and national parks. These destinations differ substantially from traditional sun-and-beach tourism because visitors are also attracted by biodiversity conservation, environmental quality, and natural heritage. Consequently, identifying the motivations that generate the highest levels of satisfaction and loyalty contributes not only to advancing theoretical understanding of tourist behavior in environmentally sensitive contexts but also to providing evidence-based guidance for destination managers to design sustainable tourism products, strengthen conservation-oriented marketing strategies, and promote long-term visitor loyalty while balancing tourism development with ecosystem protection.

In this context, the effective management of sustainable coastal and marine destinations within national parks requires a clear understanding of tourist motivations, particularly identifying which motivational dimensions significantly predict visitor satisfaction and loyalty in order to inform sustainable development planning. However, research on this topic remains limited, and existing studies have produced heterogeneous and insufficiently standardized findings.

Accordingly, the present study was conducted in the Galápagos Islands, a marine protected area widely recognized as an ideal setting for sustainable coastal and marine tourism. The study pursues three main objectives: (i) to identify the principal motivational dimensions in sustainable coastal and marine destinations; (ii) to determine which motivations significantly predict tourist satisfaction in these contexts; and (iii) to establish which motivations influence loyalty-related outcomes, including intention to revisit, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth regarding the sustainable coastal and marine destination.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motivations in Sustainable Coastal and Marine Destinations

Understanding tourist motivations is central to explaining behavioral dynamics in coastal and marine tourism. In tourism studies, motivation has been conceptualized as the set of internal needs and desires that stimulate individuals to travel outside their usual environment in search of meaningful experiences (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). A foundational framework was proposed by Crompton (1979) through the push–pull model, which differentiates between internal drivers, such as escape, relaxation, novelty, and social interaction and external destination attributes, including natural landscapes, cultural attractions, and recreational opportunities (Jeong, 2014). Additionally, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been widely incorporated into tourism research, suggesting that travel behavior reflects a progression from basic restorative needs to higher-level aspirations related to personal growth and self-actualization (Yousaf et al., 2018). These theoretical approaches underpin much of the empirical work examining motivational dimensions in coastal environments (Sastre & Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017; Güzel et al., 2020; Carvache-Franco et al., 2023, 2024; Cifci et al., 2024).

In coastal and marine tourism contexts, motivational structures tend to be multidimensional due to the recreational and environmental characteristics of these destinations. Research conducted in Mediterranean and island settings demonstrates that while the traditional “sun and sea” image remains influential, overreliance on this positioning may limit diversification and year-round demand (Koutra & Karyopoulis, 2013). Empirical

evidence from Latin American destinations shows that dimensions such as culture and nature, learning, novelty and social interaction, authentic coastal experiences, nightlife, and beach-related leisure play a significant role in shaping revisit intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021). Similar patterns have been observed in African and European coastal contexts, where motivations linked to heritage, education, relaxation, and social bonding reinforce both cognitive and affective components of the travel experience (Rid et al., 2014; Kassean & Gassita, 2013; Le Corre et al., 2021; Solis-Radilla et al., 2021).

Furthermore, specialized forms of marine tourism illustrate how motivations adapt to specific activities. In scuba diving, internal drivers such as exploration, personal challenge, and self-development interact with pull factors like biodiversity and site quality (Albayrak et al., 2021). Recreational fishing motivations emphasize connection with nature, socialization, and cultural engagement (Cifci et al., 2024), while yachting tourism reflects patterns associated with novelty, leisure-sport orientation, and self-realization (Yao et al., 2021). In a recent study in the coastal and marine destination of Montañita (Ecuador), academics Carvache-Franco et al. (2025) argued five motivational dimensions, namely, Culture and Nature, Novelty and Social Interaction, Sun and Beach, Sports, and Entertainment.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that coastal and marine tourism motivations extend beyond passive relaxation and beach enjoyment, incorporating experiential depth, identity expression, and social meaning. At the same time, variations across destinations and visitor segments highlight the importance of context-specific empirical research to refine motivational models and enhance theoretical consistency within coastal and marine tourism scholarship. Collectively, previous studies demonstrate that tourist motivations in coastal and marine destinations are multidimensional and may include cognitive, environmental, recreational, experiential, and social components. However, the relative composition of these motivational dimensions varies according to the ecological, cultural, and managerial characteristics of each destination. In protected coastal and marine areas such as the Galápagos Islands, tourism motivations are therefore expected to reflect not only conventional recreational interests but also learning, natural heritage, authenticity, novelty, and social interaction. Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *Tourist motivation in sustainable coastal and marine destinations comprises a multidimensional structure involving Learning, Heritage and Nature, Sun and Beach and Sports, Authentic Coastal Experience, Novelty, and Social Interaction.*

2.2. Motivations and Satisfaction in Sustainable Coastal and Marine Destinations

Regarding satisfaction in destinations, Bond et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of acknowledging the diverse needs and expectations that visitors bring to a destination, ranging from the pursuit of knowledge and cultural enrichment to the desire for relaxation and temporary escape from daily routines. Recognizing these varied aspirations is essential for understanding satisfaction not merely as a cognitive evaluation, but as a multidimensional experience shaped by emotional fulfillment and personal meaning within sustainable tourism contexts.

A growing body of research highlights that identifying and interpreting tourist motivations is essential for improving satisfaction levels in highly competitive coastal destinations. For example, Carvache-Franco et al. (2021), in their study of Acapulco, identified motivational dimensions such as experiential reflection, experiential learning, and ecological observation as significant predictors of tourist satisfaction. Their findings suggest that visitors driven by interests in learning, immersion, and meaningful engagement with the environment tend to express higher satisfaction compared to those primarily motivated by

leisure-oriented or passive consumption experiences. In a similar vein, [Sangpikul \(2018\)](#), analyzing island destinations, reported that interaction with local communities and engagement with beach-related natural attractions positively influenced both satisfaction and loyalty. These results underscore the importance of social connection and interaction with natural settings as central components shaping satisfying coastal tourism experiences.

Empirical research in coastal and marine tourism consistently demonstrates that certain motivational dimensions exert a stronger influence on visitor satisfaction than others. In the context of Red Sea dive resorts, [Zhong et al. \(2024\)](#) found that motivations directly linked to marine engagement—such as scuba diving and interaction with marine biodiversity were significant predictors of satisfaction, underscoring the value of immersive and high-involvement experiences. Similarly, [Jawabreh et al. \(2023\)](#), in their study of Aqaba (Jordan), identified “reason for visiting” as a statistically significant determinant of satisfaction, with motivations associated with active participation and cultural interest generating higher levels of visitor well-being. In line with these findings, [Carvache-Franco et al. \(2021\)](#) reported that satisfaction levels were greater when tourists’ motivations were aligned with authentic and educational experiences rather than purely hedonic drivers such as nightlife. This perspective resonates with the work of [Antón et al. \(2017\)](#), who highlighted that emotional attachment and the intensity of prior engagement with motivational factors significantly shaped satisfaction and subsequent loyalty behaviors.

The concept of experience co-creation further clarifies the link between motivation and satisfaction. According to [Lončarić et al. \(2018\)](#), when visitors actively participate in shaping their travel experiences in ways that reflect their personal motivations, satisfaction and overall well-being are enhanced. Comparable evidence from marine tourism contexts indicates that satisfaction is highest when adventure, exploration, and biodiversity-related motivations are fully realized during the visit. Likewise, [Solis-Radilla et al. \(2021\)](#) identified novelty followed by social interaction as key motivational predictors of satisfaction in coastal destinations. Also, [Sangpikul \(2018\)](#) emphasized that sustained satisfaction in beach tourism depends more on service quality, cultural engagement, and emotional resonance than on natural attractions alone. Similarly, [Kassean and Gassita \(2013\)](#) showed that motivations such as escape, novelty, and nostalgia were more strongly associated with satisfaction than simple beach recreation in Mauritius.

Current motivations in coastal and marine tourism are characterized by a convergence between the search for highly specialized sporting experiences and a growing environmental awareness. In the specific case of diving tourism, motivations focus on the exploration of marine biodiversity and the quality of preserved dive sites ([Sangthong et al., 2025](#)). Likewise, travel intentions in this sector are influenced by psychological frameworks where the destination’s capacity and opportunity act as critical drivers for the modern tourist ([Zhuge et al., 2025](#)). On the other hand, a strong motivation linked to sustainability is emerging, where activities such as fishing tourism are now associated with reduced consumption and recycling behaviors, reflecting a more responsible tourist towards the coastal ecosystem ([Han et al., 2026](#)). In this sense, the perception of environmental risks and health safety continue to be determining factors that condition destination choice and the motivation for escape in contexts of coastal vulnerability ([Yang et al., 2026](#)).

Across diverse coastal and marine settings, a consistent pattern emerges: motivations that encourage active involvement, learning, authenticity, and meaningful social connection tend to produce higher levels of satisfaction. In contrast, more generic leisure-oriented motives often demonstrate moderate or context-dependent effects. Consequently, identifying and strategically addressing complex motivational profiles is essential for sustainable coastal and marine destinations seeking to enhance visitor satisfaction and strengthen their competitive positioning. Across diverse coastal and marine settings, a consistent

pattern emerges: motivations that encourage active involvement, learning, authenticity, and meaningful social connection tend to produce higher levels of satisfaction. In contrast, more generic leisure-oriented motives often demonstrate moderate or context-dependent effects. In sustainable and environmentally protected destinations, natural and heritage attributes may acquire greater relevance because they constitute the central elements of the visitor experience and distinguish these destinations from conventional sun-and-beach settings. Consequently, identifying the motivational dimensions with the greatest predictive influence is essential for enhancing visitor satisfaction and strengthening the competitive positioning of sustainable coastal and marine destinations. Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. *Heritage and Nature is the strongest motivational predictor of tourist satisfaction in sustainable coastal and marine destinations.*

2.3. Motivations and Loyalty in Sustainable Coastal and Marine Destinations

The association between tourist motivations and loyalty has received considerable scholarly attention, particularly within experiential tourism contexts. The push–pull framework proposed by Crompton (1979) remains a foundational model for explaining how internal drivers (e.g., escape, novelty, social interaction) and external destination attributes influence post-visit behaviors. Empirical evidence suggests that not all motivations exert the same predictive power on loyalty outcomes. For instance, research conducted in Acapulco by Carvache-Franco et al. (2021) found that motivations linked to experiential learning, cultural exchange, and authenticity were positively associated with revisit intention and destination recommendation. Similarly, Prayag (2012), in a study of Mauritius, demonstrated that motivations related to nature, environmental quality, and local friendliness significantly predicted both return intentions and favorable word-of-mouth. Complementing these findings, Antón et al. (2017) highlighted that emotionally grounded motivations such as attachment to place and positive social experiences strengthened the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty behaviors.

Within marine and diving tourism, loyalty appears particularly influenced by motivations centered on biodiversity, personal challenge, and distinctive underwater experiences. Zhong et al. (2024) observed that divers motivated by exploration and relaxation (push factors), together with high-quality marine environments (pull factors), exhibited strong intentions to revisit and advocate for the destination. In beach tourism contexts, however, generalized “sun and sea” motivations often prove insufficient to generate enduring loyalty. For example, Yusof et al. (2021) reported that while relaxation attracted most visitors, loyalty was stronger among those motivated by nature engagement and social bonding. Likewise, Perles-Ribes et al. (2020) found in Spanish coastal cities that motivations were more stable predictors of long-term loyalty than satisfaction alone, suggesting that the reasons underlying destination choice may shape future behavior more consistently than post-visit evaluations.

Overall, the literature indicates that motivations associated with authentic experiences, cultural and natural exploration, novelty, and social interaction tend to generate deeper psychological connections and stronger loyalty outcomes, including return intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth. In contrast, more generic hedonic motives—such as nightlife or standardized beach enjoyment—often lack the distinctiveness required to foster lasting attachment. For coastal and marine destinations seeking sustainable competitiveness, identifying and strategically reinforcing the motivational dimensions that cultivate emotional bonds with visitors becomes essential. Overall, the literature indicates that motivations associated with authentic experiences, cultural and natural exploration, novelty, and social interaction tend to generate deeper psychological

connections and stronger loyalty outcomes, including revisit intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth. In contrast, more generic hedonic motives, such as nightlife or standardized beach enjoyment, often lack the distinctiveness required to foster lasting attachment. In protected coastal and marine destinations, natural heritage and biodiversity may create stronger emotional and symbolic connections because they represent unique and difficult-to-substitute attributes of the destination. For destinations seeking sustainable competitiveness, identifying and strategically reinforcing the motivational dimensions that cultivate enduring bonds with visitors is therefore essential. Based on these theoretical and empirical considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. *Heritage and Nature is the strongest motivational predictor of loyalty in sustainable coastal and marine destinations, expressed through revisit intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth.*

The conceptual relationships proposed in Hypotheses H1–H3 are summarized in Figure 1.

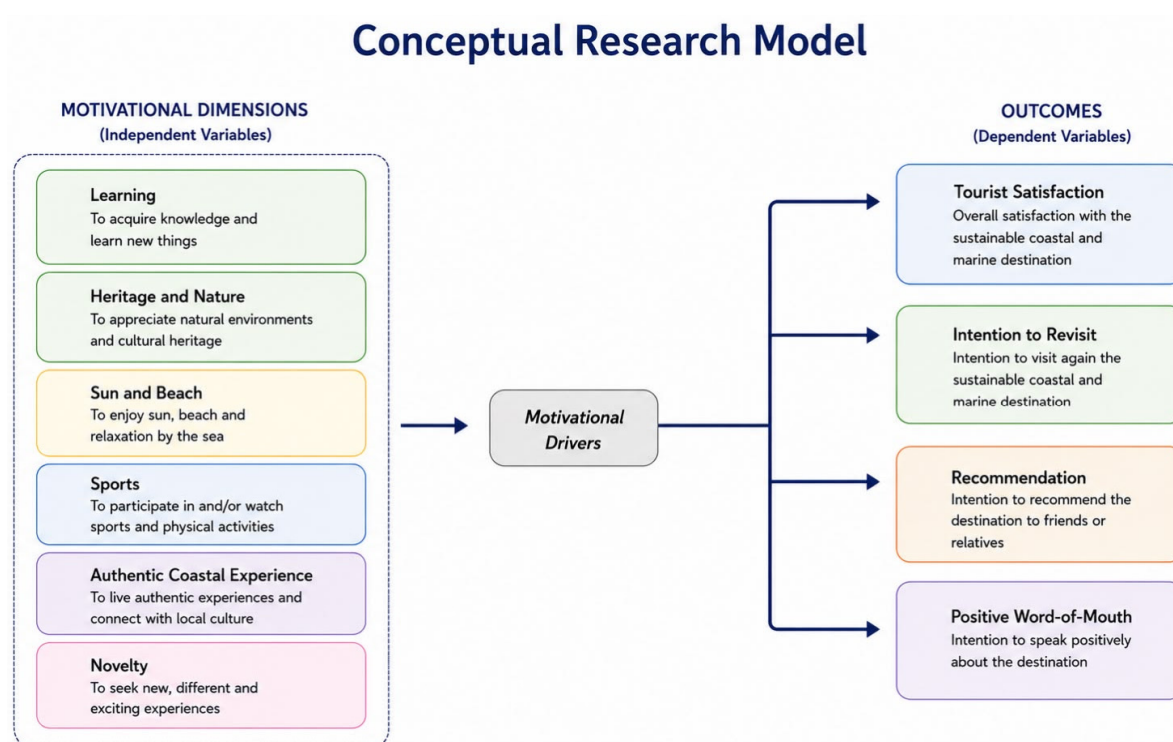


Figure 1. Conceptual research model linking motivational dimensions to tourist satisfaction and loyalty outcomes in sustainable coastal and marine destinations.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Area

The Galápagos Islands are situated in the Pacific Ocean approximately 1000 km west of mainland Ecuador and are internationally recognized for their extraordinary biodiversity and high degree of endemism. This volcanic archipelago is protected through an extensive conservation framework that includes the Galápagos National Park, which encompasses around 97% of the terrestrial territory, and the Galápagos Marine Reserve, one of the largest marine protected areas in the world. Together, these protected areas safeguard unique terrestrial and marine ecosystems, including fragile coastal habitats, coral formations, mangroves, and endemic wildlife species that constitute the foundation of its tourism appeal.

From a tourism perspective, Galápagos has become a global reference point for coastal and marine tourism based on sustainability principles. Activities such as snorkeling, diving, wildlife observation, and regulated coastal excursions are developed under strict environmental controls designed to limit visitor impact and preserve ecological integrity. The destination's management model integrates conservation, scientific research, community participation, and controlled visitor flows, illustrating how tourism can generate economic benefits while maintaining ecological balance. Consequently, the Galápagos Islands represent a paradigmatic case of sustainable coastal and marine tourism, demonstrating that biodiversity protection, responsible governance, and experiential tourism can coexist within a long-term sustainability framework.

In the Galápagos Islands, coastal and marine tourism activities are designed to provide immersive nature-based experiences while operating under strict environmental regulations. Among the most representative activities is scuba diving, which allows visitors to observe unique marine species such as hammerhead sharks, sea turtles, and endemic fish within the protected waters of the Galápagos Marine Reserve. Snorkeling is another widely practiced activity, offering close contact with marine biodiversity in shallow coastal areas. Wildlife observation excursions, conducted by certified naturalist guides, enable visitors to encounter sea lions, marine iguanas, blue-footed boobies, and other emblematic species along rocky shores and beaches (Figure 2).

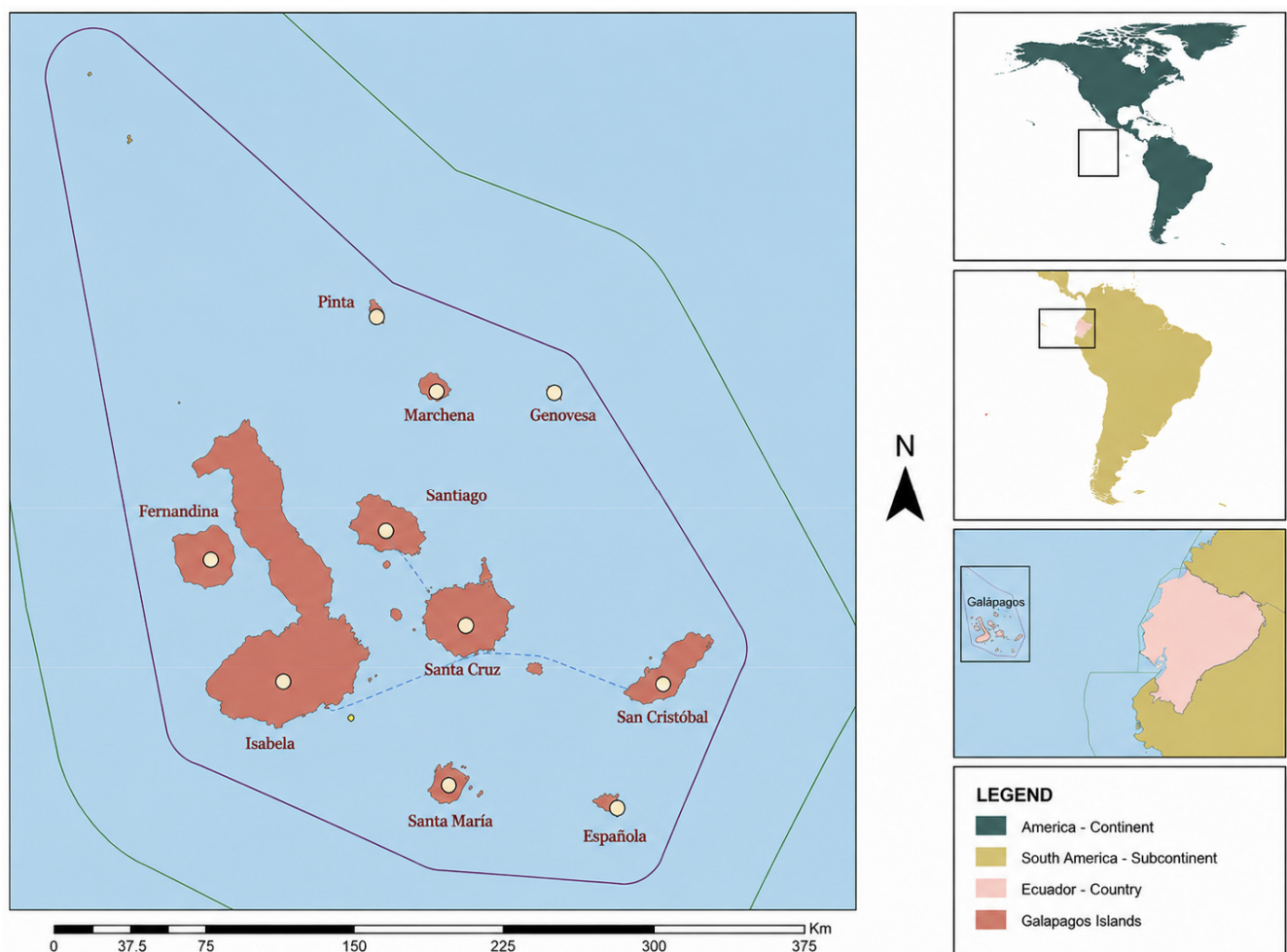


Figure 2. Geographic location of the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador.

3.2. Survey, Data Collection, and Analysis

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of Polytechnic University of Ecuador ESPOL, code: CERT-PI-CEIE-001-2023, approved 12 June 2023. As part of the ethical procedures, informed consent was included in the questionnaire used for data collection, which was previously accepted by the participants in written form.

To address the research objectives, an in situ field study was conducted using a structured questionnaire composed of 18 items organized into three sections: sociodemographic profile, trip characteristics, and visitor motivations. The study population included national and international tourists aged over 18 who were visiting the Galápagos National Park. The instrument was developed following a review of prior empirical studies to ensure conceptual consistency and methodological rigor. Sociodemographic variables and travel characteristics were adapted from Lee et al. (2018) and were measured through closed-ended questions. Motivational items were constructed based on the framework proposed by Rid et al. (2014) and assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 ("very important"). Satisfaction and behavioral intention measures were adapted from Kim and Park (2017). Satisfaction was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all satisfied; 5 = very satisfied), while return intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth were measured on a five-point agreement scale (1 = totally in disagreement; 5 = totally in agreement). The reliability of the motivational construct was confirmed through a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency and stability of the measurement instrument.

Although the motivational items were adapted from the instrument proposed by Rid et al. (2014), an exploratory approach was considered appropriate because the scale was transferred to a substantively different tourism context. The Galápagos Islands constitute a marine protected area, a national park, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site characterized by exceptional biodiversity, strict conservation regulations, and nature-based visitor experiences. Because the original dimensional structure had not been previously examined in this specific context, it could not be assumed a priori that the motivational items would reproduce the same configuration identified in other destinations. Accordingly, an exploratory procedure was used to examine how the items were grouped in the present sample and to identify a context-specific motivational structure before estimating their predictive relationships with satisfaction and loyalty. This procedure was exploratory and was not intended to confirm a prespecified measurement model. Therefore, the present study does not claim confirmatory validation of the motivational scale.

Data were collected at Mann Beach, located on San Cristóbal Island, where visitors were engaged in coastal and marine recreational activities. The survey period extended from January to February 2024. The sample collection was carried out every weekend. Trained university students administered the questionnaires under the supervision of the research team. A convenience sampling approach was applied on-site. A total of 407 valid responses were obtained from a finite population, considering that the Galápagos Islands recorded 329,475 visitors in 2023, of whom 54% were international and 46% domestic tourists (Galápagos National Park, 2023). The study was designed with a 95% confidence level, a $\pm 4.85\%$ margin of error, and a 50% variance assumption. Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 22.

To examine the dimensional structure of the motivational items, an exploratory Principal Component Analysis was conducted as a data-reduction procedure. Varimax rotation was applied to improve the interpretability of the extracted components by maximizing high loadings and minimizing low loadings across components. Kaiser's criterion was initially used to retain components with eigenvalues greater than 1. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index

was used to assess sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's test of sphericity was applied to determine whether the correlation matrix was suitable for component analysis. This exploratory procedure was used to identify a context-specific motivational structure and was not intended as a confirmatory test of a prespecified latent measurement model. Finally, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which motivational dimensions significantly predicted satisfaction and loyalty outcomes, including return intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth related to coastal and marine tourism.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

The sample was predominantly composed of domestic visitors (84.3%), while international tourists represented 15.7% of respondents. Among foreign participants, the largest proportion originated from Europe (38.6%). In terms of gender distribution, 55.8% were male and 44% female. Most respondents were single (59.2%). The age structure was mainly concentrated between 21 and 30 years (42.1%), followed by those aged 31 to 40 (35%). Regarding educational attainment, the majority held university degrees (62.9%), and a substantial segment had completed postgraduate, master's, or doctoral studies (21.6%). Concerning occupation, private-sector employees constituted the largest group (30.7%). Finally, travel patterns indicated that 26.3% of participants traveled alone, while 26% visited the destination with their partner.

4.2. Motivations in Coastal and Marine Destinations

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying motivational structure, resulting in six distinct dimensions. Principal component analysis was employed as a data reduction technique, and Varimax rotation was applied to enhance interpretability by maximizing high loadings and minimizing low ones. The Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues > 1) guided the retention of factors. Together, the six factors explained 63.75% of the total variance, which is considered satisfactory, as incorporating components with eigenvalues below 1 would not have contributed meaningful explanatory power to the model. Internal consistency was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.640 to 0.852. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure reached 0.87, indicating strong intercorrelations among variables and confirming the adequacy of the factor analysis. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), supporting the suitability of the dataset for this procedure.

The first factor, labeled "learning," demonstrated the highest explanatory capacity (28.91% of total variance). It encompassed motivations associated with interest in local myths and legends, traditional dances, handicrafts, gastronomy, nightlife, and language learning—elements closely tied to the destination's cultural identity. The second factor, "heritage and nature" (12.13%), reflected the importance of coastal and marine tourism, natural areas, the historical and cultural legacy of Galápagos, encounters with marine wildlife, national parks, and the distinctive coastal landscape, all strongly connected to environmental sustainability. The third dimension, "sun, beach, and sports" (7.78%), included motivations related to swimming, water-based activities, relaxation, and beach enjoyment. The fourth factor, "authentic coastal experience" (5.28%), captured the desire to interact with local residents, immerse oneself in coastal lifestyles, and experience the destination in an emotionally meaningful way. The fifth dimension, "novelty" (5.15%), represented the motivation to observe unique flora and fauna, explore attractions beyond everyday experiences, and discover both natural and cultural resources. Finally, the sixth factor, "social interaction" (4.53%), was associated with visiting family and friends, as well as seeking safety and a sense of protection during travel (Table 1). Results that confirm Hypothesis H1 of our research.

Table 1. Motivational Dimensions in Sustainable Coastal and Marine Tourism.

Variables	Factor Loads	Eigenvalues	% of Explained Variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Learning		6.938	28.908	0.762
Interest in myths and legends	0.775			
Learn traditional dances	0.751			
Interest in local handicrafts	0.722			
Nightlife	0.596			
Learn local languages	0.572			
Typical cuisine	0.513			
Factor 2: Heritage and nature		2.912	12.132	0.852
Importance of coastal marine tourism	0.853			
Importance of tourism in natural areas	0.830			
Importance of history & culture	0.777			
Experience marine wildlife sites and national parks.	0.749			
Experience related to the coastal landscape	0.566			
Factor 3: Sun & beach, and sports		1.864	7.767	0.785
Importance of swimming	0.770			
Importance for water sports	0.750			
Importance of sun-beach tourism	0.677			
To rest and relax	0.624			
Factor 4: Authentic coastal experience		1.262	5.257	0.796
Stay among the coastal population	0.761			
Strong feelings of experiences lived	0.725			
Share interesting experiences with the local population	0.629			
The lifestyle of the coastal population	0.541			
Factor 5: Novelty		1.236	5.149	0.640
For knowing the flora and fauna	0.733			
I want to see the things that I normally do not see	0.73			
For its tourist attractions	0.69			
Factor 6: Social interaction		1.088	4.532	0.653
To visit family and friends	0.808			
Safety and protection	0.520			
Total variance extracted (%)			63.746	

4.3. Tourist Motivations and Satisfaction in Coastal and Marine Destinations

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the motivational predictors with the greatest relative influence on tourist satisfaction. The motivational predictors were composed of the motivational factors identified through factor analysis, while the satisfaction variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all satisfied; 5 = very satisfied). The interpretation of the models focused primarily on standardized Beta coefficients, t-statistics, and their corresponding significance levels, as these indicators allow us to identify which motivational dimensions show statistically significant effects and compare their relative weight within each model. See Table 2.

According to the results presented in Table 2, the F-test was significant; therefore, the motivational dimensions, considered jointly, significantly explain tourist satisfaction. Regarding the Durbin–Watson index, values between 1.5 and 2.5 are generally considered acceptable.

Analyzing the results of the variables, all motivational dimensions, except for Learning and Social Interaction, were statistically significant, with Heritage and Nature emerging as the predictor with the greatest relative influence (Beta = 0.308) on tourist satisfaction. Therefore, the more tourists were motivated by the Heritage and natural attributes of the destination, the higher their overall level of satisfaction with the experience. Likewise,

Novelty (Beta = 0.216) was another influential predictor of satisfaction. Results that confirm hypothesis H2 of our research.

Table 2. Tourist Motivations and Satisfaction in coastal and marine destinations.

Variables	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerancia
Learning	−0.071	−1.565	0.118	1.000
Heritage and nature	0.308	6.843	0.000	1.000
Sun & beach, and sports	0.161	3.579	0.000	1.000
Authentic coastal experience	0.126	2.789	0.006	1.000
Novelty	0.216	4.797	0.000	1.000
Social interaction	−0.031	−0.678	0.498	1.000
(Constante)		100.328	0.000	
F	15.557			
Sig.	0.000			
Durbin–Watson	1.926			

4.4. Motivations and Return Intentions in Coastal and Marine Destinations

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the motivational predictors with the greatest relative influence on tourists' return intentions. This dependent variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = totally in disagreement; 5 = totally in agreement). See Table 3.

Table 3. Motivations and Return Intentions in Coastal and Marine Destinations.

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerancia
Learning	0.037	0.791	0.430	1.000
Heritage and nature	0.275	5.938	0.000	1.000
Sun & beach, and sports	0.164	3.533	0.000	1.000
Authentic coastal experience	0.127	2.736	0.007	1.000
Novelty	0.157	3.392	0.001	1.000
Social interaction	0.024	0.514	0.607	1.000
(Constante)		65.188	0.000	
F	11.271			
Sig.	0.000			
Durbin–Watson	1.858			

Based on the results presented in Table 3, it can be observed that all motivational dimensions were statistically significant, except for the variables Learning and Social Interaction. Among the analyzed factors, Heritage and Nature emerged as the predictor with the greatest relative weight (Beta = 0.275) on tourists' return intentions. This suggests that the stronger the motivation associated with the destination's heritage and natural resources, the greater the visitors' intention to return. Likewise, motivations related to Sun, Beach, and Sports (Beta = 0.164) also showed a relevant influence on the decision to revisit, constituting another important predictive factor.

4.5. Motivations and Recommendation Intentions in Coastal and Marine Destinations

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the motivational predictors with the greatest relative influence on tourists' recommendation intentions. See Table 4.

Table 4. Motivations and Recommendation Intention in Coastal and Marine Destinations

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerancia
Learning	−0.117	−2.588	0.010	1.000
Heritage and nature	0.281	6.232	0.000	1.000
Sun & beach, and sports	0.190	4.217	0.000	1.000
Authentic coastal experience	0.136	3.020	0.003	1.000
Novelty	0.211	4.681	0.000	1.000
Social interaction	−0.007	−0.162	0.871	1.000
(Constante)		96.421	0.000	
F	15.729			
Sig.	0.000			
Durbin–Watson	1.797			

According to the data presented in Table 4, all motivational dimensions were statistically significant, except for Social Interaction. Among them, Heritage and Nature stood out as the factor with the greatest relative weight (Beta = 0.281) in tourists' recommendation intentions. This indicates that the more visitors were motivated by the heritage and natural attributes of the destination, the greater their willingness to recommend it. Likewise, the motivation associated with Novelty (Beta = 0.211) also showed a significant influence on recommendation intention, positioning itself as another relevant predictor.

4.6. Motivations and Saying Positive Things About the Coastal and Marine Destination

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the motivational predictors with the greatest relative influence on saying positive things about the destination. See Table 5.

Table 5. Motivations and Saying Positive Things about the Coastal and Marine Destination

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerancia
Learning	−0.103	−2.199	0.028	1.000
Heritage and nature	0.258	5.517	0.000	1.000
Sun & beach, and sports	0.084	1.803	0.072	1.000
Authentic coastal experience	0.038	0.802	0.423	1.000
Novelty	0.198	4.231	0.000	1.000
Social interaction	−0.018	−0.377	0.707	1.000
(Constante)		108.636	0.000	
F	9.535			
Sig.	0.000			
Durbin–Watson	2.023			

According to the results presented in Table 5, all motivational dimensions, except for Authentic Coastal Experience and Social Interaction, were statistically significant, with Culture and Nature emerging as the predictor with the greatest relative influence (Beta = 0.258) on saying positive things about the destination. Therefore, the more tourists were motivated by the destination's heritage and natural attributes, the higher their level of positive word-of-mouth. Motivations related to Novelty (Beta = 0.198) also represented another influential predictor of recommendation. Results that confirm hypothesis H3 of our research.

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to establish the construct of motivations in coastal and marine destinations, specifically in a destination that is both a marine protected

area and a national park, such as the Galápagos Islands. In order to generate results that contribute to the academic literature and verify hypothesis H1, the findings reveal six motivational dimensions: learning, heritage and nature, sun and beach, sports, authentic coastal experience, novelty, and social interaction, confirming that tourist motivation in coastal and marine destinations is multidimensional. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in coastal destinations such as Acapulco (Solis-Radilla et al., 2021), Lima (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021), and Montañita (Carvache-Franco et al., 2025), where motivations related to nature, novelty, and recreational experiences also emerged. However, unlike these previous studies, the Galápagos context highlights Heritage and Nature as a distinct motivational dimension associated with a marine protected area and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This difference suggests that destinations characterized by strict conservation policies and exceptional biodiversity generate motivational structures in which environmental and patrimonial values become more salient than purely recreational motivations. Consequently, the present study extends previous motivational models by demonstrating that protected coastal and marine destinations require a stronger incorporation of sustainability-related motivational dimensions.

As a second objective, the study aimed to determine which motivations predict satisfaction in coastal and marine destinations. Testing Hypothesis H2, the results indicate that Heritage and Nature is the strongest predictor of tourist satisfaction, followed by Novelty. This finding is consistent with Sangpikul (2018), who reported that natural attractions substantially enhance satisfaction in island destinations, and with Zhong et al. (2024), who demonstrated that interaction with marine biodiversity significantly improves visitor satisfaction in diving tourism. Similarly, Jawabreh et al. (2023) found that motivations associated with heritage and destination attributes positively affect visitor well-being. However, the present study differs from previous research conducted in conventional coastal destinations such as Acapulco, where Novelty was identified as the strongest predictor of satisfaction (Solis-Radilla et al., 2021). A possible explanation is that visitors to the Galápagos travel primarily to experience unique biodiversity and protected ecosystems rather than to seek recreational or entertainment experiences. Therefore, ecological and patrimonial values become the principal source of satisfaction, reinforcing the distinctive role of conservation-oriented destinations within sustainable tourism.

As a third objective, the study sought to establish which motivations most strongly predict loyalty in coastal and marine destinations, measured through return intentions, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth. Testing Hypothesis H3, the findings suggest that Heritage and Nature is the strongest predictor of revisit intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth. This finding supports Prayag (2012), who demonstrated that natural environments encourage revisit intentions, and Zhong et al. (2024), who reported that marine biodiversity strengthens destination loyalty among divers. Likewise, Yusof et al. (2021) concluded that motivations related to nature produce stronger loyalty than purely recreational motivations. Nevertheless, the present findings differ from studies conducted in traditional coastal destinations, where Novelty or Sun-and-Beach motivations exert greater influence on loyalty (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021; Solis-Radilla et al., 2021). These differences may be explained by the protected status of the Galápagos Islands. Unlike mass tourism destinations, tourists visiting marine protected areas seek authentic contact with biodiversity, environmental conservation, and unique natural heritage. Consequently, the emotional attachment generated by these environmental attributes becomes a stronger determinant of loyalty than recreational motivations.

The effects of Learning differed across the four regression models and therefore should not be interpreted as uniformly nonsignificant. Learning did not significantly predict tourist satisfaction ($\text{Beta} = -0.071, p = 0.118$) or revisit intention ($\text{Beta} = 0.037, p = 0.430$).

However, it showed small but statistically significant negative relationships with recommendation intention ($\text{Beta} = -0.117, p = 0.010$) and positive word-of-mouth ($\text{Beta} = -0.103, p = 0.028$). One possible contextual explanation is that visitors with stronger learning-oriented motivations may evaluate the educational and cultural components of the destination more critically. Because the tourism experience in the Galápagos is primarily structured around biodiversity, protected ecosystems, and natural heritage, visitors mainly motivated by cultural learning may perceive a weaker correspondence between their initial expectations and the experiences offered. After controlling for the remaining motivational dimensions, this may be reflected in a lower propensity to recommend the destination or say positive things about it. Nevertheless, this interpretation should be treated cautiously because the study did not directly measure expectation–experience discrepancies.

In contrast, Social Interaction did not significantly predict satisfaction, revisit intention, recommendation intention, or positive word-of-mouth. This finding suggests that motivations associated with visiting family and friends and seeking safety and protection are secondary to direct experiences involving endemic wildlife, protected ecosystems, and natural heritage in the Galápagos Islands. However, the nonsignificant effects of Social Interaction should also be interpreted cautiously because this dimension contains only two conceptually heterogeneous items and shows moderate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.653$). Therefore, its lack of predictive influence may reflect both the contextual predominance of environmental motivations and the structural limitations of its measurement.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The finding that motivations such as learning, heritage and nature, sun and beach, sports, authentic coastal experience, novelty, and social interaction coexist and structure demand in a coastal and marine destination such as the Galápagos Islands makes a substantial contribution to the academic literature on tourist behavior. First, it expands traditional motivational models by demonstrating that, in contexts of high ecological sensitivity, motivations are not limited to recreational dimensions but instead integrate cognitive (learning), environmental (heritage and nature), and experiential (authenticity and novelty) components within a multidimensional structure. Second, it contributes to the theoretical differentiation of protected coastal and marine destinations from conventional sun-and-beach destinations, showing that the tourist experience is shaped by a complex combination of educational, environmental, and social interests. Furthermore, the empirical recognition of these dimensions strengthens approaches that conceptualize motivation as a dynamic and contextual construct, sensitive to territorial characteristics and visitor profiles. Overall, this contribution enriches sustainable tourism theory by providing evidence that, in marine protected areas, tourism demand follows an integrated experiential logic in which conservation, authenticity, and social interaction are central to the perceived value of the destination.

The finding that motivation associated with Heritage and Nature constitutes the principal predictor of satisfaction in coastal and marine destinations such as the Galápagos Islands represents a relevant theoretical contribution to the field of sustainable tourism. First, it expands the explanatory framework of the push–pull theory proposed by Crompton (1979), demonstrating that attraction factors linked to ecological and patrimonial value not only influence travel decisions but also significantly determine post-visit evaluations. Second, it reinforces approaches that integrate motivation and satisfaction within a unified structural model, showing that environmental and cultural motivations act as direct antecedents of tourists' affective responses. Moreover, this result contributes to the theoretical differentiation of high-biodiversity coastal and marine destinations from those primarily

focused on recreational leisure, suggesting that connection with nature and patrimonial authenticity constitute central axes in the construction of experiential value. Overall, the study strengthens the literature on nature-based tourism by proposing that satisfaction in ecologically sensitive contexts primarily emerges from fulfilling expectations related to environmental contemplation, conservation, and uniqueness.

Finally, the finding that motivation related to Heritage and Nature is the main predictor of return intentions, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth in a coastal and marine destination such as the Galápagos Islands represents a significant theoretical contribution to the literature on post-visit behavior. First, it extends Crompton's push-pull model (1979) by demonstrating that attraction factors associated with ecological and patrimonial value not only influence destination choice but also shape subsequent behavioral intentions. Second, it strengthens conceptual frameworks integrating motivation and loyalty, showing that environmentally based motivations operate as direct antecedents of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, expressed through revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth. This result also contributes to the theoretical distinction between high-biodiversity coastal and marine destinations and those predominantly oriented toward leisure, suggesting that connection with nature and patrimonial authenticity are central to building enduring destination bonds. In sum, the study advances sustainable tourism theory by positioning ecological motivations as a key driver of loyalty and reputation in environmentally sensitive contexts.

5.2. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, identifying that motivations such as learning, heritage and nature, sun and beach, sports, authentic coastal experience, novelty, and social interaction coexist in coastal and marine destinations that are marine protected areas such as the Galápagos Islands implies that management should design a comprehensive and balanced offer that integrates conservation and experience. In particular, it is recommended to strengthen environmental interpretation and tourism education programs that enhance learning and connection with natural heritage, while regulating and planning recreational activities such as water sports and sun-and-beach experiences under sustainability criteria. Likewise, incorporating authentic experiences and spaces that foster social interaction and novelty can diversify the value proposition without compromising ecological integrity. Overall, these findings guide managers toward a strategic planning model that integrates multiple motivations, ensuring tourism competitiveness and effective protection of the marine environment.

From a practical standpoint, identifying that motivation associated with heritage and nature is the main predictor of satisfaction in coastal and marine destinations that are marine protected areas such as the Galápagos Islands provides clear strategic guidance for destination management. First, it suggests that public policies and marketing strategies should prioritize conservation, environmental interpretation, and the enhancement of natural heritage as the core of the value proposition, since these attributes not only increase satisfaction but also directly influence loyalty. Second, by demonstrating that heritage and nature—followed by sun and beach and sports—predict return intentions, it is recommended to develop integrated tourism products that combine biodiversity-based experiences with sustainable recreational activities, thereby strengthening revisit intention. Finally, the fact that heritage and nature predict recommendation and positive word-of-mouth implies that management must ensure authentic, educational, and environmentally responsible experiences, as the quality of interaction with the protected environment translates into reputation and organic promotion of the destination. Altogether, these findings support decision-making toward a sustainability-centered management model, where the

conservation of natural heritage is not only an ecological imperative but also a strategic asset for competitiveness and international positioning. Overall, aligning destination management strategies with tourists' primary motivational drivers can strengthen visitor satisfaction, encourage positive word-of-mouth, increase repeat visitation, and improve the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of coastal and marine tourism destinations.

6. Conclusions

The study of motivations and their influence on satisfaction and loyalty is essential in coastal and marine destinations such as the Galápagos Islands, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the factors that truly generate value in environmentally sensitive contexts. Analyzing how motivations influence the evaluation of the experience and subsequent behaviors, such as return and recommendation, contributes to strengthening theoretical models of tourist behavior while guiding sustainable management based on conservation and the creation of meaningful experiences.

The study identified six motivational dimensions: Learning, Heritage and Nature, Sun, Beach, and Sports, Authentic Coastal Experience, Novelty, and Social Interaction. This multidimensional structure is broadly consistent with evidence from Acapulco, Lima, and Montañita, where nature, novelty, recreational, and social motives have also been identified as relevant components of coastal tourism demand (Solis-Radilla et al., 2021; Carvache-Franco et al., 2021, 2025). However, the predictive hierarchy found in the Galápagos Islands differs from that observed in conventional coastal destinations. Heritage and Nature was the strongest predictor of tourist satisfaction, followed by Novelty. This result is consistent with Sangpikul (2018), who highlighted the contribution of natural attractions to satisfaction in island destinations, and with Zhong et al. (2024), who found that interaction with marine biodiversity strengthens satisfaction in diving tourism. In contrast, Solis-Radilla et al. (2021) identified Novelty as the strongest predictor of satisfaction in Acapulco. This difference suggests that, in a protected and high-biodiversity destination such as the Galápagos Islands, ecological and patrimonial attributes constitute the core of the tourist experience and therefore carry greater weight in post-visit evaluations than generic leisure or entertainment motives.

Heritage and Nature also emerged as the strongest predictor of revisit intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth. This finding is consistent with Yusof et al. (2021), who reported that nature-related motivations generate stronger loyalty than purely recreational motives, and with Zhong et al. (2024), who showed that marine biodiversity reinforces destination loyalty among divers. Nevertheless, the present result differs from studies conducted in conventional coastal destinations, where Novelty or Sun-and-Beach motivations exerted greater influence on loyalty (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021; Solis-Radilla et al., 2021). In the Galápagos context, the protected status of the destination, its unique ecosystems, and its conservation-oriented tourism model may foster stronger emotional attachment and perceived destination distinctiveness. Thus, Heritage and Nature occupies the leading position in the relative predictive hierarchy, whereas Novelty and Sun, Beach, and Sports operate as complementary predictors of satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, these findings theoretically differentiate protected coastal and marine destinations from leisure-oriented coastal destinations and reinforce the central role of environmental and patrimonial motivations in sustainable tourism behavior.

From a practical perspective, the results serve as action guidelines for developing management plans in marine protected areas and national parks with coastal and marine tourism potential. The findings also assist tourism businesses in understanding the motivations of their demand and identifying which motivations influence satisfaction and loyalty.

The present study has several limitations. First, data were collected only during January and February 2024 and on weekends; therefore, tourist motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty may vary across different seasons and data-collection periods. Second, the study used a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of visitors to the Galápagos Islands. An additional methodological limitation concerns the exploratory nature of the dimensional analysis. Although the motivational items were adapted from a previously established instrument, the present study used Principal Component Analysis to identify their dimensional configuration in the specific context of the Galápagos Islands. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis was not conducted; therefore, the six-dimensional solution should be interpreted as preliminary and context-specific rather than as a confirmatorily validated measurement model. The Social Interaction dimension should also be interpreted with caution because it comprises only two items representing partially different conceptual domains: visiting family and friends, and safety and protection. Its moderate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.653$) suggests that this component may capture a broader dimension of interpersonal security or social support rather than social interaction exclusively. Furthermore, the Novelty dimension showed moderate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.640$), and its regression results should consequently be interpreted with caution. Future research should test the stability of the motivational structure through Confirmatory Factor Analysis using an independent sample and should report composite reliability, average variance extracted, discriminant validity, and appropriate model-fit indices. Future studies should also refine the Social Interaction and Novelty dimensions by incorporating additional conceptually homogeneous items and evaluating their structure across independent samples, different seasons, and other coastal and marine tourism contexts. Finally, future research could examine environmentally responsible tourist behavior in coastal and marine destinations located within marine protected areas.

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