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Research Article

## An Empirical Study of Tourists' Motives for Visiting Selected Ecotourism Destinations in Himachal Pradesh

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### Abstract

Tourists travel to a destination for motives based on the destination image and its offerings. The tourists visit ecotourism destinations with the intention of improving their health, appreciating natural attractions and cultural manifestations, and seeking a peaceful environment. The present study examines the key motivational factors influencing tourists' intentions to visit the selected (six) ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh, India. The findings reveal that primary motives driving ecotourism travel behaviour are strongly associated with nature, spending quality time with family in natural surroundings, avoiding overcrowded tourist destinations, and gaining health benefits in natural environments. The study strongly aligns with the push-pull motivational framework in tourism literature, wherein intrinsic psychological factors such as relaxation, escape, emotional bonding, and wellness are strongly associated with destination attributes, including natural landscapes, peaceful ambience, and authentic local experiences. The findings further confirm that natural appreciation remains the strongest determinant of ecotourism travel behaviour, and the preference for less crowded destinations reflects a gradual shift from mass tourism toward sustainable and responsible tourism practices. In contrast, a lower preference for eco-drives, cultural activities, and local cuisine suggests limited participation in conservation-oriented and community-based ecotourism activities. This highlights the need for greater awareness, improved destination engagement strategies, and stronger community participation. The findings offer important implications for policymakers, tourism planners, and destination marketers to promote sustainable infrastructure, eco-friendly tourism practices, environmental conservation, and effective visitor management strategies for the long-term sustainable development of ecotourism destinations and their communities in Himachal Pradesh.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that works upon three aspects of sustainability: environmental conservation, respect, and protection of local culture through active participation of locals, and responsible behaviour of both tourists and the host community (Nag et al., 2024; Nag et al., 2025). Visitors are expected to visit the place with the purpose of self-development (Parsons et al., 2019; Yi & La, 2023; Irimiás, 2023; Kumar et al., 2025a), appreciating nature, enjoying local cuisines, cultural exchange, avoiding crowds and ecotours. Tourists travel to an Ecotourism destination with a motive that opens the opportunities for them to see the pristine nature, authentic culture, and warmth of local hospitality (Yang et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2026a). It generates a sense of responsibility for both host and tourist communities with respect to the native ecosystem, culture, and socio-economic well-being of communities of visited destination (Kumar et al., 2023; Karst & Nepal, 2022). The motivation that leads to visiting a destination is driven by push and pull factors. Push motives are primarily psychological, such as looking for new experiences, cultural interaction, relaxation, and escape from daily routine, whereas pull factors relate to tangible attributes of a destination, namely cuisine, shopping, climate, natural landscape, and cultural attractions (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014; Kumar et al., 2026b). The choice of a tourist destination is influenced by motivation (both push and pull factors), a key factor in determining visitors' travel decisions (Gaetjens et al., 2023; Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014). People's different desires and needs are reflected by the motivation, which leads to satisfaction, trip attributes and destination image (Sánchez Oro et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2025b). It is, therefore, a prerequisite for a visitor to include one or more motives to see a place. To meet the expectations of a tourist to visit is the secondary thing, as priority should be given to know the purpose of the visit, which makes the travel and visit more experiential and satisfactory (Luo & Ye, 2020; Kumar et al., 2025a). The ecotourism destination is bound with the principles of sustainability that focus on environmental conservation, respect for local culture and responsible behaviour of both host and guests of that destination (Kiper, 2013; El Moslem Badr, 2022; Manosuthi et al., 2026). The tourist who travels especially to visit the ecotourism destination is considered an ecotourist who must follow the principles and guidelines framed for the sustainable development of that place. The motives of a visit to an ecotourism destination must align with the norms of sustainability; otherwise, it will not serve the purpose of its formation (Walker & Moscardo, 2014; Jayasekara et al., 2024). The present study tries to examine the motives of tourists visiting the six selected ecotourism destinations of Himachal Pradesh to understand the main reason for their visit to these places. The reason to choose all these destinations and not just one is that since all these destinations are still in the nascent stage of development, it becomes crucial to obtain the feedback of tourists visiting one or all these destinations to get clear and better results. The study is limited to only six places in Himachal Pradesh;

however, numerous places in the state have the same attractions and facilities as those of a known ecotourism destination. All the ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh are still in the nascent stage of development (Department of Environment, Science Technology & Climate change, DEST, 2017) and need attention from the local authorities and promoters to develop these into sustainable ecotourism destinations in the near future.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies have indicated that tourists have visited ecotourism destinations with the purpose of eco-friendly activities, studying and appreciating the natural attractions, escaping from normal routines, experiencing local culture, cuisines, art and craft, flora & fauna and participating in the conservation of natural resources (Carvache-Franco et al., 2023; Carrascosa-López et al., 2021; Perkins & Grace, 2009; Kumar et al., 2025b). To understand the motives of tourists to visit a destination, it becomes crucial to first get acquainted with the motivation of travel, followed by the motives of travel and the attributes of the destination that pull tourists toward it. The following section will address these factors with the help of existing knowledge.

### 2.1 Motivation for travel

Travel motivations have been divided into two factors – Push factors and pull factors, which shape the tourist behaviour about visiting a destination. The push factors are the intrinsic ones that are based on psychological and personal aspects of a tourist such as escape from daily stress, fun, excitement, knowledge seeking, disposal income, rest, and relaxation (Mansueto et al., 2024; Arya et al., 2025), whereas pull factors include accessibility, natural landscapes, local hospitality, service quality offered, spending time together with family and friends, novel experience, adventure, learning new culture and cleanliness and safety (Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020; Hin et al., 2024; Arya et al., 2025; Nieves-Pavón et al., 2025). These factors play a crucial role in shaping the choice of a destination. Destinations attract tourists through offering a variety of attractions, accommodation facilities, ease of access and activities. These are the prime factors that motivate a person to visit a place.

### 2.2 Motives of visit to the Ecotourism destination

Existing literature on motives to visit an ecotourism destination pointed out that prime purposes of visit to such places are (1) contact with nature, (2) escape and relaxation, (3) admiring nature and wildlife, (4) self-development, (5) adventure and (6) social interactions (Hartley & Harrison, 2009; Kim, 2014; Christiansen, 2019; Lameed et al., 2024). Motives are one of the factors that shape the tourist's choice of destination, and it is based on the facts presented by advertisements, brochures of travel agents/tour operators, promotional efforts of local agencies, and feedback generated by the existing visitors of the same place through various online platforms. Tourists' intention to visit ecotourism destinations indicates the sense of

accountability that regulates the relationship between their motive of visit and conserving ecotourism destinations, shaping their sustainability efforts (Lim et al., 2023; Bisht et al., 2025a). The motives of tourists to visit eco-tourism destinations are determined by factors such as escape, nature, new experiences, social gathering, novelty seekers, and ego (Jopp et al., 2022). One of the factors that moderates the travel motivation to visit an ecotourism destination is the destination image of that place, but it has no significant impact on socialising motives (Chi & Pham, 2024). Another motivational factor is increasing environmental awareness that shapes visitors' intention to gain educational and natural experience (Carantes, 2025). A study conducted in Romanian ecotourism destinations highlighted that visitors are mostly nature travellers, cultural travellers, adventure travellers, and new experience lovers (Constantin et al., 2021). These categorisations of visitors and their motives can significantly aid the management in targeting potential customers through establishing suitable management and marketing strategies to develop the ecotourism destinations.

### 2.3 Attributes of Ecotourism destination image and travel intention

Ecotourism destination image significantly and positively influences tourists' intention to visit, which shows the relationship between ecotourism destination and environmental concern of the visitor (Pham & Khanh, 2021; Wismantoro et al., 2023). The image of ecotourism sites significantly drives the travel motives such as excitement, escape & reward, knowledge quest and self-development (Chi & Pham, 2024). Destination image critically shapes the travel decision related to the choice of travel and future behavioural intentions for ecotourism (Wismantoro et al., 2023). In addition to environmental concerns, place attachment plays a crucial role in mediating the relationship between the ecotourism destination and visitor intentions. The desire for a nature-based destination generates anticipation among tourists, resulting in a stronger desire to indulge in ecotourism activities (Luong, 2025). A study conducted in Indonesia highlights that online marketing and promotion motivated and influenced the tourists' intentions to visit the ecotourism destination in the country (Mulianto et al., 2020). Attributes that influence the tourist's intention to visit an ecotourism destination include cultural, attractions, community, and nature-based activities. The tour operators, local communities, and stakeholders must develop plans, strategies and distribute resources to lure potential tourists with the proper ecotourism products.

(Abdurahman et al., 2016). A study conducted in Indonesia showed that appealing attributes of ecotourism destination includes bio-diversity richness, well-managed natural ecosystems, eco-friendly facilities, and engagement of an authentic local community that fosters a sense of responsibility and emotional attachment in tourists' intention of visit and enriching their experience (Djausal et al., 2025). Notably, every ecotourism site has certain attributes that enhance its destination image, which further lead to shaping the travel intention of a visitor and supply a deeper and more authentic experience. Existing studies have explored ecotourism motivation in international contexts; however, limited empirical studies have examined tourist motives in engaging ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh. The studies further pointed out that tourism businesses and management authorities should focus on improving the quality of services, development of sustainable ecotourism facilities, and catering to the tourists' requirements by considering the factors that influences his decision to choose a destination. These factors are a unique natural environment, environmental conservation, local culture, experiential activities, safety and costs of services and facilities (Ngan & Hai, 2025; Bisht et al., 2025b). Local authorities and tour operators should focus on exploring and promoting nature-based and culture-based activities that lead to sustainable development. It will further strongly shape the tourist's intention to visit this destination based on the available attributes offered by a place.

### 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the purposes of tourists to visit an ecotourism destination in Himachal Pradesh.
2. To suggest recommendations for policymakers and authorities to strengthen the development of ecotourism sites in Himachal Pradesh.

### 4. Study area

To meet the objectives of the present study, the following six villages known as Eco-villages under the Model Eco-village scheme of the Himachal Pradesh government that was initiated in the year 2016 and implemented from 2017 onwards to sustainably develop, promote and conserve the natural assets, enhance the well-being of local communities through active participation in conservational efforts and ecotourism activities and seeking responsible behavior of tourists visiting to these sites. The villages included in the scheme are:

**Table 1.** List of Eco-villages (Ecotourism destinations) of Himachal Pradesh selected for study:

S. No.	Eco-village Particulars	District	Approx. no. of tourists visited the villages in a year
1.	Kamroo, Sangla, Kalpa Block	Kinnaur	3000
2.	Keori, Baijnath Block	Kangra	2000
3.	Shaleen, Naggar Block	Kullu	3000
4.	Tepra, Sadar Block	Bilaspur	700
5.	Bayla, Seraj Block, Janjehli	Mandi	2500
6.	Mahog, Kandaghat	Solan	1000

**Source:** Model eco-village scheme document, Department of Environment, Science, Technology & Climate change (2017).

Table 1 represents the list of eco-villages (ecotourism destinations) of Himachal Pradesh chosen for the study. These villages are situated in the vicinity of famous tourist destinations that are still less explored and have the immense potential of becoming famous ecotourism sites in the near future. These destinations have already started getting tourist footfall, but the number of tourists is less; therefore, it becomes significant to understand the intentions of tourists to visit these destinations, so that better management of these destinations can be implemented to attract a substantial number of tourists who are looking for ecotourism destinations.

## 5. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising thirty-three questions related to demographic characteristics, motives for visiting ecotourism destinations, tourists' perceptions of destinations and overall satisfaction with facilities and services. Dichotomous tests and cross-tabulation were employed to analyse the motives of visit, while perceptions and satisfaction levels were measured using a five-point Likert scale. A total of 365 questionnaire was distributed among tourists visiting selected ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh, out of which 304 valid responses were retained for final analysis after data screening. Since the present.

The study specifically focused on understanding tourists' motives

for visiting ecotourism sites; only demographic variables and motive-related responses were considered for analysis. Secondary data were obtained from the official documents of the Model Eco-village Scheme issued by the Department of Environment, Science, Technology and Climate Change (DEST), Himachal Pradesh. The collected data were analysed using SPSS software (version 23.0). The study adopted a combination of purposive and proportionate sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was utilised to identify the tourists who had visited the selected ecotourism destinations, while proportionate sampling ensured balanced representation from all six destinations based on their estimated tourist footfall. The distribution of respondents across destinations was determined in proportion to the annual tourist arrivals reported in the DEST (2017) Model Eco-village Scheme document.

## 6. RESULT & FINDINGS

The results of the study are shown based on data collected from 304 valid respondents who visited selected ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh. Following the objectives of the study, the results primarily focus on the demographic profile of respondents and the motives influencing their visit to ecotourism destinations. The findings are presented systematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing ecotourism visitation in the study area.

Table 2: Demographic profile of Tourists

Sr. No.	Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency
1	Gender	Male	197
		Female	107
		<b>Total</b>	304
2	Age	Up to 25 years	85
		26 – 50 years	160
		51– 75 years	45
		Above 75 years	14
		<b>Total</b>	304
3	Marital Status	Married	137
		Unmarried	167
		<b>Total</b>	304
4	Educational Qualification	Matriculation	11
		12 <sup>th</sup>	40
		Graduation	146
		Post-graduation and above	107
		<b>Total</b>	304
5	Occupation	Student	61
		Government Employed	44
		Private Employed	122
		Self-Employed	77
		<b>Total</b>	304
	Annual Income	Up to Rs. 2,00,000	87
		Rs. 2,00,001 to Rs. 4,00,000	72
		Rs. 4,00,001 to Rs. 6,00,000	88
		Above Rs. 6,00,000	57
		<b>Total</b>	304
7	Ecotourism destination visited	Kamroo	50
		Keori	51
		Shaleen	52
		Tepra	49
		Bayla,	54
		Mahog	48
		<b>Total</b>	304

Source: Author's own illustration from the data collected through the questionnaire.

Table 2 represents the demographic profile of the tourists who paid a visit to the selected ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh. The data shows that based on gender classification, out of 304 respondents, 197 were males and 107 were females who participated and responded effectively. In the category of age, the respondents were divided into 4 age groups, out of which, 85 respondents belong to the interval of up to 25 years (youth), 160 belong to age group of 26 – 50 years (middle age adults), the highest number of respondents in all age group category, 45 respondents belong to age group of 51 – 75 years (elderly) and only 14 respondents belong to age group of – above 75 years (senior citizens), the lowest in the category. In the category of marital status, 137 respondents were reported married, and 167 respondents were reported unmarried. Based on educational qualification, the total of 304 respondents were divided into four categories, in which eleven respondents belong to the first category, i.e., 10<sup>th</sup>, 40 respondents belong to the second category of educational qualification, i.e., 12<sup>th</sup>, similarly, 147 respondents belong to graduated level of educational qualification, and 107 respondents belong to the post-graduate level of educational qualification. In the category of occupation, the 304 respondents were segmented into four categories. The first one was a student, under which sixty-one were reported, under the second one, “the government employed”, forty-four respondents were reported. 122

Respondents were reported to work as privately employed, and seventy-seven respondents out of a total of 304 chose self-employed as their occupation. The last demographic factor considered for the study was annual income, which was segregated into four categories. The first was with annual income – Up to Rs. 2 Lakhs, under which eighty-seven responses were reported, seventy-two were reported to fall under the annual income of Rs 2,00,001/- – Rs. 4,00,000/-, similarly, eighty-eight responses were reported against annual income interval of Rs. 4,00,001/- – Rs. 6,00,000/-, and fifty-seven responses were reported against the annual income group – Above Rs. 6 Lakhs. The result shows that respondents were spread across all the categories of demographic variables. It indicates that tourists belonging to all demographic categories were taken into consideration for the study, showing the reliability of the data reported.

Table 2 shows that out of six selected Eco-villages or ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh, fifty responses were collected from Kamroo, Kinnaur, fifty-one responses from Keori, Kangra, fifty-two responses were collected from Tepra, Bilaspur, fifty-four responses were gathered from Bayla, Mandi, and forty-eight responses were taken from Mahog, Solan. All the responses were valid and filled out the survey questionnaire completely. The results indicated that responses were moderately distributed and covered fair responses from every selected destination.

**Table 3:** Motives of travel, Frequency distribution.

Motives	Responses		Per cent of Cases
	N	Percent	
To connect with nature. (M1).	146	23.0%	48.0%
To taste the local authentic cuisines (M2).	65	10.2%	21.4%
To participate in Eco drives (M3).	24	3.8%	7.9%
To enjoy cultural programs/activities of local communities (M4).	61	9.6%	20.1%
To avoid overcrowded tourist destinations (M5).	103	16.2%	33.9%
To gain health benefits in the lap of nature (M6).	97	15.3%	31.9%
Spend quality time with family in the natural surroundings (M7).	139	21.9%	45.7%
Total	635	100.0%	208.9%

**Source:** Author's own illustration through questionnaire.

The results of Table 3 present the frequency distribution of respondents' motives of visit to Ecotourism sites in the six selected destinations in Himachal Pradesh. A total of 635 responses were recorded, suggesting that respondents selected multiple motives for their visit. The cumulative percentage of cases is 208.9%, confirming the selection of multiple responses by the visitors. The data from the above table asserts that among the given motives, the most selected reason for visit was “To make contact with nature (M1)”, selected by 146 respondents, representing 48.0% of overall cases. This suggests that half of the respondents' prime motive of visit reflects a desire to reconnect with nature. The second most chosen motive was “Spend quality time with family in natural surroundings (M7)”, chosen by 139 respondents, accounting for 45.7% of total cases. This highlights that family bonding and programs/activities of local communities (M4)”, with just sixty-one responses, 20.1 % of cases, suggesting moderate interest in

Relaxation in natural settings is a major driving force for visitors. Another most chosen motive was “To avoid overcrowded tourist destinations (M5)”, reported by 103 respondents, 33.9% of cases, revealing a preference of tourists to visit less crowded and peaceful destinations. Similarly, “To gain health benefits in the lap of nature (M6)” was chosen by ninety-seven respondents, 31.9% of overall cases, which implies increasing awareness of nature-based health benefits and wellness. On the contrary, the least preferred motive was “To participate in eco-drives (M3)”, selected by only twenty-four respondents, accounting for 7.9% of total cases. This shows low direct participatory interest in environmental activities. It is being followed by the motive “To taste local authentic cuisines (M2)”, with fewer selected motives by 65 responses, 21.4% of cases and “To enjoy cultural, culinary and cultural experiences. Overall, findings reveal that respondents' primary motive of visit to ecotourism destinations

is contact with nature, family togetherness in the lap of nature, escape from crowded destinations and health-related benefits, while cultural and culinary experiences are the moderate choice of respondents as motives to visit the destinations, demonstrating an enormous potential for marketers to work

upon these aspects to attract more tourists. Eco-activities are comparatively less influential in the travel-decision-making (Budeanu 2007; Juvan & Dolnicar 2017), indicating a huge opportunity for the local authorities to use them as a strategy to attract targeted tourists.

Eco-tourism destinations		Motives of Visit							Total Respondents
		M1.	M2.	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	
Kamroo	Count	25	13	3	8	16	14	20	50
Keori	Count	22	11	3	10	21	11	25	51
Shaleen	Count	28	19	13	16	20	24	24	52
Tepra	Count	24	7	2	5	18	20	23	49
Bayla	Count	23	8	1	11	14	16	25	54
Mahog	Count	24	7	2	11	14	12	22	48
<b>Total Responses Count</b>		146	65	24	61	103	97	139	304
Percentages and totals are based on respondents.									
a. Group									

Source: Author's own illustration from the data collected through the questionnaire

Table 4 illustrates the results of various motives selected by the respondents of the ecotourism sites chosen for the study. The findings present the multiple responses of the tourists as their motives of visit to selected ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh. For this study, a total of 635 responses were collected from 304 respondents who chose more than one reason to visit the ecotourism sites. Out of 635 responses, 146 responses were selected against the motive M1 (To connect with nature), the highest among all seven motives, indicating that the majority of tourists still visit ecotourism destinations to experience a connection with nature. The second most selected motive was M7 (Spend quality time with family in the natural surroundings) with 139 responses, indicating that one of the primary motives to visit the eco-friendly sites was to strengthen family bonding through time spent in a natural environment. Similarly, 103 responses were reported against motive M5 (To avoid overcrowded tourist destinations), showing that tourists visited the destinations to escape from the overcrowded destinations to get some mental peace and harmony. On the other hand, only twenty-four responses were obtained for M3 (to participate in Eco-drives), and sixty-one responses were reported for M4 (to enjoy cultural programs/ activities of local communities), indicating that these motives were least selected by the respondents due to the lack of activities and active participation of local communities to attract eco-tourists toward their areas & cultural events. It emphasises that there is a need for local authorities and the management team to work on these areas, as it will enhance the tourist flow into the areas. Motives M2 (to taste the local authentic cuisines) and M6 (to gain health benefits in the lap of nature) were found in the mid-point of the selection, asserting that these motives were moderately affecting the choice of tourists for the selection of ecotourism destination and showing a positive attitude toward local cuisines and health benefits obtained from the natural environmental features. Among the destinations, except Keori and Bayla, the rest of the destinations attracted tourists based on their motive of M1 (to connect with nature), wherein Keori

And Bayla received the highest responses for M7 (spending quality time with family in a natural environment) due to the variety of activities being offered in these destinations. Keori is a village next to Bir, the landing site of Paragliding in Kangra, and Bayla is situated in Janjehli, known for an ecotourism destination and offering various activities like trek to Shikari Devi. The results show that all the motives selected for the study have significantly affected the choice of selecting the ecotourism destination in Himachal Pradesh. The variation of responses may be influenced by the quality of services, facilities, local hospitality, and activities being offered by these destinations. These findings present crucial information about the purpose of the visit that is influenced by the level and quality of services and facilities offered by a destination. These results would help the planners and marketers to think about enhancing the facilities and number of nature-friendly activities that will attract more tourists to these destinations.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of the present study reveal that the primary motives influencing tourists to visit ecotourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh are connecting with nature, spending quality time with family in natural surroundings, avoiding overcrowded tourist destinations, and gaining health benefits through nature-based experiences. These findings show a growing preference among tourists for wellness-oriented, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable travel experiences. The study supports the push-pull motivational framework, where psychological needs such as relaxation, escape, and emotional well-being align with destination attributes, including natural landscapes, peaceful environments, and authentic experiences. The strong preference for nature connectivity confirms that appreciation of natural environments is still one of the central motivations for ecotourism travel. Similarly, the importance of family-oriented experiences highlights the role of ecotourism destinations in promoting social bonding and recreation in natural settings.

The findings further indicate that tourists increasingly prefer less crowded and environmentally responsible destinations, reflecting a gradual shift from mass tourism towards sustainable tourism practices. Nature-based wellness and health benefits also appeared as significant motivational factors, emphasising the growing relevance of ecotourism in promoting mental and physical well-being.

In contrast, comparatively low responses were reported for participation in eco-drives, cultural activities, and local cuisine experiences. This suggests limited tourist engagement in conservational and cultural activities, due to inadequate promotion, lack of awareness, or insufficient community participation at the destination level.

The study has important implications for policymakers, tourism planners, and destination marketers. Greater emphasis should be placed on developing sustainable tourism infrastructure, conserving natural ecosystems, and promoting eco-friendly and family-oriented tourism experiences. Local authorities should also encourage community participation and strengthen awareness about environmentally friendly activities, local culture, and conservation programs to enhance visitor engagement and support long-term sustainable development.

Since the study is limited to six eco-villages or ecotourism destinations of Himachal Pradesh, future research may include a larger geographical area and apply advanced statistical techniques to examine the relationship between tourist motivation, destination image, and behavioural intentions in ecotourism destinations.

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