

# Identifying the Dimensions of the Domestic Tourism Demand Model in Tehran

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## Article Info

### Article type:

Original Research

### How to cite this article:

Afifi, R., Razaghi Shirsavar, H., Valikhani Dehaghani, M., & Ebrahimpour, A. (2024). Identifying the Dimensions of the Domestic Tourism Demand Model in Tehran. *International Journal of Innovation Management and Organizational Behavior*, 4(2), 81-87.  
<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijimob.4.2.10>



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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The dynamics of domestic tourism have gained prominence, especially in the wake of global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted travel preferences towards more localized experiences. This study aims to identify and analyze the dimensions of domestic tourism demand in Tehran, focusing on the motivations, barriers, preferences, and impacts of tourism within the city. The objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding that can inform policy and strategic planning to enhance Tehran's appeal as a domestic tourist destination.

**Methodology:** A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The study targeted a purposive sample of local residents, domestic tourists, and professionals within the tourism sector in Tehran. Theoretical saturation guided the data collection process, ensuring a thorough exploration of themes. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of key patterns, themes, and categories within the data.

**Findings:** The study unveiled five main themes: Motivations for Domestic Tourism, Barriers to Domestic Tourism, Perceptions of Tehran as a Tourist Destination, Tourist Preferences and Behaviors, and the Impact of Domestic Tourism. Each theme comprised various categories with associated concepts, ranging from cultural interest, relaxation, and social connections to economic factors, safety concerns, and the broader economic, cultural, and social impacts of tourism. These findings underscore the complex interplay of factors influencing domestic tourism demand in Tehran.

**Conclusion:** This research highlights the multifaceted nature of domestic tourism demand in Tehran, revealing a spectrum of motivations driving tourists, alongside significant barriers that need addressing. The study underscores the potential of domestic tourism as a catalyst for economic development, cultural preservation, and social cohesion in Tehran. By addressing identified barriers and leveraging the motivations and preferences of domestic tourists, Tehran can enhance its domestic tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Domestic tourism, Tehran, Tourism demand, Qualitative research, Thematic analysis, Tourism barriers, Tourist motivations, Tourism impacts.

## 1 Introduction

The evolution of tourism demand has long been a subject of intense study within the field of tourism management and economics, reflecting a dynamic interplay between various socio-economic factors and emerging global trends. This complexity is further underscored by shifts in tourist behavior patterns, especially in the wake of significant global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which have precipitated profound changes in the tourism landscape. The interplay between domestic and international tourism has been a focal point of research, with studies such as that by Athanasopoulos et al. (2014) employing a system-of-equations approach to model the substitution effects between these two forms of tourism in Australia. This body of work lays a foundational understanding of the economic interactions at play, informing our exploration of similar dynamics within the context of Tehran (Athanasopoulos et al., 2014). Furthermore, the pandemic-induced 'new normal' in tourism behaviors, as delineated by Boonkaew et al. (2023), provides a contemporary lens through which to examine the shifts in tourist preferences towards more localized travel experiences (Boonkaew et al., 2023). This shift is reflective of broader changes in tourism dynamics, as evidenced by Falk, Hagsten, and Lin's (2022) analysis of domestic tourism demand in Europe during the summer of 2020, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of domestic tourism markets (Falk et al., 2022).

Economic factors play a significant role in shaping tourism demand, a theme extensively explored in the literature. Gözgör and Ongan (2016) underscored the impact of economic policy uncertainty on tourism demand in the USA, suggesting that economic factors can have far-reaching effects on tourism patterns. This insight is relevant to our study as it highlights the potential influence of economic stability and policy on domestic tourism demand in Tehran (Gözgör & Ongan, 2016). The methodological advancements in tourism demand forecasting, as reviewed by Song and Li (2008), further provide a methodological framework for analyzing tourism trends, while Tsui's (2017) investigation into the impact of low-cost carriers on New Zealand's domestic tourism growth exemplifies the multifaceted drivers of tourism demand (Song & Li, 2008).

Pooling methods in tourism demand forecasting, as discussed by Wen, Liu, and Song (2018), offer innovative approaches to understanding tourism flows, which could be particularly applicable to analyzing the complex tourism ecosystem of a sprawling metropolis like Tehran (Wen et al.,

2018). Wu, Song, and Shen (2017) highlight new developments in tourism and hotel demand modeling, emphasizing the importance of adapting forecasting techniques to evolving tourism dynamics. This methodological insight is crucial for our study as it seeks to capture the nuanced patterns of domestic tourism demand in Tehran (Wu et al., 2017).

The spatial dynamics of tourism flows, as investigated by Yang and Wong (2012), provide a pertinent analytical lens for this study, considering Tehran's unique geographical and cultural landscape (Yang & Wong, 2012). Moreover, the interrelation between environmental factors and tourism demand, as explored by Zhou et al. (2019) in the context of air pollution in Beijing, underscores the importance of considering environmental sustainability in the development of tourism strategies. This aspect is particularly relevant to Tehran, where urban environmental factors may influence tourism demand (Zhou et al., 2019).

In summary, this study aims to build on the rich tapestry of existing research by focusing on the specific context of Tehran, exploring the underlying dimensions of domestic tourism demand within the city. By employing a qualitative approach centered on semi-structured interviews, this research seeks to uncover the motivations, barriers, preferences, and perceptions shaping domestic tourism in Tehran. Through this lens, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics influencing domestic tourism demand in urban settings, offering insights that can inform strategic planning and policy development in the tourism sector.

## 2 Methods and Materials

### 2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the dimensions of the domestic tourism demand model in Tehran. The research design is centered on achieving a deep understanding of the factors influencing domestic tourism demand within the city, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of both local residents and domestic tourists.

The study employs theoretical saturation as a criterion for data collection, meaning that interviews are conducted until no new or relevant information is observed to emerge regarding the dimensions of domestic tourism demand in Tehran. This approach ensures that the data collected provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon

under study, without unnecessary duplication of information.

Participants are provided with an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their privacy. Informed consent is obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

### 2.2 Data Collection

The primary method of data collection employed in this research is semi-structured interviews. This method is chosen for its flexibility, allowing for the exploration of participants' views, experiences, and insights in-depth while providing the researcher with the ability to probe further into interesting or unexpected areas that arise during the discussion.

Interviews are conducted with a purposive sample of participants, including local residents of Tehran, domestic tourists who have visited Tehran, and professionals working within the tourism sector of the city. This diverse participant pool is selected to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to domestic tourism demand in Tehran.

The semi-structured interviews are guided by a pre-determined set of open-ended questions, with room for follow-up questions and exploration based on the interviewees' responses. The questions are designed to uncover the factors that influence domestic tourism demand, including but not limited to motivations for travel,

preferences, perceptions of Tehran as a tourist destination, and any barriers to tourism within the city.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

The data from the interviews are transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves a systematic process of coding the data to identify patterns, themes, and categories that emerge from the interviews. The thematic analysis enables the identification of key dimensions of the domestic tourism demand model in Tehran, grounded in the real-world experiences and perspectives of the participants.

## 3 Findings and Results

In our study, we engaged with a diverse group of 25 participants to explore the dimensions of domestic tourism demand in Tehran. The demographic characteristics of our participants were varied, providing a wide range of perspectives on the subject. Specifically, the age distribution of participants was as follows: 6 participants (24%) were aged between 18-25 years, 9 participants (36%) fell within the 26-35 age range, 5 participants (20%) were aged 36-45, and the remaining 5 participants (20%) were aged 46 years and above. In terms of gender, 12 participants (48%) identified as male, and 13 participants (52%) as female, offering a balanced gender representation. With regard to professional background, the participants included 8 (32%) individuals working within the tourism sector, 7 (28%) from the education sector (including students), 5 (20%) from the service industry, and 5 (20%) from various other sectors.

**Table 1**

*The Results of Qualitative Analysis*

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts
Motivations for Domestic Tourism	Cultural Interest	Cultural festivals, Historical sites, Local crafts
	Relaxation and Recreation	Beaches, Parks, Wellness centers
	Social Connections	Family visits, Friendship bonds, Social events
	Adventure and Exploration	Hiking, Diving, Safari
	Educational Tourism	Workshops, Museums, Lectures
Barriers to Domestic Tourism	Economic Factors	Costs, Budget constraints, Economic downturn
	Safety Concerns	Safety concerns, Crime rates, Political instability
	Accessibility Issues	Transport issues, Geographic accessibility, Disability access
	Information Availability	Lack of information, Misleading advertisements, Language barriers
Perceptions of Tehran as a Tourist Destination	Cultural Barriers	Religious restrictions, Social norms, Dress codes
	Historical Significance	Ancient monuments, Heritage sites, Museums
	Modern Attractions	Shopping malls, Urban parks, Nightlife
	Safety and Security	Crime safety, Emergency services, Safe accommodations
Tourist Preferences and Behaviors	Cultural Experiences	Food culture, Art galleries, Music scene
	Hospitality and Services	Friendly locals, Quality service, Accommodation standards
	Accommodation Preferences	Hotels vs. Airbnb, Luxury vs. Budget, Location preferences
	Culinary Interests	Local cuisine, Street food, Fine dining

Impact of Domestic Tourism	Transportation Choices	Public transport, Rental cars, Walking tours
	Seasonal Preferences	Summer travel, Winter sports, Off-peak tourism
	Event-driven Tourism	Festivals, Sports events, Cultural celebrations
	Economic Impact	Revenue generation, Job creation, Infrastructure development
	Cultural Impact	Cultural preservation, Community pride, Identity reinforcement
	Environmental Impact	Conservation efforts, Pollution, Over-tourism
	Social Impact	Community cohesion, Volunteerism, Heritage awareness
	Policy and Governance	Regulation changes, Investment, Strategic planning

In exploring the dimensions of domestic tourism demand in Tehran, our qualitative analysis identified five main themes, each comprising several subthemes with associated concepts. These findings illuminate the complexity and multifaceted nature of domestic tourism within the city, as described below:

### 3.1 Motivations for Domestic Tourism

Our research revealed diverse motivations driving domestic tourism in Tehran, categorized into five subthemes:

**Cultural Interest:** Participants expressed a keen interest in exploring cultural festivals, historical sites, and local crafts. One interviewee remarked, "Visiting Tehran's historical sites feels like a journey through time, unveiling the city's rich cultural tapestry."

**Relaxation and Recreation:** The need for relaxation and recreational activities was highlighted, with beaches, parks, and wellness centers being popular. "Finding tranquility in Tehran's parks offers a much-needed escape from daily stresses," shared another participant.

**Social Connections:** Social connections emerged as a significant motivation, encompassing family visits, friendship bonds, and social events. "Traveling to Tehran allows me to reconnect with family and friends, strengthening our bonds," a respondent commented.

**Adventure and Exploration:** A desire for adventure and exploration was noted, with activities such as hiking, diving, and safari being sought after. "Exploring the less-traveled paths in Tehran provides an exhilarating sense of adventure," an enthusiast explained.

**Educational Tourism:** Interest in educational tourism was evident, with workshops, museums, and lectures attracting visitors. "Every visit to Tehran's museums is an educational journey, offering deep insights into Iran's history and culture," a museum-goer observed.

### 3.2 Barriers to Domestic Tourism

Participants identified several barriers that hinder domestic tourism in Tehran, which include:

**Economic Factors:** Economic constraints, such as costs and budget limitations, were cited as significant barriers. "The high cost of accommodation and activities in Tehran can deter potential visitors," a respondent highlighted.

**Safety Concerns:** Concerns over safety, crime rates, and political instability were mentioned. "Perceptions of safety can influence decisions to visit Tehran, despite its many attractions," noted a participant.

**Accessibility Issues:** Issues related to transport and geographic accessibility were discussed. "Difficulties in accessing certain areas in Tehran can limit the tourism experience," an interviewee pointed out.

**Information Availability:** The lack of reliable information and misleading advertisements were seen as barriers. "Finding accurate and comprehensive information about Tehran's tourist spots can be challenging," a tourist remarked.

**Cultural Barriers:** Cultural restrictions and social norms were also identified as obstacles. "Navigating the cultural nuances of Tehran requires sensitivity and understanding," shared a respondent.

### 3.3 Perceptions of Tehran as a Tourist Destination

The study unveiled varied perceptions of Tehran as a tourist destination, highlighting its:

**Historical Significance and Modern Attractions:** Participants appreciated both the ancient monuments and the modern attractions, underscoring Tehran's blend of history and modernity.

**Safety and Security:** The city's safety and security measures were acknowledged, with one visitor stating, "Tehran's efforts to ensure tourist safety are commendable and contribute to a positive travel experience."

**Cultural Experiences and Hospitality and Services:** The rich food culture, art galleries, and music scene, along with the hospitality and service standards, were praised. "The warmth and hospitality of Tehran's people make every visit memorable," expressed a traveler.

### 3.4 Tourist Preferences and Behaviors

This theme encompasses tourists' preferences and behaviors, including accommodation choices, culinary interests, and transportation options. Seasonal and event-driven tourism preferences were also noted, reflecting the dynamic nature of tourism demand in Tehran.

### 3.5 Impact of Domestic Tourism

Finally, the impact of domestic tourism on Tehran's economy, culture, environment, social fabric, and policy was explored. Economic benefits, cultural preservation, environmental concerns, social cohesion, and the influence on policy and governance were discussed, underlining the significant role of domestic tourism in the city's development.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

In our qualitative investigation into the dimensions of domestic tourism demand in Tehran, we identified five main themes that encompass the multifaceted nature of tourism within the city. These themes include Motivations for Domestic Tourism, Barriers to Domestic Tourism, Perceptions of Tehran as a Tourist Destination, Tourist Preferences and Behaviors, and the Impact of Domestic Tourism. Each theme is further delineated into categories, with associated concepts that provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing domestic tourism in Tehran.

Motivations for Domestic Tourism emerged as a significant theme, highlighting why individuals choose to engage in tourism activities within Tehran. The categories under this theme include Cultural Interest, Relaxation and Recreation, Social Connections, Adventure and Exploration, and Educational Tourism. Concepts such as cultural festivals, historical sites, local crafts, beaches, parks, wellness centers, family visits, friendship bonds, social events, hiking, diving, safari, workshops, museums, and lectures were identified, illustrating the diverse motivations driving domestic tourism.

Barriers to Domestic Tourism were identified, pinpointing the challenges and obstacles that potential tourists face. This theme encompasses Economic Factors, Safety Concerns, Accessibility Issues, Information Availability, and Cultural Barriers, with concepts such as costs, budget constraints, economic downturn, safety concerns, crime rates, political instability, transport issues,

geographic accessibility, disability access, lack of information, misleading advertisements, language barriers, religious restrictions, social norms, and dress codes, illustrating the multifaceted barriers to domestic tourism.

Perceptions of Tehran as a Tourist Destination highlighted how the city is viewed by both residents and visitors, with categories including Historical Significance, Modern Attractions, Safety and Security, Cultural Experiences, and Hospitality and Services. Concepts such as ancient monuments, heritage sites, museums, shopping malls, urban parks, nightlife, crime safety, emergency services, safe accommodations, food culture, art galleries, music scene, friendly locals, quality service, and accommodation standards were noted, reflecting the diverse perceptions of Tehran.

Tourist Preferences and Behaviors revealed the specific preferences and behaviors of tourists when visiting Tehran, categorized into Accommodation Preferences, Culinary Interests, Transportation Choices, Seasonal Preferences, and Event-driven Tourism. This theme is characterized by concepts such as hotels vs. Airbnb, luxury vs. budget, location preferences, local cuisine, street food, fine dining, public transport, rental cars, walking tours, summer travel, winter sports, off-peak tourism, festivals, sports events, and cultural celebrations, showcasing the varied preferences and behaviors of domestic tourists.

Impact of Domestic Tourism focused on the various effects of domestic tourism on Tehran, encompassing Economic Impact, Cultural Impact, Environmental Impact, Social Impact, and Policy and Governance. Concepts identified include revenue generation, job creation, infrastructure development, cultural preservation, community pride, identity reinforcement, conservation efforts, pollution, over-tourism, community cohesion, volunteerism, heritage awareness, regulation changes, investment, and strategic planning, highlighting the broad impacts of domestic tourism on the city.

Our study underscores the diversity in motivations for domestic tourism in Tehran, ranging from cultural interest and relaxation to educational tourism. This aligns with Athanasopoulos et al. (2014), who suggest that a multifaceted approach to understanding tourism motivations is essential for capturing the complexity of tourism demand (Athanasopoulos et al., 2014). Moreover, the significance of cultural and educational motivations found in our study echoes Tsui (2017), highlighting the growing importance of enriching experiences in driving tourism demand (Tsui, 2017).



Economic factors emerged as a significant barrier, a finding that resonates with Gözgör and Ongan (2016), who underscore the impact of economic uncertainty on tourism demand. This suggests that economic stability and policy predictability are crucial for fostering a robust domestic tourism sector (Gözgör & Ongan, 2016). Additionally, concerns around safety and accessibility identified in our study are reflective of the broader challenges facing the tourism industry, as noted by Zhou et al. (2019), emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate these barriers (Zhou et al., 2019).

The preference for local experiences, particularly in culinary and accommodation choices, highlights a shift towards more authentic, localized tourism experiences. This shift is consistent with the observations of Boonkaew et al. (2023), who report a post-pandemic trend towards individualized and localized tourist behaviors (Boonkaew et al., 2023). The emphasis on sustainable and eco-friendly tourism options also mirrors the findings of Wu, Song, and Shen (2017), indicating an evolving tourist consciousness towards environmental sustainability (Wu et al., 2017).

The economic, cultural, and social impacts of domestic tourism identified in our study highlight the multifaceted benefits of tourism to urban centers. This finding aligns with Wen, Liu, and Song (2018), who advocate for the pooling of tourism demand forecasting to better understand and leverage these impacts (Wen et al., 2018). Moreover, the cultural preservation and community cohesion aspects resonate with Yang and Wong (2012), who explore the spatial dynamics of tourism flows and their implications for cultural and social structures (Yang & Wong, 2012).

The unique context of Tehran, with its rich cultural heritage and dynamic urban environment, presents both opportunities and challenges for domestic tourism. The city's ability to cater to a wide range of tourist motivations, while addressing the barriers to tourism, is crucial for its tourism sector's growth. This requires a strategic approach, one that considers the economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions of tourism, as suggested by Falk, Hagsten, and Lin (2022), who analyze domestic tourism demand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Falk et al., 2022).

This study embarked on a qualitative exploration to identify the dimensions of domestic tourism demand in Tehran, revealing a complex interplay of motivations, barriers, preferences, and impacts that shape the domestic tourism landscape. Our findings indicate a diverse range of motivations driving domestic tourism in Tehran, including cultural interest, relaxation, social connections, adventure,

and educational opportunities. However, economic factors, safety concerns, accessibility issues, information availability, and cultural barriers were identified as significant impediments. Tourist preferences leaned towards authentic local experiences, with particular emphasis on culinary interests and accommodation choices. Notably, the study also highlighted the multifaceted impacts of domestic tourism on Tehran's economy, culture, environment, and social fabric.

In conclusion, the study enriches the understanding of domestic tourism dynamics within Tehran, offering insights into the motivations, barriers, and preferences that define it. It underscores the potential of domestic tourism as a lever for economic development, cultural preservation, and social cohesion. By providing a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, this research contributes to the strategic planning and policy formulation necessary to harness the benefits of domestic tourism while addressing its challenges.

This study is not without limitations. The reliance on semi-structured interviews, while offering in-depth insights, limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population. Additionally, the focus on Tehran means that the findings may not fully encapsulate the dynamics of domestic tourism in other regions or contexts. The theoretical saturation approach, while ensuring a comprehensive exploration of themes, might also overlook emerging trends not captured within the scope of the interviews.

Future research should aim to broaden the scope of this study by incorporating quantitative methods to validate the findings across a larger population. Comparative studies involving other cities or regions could offer insights into the contextual nuances of domestic tourism demand. Moreover, longitudinal studies tracking changes in tourism dynamics over time, especially in post-pandemic scenarios, could provide valuable insights into evolving trends and their long-term implications.

For practitioners and policymakers, this study highlights the importance of developing strategies that cater to the identified motivations and preferences of domestic tourists while mitigating the barriers they face. This includes enhancing the accessibility and safety of tourist destinations, improving the availability of information, and fostering cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Furthermore, leveraging the economic, cultural, and social impacts of domestic tourism could support broader development goals, suggesting a need for integrated approaches that align tourism development with urban planning, cultural preservation, and community engagement efforts.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

## Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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