



The preferred mix of urban and rural destinations in domestic and international travel

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Abstract

While tourists usually choose a combination of urban and rural destinations for the same trip, research in tourism has focused primarily on one type of tourism. The purpose of this research is to investigate the tourist's continuum preferences of urban and rural destinations and ascertain the influence of the tourists' residence, experience, and characteristics on their preferences in the contexts of international and domestic travel. The study proposes a mediation model to examine the direct and indirect effects of tourist's experience and characteristics on urban and rural preferences and to shed more light on differences obtained by sociodemographic variables. We found that most respondents prefer a combination of urban and rural destinations as opposed to just one. Our results indicate that growing up in the city influences tourists' experiences and characteristics, which, in turn, affects their urban/rural preferences. Urban residents prefer more urban destinations and vice versa for rural residents.

Keywords Urban/rural origins · Tourist typology · Urban tourism · Rural tourism · Preference

JEL Classification D9 · M3 · R0 · Z3

1 Introduction

Tourism, one of the world's largest industries, has experienced a 10-year period of sustained growth between the 2009 financial crisis and the COVID-19 outbreak at the end of 2019. (WTTC 2019). However, in the early stages of the COVID-19

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pandemic, in the first quarter of 2020, the number of international tourist arrivals dropped by 67 million. This is by far the largest decline in the history of international tourism since 1950 (UNWTO 2020). In 2019, domestic tourism was the leading form of tourism representing 71.3 percent of total global tourism spending (WTTC 2020) and with the ongoing the COVID-19 crisis, the share of domestic tourism increased.

During 2021 there was a slight recovery in international travel demand, and a significant one in domestic demand, as was expected by UNWTO's panel of experts (UNWTO 2020). The demand for urban and rural tourist destinations has changed as well (Li et al 2021). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has required the tourism industry to re-plan and re-distribute their services within the country, focusing on health and risk aspects. Tourism research has focused on the supply or the demand for a specific destination or for a specific type of tourism. More specifically, some tourism research has only analysed rural tourism, whereas some analysed only urban tourism. Yet, up until now, little research has been done on examining rural vs. urban tourism. While the definition of urban and rural tourism has viewed these two types as the ends of a continuum, no model has been developed to study this continuum.

Therefore, this study has two primary objectives: to investigate tourists' continuum preferences for urban and rural destinations and to determine the influence of tourists' residence type, experience, and characteristics on their preferences in both international and domestic travel contexts. We define and explore a spectrum of rurality levels, ranging from exclusively urban destinations to a mix of urban and rural, and finally to exclusively rural destinations.

This research addresses a significant gap in the current literature, which often overlooks the nuanced preferences of tourists based on their residence type and previous travel experiences. By employing Cohen's (1972) typology and the International Tourist Role (ITR) scale (Mo et al 1994), which measures destination orientation, preference for travel services, and desire for social contacts, we provide a comprehensive analysis of these preferences.

Specifically, our research examines whether the relationship between tourists' urban and rural origins and their destination preferences is mediated by factors such as the desire for novelty, eagerness to interact with the local community, spontaneity, and the number of previous vacations. This focus on mediation offers a more detailed understanding of the underlying motivations driving tourist behavior, which has been insufficiently explored in previous studies.

The unique contributions of this study lie in its detailed analysis of how tourists' background and characteristics influence their destination choices, and how these choices are mediated by specific motivational factors. By identifying and analyzing these mediators, our research provides deeper insights into tourist behavior that can significantly inform the development and marketing strategies for urban and rural destinations.

This is particularly relevant in the current context, where the tourism industry faces unprecedented challenges and requires substantial rethinking and re-planning. Our findings can guide stakeholders in creating more targeted and effective promotional strategies, ensuring that both urban and rural destinations can thrive in a

rapidly changing tourism landscape. This research not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also offers practical solutions to enhance the economic resilience of the tourism sector.

2 Literature review

2.1 Classifying urban and rural tourism

The definition of urban tourism is controversial. In this paper we chose to adopt UNWTO's definition which describes urban tourism as trips to cities or places with a high population density, which provide a variety of cultural, architectural, technological, social and natural experiences and products for leisure and business. Since these trips are usually short (one to three days), urban tourism is closely linked to the short break market. According to WTTC research, based on 73 cities, cities are more reliant on international travel demand than wider economies. Urban tourism accounts for 44 percent of international tourism, with international visitor spending representing 45% of tourism spending, compared to 29% of the global tourism spending in 2018 (WTTC 2019).

The terms 'rural tourism' and 'countryside tourism' are often used synonymously to define tourism activities that take place in the countryside or rural areas. In many OECD countries "rural" was initially conceived as being "not urban". Nowadays there is broad recognition that rural is a complex phenomenon. A useful way to identify types of rural is to look at the degree of physical distance between urban and rural places and the degree of linkages (OECD 2016). Lane (1994) argued that rurality is a relative concept with the origin of tourists as the reference, and that as a concept can be connected to low population densities with open space, small-scale settlements, generally with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. In such places, the land use is dominated by farming, forestry and natural areas. This concept of rurality has been widely recognized in attracting urban residents to rural areas (Dong et al. 2013).

In the field of tourism, however, it is, in reality, difficult to distinctly categorize destinations as either 'urban' or 'rural' (Rosalina et al. (2021)). Lane (1994) claimed that rurality should be treated as a continuum, with sparsely populated remote wilderness at one end and "world city" at the other. Hall and Page (2014) emphasized the concept of an urban–rural continuum as a means of establishing differing degrees of rurality and the essential qualities of 'ruralness'. In addition, a destination can be perceived as more rural for one person but more urban for another (Qiu et al. 2019). Therefore, the distinction is mainly based on the tourist's perception.

The difficulty of classifying tourism and destination types is compounded by the difficulty of classifying vacation types. Most international tourists combine urban and rural sites in the same vacation and choose how to allocate their time abroad between the two. In contrast, on domestic vacations, the tourist typically focuses on travelling to either urban or rural sites, that is to say one vacation type per trip.

Overall, these studies highlight the need for several additional levels in the urban and rural destination scale, as well as a scale from the tourist point of view. Such a scale has been developed and implemented in the current research to better describe tourist preferences over a mix of urban and rural destinations for their vacations.

2.2 The effect of residence on tourism behaviour

Early life experiences have a dominant influence on tourist personality and, according to the continuity theory, can form a bridge between an individual's past, present and future (Atchley 1999). Moreover, personality plays a significant role in shaping a tourist's motivation, perception and behaviour (Stokburger-Sauer 2011). In the context of rural tourism, frequent contact with nature in childhood has an influence on interaction with and attitudes toward the environment (Thompson et al. 2008). This view is also supported by Sirgy and Su (2000) who applied the self-congruity theory to the context of tourist destinations and claimed that the greater the match between the destination personality and the visitor's self-concept, the more likely it is that the visitor will have a favourable attitude toward that destination. Similarly, Yun et al. (2016) found that rural residents were less interested in urban destinations than urban residents. Conversely and Li et al. (2020) found that urban life creates a demand for rural tourism and vice versa.

The literature has highlighted additional tourism differences between urban and rural residents concerning push and pull motives (Duman et al. 2020), flexibility to travel (Bernini and Cracolici 2015), frequency of trips and their distance from the tourist home (Holz-Rau et al. 2014). McKercher (2024) found that residents of rural areas value travel as much as urban residents. However, they tend to be more conservative and thus preferring to visit new places, do not necessarily wish to experience cultures different from their own. In addition, Li et al. (2020) found that urban life tends to increase the desire to travel abroad specifically for those with higher income.

These studies clearly indicate that there is a relationship between the tourist residence type and their rural/urban preferences. However, the conflicting research findings make it difficult to predict the tourists' preferences given their residence type.

Therefore, we hypothesises that:

Hypothesis 1a: childhood residence effects the continuum preference between urban and rural vacation in international tourism

Hypothesis 1b: childhood residence effects the continuum preference between urban and rural vacation in domestic tourism

2.3 Tourist typology and tourists' characteristics

Most of the narrative on the concept of tourist typology is centred on Cohen's typology (Cohen 1972) ideas (Chen 2016). Cohen typology categorizes tourists into the four groups: organized mass tourists, independent mass tourists, explorers, and drifters.

The organized mass tourist typically looks for familiar destinations, travels on package tours, desires familiar places when traveling (such as international hotel chains) and has no (or little) interaction with the local community. Independent mass tourists take the regular tourist routes but prefer to make their own arrangements and travel individually. The third group is made up of explorers who travel to lesser-known destinations and who like to explore local culture without much interaction with the local population. The last group of tourists includes the drifters who travel to less developed, less known destinations; they stay with local residents, eat local food, and try to learn as much as they can about the culture. However, there is no universally approved scale to measure Cohen's typology (Mapingure, and du Plessis 2022). The first attempt to develop a scale was made by Snepenger (1987) which simply asked the tourists to indicate whether they were on a full package, partial package or a self-guided vacation. This scale was later considered unreliable (Jiang et al. 2000; Mo et al. 1994).

Using the novelty-familiarity continuum, Mo et al. (1994) developed a scale and questionnaire known as the International Tourist Role (ITR) scale, which includes three dimensions for distinguishing individuals based on their preferences on a novelty-familiarity continuum. However, Fan et al. (2017) noted that the novelty-familiarity spectrum was too general to describe the diverse behavioural characteristics of tourists.

Understanding tourism typology can provide information that is important for the planning of tourism policy, including understanding the effects that different types of tourists have on the destination, (Coccosis & Constantoglu 2008; Swarbrooke and Horner 2016) and enables destination marketing managers to devise effective marketing strategies (Cho et al. 2017; Mapingure & du Plessis 2022).

Based on the above literature our hypotheses are that:

Hypothesis 2a: destination oriented, social contact and organized plans effects the preference over urban and rural vacation in international tourism

Hypothesis 2b: destination oriented, social contact effects the preference over urban and rural vacation in domestic tourism

The current research analyses the relationship between the tourist's characterises and the tourist preferences over urban and rural destinations. Understanding the characteristics of the tourist who prefer more urban destinations should help tourism managers in the cities to adjust their services to better meet tourists' expectations. On the other hand, tourism managers in rural destinations can attract tourists who prefer more urban destinations by offering them new services which meet their expectations. The same applies for tourists who prefer more rural destinations.

2.4 International vs. domestic tourism choices

Some research on tourist destination choices distinguishes between decisions to travel domestically or abroad. Eugenio-Martin and Campos-Soria (2011) found that willingness to travel is not only related to income level but also to the characteristics of the person's region of residence, such as climate, size and local tourist attractions.

They found that those who live in larger communities travel more, probably because of the wider access to varied means of transportation. As age or income increases, people are more likely to opt for international travel. On the other hand, as the family size increases, people are more likely to travel domestically.

Mechinda et al. (2009) showed that domestic and international tourists differ not only in their motivations for choosing certain destinations over others, but also in their perceptions of destinations. For example, domestic tourists were attracted to a destination because of the nature and climate, while international tourists chose the same destination because of the friendliness of the local people. In addition, domestic tourists travelled more frequently, but their length of stay in their chosen destination was generally shorter and their level of spending is lower.

Based on the above literature our hypotheses are that:

Hypothesis 3: There will be a difference between tourist preferences concerning international vacation and her preferences concerning domestic vacation.

Hypothesis 4: The impacts of tourist typology, tourist experiences and childhood experiences will be different between international and domestic travel decisions.

Thus, previous studies support the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the tourists' residence type and their preferences, and that tourist characteristics based on tourist typology may influence preferences as well. Studies have also found that tourist residence type may influence tourists' characteristics and experiences. These preferences and their relationships may differ depending on whether domestic and international travel is chosen. To provide tourism managers and developers with a more effective way to target customers in their travel destination choices and enhance the tourist experience, we developed a comprehensive urban/rural preferences model that takes into consideration the above factors. Additionally, in our research, we shed a light on the differences obtained by sociodemographic variables.

3 Materials and methods

To address the study's objectives, we employed a quantitative cross-sectional design. This approach is suitable for capturing the complex relationships between tourists' characteristics, experiences, and their destination preferences at a specific point in time. The study's two primary objectives were to investigate tourists' continuum preferences for urban and rural destinations and determine the influence of tourists' residence type, experience, and characteristics on these preferences in both international and domestic travel contexts.

3.1 Sample

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit 269 Israeli participants, reflecting a diverse range of travel behaviors and preferences. This method allowed us to efficiently gather data from a broad demographic, ensuring a

representative sample of the Israeli tourist population. The relevant population is about 2.58 million households and the sample size needed for a 95% confidence level and 6% confidence interval for this population is 267.

Out of the sample of 269 Israeli participants, 219 travel internationally with an average of 1.6 vacations per year and 229 opt for domestic travel with an average of 4.4 vacations per year (the term vacation is intended to include day trips). From those participants, 200 traveled both domestically and internationally. The study was conducted from April to June 2018.

Before the self-administered questionnaires were distributed, the purpose of the study was briefly explained and the subjects were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and that the results would only be used for research purposes. Although, most of the questionnaires were completely filled out, a small number of respondents skipped some of the answers. We collected the reported data from those who completely filled out the questionnaire concerning at least domestic or international travel. Accordingly, the sample was split to domestic and international subsamples.

Out of the domestic / international sub samples, 73/77 percent grew up in a city respectively and 27/23 percent grew up in another type of residence. Table 1 shows the participants reported demographic characteristics for the domestic and international subsamples.

3.2 Procedure

The research questionnaire was partially based on the ITR questionnaire developed by Mo et al. (1994). It was translated into Hebrew by one of the authors and back translated by the other author. By translating and back-translating the questionnaire, we ensured linguistic and conceptual consistency, which is vital for maintaining the validity and reliability of the responses. The Ethics Committee of the higher education institution with which the authors are affiliated approved this study.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	DOMESTIC (<i>N</i> =229)		International (<i>N</i> =219)			
		N	Percentage	N	Percentage	
Gender	Male	110	48%	Male	106	48.4%
	Female	119	52%	Female	113	51.6%
Marital status	Single	192	83.8%	Single	183	83.6%
	Married	37	16.2%	Married	36	16.4%
Religion	Jewish	183	80.6%	Jewish	183	83.6%
	Non-Jewish	46	19.4%	Non-Jewish	36	16.4%
Income	Below Average	114	54.1%	Below Average	105	51.2%
	Average and above	115	45.9%	Average and above	114	48.8%
Education	High school or diploma	98	43.2%	High school or diploma	96	44.2%
	Academic degree	131	56.8%	Academic degree	123	55.8%

3.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire incorporated three dimensions. First, the '*Destination Oriented Dimension*' (*Destination oriented*) considered the tourist's preference with regard to novelty and familiarity of a destination. This dimension is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-familiarity to 5-novelty. Second, the '*Social Contact Dimension*' (*Social contact*) examined the degree to which tourists want to observe the local culture and community as an outsider or whether they prefer interaction, also measured on a Likert scale from 1– observe the local culture to 5 – interact with the local culture. Finally, the '*Travel Service Dimension*' looked at the degree to which tourists seek organized tourism services and plan ahead. However, since this dimension involves two different aspects (i.e., using travel agent services and/or planning ahead) this would have undermined the internal consistency (or reliability) of the test item based on Cronbach's Alfa. Therefore, we introduced two new dimensions to this study: the Organized Plans Dimension and the Third-Party Dimension. The Organized Plans Dimension (*Organized plans*) was used to measure the level of planning before a vacation (1 – plans ahead; 5 – does not make plans), while the Third-Party Dimension (*Third party*) defined the level of seeking assistance from a travel agent or other third party (1 – uses a third party; 5 – does not use a third party). For each one of the four dimensions, a combined score was calculated based on the average of responses to the questions related to this dimension.

The questionnaire included the following sections:

- 1) *Sociodemographic details and vacation details*, including gender, age, education, childhood city / non city residence (denoted as *Childhood residence*) and coded by 1 – city or 0 – other), number of previous domestic vacations (denoted by # domestic vacations) and number of previous international vacations.
- 2) *Tourist characteristics on international vacations*: Subjects were asked questions based on Mo et al. (1994) to measure international tourists' characteristics, denoted by *Destination Oriented_{International}*, *Social Contact_{International}*, *Organized plans_{International}*, *Third party_{International}* on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 – very much agree; 5 – do not agree).
- 3) *Tourist characteristics on domestic vacations*: Subjects were asked questions based on Mo et al. (1994) to measure domestic tourists' characteristics, denoted by *Destination Oriented_{Domestic}*, *Social Contact_{Domestic}*, *Organized Plans_{Domestic}*, *Third party_{Domestic}* and ranked on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – very much agree; 5 – do not agree).
- 4) *Tourist preference for international and domestic vacations*: This referred to the mix of urban and rural sites during a vacation, ranked on a 5-point Likert scale (1-urban only; 2—more urban than rural; 3—urban and rural equally; 4—more rural than urban; 5—rural only). The preferences were denoted by *urban/rural_{international}* and *urban/rural_{Domestic}* for international and domestic vacations respectively.

3.4 Data analysis

The statistical package SPSS 25 was used for statistical analysis of the data. International vs. domestic differences were examined by paired t-tests for independent samples. This research tested the total and direct effects to determine whether the effect of the childhood city/non-city residence on the tourist preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations is completely/partially/inconsistently mediated by tourists' experiences and characteristics. Partial mediation occurs when the indirect effect and the corresponding direct effect are of the same sign. Complete mediation occurs when the indirect effect is nonzero, and the direct effect is zero. Inconsistent mediation (sometimes called suppression) occurs when the indirect effect and the direct effect are nonzero but have opposite signs (Maassen and Bakker 2001; MacKinnon et al. 2000). The Pearson correlation method examined direct effects and PROCESS macro examined mediation effects for the hierarchical multiple regression.

Hierarchical multiple regression models were used to test our hypotheses, allowing us to control for sociodemographic variables and isolate the specific effects of interest. The significance of the mediation effects was examined by calculating 5,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the 95% bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals (CIs) of indirect effects of the predictor on the outcome through the mediator (Hayes 2017). The use of bootstrapped samples for estimating confidence intervals of indirect effects provided robust and reliable mediation analysis results.

By employing these methodological choices, we ensured a comprehensive and rigorous examination of the factors influencing tourists' preferences for urban and rural destinations. Our approach allows for detailed insights into how tourists' backgrounds and characteristics shape their travel behaviors, which is critical for developing targeted and effective tourism marketing strategies.

4 Results

The tourist characteristics and experiences for international and domestic vacations, and the reliability and correlation between them are shown in Tables 2 and 3 respectively.¹

Table 2 indicates that *Social Contact*_{International} and *Destination Oriented*_{International} are positively associated with the chosen mix of urban and rural international sites, while *Organized Plans*_{International} and *Childhood Residence* have no significant correlation. In addition, *Social Contact*_{International}, *Destination Oriented*_{International} and *Organized Plans*_{International} are positively associated. The association between *Destination Oriented*_{International} and *Childhood Residence* is positive as well.

Table 3 indicates that *Childhood Residence* and *# domestic vacations* is positively associated with the chosen mix of urban and rural sites on domestic vacations, while *Destination Oriented*_{Domestic} and *Social contact*_{Domestic} has no significant

¹ The tables include only those variables which were included in the final models.

Table 2 Major international tourist variables and correlations between them

	Variables			Correlations				
	M (SD)	Range	Cronbach's alpha	1	2	3	4	5
1. <i>Urban/Rural</i>	2.86 (0.82)	1–5	-	-	0.20**	0.33**	-0.06	0.09
2. <i>Social Contact</i>	2.93 (0.93)	1–5	0.90		-	0.32**	0.46**	0.03
3. <i>Destination Oriented</i>	3.44 (0.76)	1–4.9	0.87			-	0.17*	0.14*
4. <i>Organized Plans</i>	2.45 (1.14)	1–5	0.88				-	0.08
5. <i>Childhood Residence</i>								-

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

correlation. Moreover, growing up in a city is associated with # *domestic vacations*. Social contact_{Domestic} is negatively associated with *Destination Oriented*_{Domestic}.

Table 4 compares the characteristics and preferences of the tourist on international and domestic vacations.

The results indicate that on international vacations tourists look for more novelty and contact with the local people than on domestic vacations. The mix of urban and rural sites differs between international and domestic vacations. The preference for rural sites is stronger among those who choose domestic vacations.

To examine the association between tourists' experiences, tourist characteristics and urban/rural preferences with the control of the sociodemographic variable (education, income, religion, and gender), several hierarchical multiple regression models were tested.

The best fit for international tourism is illustrated by Fig. 1a and summarized in Table 5, including *Destination Oriented*_{International}, *Social Contact*_{International}, *Organized Plans*_{International} as mediator variables and gender as a covariate.

The results in Table 5 indicate that women and men significantly differ with regard to *Social Contact*_{International}, *Organized Plans*_{International}. Men prefer to have more contact with the local community than women. In addition, the behavior of male tourists is more spontaneous. The preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations significantly depend on *Destination Oriented*_{International}, *Social Contact*_{International}, *Organized Plans*_{International} (paths b1, b2, b3 respectively). Tourists who tend to create connections with the local population or desire novelty on their international vacations choose more rural sites, whereas those who like to travel without a great deal of forward planning prefer more urban sites.

In addition, growing up in the city has an indirect effect on the preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations through the *Destination oriented*_{International} (path a1b1). Tourists who grew up in the city prefer more urban sites. However, there is no direct effect of growing up in the city (path c'). The effect of growing up in the city on the preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations is completely mediated. The overall model was significant $p = 0.000$, $R^2 = 0.1553$, $F(5,213) = 7.8334$.

Table 3 Domestic tourist variables and correlations of the study variables

	Variables			Correlations				
	M (SD)	Range	Cronbach's alpha	1	2	3	4	5
1. <i>Urban/Rural</i>	3.22 (1.02)	1–5	–	–	0.06	0.11	0.17*	0.17*
2. <i>Social Contact</i>	2.60 (1.03)	1–5	0.90		–	-0.14*	0.08	0.03
3. <i>Destination Oriented</i>	3.07 (0.93)	1–5	0.67			–	0.05	-0.04
4. # <i>domestic vacations</i>	4.36 (5.86)	0.33–50	–				–	0.25**
5. <i>Childhood Residence</i>								–

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The best-fit model for domestic tourism is illustrated by Fig. 1b and Table 6 including *Destination Oriented_{Domestic}*, *Social Contact_{Domestic}* and # *domestic vacations* as mediator variables.

The results in Table 6 indicate that the preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations in domestic vacations significantly depend on *Destination Oriented_{Domestic}* and # *domestic vacations* (paths b1, b3 respectively). Travelers who take more domestic vacations or desire novelty in domestic vacations choose more rural sites. Growing up in the city has an indirect effect on the preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations through the number of previous domestic vacations (path a3b3). Tourists who grew up in the city tend to travel less domestically and therefore prefer more urban sites. There is no direct effect of growing up in the city on preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations (path c'). Therefore, the effect of growing up in the city on the preference is completely mediated. The overall model was significant $p = 0.000$, $R^2 = 0.0119$, $F(4, 224) = 0.09$.

5 Discussion

The actors of tourism management and development face many challenges, often requiring them to create new offerings of urban and rural sites in their countries. This ability to adapt to change has become particularly important as the tourism industry begins to recover post covid-19. Although Lane (1994) described the continuum between urban and rural tourism, tourism management research usually focuses on only one of them or just compares them. The main goal of the current study was to fill this gap by modeling and studying the continuum choice between urban and rural sites from the tourist's point of view. The second aim of this study was to investigate the effect of tourist residence, tourist's experiences and tourist characteristics on the preference for a mix of urban and rural sites on international and domestic vacations. The study proposes a new model to examine the direct and indirect effects of these variables and shed more light on differences obtained by the background sociodemographic variables (such as gender, religion, income,

education, number of previous vacations, and marital status). Moreover, the effect of tourist residence type on tourist characteristics is tested as well. Unlike most research regarding urban and rural tourism, this research does not look at the destination as a dichotomic variable but on a scale between only urban to only rural with an option to combine them. The respondent answers prove the necessity of such a scale since most of respondents prefer a combination of urban and rural sites, and not only one of them.

The current model is an extension of the continuity and self-congruity theories and builds on the work of Thompson et al. (2008), Sirgy and Su (2000), and Stokburger-Sauer (2011) who argued that childhood experience affects tourism behavior. More specifically, our results show that tourists who grew up in the city tend to prefer more urban sites over more rural sites, which is in line with Yun's findings Yun et al. (2016) and support hypothesis 1a and 1b. Although these findings for international and domestic vacations are along the same lines, the underlying reasons are different supporting hypothesis 4. On international vacations, travelers who grew up in the city desire more familiarity when they visit a destination, which in turn explains their preference for more urban sites. On the other hand, for domestic vacations, the preference for more urban sites appears to be related to the number of previous domestic vacations. Tourists who grew up in the city tend to travel less. The connection found between the tourist's region of residence and number of previous vacations contradicts the findings of Eugenio-Martin and Campos-Soria (2011), Bernini and Cracolici (2015). Li et al. (2020), and Holz-Rau et al. (2014) and McKercher (2024). The contradiction could be due to the current separation between domestic and international travel and the fact that one day domestic tours are counted as well.

Concerning international vacations, we found that all of the tourist characteristics have a significant effect on the mix of urban and rural preferences therefore supporting hypothesis 2a, while only the destination-oriented dimension has a significant effect on domestic vacations therefore partially supporting hypothesis 2b. Travelers who desire novelty prefer more rural over urban sites on both international and domestic vacations. On international trips, tourists who like to become better acquainted with the local culture prefer more rural sites. On the other hand, tourists who carefully plan their vacation in advance prefer urban destinations.

The tourist's gender has a significant effect on the mixed preferences for urban and rural destinations on international vacations: men (compared to women) prefer

Table 4 International vs. domestic differences in tourist characteristics and preferences ($N=200$)

	International	Domestic	t-test(df)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
<i>Social Contact</i>	2.95 (0.92)	2.54 (1.0)	5.649(202)***
<i>Destination Oriented</i>	3.42 (0.74)	3.12 (0.94)	5.12(203)***
<i>Urban/Rural</i>	2.85 (0.84)	3.24 (1.02)	-5.78(199)***

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

to have more contact with the local community and are more spontaneous, which in turn leads to a higher preference for rural sites.

The number of domestic or international vacations has no effect on international preferences, while the number of domestic vacations has a significant effect on the mix of urban and rural destination preferences concerning domestic vacations. Tourists who take more domestic vacations prefer more rural sites.

Tourist characteristics are different for international and domestic vacations. On international vacations, the tourist desires more novelty and more social interaction than on domestic trips. In addition, in the context of domestic vacations, the tourist preference for rural sites is stronger than on international vacations therefore supporting hypothesis 3. Mechinda et al. (2009) documented differences between international and domestic tourists which may be explained by the results of the present study.

The findings of this paper make several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge in the field of tourism studies. The current research provides a nuanced understanding of tourists' preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations. By conceptualizing these preferences along a continuum, it challenges the traditional dichotomy that views urban and rural tourism as mutually exclusive categories. Differences found in previous studies between urban and rural tourists might be questionable due to the results found in this study that most of the travelers are both rural and urban tourist on the same travel. In addition, the research highlights the impact of tourists' residence type and childhood experiences on their travel preferences. It shows that urban residents tend to prefer urban destinations, whereas rural residents lean towards rural destinations. Moreover, by employing a mediation model, the study reveals the indirect effects of tourists' experiences and characteristics on their destination preferences. It identifies specific mediators such as the desire for novelty, social interaction, and planning behaviors, providing deeper insights into the motivational factors driving tourist behavior. This adds to the understanding of tourist typologies and their practical implications for destination marketing.

While tourist characteristics and preferences remain fairly constant, tourist behavior has changed as a result of the pandemic and in response to health risks and local restrictions. Therefore, although the data were collected before the COVID-19 outbreak, there are some relevant implications for the post COVID-19 world. The demand for urban destinations has changed due to the dramatic decrease in international tourism. In addition, domestic tourists who prefer more urban destinations may choose to travel to rural destinations (despite their preferences) due to the fear of crowded areas.

5.1 Detailed Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Tailored Marketing Strategies:

Urban Destinations: For urban destinations, focus on promoting familiarity and convenience, which are highly valued by urban residents. Highlight well-known attractions, international hotel chains, and organized tours. Emphasize safety and ease of access, particularly in post-pandemic marketing campaigns.

Fig. 1 a The study model: The association between childhood city/non-city residence (CCR) and international urban and rural preferences mediated by DODi, SCDi, OPi and a covariate variable, gender. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. **b** The study model: The association between childhood city/non-city residence (CCR) and domestic urban and rural preferences mediated by DODd, SCDd and number of previous domestic vacations. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Rural Destinations: For rural destinations, promote unique and novel experiences. Market the natural beauty, tranquillity, and opportunities for adventure and social interaction with local communities. Develop packages that include guided nature tours, cultural immersion activities, and local gastronomy.

2. Segment-Specific Promotions:

Urban Residents: Create marketing campaigns that resonate with the urban lifestyle, emphasizing short getaways, cultural experiences, and city tours. Design promotional materials that showcase urban attractions such as shopping, dining, and entertainment options. Offer urban residents customized domestic itineraries that combine both urban and rural attractions to cater to their mixed preferences.

Rural Residents: Create marketing campaigns that promote nature trips and meeting with local people in diverse destinations. Offer rural residence customize domestic campaigns that offer discounts on return trips.

3. Enhanced Travel Services:

Customized Planning Tools: Develop online tools and mobile apps that help tourists plan their trips, offering recommendations based on their preferences for urban or rural experiences, preferences for novelty and for contact with the locals. According to the main destinations and vacation length chosen by the user the app will offer customized itinerary, including options for booking.

4. Product Development:

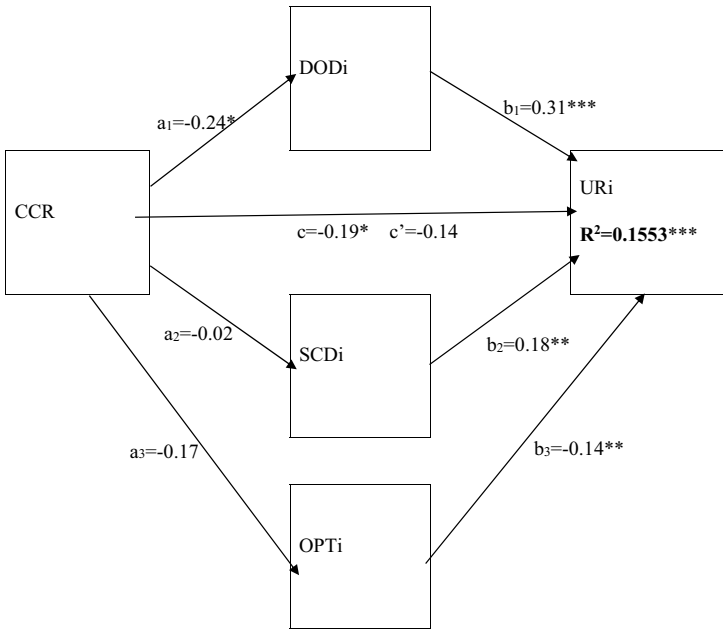
Annual Passes and Combined Packages: Introduce annual passes for domestic tourists that allow them to access a variety of urban and rural attractions. Create combined packages that offer experiences in both settings, encouraging tourists to explore more diverse destinations within the same trip.

Specialized Tours and Workshops: Develop specialized tours and workshops, such as storytelling tours, cooking classes, and craft workshops, that cater to tourists' desires for novelty and interaction with local culture. These can be particularly attractive to rural destinations.

5. Gender-Specific Offerings:

Women-Only Tours: Recognize the significant differences in preferences between male and female tourists. Offer women-only tours or packages that cater to female travellers' interests and safety concerns, providing a more comfortable and secure travel experience.

a



b

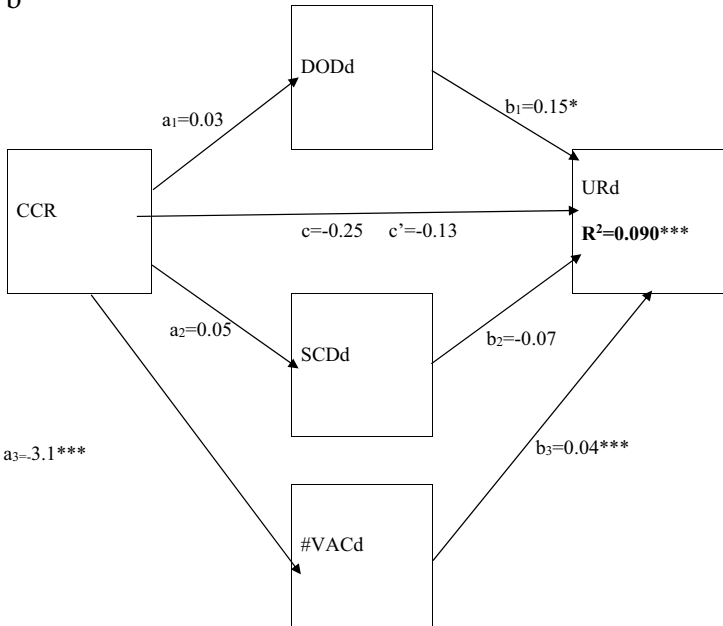


Table 5 Regression analysis: Factors affecting the preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations on international vacations. $N=219$. Total, direct, and indirect effects of childhood city/non-city residence on preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations on international vacations through *Destination Oriented*, *Social Contact* and *Organized plans*

Predictor	B	SE	T	LLCI,ULCI
	Dependent variable: <i>Urban/Rural</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path c = total effect)	-0.19	0.13	-1.44	-0.45, -0.07
	Mediator: <i>Destination Oriented</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path a_1)	-0.24	0.12	-2.00	-0.48, -0.01
Gender	0.01	0.10	0.07	-0.19, 0.21
	Mediator: <i>Social Contact</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path a_2)	-0.02	0.15	-0.12	-0.31, 0.27
Gender	-0.37	0.12	-2.97	-0.61, -0.12
	Mediator: <i>Organized plans</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path a_3)	-0.17	0.18	-0.97	-0.53, 0.18
Gender	-0.44	0.15	-2.86	-0.74, -0.14
	Dependent variable: <i>Urban/Rural</i>			
<i>Destination Oriented</i> (path b_1)	0.31	0.07	4.31	0.17, 0.46
<i>Social Contact</i> (path b_2)	0.18	0.07	2.72	0.05, 0.31
<i>Organized plans</i> (path b_3)	-0.14	0.05	-2.80	-0.25, -0.04
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path c' = direct effect)	-0.14	0.12	-1.09	-0.38, 0.01
<i>Destination Oriented</i> (path a_1b_1 = indirect effect)	-0.08	0.04		-0.17, -0.01
<i>Social Contact</i> (path a_2b_2 = indirect effect)	-0.003	0.03		-0.06, 0.06
<i>Organized plans</i> (path a_3b_3 = indirect effect)	0.03	0.03		-0.03, 0.09
Gender	0.05	0.11	0.49	-0.16, 0.26

B = unstandardized beta, SE = standard error for the unstandardized beta (boot standard error), T = t test statistic, $LLCI-ULCI$ = lower limit of the confidence interval–upper limit of the confidence interval (boot LLCI–ULCI)

By implementing these recommendations, tourism practitioners can better meet the diverse needs and preferences of tourists, enhancing their travel experiences and potentially increasing tourist satisfaction and loyalty. These strategies also help to bridge the gap between urban and rural tourism, fostering a more integrated and comprehensive approach to destination marketing and development.

The present research was the first to focus on the perspective of the tourist's preference for a mix of urban and rural destinations and consider the effect of personality on their travel choices. Further research may consider how tourist's preference and personality may affect other aspects of tourism, including destination choice, motivation factors and specific tourism niches such as wellness tourism, ecotourism, culinary/food tourism, or religious tourism.

The limitations of this research include the fact that it was conducted on a relatively small sample and in a specific location. Future research should study larger samples from different countries. Expanding the research to include different

Table 6 Regression analysis: Factors affecting the preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations on domestic vacations. $N=229$. Total, direct, and indirect effects of childhood city/non-city residence on preferences for a mix of urban and rural destinations on domestic vacations through *Destination Oriented*, *Social Contact* and *# domestic vacations*

Predictor	B	SE	T	LLCI, ULCI
	Dependent variable: <i>Urban/Rural</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path c = total effect)	-0.25	0.15	-1.65	-0.55, 0.05
	Mediator: <i>Destination Oriented</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path a_1)	0.03	0.14	0.20	-0.25, 0.31
	Mediator: <i>Social Contact</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path a_2)	0.05	0.15	0.35	-0.25, 0.36
	Mediator: <i># domestic vacations</i>			
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path a_3)	-3.10	0.85	-3.67	-4.77, -1.44
	Dependent variable: <i>Urban/Rural</i>			
<i>Destination Oriented</i> (path b_1)	0.15	0.07	2.18	0.02, 0.29
<i>Social Contact</i> (path b_2)	-0.07	0.06	-1.08	-0.2, 0.06
<i># domestic vacations</i> (Path b_3)	0.04	0.01	3.48	0.02, 0.06
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (path c' = direct effect)	-0.13	0.15	-0.84	-0.42, 0.17
<i>Destination Oriented</i> (path a_1b_1 = indirect effect)	0.004	0.02		-0.04, 0.06
<i>Social Contact</i> (path a_2b_2 = indirect effect)	-0.004	0.02		-0.04, 0.03
<i># domestic vacations</i> (path a_3b_3 = indirect effect)	-0.13	0.05		-0.23, -0.05

B =unstandardized beta, SE =standard error for the unstandardized beta (boot standard error), T =t test statistic, $LLCI$ – $ULCI$ =lower limit of the confidence interval–upper limit of the confidence interval (boot $LLCI$ – $ULCI$)

countries may shed light on cultural differences concerning tourists' urban–rural preferences. In addition, tourism research should apply the concept of an urban–rural continuum to the supply side as well.

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Declarations

Ethical approval The research was approved by the ethical committee in the authors academic institute.

Human and Animal Rights This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

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