

The Power of Kindness: Examining the Impact of Local Hospitality on Tourists' Revisit Intention Across Nationalities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of perceived kindness from local residents on tourists' emotional bonding and revisit intention, drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework. As contemporary travellers increasingly seek authentic and meaningful interactions, local residents have shifted from a traditional backstage presence to a prominent front-stage role in shaping tourism experiences. Using quantitative data from 427 respondents, this study employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and One-Way ANOVA to analyse the relationships among key constructs and compare regional differences. The findings reveal that perceived kindness from locals functions as a significant stimulus that enhances tourists' emotional bonding with the destination. This emotional connection subsequently strengthens their intention to revisit, underscoring the pivotal role of human warmth in shaping post-visit behaviours. ANOVA results further indicate that among the three regional groups (Asia, Oceania, and Western), visitors from Oceania consistently reported higher perceptions of locals' kindness, stronger emotional bonding, and higher revisit intention, followed by respondents from Asia and Western regions. This study contributes to tourism theory by empirically validating kindness as a critical socio-emotional factor within the S–O–R model and offers practical insights for destination managers aiming to foster loyalty through enhanced resident–tourist interactions.

Keywords: Host–guest interactions, Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, Emotional bonding, Destination loyalty, Acts of kindness

INTRODUCTION

Social interactions in tourism are both paramount and inevitable, significantly shaping the overall tourist experience. Prior research highlights that these interactions generally manifest in two primary forms: tourist–tourist and tourist–host interactions, with particular emphasis on the dynamics of the tourist–host relationship (Qu et al., 2024). These social exchanges are integral not only to service encounters but also to emotional and cultural engagement. Moreover, earlier research indicated that local residents were often perceived as part of the destination's backstage, playing a peripheral role in shaping tourists' experiences (Goffman, 1973). However, as tourist expectations have evolved towards seeking more immersive and authentic encounters, these community members have increasingly moved to the forefront. Their everyday attitudes, behaviours, and emotional expressions now significantly influence how visitors experience and interpret a destination. When locals display sincere warmth and hospitality, tourists tend to feel both physically comfortable and emotionally welcomed, fostering a deeper connection with the place. This shift underscores the growing recognition of host–guest interactions as a vital component of memorable and meaningful tourism experiences.

Despite the centrality of human connection in tourism, explorations into the concepts of kindness and gratitude, defined as a felt sense of thankfulness, remain underexplored. Although scientific evidence strongly supports the positive impacts of kindness, realistic examples and contextual studies can further illustrate its transformative power. Numerous studies emphasise that acts of kindness serve as a powerful and accessible means to enhance happiness, reduce anxiety, and foster a sense of connection among individuals (e.g., Oliveira, 2024; Glover & Filep, 2015). While prior research has established that receiving kindness from strangers contributes significantly to well-being, extending beyond the mere pursuit of pleasure, detailed social scientific investigations into the role of gratitude within tourism contexts are notably absent. Addressing this gap could provide deeper insights into the psychological value of interpersonal relationships and the social capital that is built through travel experiences.

The need for kinship and the enhancement of relationships has long been recognised as a core motive for travel, often linked to tourist satisfaction. However, how this need is fulfilled. Despite its importance, kindness remains a surprisingly neglected area of empirical investigation within the social sciences (Baskerville et al., 2000; Nowak & Roch, 2007), including within tourism research (Glover & Filep, 2015). Moreover, gratitude as a response to these interactions can offer new insights into the affective outcomes of travel, especially in terms of tourist well-being. As Baumeister and Leary (1995) emphasise, interpersonal bonds and acts of kindness are fundamental to human well-being. Therefore, this study explores how tourists' perceptions of kindness from local residents influence their emotional responses and, subsequently, their intention to revisit. This approach enriches our understanding of tourism as a socially meaningful and emotionally resonant experience.

In this study, tourists' regional backgrounds are also examined as a moderating variable to assess whether cultural or regional backgrounds influence the relationship between perceived kindness and revisit intention. Understanding how different nationalities respond to kindness can offer valuable insights for destination marketers and tourism authorities to develop targeted service strategies, cultural exchange programmes, and promotional campaigns to strengthen emotional bonds and encourage repeat visitation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acts of Kindness in Tourism Studies

As part of the foundational norms within the hospitality and tourism industry, generosity and acts of kindness are particularly expected from service providers, forming an essential element of the service experience (Buchanan & Bardi, 2010). In the broader tourism context, however, interactions are not confined to professional service workers; they often extend to spontaneous encounters with local residents. Under these circumstances, tourists may still expect to experience acts of kindness from others, guided by underlying principles of reciprocity, social exchange, or equity (Simpson & Willer, 2015), shaping tourists' expectations and interpretations of their social interactions during travel.

Kindness is scientifically defined as the intentional expression of compassion, empathy, and generosity toward others. Studies show that this form of prosocial behaviour contributes to individual well-being, strengthens interpersonal relationships, enhances physical health, and promotes overall life satisfaction (Piff et al., 2015). A growing body of research has examined the impact of kindness on both the giver and the recipient, highlighting its psychological, physiological, and social benefits. For instance, a meta-analysis published in *Psychological Bulletin* (Hui et al., 2020), which synthesised findings from over 200 studies, found consistent and significant associations between acts of kindness and increased subjective well-being, improved relationship satisfaction, and even physiological benefits such as lower blood pressure. These findings underscore the significance of kindness as a contributor to both individual and collective well-being.

Small acts of kindness have the potential to create a ripple effect of positivity, benefiting not only the recipient but also the donor. Numerous studies have consistently found that engaging in kind acts is positively associated with enhanced life satisfaction (e.g., Dulin et al., 2001; Hunter & Lin, 1981). These findings suggest that the emotional rewards of kindness extend beyond immediate interactions, contributing more broadly to individual well-being. Despite this well-established link between kindness and personal satisfaction, the potential spillover effects of such acts, particularly how they might influence tourists' revisit intentions, remain largely unexplored.

Host-Guest Interactions

In the context of tourism, social interactions have been widely recognised as a fundamental element of the tourist experience, influencing destination perceptions, emotional engagement, and behavioural outcomes such as satisfaction, emotional attachment, and revisit intention. Given the significance of these interactions, a conceptual framework addressing host-guest relations is essential to better understand their dynamics and implications. As Bimonte and Punzo (2016) highlight, tourism inherently involves the encounter between two distinct and non-

homogeneous groups, residents and tourists, each bringing their own expectations, behaviours, and cultural values into the interaction.

Guests are generally understood as tourists or travellers visiting a destination (Cardona et al., 2024), while hosts are members of the local community, including residents, workers, and service providers present at the destination, regardless of whether they are originally from or currently reside in the area (Reisinger & Turner, 2012; Griffiths & Sharpley, 2012; Sharpley, 2014).

This conceptual framework underscores the exchange process between tourists and locals, recognising both as key stakeholders in the tourism experience. These interactions can lead to a range of outcomes, either positive or negative, for both parties (Reisinger, 1994). Previous research has primarily examined these relationships through anthropological and tourism development perspectives, highlighting their implications for community well-being, cultural preservation, and local support for tourism initiatives (MacCannell, 1976; Smith, 1989). Strong mutual perceptions and relationships between tourists and hosts are often considered essential for the sustainable development of destinations (Sinkovics & Penz, 2009).

Moreover, host–guest interactions have been explored as reciprocal or binary processes, where the attitudes and behaviours of one group may influence the other. For example, Prentice et al. (1994) examined tourists' endearment behaviours during their interactions with host communities in South Wales. Their findings showed that many tourists felt welcomed and appreciated by locals, and that conversational exchanges enhanced cultural understanding. However, for some first-time visitors, the experience was perceived as culturally superficial and transient. Notably, some tourists viewed their emotional connection with locals as a motivating factor for return visits and participation in experiential activities.

Carneiro & Eusébio (2015) further investigated how residents' satisfaction with their interactions with tourists affected their perceptions of tourism's influence on quality of life in Barra, Costa Nova, and Ílhavo, Portugal. Although such interactions were typically brief and lacking depth, both the frequency of these encounters and residents' satisfaction with them were positively associated with perceptions of tourism's benefits to specific dimensions of local quality of life.

Within this dynamic, kindness emerges as a particularly meaningful and underexplored form of social interaction. Acts of kindness from locals, whether through assistance, generosity, or spontaneous expressions of warmth, can serve as emotionally salient touchpoints in the tourist experience. Such interactions not only humanise the destination but also foster feelings of gratitude, emotional connection, and trust. Unlike transactional service encounters, these gestures are often voluntary and shaped by social norms such as reciprocity and prosocial behaviour, making them especially impactful. In this study, kindness is conceptualised as a positive social stimulus that influences tourists' emotional responses and, ultimately, their intention to revisit the destination.

Emotional Bonding

While customer satisfaction is a key determinant of behavioural intentions in tourism settings (Chiu et al., 2016), it may not be sufficient to cultivate enduring loyalty to a destination (Chiu et al., 2016; Lestari et al., 2023). Long-term loyalty often requires a deeper psychological connection, referred to as commitment. This commitment encompasses both cognitive and emotional dimensions, with the latter playing a particularly important role in tourist behaviour. Han and Jeong (2013) suggest that experiences integrating both cognition and emotion offer more nuanced insights into tourists' psychological states.

According to Mattila (2006), commitment can be classified into affective and cognitive forms. Affective commitment, which reflects emotional bonding, involves the emotional attachment that tourists develop toward a destination. In contrast, cognitive (or calculative) commitment is grounded in logical assessments and brand-related beliefs. In the present study, emotional bonding is conceptualised as an affective response shaped by perceived kindness and genuine care extended by local residents.

A growing number of studies have begun to focus on the emotional component of the tourist experience, recognising it as a crucial driver of revisit intention and destination advocacy. This has been demonstrated across diverse tourism contexts, including shopping (Yüksel, 2007), festivals (Grappi & Montanari, 2011), and dining experiences (Han & Jeong, 2013). However, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific antecedents of emotional bonding, particularly the influence of kind acts from locals. Limited research has examined how these interpersonal gestures contribute to tourists' emotional attachment to a destination and, in turn, affect their behavioural intentions.

The relationship between emotional experiences and behavioural intentions has long been established, particularly within marketing and tourism literature (Bagozzi et al., 2016; Romero & Ruiz-Equihua, 2020). Research consistently demonstrates that positive emotional experiences are strongly linked to increased satisfaction and greater likelihood of future behavioural intentions, such as revisiting or recommending a destination (Han & Jeong, 2013; Grappi & Montanari, 2011). For instance, Prayag et al. (2017) found that emotional experiences arising from social and physical interactions within a destination significantly enhance both satisfaction and behavioural

responses. In the context of ecotourism, Roseta et al. (2020) similarly confirmed that emotionally positive experiences throughout the journey play a critical role in shaping tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. Moreover, McIntosh and Siggs (2005) argued that emotional experience is a vital element in creating memorable tourism encounters, with emotional intensity varying across service touchpoints (Lee et al., 2012). Building upon this foundation, the present study aims to advance understanding of how emotional bonding—particularly that which is fostered by perceived kindness from locals—influences tourists' intentions to revisit a destination.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm is considered into this study. This framework was developed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974 suggests that internal feelings or Behavior of an organism (person) are caused by the external environment (stimuli). This internal stimulus processing can be conscious or unconscious, including perceptions and environmental interpretations that influence someone's feelings and decisions. This influence further triggers an emotion that leads to a response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The S-O-R model divides the concept of a person's involvement into three types and reveals that the environment is a stimulus (S), which consists of a series of signs that cause a person's internal evaluation (O) and are said to cause and generate two types of behavioral responses (R): approach or avoidance (Russell & Mehrabian, 1977; Hochreiter et al., 2023).

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model provides a clear and integrative framework for understanding how individuals' cognitions and emotions toward external stimuli influence their subsequent behaviours (Su et al., 2020). The model's applicability has been validated across a range of contexts, including environmental psychology, consumer behaviour, and pro-environmental research within tourism settings (e.g., Kim et al., 2020; Su et al., 2017).

In this study, perceived kindness from locals serves as the stimulus (S), an external social cue encountered during the tourism experience. This stimulus triggers internal evaluations within the tourist, representing the organism (O), which include emotional responses such as feelings of gratitude, emotional bonding, and enhanced well-being. These internal emotional reactions then influence the response (R), operationalised in this study as tourists' intention to revisit the destination.

Under this framework, acts of kindness experienced by tourists are not simply isolated events; rather, they initiate an emotional process that fosters a deeper psychological connection with the destination. This connection increases the likelihood that tourists will exhibit approach behaviours, particularly a stronger intention to return. Thus, the S-O-R model enables a deeper exploration of how social interactions, specifically the kindness perceived from locals, can emotionally move tourists and subsequently drive revisit behaviour.

Drawing upon the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework and existing literature on social interactions in tourism, this study investigates the influence of perceived kindness from local residents on tourists' emotional bonding with the destination and its subsequent effect on their intention to revisit. Additionally, the study examines whether nationality moderates the relationship between perceived kindness and revisit intention, suggesting that the strength and direction of this relationship may differ across cultural or regional groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this research, a quantitative methodology employing a self-administered survey questionnaire was utilized for data collection. The questionnaire was developed based on insights from the literature review and encompasses latent variables such as the perception of kindness from locals, emotional bonding, and intention to revisit the destination. As a result, the questionnaire comprises three sections: the first aims to collect socio-demographic information from respondents (e.g., age, gender, nationality, income), the second seeks to identify respondents' visiting patterns, and the third is dedicated to exploring respondents' perceptions of various experiential aspects. The measurement scales (observed variables) used in this study were adopted and adapted from prior studies (see Table 2). A seven-point Likert and sentimental scales will be employed, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree.

After developing the questionnaire, it was reviewed by senior researchers with expertise in the social sciences, particularly in the hospitality and tourism field. Expert review involves identifying potential problems or errors in the questionnaire, such as grammatical errors, shortcomings, or obstacles that participants may encounter while completing it (Olson, 2010). Competent experts assessed the suitability and relevance of the items concerning the study's objectives.

Additionally, the questionnaire was translated into English, Chinese, and Russian to enhance the reliability and accuracy of responses, ensuring participants' comprehensive understanding and reducing the potential for misinterpretation. This multilingual approach is crucial for improving data quality.

To collect the data, purposive sampling was employed. Respondents were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: 1.) be at least 18 years of age and 2.) have stayed at the destination for a minimum of two nights.

This prerequisite aimed to ensure that respondents possess adequate knowledge and experience related to the study topic, enabling them to provide accurate information. It helped ensure respondents can recall their experiences accurately, leading to meaningful survey responses. Data collection took place in Phuket, Thailand, at prominent tourist attractions.

Measures

All measurement items used in this study were adapted and modified from established scales in prior research to ensure validity and contextual relevance. The items assessing perceived kindness from locals were developed based on key dimensions identified in qualitative studies by Piff et al. (2015) and Glover and Filep (2015), capturing emotional warmth, helpfulness, and altruistic behaviour. For emotional bonding, seven items were adapted from Hosany et al. (2015) and Quynh et al. (2021), reflecting tourists' affective attachment and emotional connection to the destination. Finally, revisit intention was measured using five items adapted from Nguyen (2020) and Abbasi et al. (2021), focusing on the likelihood of returning, recommending the destination, and prioritising it for future travel.

Data Analysis

This study utilised the standard two-step approach introduced by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to analyse Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). SEM is a quantitative research technique aimed at exploring and identifying relationships between multiple variables, as noted by Fan et al. (2016). In the first step, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were conducted to assess the validity of the measurement scales and evaluated how effectively the underlying dimensions and items represent the constructs.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), as defined by Hair et al. (2010), condenses information from a large set of original variables into a more concise collection of factors or dimensions. Various criteria are considered during EFA, including factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.7 for reliability, factor loading values surpassing 0.5 for acceptability, average communality values not falling below 0.4, and statistically significant results for Bartlett's test of sphericity with a p-value less than 0.05. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) should exceed 0.5.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) allows researchers to evaluate how well underlying dimensions and items represent constructs. Common indicators for assessing model fit include Normed Chi-Square, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI). A smaller chi-square value suggests better model fit, but this statistic is sensitive to sample size. Therefore, the ratio of chi-square statistic to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) is favored. RMSEA aims to assess misfit, with smaller values indicating better model fit. A perfect fit is 0.000, and RMSEA should be equal to or lower than 0.08. CFI evaluates model fit compared to a baseline model, with a value exceeding 0.90 recommended. TLI complements other indices and should be greater than 0.90.

In the second step, once the measurement model was established, a structural model was constructed to assess the conceptual framework involving three primary constructs: the perceived kindness from locals, emotional bonding, and intention to revisit. Similar criteria for model fit as in CFA were applied. SEM was used to examine how perceived kindness from locals influences emotional bonding with the destination, and the subsequent impact on intention to revisit.

SEM was tested using statistical software, particularly R (*Lavaan*), to explore these relationships. Direct effects were examined with the structural model, and their significance was determined based on regression weights and p-values, following recommendations by Byrne (2016).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The demographic profile, as presented in Table 1, reveals a nearly even gender distribution, with 48.5% identifying as female, 50.8% as male, and 0.7% preferring not to disclose their gender. Age-wise, the largest group of participants falls within the 20–30 year range (36.1%), followed by those aged 31–40 years (21.8%), 41–50 years (13.3%), 51–60 years (9.8%), and 61 years and above (12.9%), while a smaller proportion (6.1%) were under 20 years old. In terms of geographical origin, a majority of respondents came from Asia (51.8%), followed by Oceania (25.8%), and Western (22.5%).

Regarding educational background, most participants held a bachelor's degree (38.4%), while others held a high school diploma or equivalent (26.5%), a master's degree or higher (17.6%), an associate degree (15.0%), or education lower than high school (2.6%). Employment status was diverse, with 22.2% identifying as business owners, 14.3% as administrative officers, 13.3% as students, 14.1% as freelancers, 7.7% as government officers, 4.4% as unemployed, and 23.9% falling into other categories. Monthly income levels also varied: 23.4% earned between 1,001–2,000 USD, 19.9% earned 2,001–3,000 USD, 17.3% earned above 5,001 USD, 16.6% earned 1,000 USD or less, 12.4% earned 3,001–4,000 USD, and 10.3% earned 4,001–5,000 USD. These findings reflect a demographically diverse sample in terms of gender, age, education, profession, income, and nationality.

Table 2 Respondents' profile, visiting pattern, and motivation

Profile Category	Frequency (N= 427)	Percent (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	207	48.5%
Male	217	50.8%
Prefer not to specify	3	0.7%
<i>Age</i>		
Less than 20 years old	26	6.1%
20-30 years old	154	36.1%
31-40 years old	93	21.8%
41-50 years old	57	13.3%
51-60 years old	42	9.8%
61 years old and above	55	12.9%
<i>Continents</i>		
Asia	221	51.8%
Oceania	110	25.8%
Western	96	22.5%
<i>Education</i>		
Lower than High school	11	2.6%
High school or equivalent	113	26.5%
Associate degree	64	15.0%
Bachelor's degree	164	38.4%
Master's degree or higher	75	17.6%
<i>Employment</i>		
Business owner	95	22.2%
Administrative officer	61	14.3%
Student	57	13.3%
Freelance	60	14.1%
Government officer	33	7.7%
Unemployed	19	4.4%
Others	102	23.9%
<i>Monthly Income</i>		
1,000 USD or less	71	16.6%
1,001-2,000 USD	100	23.4%
2,001-3,000 USD	85	19.9%
3,001-4,000 USD	53	12.4%
4,001-5,000 USD	44	10.3%
5,001 USD or higher	74	17.3%
Visiting Patterns		
<i>Accompanying</i>		
Alone	44	10.3%
With friends	128	30.0%
With spouse/partner	134	31.4%
With family/relatives	117	27.4%
With an organized tour/group	4	0.9%
<i>Prior visiting experience</i>		
No	258	60.4%
Yes	169	39.6%
<i>Number of Prior Visit</i>		

First time	260	60.9%
2-3 times	105	24.6%
4-5 times	18	4.2%
More than 5 times	44	10.3%
<i>Purpose of visiting</i>		
Leisure	384	89.9%
Business	9	2.1%
Visiting relatives/friends	15	3.5%
Participating in any training/workshop	3	0.7%
Others	16	3.7%
<i>Influential factors</i>		
Ease of accessibility	154	36.1%
A variety of accommodations	144	33.7%
A variety of activities	222	52.0%
Value for money	213	49.9%
Local friendliness	172	40.3%
Safety and security	148	34.7%
Beaches/natural attractions	326	76.3%
Cultural attractions	155	36.3%
Others	16	3.7%

The majority of tourists reported travelling with companions, with 31.4% visiting with a spouse or partner, 30.0% with friends, and 27.4% with family or relatives. Only 10.3% travelled alone, and a small proportion (0.9%) were part of an organised tour group. Most participants were first-time visitors (60.9%), while 24.6% had visited 2–3 times, 4.2% had visited 4–5 times, and 10.3% had visited more than five times. Regarding overall prior visiting experience, 60.4% were new to the destination, while 39.6% had visited before.

In terms of visit purpose, the overwhelming majority (89.9%) cited leisure as the primary motivation, followed by visiting friends or relatives (3.5%), business (2.1%), training or workshops (0.7%), and other purposes (3.7%). When asked about influential factors contributing to their visit, the top three responses were beaches and natural attractions (76.3%), a variety of activities (52.0%), and value for money (49.9%). Other significant factors included local friendliness (40.3%), cultural attractions (36.3%), ease of accessibility (36.1%), safety and security (34.7%), a variety of accommodations (33.7%), and other unspecified reasons (3.7%). These findings reflect that Phuket continues to appeal primarily as a leisure destination, especially for couples and families, with natural assets, recreational variety, and perceived value playing key roles in travel decisions.

Additionally, the assessment of normality revealed that skewness values ranged from -2.487 to -.885 and kurtosis values ranged from .252 to 7.890, all within acceptable thresholds, skewness between -3 and 3 (Brown, 2015) and kurtosis below 10 (Kline, 2011), suggesting that the data are normally distributed.

This study adopted the widely used two-step approach to Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). SEM is a quantitative method employed to examine and estimate the relationships among multiple latent and observed variables (Fan et al., 2016). The dataset ($N = 427$) was randomly divided into a calibration subsample ($n_1 = 299$; 70%) and a validation subsample ($n_2 = 128$; 30%). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first conducted on the calibration subsample, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the validation subsample. Subsequently, CFA was re-estimated using the full sample ($N = 427$) to obtain stable parameter estimates and evaluate the overall model fit.

In the first step, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of Hair et al. (2010) and Costello and Osborne (2005). Factor loadings of 0.50 or higher and communalities above 0.25 were considered acceptable thresholds (Beavers et al., 2013). The EFA results, as exhibited in Table 2, revealed a unidimensional structure for each construct. The perceived kindness from locals was represented by a single factor comprising 10 items, with factor loadings ranging from 0.78 to 0.87. Emotional bonding was also captured by a single factor of 7 items, with loadings between 0.75 and 0.85. Likewise, revisit intention was represented by a single factor consisting of 4 items, with loadings ranging from 0.83 to 0.92. The communalities ranged from 0.63 to 0.75 for perceived kindness, 0.56 to 0.72 for emotional bonding, and 0.70 to 0.85 for revisit intention, all falling within the acceptable range. Although communalities above 0.70 are ideal, values between 0.25 and 0.40 remain acceptable (Beavers et al., 2013). Furthermore, the results of Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded p -values less than .001 for all three constructs, indicating significant correlations among the variables, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). In addition, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy ranged from 0.82 to 0.95, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, thus confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Hoelzle & Meyer, 2013; Lloret et al., 2017).

To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated, as recommended by Pallant (2020) and Sekaran and Bougie (2009). The alpha values ranged from 0.89 to 0.95, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (DeVellis, 2012), indicating excellent reliability for all constructs.

Subsequently, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted on the validation subsample ($n = 128$) to assess the construct validity of the measurement model and examine how well the observed indicators represented their respective latent constructs. The CFA results, as presented in Table 2, indicated an acceptable model fit, with $\chi^2 = 388.96$, $df = 174$, $\chi^2/df = 2.24$, $RMSEA = 0.072$, $CFI = 0.941$, $TLI = 0.928$. These values meet the recommended thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2010), which state that a normed chi-square (χ^2/df) less than 3, $RMSEA$ below 0.08, and CFI and TLI values above 0.90 indicate good model fit. To ensure robustness and obtain stable parameter estimates, the CFA was subsequently re-estimated using the full sample ($N = 427$). The final model also demonstrated satisfactory fit, with $\chi^2 = 431.50$, $df = 174$, $\chi^2/df = 2.48$, $RMSEA = 0.059$, $CFI = 0.937$, $TLI = 0.924$, supporting the adequacy of the measurement model.

Additionally, convergent validity was confirmed by evaluating the standardised factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct, all of which surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.89 and 0.95, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.70 and indicating high internal consistency among the constructs. Furthermore, each AVE value was greater than its corresponding squared inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity based on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Discriminant validity was also assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), with all values falling below the conservative cutoff of 0.85, specifically ranging from 0.68 to 0.81, providing further evidence of discriminant validity (Kline, 2011).

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

<i>Measurement Items</i>	<i>Factor Loadings</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
<i>Perceived Kindness from Locals (AVE: .064, CR: 0.95, α: 0.95)</i>			
I felt welcomed by the local community.	0.77	6.35	.939
I felt locals genuinely cared about tourists.	0.81	6.09	1.104
I felt that locals were genuinely willing to help tourists.	0.83	6.20	1.018
I received help from locals during my trip	0.81	6.20	1.059
I experienced acts of kindness from locals during my visit.	0.79	6.18	1.117
Even when not expected, locals offered assistance or support.	0.76	5.82	1.232
The locals were courteous and respectful in their interactions with me.	0.82	6.22	1.096
Locals showed empathy and understanding toward tourists.	0.84	6.00	1.174
I observed locals showing kindness to other tourists as well	0.77	6.07	1.128
My overall impression is that the local people are kind-hearted.	0.80	6.34	.910
<i>Emotional Bonding (AVE: 0.61, CR: 0.91, α: 0.91)</i>			
I feel emotionally attached to this destination as a whole.	0.77	6.00	1.103
I have strong sentimental feelings about this place.	0.79	5.79	1.167
My visit to this destination created meaningful emotional memories.	0.76	6.22	.988
I felt a meaningful personal connection with local people.	0.78	5.60	1.327

I felt a sense of gratitude toward the locals.	0.74	5.94	1.138
The kindness of locals strengthened my emotional ties to the destination.	0.81	5.90	1.129
This destination feels special to me on an emotional level.	0.80	5.88	1.129
Revisit Intention (AVE:0.69, CR:0.90, α: 0.89)			
I would consider revisiting this destination in the future.	0.75	6.44	.980
I am likely to choose this destination over others in the future.	0.76	5.83	1.119
My positive experience here motivates me to return.	0.93	6.20	.972
The kindness I experienced here makes me want to come back.	0.87	6.17	1.053
Discriminant Validity			
	PK	EB	RI
Perceived Kindness from Locals (PK)	1		
Emotional Bonding (EB)	<i>0.59</i>	1	
Revisit Intention (RI)	<i>0.43</i>	<i>0.59</i>	1
AVE	0.64	0.61	0.69

Note: All paths are significant. CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, α = Cronbach's alpha. The squared correlation coefficients are italic faced; all correlations are presented in the lower left triangle. All correlations are significant.

The structural model revealed a satisfactory level of fit, with the following indices: $\chi^2 = 445.29$, $df = 154$, $\chi^2/df = 2.89$, RMSEA = 0.067, CFI = 0.960, and TLI = 0.945. In addition, the structural model explained a substantial proportion of variance in emotional bonding ($R^2 = 0.71$) and revisit intention ($R^2 = 0.67$) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The structural estimation results

Model	Coefficient (β)	R ²	S.E.	z-value	p-value	Significant
Emotional Bonding<-----Perceived Kindness from Locals	0.795	0.714	0.064	12.375	0.000***	Significant
Revisit Intention<-----Emotional Bonding	0.894	0.672	0.077	11.626	0.000***	Significant

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

In term of significant path coefficients (see Table 3), the results of this analysis revealed that tourists' perceived kindness from locals significantly and positively influences the development of emotional bonding with the destination ($\beta = 0.795$, $p < 0.001$). This emotional bonding, in turn, plays a crucial influencing role by enhancing tourists' intention to revisit ($\beta = 0.894$, $p < 0.001$). These findings underscore the importance of human interactions, particularly acts of kindness by local residents, in shaping meaningful emotional connections that drive future travel behaviour.

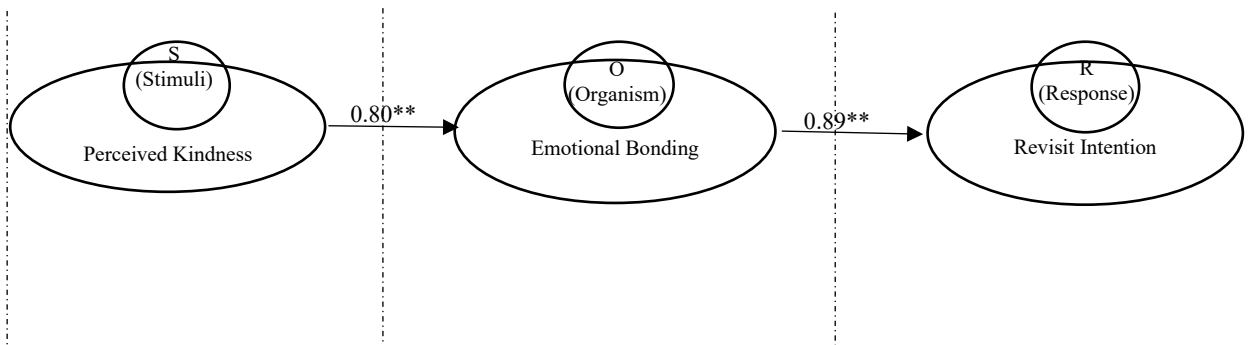


Figure 1. Path Coefficient Model of the Influence of Locals’ Kindness on Revisit Intention

With the key objective of this study being to identify variations in sensitivity across nationalities regarding their perception of locals’ kindness and its impact on revisit intention, an additional analysis was conducted using one-way ANOVA. For the purpose of this analysis, nationalities were categorised into three broader regional groups: Asia, Oceania, and Western. This categorisation enabled a comparative exploration of whether individuals from different cultural backgrounds perceive and respond differently to acts of kindness demonstrated by locals, and how such perceptions subsequently influence their emotional bonding with the destination and their intention to revisit.

To explore the differences across nationalities in terms of their perceptions of locals’ kindness and its subsequent influence on emotional bonding and revisit intention, a one-way ANOVA was conducted by categorising respondents into three regional groups: Asia, Oceania, and Western. The results, as presented in Table 4, revealed significant differences in perceived kindness from locals, $F(2, 424) = 5.98, p = .026, \eta^2 = .03$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey’s HSD indicated that respondents from Oceania reported significantly higher kindness perceptions ($M = 6.38, SD = 0.64$) than both the Asia group ($M = 6.11, SD = 0.94, p = .025$) and the Western group ($M = 5.97, SD = 0.95, p = .003$). No significant difference was observed between Asia and Western.

Similarly, the analysis revealed statistically significant differences in emotional bonding, $F(2, 424) = 5.43, p = .005, \eta^2 = .03$. Respondents from Asia ($M = 5.99, SD = 0.92$) and Oceania ($M = 5.96, SD = 0.79$) both reported significantly higher emotional bonding compared to the Western group ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.02$), with $p = .004$ and $p = .032$ respectively. However, no significant differences were found between the Asia and Oceania groups.

Although no statistically significant difference was found in revisit intention across regions, $F(2, 424) = 0.90, p = .409, \eta^2 = .004$, the mean scores suggest a consistent trend: those perceiving higher kindness (particularly the Oceania group) also reported slightly higher revisit intentions ($M = 6.22$), compared to Asia ($M = 6.17$) and Western ($M = 6.06$).

Table 4 Comparison of perceived kindness from locals, emotional bonding, and revisit intention across three regional groups (Asia, Oceania, and Western)

Factor	Mean			F	p-value	Post hoc (Tukey)
	Asia (A) (N=221)	Oceania (O) (N=110)	Western (W) (N=96)			
Perceived Kindness from Locals	6.11	6.38	5.97	5.89	.026*	A≠O, O≠W
1. I felt welcomed by the local community.	6.26	6.58	6.29			A≠O
2. I felt locals genuinely cared about tourists.	6.11	6.22	5.91			-
3. I felt that locals were genuinely willing to help tourists.	6.17	6.40	6.02			O≠W
4. I received help from locals during my trip	6.16	6.50	5.94			A≠O, O≠W
5. I experienced acts of kindness from locals during my visit.	6.10	6.49	6.01			A≠O, O≠W

6. Even when not expected, locals offered assistance or support.	5.81	6.10	5.52			O≠W
7. The locals were courteous and respectful in their interactions with me.	6.13	6.49	6.14			A≠O, O≠W
8. Locals showed empathy and understanding toward tourists.	6.00	6.20	5.77			O≠W
9. I observed locals showing kindness to other tourists as well	6.11	6.23	5.78			A≠W, O≠W
10. My overall impression is that the local people are kind-hearted.	6.25	6.56	6.31			A≠O
<i>Emotional Bonding</i>	5.99	5.96	5.64	5.43	.005*	A≠W, O≠W
1. I feel emotionally attached to this destination as a whole.	6.10	5.95	5.83			-
2. I have strong sentimental feelings about this place.	5.97	5.72	5.48			A≠W
3. My visit to this destination created meaningful emotional memories.	6.32	6.16	6.04			-
4. I felt a meaningful personal connection with local people.	5.73	5.86	5.02			A≠W, O≠W
5. I felt a sense of gratitude toward the locals.	5.88	6.27	5.71			A≠O, O≠W
6. The kindness of locals strengthened my emotional ties to the destination.	5.95	6.02	5.64			O≠W
7. This destination feels special to me on an emotional level.	6.02	5.73	5.74			-
<i>Revisit Intention</i>	6.17	6.22	6.06	0.90	.409	-
1. I would consider revisiting this destination in the future.	6.40	6.53	6.43			-
2. I am likely to choose this destination over others in the future.	5.59	5.85	5.53			A#W
3. My positive experience here motivates me to return.	6.19	6.25	6.17			-
4. The kindness I experienced here makes me want to come back.	6.15	6.25	6.11			-

Note: $p < 0.05^*$, $< 0.0^{**}1$, $< 0.001^{***}$

These results suggest that **cultural background influences how tourists perceive and value kindness from locals**. Importantly, these findings underscore that perceived kindness from locals plays a vital role in fostering emotional bonding, which is a known driver of revisit intention. While revisit intention may not differ significantly across nationalities in direct terms, the emotional connection formed through acts of kindness is a crucial pathway influencing future travel decisions.

DISCUSSION

Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, the findings reveal that tourists' perceptions of locals' kindness (stimulus) significantly enhance their emotional bonding with the destination (organism), which in turn strengthens their revisit intention (response). When tourists feel genuinely welcomed, supported, and emotionally acknowledged by local residents, they are more likely to form a deeper attachment to the place. This emotional connection becomes a powerful driver of destination loyalty, motivating tourists not only

to return but also to recommend the destination to others. While prior studies have predominantly focused on the role of locals in facilitating tourism development or supporting community-based initiatives, revisit intention has typically been attributed to interactions with formal service providers such as hotel staff or tour guides.

These results align with Shi et al. (2019), who noted that local residents were traditionally viewed as part of a destination's backstage, with limited influence on tourists' experiences. However, as contemporary travellers increasingly seek authentic, meaningful, and human-centred interactions, residents have moved into a front-stage role. Their attitudes, behaviours, and emotional expressions now substantially shape how tourists interpret and evaluate their travel experiences.

The findings also support existing literature emphasising the role of emotional connections in fostering destination loyalty (e.g., Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Zhao & Yang, 2018). Emotional experiences rooted in human warmth and kindness not only enhance tourists' immediate satisfaction but also shape their post-visit evaluations and future behavioural intentions. Numerous studies have similarly found that acts of kindness, whether given or received, are positively associated with heightened life satisfaction (e.g., Dulin et al., 2001; Hunter & Lin, 1981). The emotional rewards of kindness appear to transcend the immediate context, contributing to broader psychological well-being and long-term intentions, such as returning to a destination.

In addition, when considering regional or cultural backgrounds, the results highlighted that among the three regional groups (Asia, Oceania, and Western), respondents from Oceania consistently reported higher perceptions of locals' kindness, stronger emotional bonding with the destination, and greater intention to revisit, followed by those from Asia and Western regions, respectively. This suggests that individuals from Oceania may possess heightened sensitivity to interpersonal warmth and local hospitality. Supporting this notion, MacGill et al. (2024) explored the role of families as the first teachers in early childhood and found that grandparents in Oceania often emphasise value-based storytelling. These stories commonly centre around core virtues such as honesty, faithfulness, truth, love, kindness, and peace. Such intergenerational practices may shape individuals' moral development and social expectations, potentially influencing their responsiveness to kind behaviours encountered during travel.

Moreover, the findings revealed that tourists from the Asia group reported significantly higher emotional attachment to the destination compared to their Western counterparts. This outcome may be attributed to several culturally rooted factors. First, tourists from Asian countries may experience a greater sense of cultural proximity to Thailand, sharing common values, norms, or traditions that enhance mutual understanding and comfort in host-guest interactions. Such familiarity can foster a stronger sense of belonging, thereby deepening emotional ties (Liang et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2025). Furthermore, Asian cultures are often characterised by collectivist orientations, which prioritise social harmony, empathy, and interpersonal relationships (Hofstede, 2011). As a result, Asian tourists may be more sensitive to acts of kindness and more inclined to interpret these interactions as emotionally meaningful, strengthening their psychological connection to the place. The frequent and accessible nature of travel between Asian countries and Thailand may also contribute to a cumulative sense of familiarity and emotional investment. Together, these elements suggest that cultural similarity, collectivist values, and regional affinity play important roles in shaping the emotional bonding experiences of Asian tourists, with meaningful implications for tourism marketers seeking to cultivate destination loyalty through authentic local engagement.

In addition, the findings underscore the consistent and significant role of locals' kindness in shaping tourists' revisit intention, a pattern observed across all regional groups with no significant difference. This suggests that regardless of cultural background, the warmth and hospitality demonstrated by local residents are universally valued and play a crucial role in encouraging tourists to return to the destination. Previous studies have similarly highlighted the impact of host-guest interactions on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) and Shi et al. (2019) underscored that positive interpersonal encounters with locals significantly enhanced tourists' emotional evaluations of a destination and their willingness to revisit. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2018) demonstrated that perceived hospitality and friendliness from local residents were key determinants of destination attachment and behavioural intentions. These findings align with the current study by reaffirming that kindness not only enriches tourists' immediate experiences but also contributes to lasting emotional connections that foster destination loyalty.

These findings reinforce the strategic value of encouraging pro-social behaviour, friendliness, and helpfulness among locals, not only for improving tourists' immediate experiences but also for cultivating long-term destination loyalty. In a competitive tourism landscape, authentic interpersonal encounters with locals may serve as a powerful differentiator for destinations seeking to boost repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings underscore the strategic importance of designing emotionally resonant tourism experiences that go beyond service efficiency and satisfaction. Tourism stakeholders should consider psychographic differences among visitors to develop targeted marketing promotions for each segment (Kim et al., 2015). Destination

Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are encouraged to integrate the human dimension of kindness into their branding strategies by highlighting authentic local hospitality in promotional narratives. Rather than focusing solely on amenities or attractions, destinations can differentiate themselves through emotionally compelling storytelling that features meaningful local encounters. Promotional materials should incorporate visual and narrative cues that reflect acts of kindness by local residents, such as moments of assistance, warmth, positive interactions, or spontaneous generosity, to evoke emotional connection and deepen the appeal of the destination. These representations not only strengthen emotional engagement but also contribute to shaping a more trustworthy, compassionate, and memorable destination image.

Furthermore, tourism authorities and community leaders should invest in community engagement initiatives that raise awareness of the socio-economic and emotional value of kindness. By fostering an inclusive culture of prosocial behaviour, local communities can co-create experiences that generate lasting emotional connections and promote sustainable destination loyalty. Training programmes that integrate emotional intelligence, intercultural communication, and community pride can empower residents, not only tourism professionals, to become emotionally engaged ambassadors of the destination.

In addition, the study's cross-cultural lens highlights the moderating role of nationality, suggesting that tourists from different cultural backgrounds may vary in how they interpret and emotionally respond to kindness. This insight allows for the development of targeted engagement strategies based on cultural sensitivity, enhancing the effectiveness of destination communication, tour design, and service delivery.

Lastly, this research invites future studies to explore the longitudinal impact of kindness-based experiences on tourist memory, identity, and destination loyalty, offering a new trajectory for research on affective mechanisms in tourism. It also paves the way for interdisciplinary integration between tourism studies, behavioural science, and human-centred design, strengthening the theoretical and practical bridge between emotion, interaction, and intention.

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