



## **EXPLORING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE CHOICE OF A TOURIST DESTINATION BY FOREIGN TOURISTS**

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### **Abstract**

*In the service sector, tourism plays an important role and is one of the main economic drivers in Albania. The choice of a tourist destination depends on several factors, the importance of which varies based on personal preferences. The purpose of this study is to determine these factors by referring to foreign tourists who visited the city of Vlora in the summer of 2024. A questionnaire was used to collect data, the first part of which was used for the demographic data of tourists, such as age, gender, citizenship, and number of visits to Albania. Respondents were also asked for information about their way of knowing the destination, as well as to make a rating from 1 to 5 for the experience during their visit. The second part of the questionnaire allowed the evaluation based on a five-point Likert scale of thirteen items that influence the choice of a tourist destination. The data from 150 foreign tourists was analysed using descriptive and factor analysis in R software. In the survey, 42% of tourists were between 31 and 50 years old. Men had the highest percentage (51%), and 70% were from EU countries. About 40% claimed to be familiar with the city of Vlora through tourist agencies, and most had visited Albania once (47.33%). About 41% of tourists were very satisfied with Vlora as a tourist destination. Their responses showed that the most important items for tourists based on mean*

value were 'culinary experience', 'road conditions', and 'tourist services'. This suggests a greater appreciation for authentic experiences and infrastructure than for environmental aspects. Factor analysis detected four factors that explain 65.38% of the variance: 'sustainable practices', 'attractions and cultural infrastructure', 'cost and value for money', and 'safety and security'. The findings give insights into the government and local authorities of Vlora to improve it as a tourist destination.

*Keywords: cultural heritage, safety, transport networks, tourism promotion, accessibility*

## INTRODUCTION

A very important sector for the economic and cultural development of a country in the Mediterranean region is tourism. This sector contributes to increasing income, creating jobs and promoting cultural heritage. Tourism enables people to explore new destinations, get to know local traditions and strengthen intercultural understanding. Tourism also stimulates investments in infrastructure and services, improving the quality of life of local communities and supporting the long-term sustainability of tourist areas. Increased international competition requires a more accurate assessment of visitors' perspectives to improve the quality of service (Burlea-Schiopoiu & Ozuni, 2021). Tourism is growing rapidly in Albania, contributing about 8% of GDP in 2023, helping to increase the number of employees by 20% (Albanian Investment Development Agency, 2023). The country, which is becoming increasingly attractive to foreign tourists, especially the Albanian Alps, the capital Tirana, and heritage cities, has a considerable number of accommodation structures and seventeen international hotel brands. The development of new tourist markets makes tourism an important factor in the domestic and foreign economy. Tourist destinations in Albania are constantly being developed and improved to be as close as possible to the demands of domestic and foreign tourists (Kruja, 2012).

According to the National Tourism Strategy 2024-2030, the Vlora region is part of the Ionian coastal cluster. This region, where the Adriatic and Ionian Seas meet, is known for its diverse natural and cultural attractions. Tourists are attracted by its clean beaches, such as those of Radhima, Orikum and the almost inaccessible beaches of the Karaburun Peninsula. Llogara National Park, where nature lovers go for magnificent views, good hiking and a rich variety of fauna and flora. Ecotourism routes, including sea caves such as the Haxhi Aliu Cave, and protected coastal areas such as Grama Bay. Add to this the quiet beauty that nature has bestowed here and the rich cultural environment that this destination has, this place can make a trip an unforgettable experience. The history and architecture of the Museum of Independence, and the 16th-century Muradiye Mosque are two of the most visited sites in the city. The religious

and historical continuity of the region can be seen in the Zvërnec Monastery, an isolated lagoon island, as well as in the archaeological ruins of Orikum and the Marmiro Church. The regional cuisine, which combines Mediterranean and Albanian flavors, along with seasonal festivals and cultural and historical events, enhances the visitor experience, transforming Vlora into a multifaceted destination for cultural, recreational and historical tourism.

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that foreign tourists prioritize when choosing Vlora as a tourist destination, as their identification and improvement play an important role in the development of the destination.

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the main items that influence the decision of foreign tourists to choose Vlora as a travel destination.
- To assess the perceived importance of these items using descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis.

By providing valuable insights, tourist structures operating in this region can be helped to improve their offers and their competitive position in the international market.

The article is organized as follows: after this introduction, a summary of the literature studying the factors that influence domestic and foreign tourists in choosing a destination is presented. Then, the methodology section is presented, continuing with the results, discussions and conclusions of this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies of the tourism sector provide valuable analyses that help to understand tourist behavior. Destination selection, management, and sustainability of tourism arouse interest in those countries where tourism is a major factor in the economy (Buhaljoti, 2024; Gerverni, 2024; Hoxha & Naumov, 2024).

Several studies have focused on identifying the key factors that influence destination choices among foreign tourists, emphasizing their perceptions of service quality, safety, and cultural appeal. Kosova et al (2023) in their article, through a survey of 135 foreign tourists who visited the city of Berat, evaluated the quality of tourist services. The analysis of the answers given according to the 5-point Likert scale was carried out by descriptive analysis, reliability analysis with the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and the independent samples "t" test in the SPSS software. According to the authors, most responses were positive for all types of tourism services in general, but the most valued were atmosphere and destination. The least valued factor was the cost of tourist activities and services. An important contribution to the evaluation of the tourist experience in Albania is the study by Qefalia (2024), which analyzed the

relationship between service quality and overall satisfaction of tourists visiting Albanian destinations. Two hundred and eighty-four international tourists were surveyed during the 2023 tourist season. The data were processed with the SPSS program for the realization of descriptive analysis. Although the foreign respondents' perception of service quality was assessed as high about 'safety' and 'price and value for money', they also noted some problems with 'road infrastructure' and 'public transport'.

A portion of the literature examines the behavior of domestic tourists, highlighting the influence of affordability, relaxation motives, and the role of social media in shaping their travel decisions. Seyidov and Adomaitienė (2016) examined how local tourists behaved and made decisions when choosing domestic travel destinations in Azerbaijan. A total of 227 visitors answered 33 questions about social, cultural, psychological, and personal aspects. The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS using Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, and Factor Analysis. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to indicate the level of reliability of the measuring instrument. Factor analysis using the Principal Components Analysis method showed that 'destination facilities and environmental features' was the most important factor in decision-making, and the other two factors that were identified, 'destination attractions and personal characteristics of tourists' and 'tourism infrastructure at the destination', had almost the same influence. Mim, Hasan, Hossain, and Khan (2022) analyzed the influence of several important factors on the selection of tourist destinations by domestic tourists in Bangladesh. A sample of 256 tourists responded to a questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, multicollinearity test, reliability analysis with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, and linear regression analysis in SPSS were used for data analysis. According to the authors, 'social media', 'destination image', and 'reference groups' were the most influential factors in choosing a tourist destination. Focusing on residents of Tirana, Kotollaku (2024) examined the push-pull motivational factors that influence domestic tourists in choosing a tourist destination. Information was collected from 200 residents traveling within the country, who completed a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, and who responded to a survey using a 5-point Likert scale. The analysis was performed in the SPSS 22 program, using descriptive analysis and direct interpretation of the distribution of responses for each statement. According to the author, pull factors such as 'affordable accommodation', 'local cuisine', 'language' and the push factor 'relaxation' were the factors with the greatest impact.

Some research includes both domestic and foreign tourists to explore shared and divergent preferences, with a particular emphasis on cultural heritage, natural attractions, and perceived safety. Debski and Nasierowski (2017) were interested in the factors that influence students when choosing a tourist destination. The sample of respondents included 225 students

from Poland, 110 from Canada, and 121 from Trinidad and Tobago. A five-point Likert scale was used to complete a questionnaire with 17 questions. Descriptive analysis, Spearman correlation coefficient and factor analysis method, as well as Oblimin rotation were used for data analysis. Despite cultural and economic differences between countries, students' preferences turned out to be very similar. The most commonly rated factors, based on means, were travel cost, climate, and ease of access to attractions. Factor analysis showed that for the three groups of students, 'comfort (and convenience)' and 'attractiveness of the destination' were the most important. According to Petrović et al. (2017), rural development in post-socialist countries such as Serbia and Slovenia is mainly a consequence of the development of rural tourism. They identified factors that influence the sustainable development of tourism in rural areas and assessed the level of competitiveness of tourist destinations in both countries. Data were collected through a questionnaire completed on a 5-point Likert scale, conducted during the period January-October 2017. The sample included 342 respondents, stakeholders of the tourism industry, including managers of travel agencies, rural accommodations, tourism organizations and traditional farms. The authors applied the integrated model of destination competitiveness and statistical correlation for data analysis. The findings showed that in Serbia, the most highly rated indicators based on average were, 'ease of communication between residents and tourists', 'ease of combining travel to the destination' and 'health/medical institutions to serve tourists'. On the other hand, Slovenia resulted in higher competitiveness by rating many elements such as 'training programs', 'financial institutions', 'ease of communication between locals and visitors', and 'reputation of the destination abroad'. Petrevska (2019) addresses the perceptions and experiences of tourists in the tourist city of Ohrid, Macedonia. The author applied a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze 382 valid responses from 500 domestic and foreign tourists who participated in the survey during the period June–August 2016. According to the author, tourists who visited Ohrid, the most famous destination in North Macedonia, perceived a city "with historical, legendary and religious places, which do not serve only as tourist places to visit". The results showed that cultural heritage attracted more tourists to the destination. Most important was the fact that tourists perceived the place as completely safe and secure. In their research, Son, Nguyen, and Hoang (2023) investigated the factors that influence tourists' satisfaction with agritourism in Vietnam using 228 questionnaires collected from domestic and foreign tourists. In analyzing the data, the researchers applied structural equation modeling and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The study showed that local culture, natural landscape, novelty, safety, tourism human resources, and perceived value positively influenced tourists' satisfaction with agritourism in the Mekong Delta.

Based on the literature analysis, the main factors influencing tourists' decision-making include tourism infrastructure, cultural and natural attractions, safety, and economic aspects of spending. Previous studies have shown that sustainable tourism is essential, especially in those countries where tourism development is essential for regional development.

## METHODOLOGY

Primary data were collected using a quantitative research method through questionnaires, employing a convenience sampling technique.

A questionnaire created in English was distributed to foreign tourists in some of the hotels in the city of Vlore during July and August 2024. Out of the 200 distributed questionnaires, only 150 were retained for analysis based on quality criteria such as completeness, consistency of responses, absence of missing values, and exclusion of uniform or outlier patterns. A five-point Likert scale from 1 'not important' to 5 'very important' was used to evaluate the considered items (Dündar & Güçer, 2015; Gürbüz et al., 2016). The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the demographic data of the respondents (gender, age, and nationality). The respondents were also asked how many times they had visited Albania and through whom they had learned about Albania as a tourist destination. In the second part, the 13 items that influence the choice and perception of the tourist destination such as accommodation cost, transportation cost, activity expenses, crime rates, emergency services, eco-friendly accommodation, conservation efforts, cultural preservation, over-tourism concerns, culinary experience, historical significance, road condition, and tourism services were assessed. The 13 items assessed in the second part of the questionnaire were adapted from previous studies on tourist decision-making (Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2016; Dahiya & Batra, 2016; Debski & Nasierowski, 2017; Mim et al., 2022; 2023; Lamçe, 2024).

Through the request in the questionnaire: "Please rate the destination from 1 to 5 in terms of your satisfaction! (1 indicates very dissatisfied and 5 indicates very satisfied)", the overall satisfaction rating for the destination Vlora was enabled.

For each item considered, the following statistics were calculated: Cronbach's alpha coefficient to ensure the reliability of the responses, the mean to see the average value, which reflects the general tendency of destination choice, the standard deviation to see the distribution of the data, and the variability of the responses related to each item. Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted as the extraction method, and Varimax as the rotation technique to identify factors that group multiple items (Lawley & Maxwell, 1962). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett tests of sphericity served to examine the suitability of the data for this analysis. The methodology used in this study is consistent with previous research (Fikri et al., 2020;

Ramazannejad et al., 2021; Mihai et al., 2023; Asheghi-Oskooee & Soleiman-Fallah, 2024), which has applied exploratory factor analysis in tourist destination choices.

Data analysis was conducted using the R software, including psych, GPArotation, stats, and ggplot2 packages to ensure comprehensive and replicable results.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

Analysis of the results of the survey conducted with tourists who visited Vlore shows their preferences and perceptions of this region. The respondents varied greatly in terms of age, gender, and country of origin, revealing different demographic patterns. In the survey, 20.67% of respondents were under 30 years old, 42% were between 31 and 50 years old, and 34.67% were over 50 years old. About 51% of the respondents were male. Regarding the country of origin, it was noted that 70% are from EU countries. Figure 1 presents the percentage of their countries of origin. Dominated countries are Kosovo, Germany and Italy.

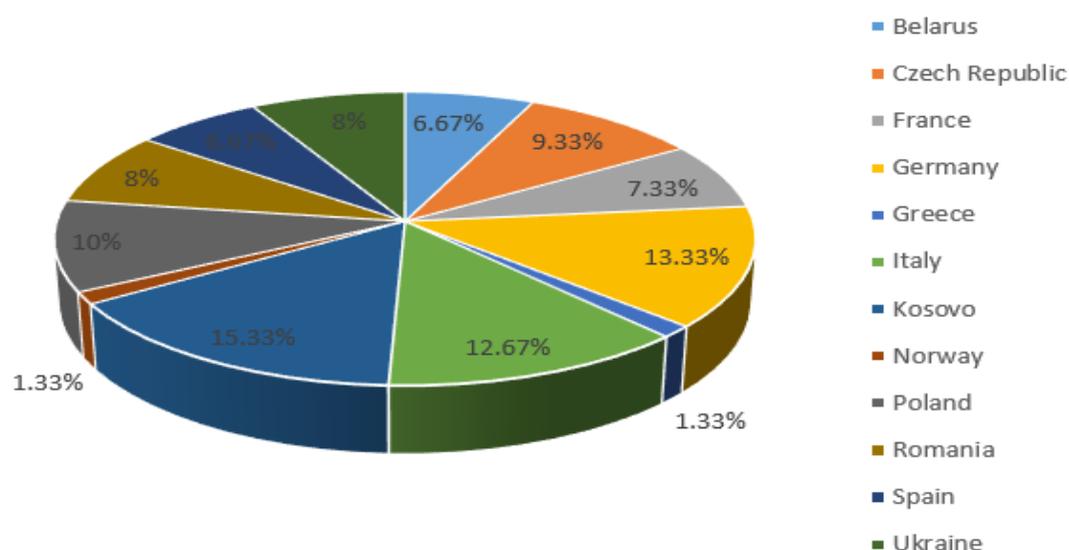


Figure 1. Distribution of tourists by country of origin

In addition to the testimonials of friends and relatives for trips to attractive destinations or different tourist packages offered by tourist agencies, nowadays, social networks play an important role in the promotion of destinations. About 40% of respondents claimed that they were familiar with the city of Vlora through tourist agencies, 24% through social networks, and 36% from the experience of friends or family. Most had visited Albania once (47.33%), and only 20% had visited it three or more times. The

responses to the question of which of the listed destinations they had visited are presented in Figure 2.

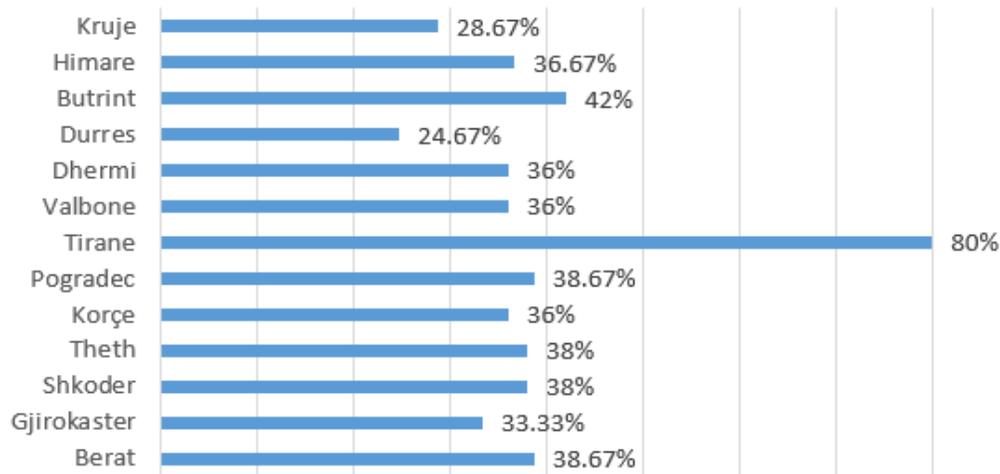


Figure 2. Destinations visited by tourists

As can be seen in Figure 2, apart from the city of Vlore, where the surveys were conducted, the most visited city was Tirana. The Mother Teresa Airport favors this city as a destination, in addition to the nightlife and numerous cultural activities it offers. Tourist attractions include historical monuments such as Skanderbeg Square, Et'hem Bey Mosque, Clock Tower, and Bunk'Art. The frequency of visits to Butrint, Berat, Shkodra, and Theth shows that in addition to maritime tourism, Albania is affirming itself for mountain and cultural tourism.

Regarding their overall satisfaction with Vlora as a tourist destination, the majority of respondents gave positive ratings. Specifically, 40.67% of tourists rated their experience as very important, 31.33% as important, and 28.00% indicated a moderate level of satisfaction. These results reflect a generally favorable perception of Vlora, highlighting its attractiveness as a travel destination among foreign visitors.

Tourists' perceptions of the 13 items influencing the evaluation of a tourist destination were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Table 1 below presents the results of the descriptive analysis. The results indicated that, based on mean values, all items were rated as important to some degree in the tourists' evaluation of Vlora as a destination. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each of the 13 items was 0.875 or higher, indicating high internal consistency, which is acceptable according to Sen and Ghosh (2023).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for items in selecting a tourist destination

Items in selecting a tourist destination	Not Important (%)	Slightly Important (%)	Moderately Important (%)	Important (%)	Very Important (%)	Mean	St. Dev	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Accommodation cost	1.33	6.67	31.33	19.33	<b>41.33</b>	<b>3.93</b>	1.06	0.878
2. Transportation cost	5.33	8.67	<b>35.33</b>	19.33	31.33	3.63	1.17	0.875
3. Activity expenses	1.33	17.33	17.33	<b>33.33</b>	30.67	3.75	1.11	0.885
4. Crime rates	6.67	14.67	<b>31.33</b>	22.67	24.67	3.44	1.20	0.886
5. Emergency services	5.33	5.33	23.33	30.00	<b>36.00</b>	<b>3.86</b>	1.13	0.881
6. Eco-friendly accommodation	0.00	16.00	<b>38.67</b>	25.33	20.00	3.49	0.99	0.877
7. Conservation efforts	2.67	15.33	<b>38.00</b>	20.67	23.33	3.47	1.09	0.878
8. Cultural preservation	6.67	17.33	20.67	20.67	<b>34.67</b>	3.59	1.30	0.878
9. Over-tourism concerns	8.00	13.33	<b>43.33</b>	17.33	18.00	3.24	1.14	0.881
10. Culinary experience	0.00	6.67	8.00	34.00	<b>51.33</b>	<b>4.30</b>	0.88	0.882
11. Historical significance	4.67	8.00	20.67	<b>40.00</b>	26.67	3.76	1.08	0.895
12. Road conditions	0.00	8.00	21.33	19.33	<b>51.33</b>	<b>4.14</b>	1.02	0.881
13. Tourism services	2.67	8.00	13.33	31.33	<b>44.67</b>	<b>4.07</b>	1.07	0.885

Descriptive analysis showed that the most important items for tourists, based on mean values, were 'culinary experiences', 'road conditions', and 'tourism services' such as guided tours, information centres, hospitality services, local transport, and customer support. These items, as well as 'accommodation cost' and 'emergency services', were rated as very important based on Likert scale ratings. Always referring to this rating, 'activity expenses' and 'historical significance' were found to be the most important, while a moderate level of importance was given to 'transportation cost', 'crime rate', 'eco-friendly accommodation', 'conservation efforts' and 'over-tourism concerns'. This indicates a greater appreciation for authentic experiences and infrastructure than for environmental aspects.

### Factor Analysis

The correlation matrix of the obtained items is presented in Table 2, indicating that there are no highly correlated variables, which would be a problem in factor analysis. According to Yong and Pearce (2013), correlations that are above 0,90 indicate multicollinearity between items.

Table 2. The correlation matrix of the items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1.00												
2	0.67**	1.00											
3	0.67**	0.55**	1.00										
4	0.43**	0.27**	0.27**	1.00									
5	0.53**	0.37**	0.35**	0.72**	1.00								
6	0.36**	0.60**	0.46**	0.43**	0.54**	1.00							
7	0.35**	0.50**	0.24**	0.47**	0.54**	0.66**	1.00						
8	0.40**	0.47**	0.31**	0.39**	0.53**	0.62**	0.60**	1.00					
9	0.29**	0.54**	0.32**	0.32**	0.39**	0.59**	0.62**	0.58**	1.00				
10	0.36**	0.48**	0.22**	0.32**	0.35**	0.39**	0.34**	0.32**	0.32**	1.00			
11	0.10	0.34**	0.08	-0.08	-0.04	0.16	0.23**	0.23**	0.26**	0.44**	1.00		
12	0.52**	0.41**	0.42**	0.28**	0.29**	0.35**	0.33**	0.44**	0.29**	0.55**	0.32**	1.00	
13	0.43**	0.45**	0.42**	0.23**	0.12	0.30**	0.20*	0.26**	0.18*	0.59**	0.45**	0.65**	1.00

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*  $p < 0.05$ . Determinant = 0.0008

Common factor analysis was used on the 13 items assessed by the respondents to identify the factors that influence their choice of tourist destination. The data are suitable for this analysis based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy 0.82 higher than the cut-off 0.6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p$ -value = 0.000 less than 0.05 (Williams et al., 2010; Shrestha, 2021). The results of the factor analysis are presented in Table 3. The four factors identified in this analysis explain a total of 65.38% of the variance. Based on the literature, factor loadings above 0.70 indicate a well-defined factor structure and are considered the ideal goal in exploratory factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). As shown in Table 3, five of the items have factor loadings between 0.575 and 0.7.

Table 3. The results of factor analysis

Items and Factors	Factor loading	Eigen values	Percentage of variance
<b>1. Sustainable practices</b>		2.757	21.21%
Eco-friendly accommodation	0.701		
Conservation efforts	0.741		
Cultural preservation	0.642		
Over-tourism concerns	0.750		

<b>2. Cultural attractions and infrastructure</b>		2.163	16.64%
Culinary experience	0.686		
Historical significance	0.580		
Road conditions	0.618		
Tourism services	0.809		
<b>3. Cost and value for money</b>		1.925	14.81%
Accommodation cost	0.808		
Transportation cost	0.574		
Activity expenses	0.723		
<b>4. Safety and security</b>		1.655	12.73%
Crime rates	0.758		
Emergency services	0.753		

Table 3...

'Sustainable practices' factor includes four items with factor loadings ranging from 0.642 to 0.750, explaining 21.21% of the variance. 'Cultural attractions and infrastructure' factor includes four items with factor loadings ranging from 0.580 to 0.809, explaining 16.64% of the variance. 'Cost and value for money' factor includes three items with factor loadings ranging from 0.574 to 0.808, explaining 14.81% of the variance. 'Safety and security' factor includes two items with factor loadings of 0.753 and 0.758, explaining 12.73% of the variance. The prominence of safety and cultural attractions in our factor analysis is in line with previous findings by Ghasemi et al. (2014), who reported similar preferences among tourists visiting Iran. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was greater than 0.79 for each factor (Shrestha, 2021).

## DISCUSSION

According to these results, foreign tourists choose Vlorë as a destination both for its natural and historical attractions, and for its rich cuisine, which includes not only traditional local dishes, but also Italian cuisine (Brokaj, 2014). Vlorë is perceived as a safe and culturally rich destination. Improving tourism infrastructure, especially the quality of roads within the city, heavy traffic, or difficulty in parking, are issues that were reflected in tourists' responses.

Descriptive analysis showed that 'culinary experiences', 'road conditions' and 'tourism services' were the most highly rated items by foreign tourists based on the mean value. These results are consistent with the results of Kotollaku (2024) where for Tirana residents 'local cuisine' was one of the two most highly rated items, and with the results of Kosova et al. (2023), where foreign tourists had positively rated all types of tourism services. The rating of

'emergency services' is consistent with the results of Petrović et al. (2017), who noted that in Serbia, one of the most important indicators based on the mean value was 'health/medical institutions to serve tourists'. The importance of the items, 'cost of accommodation' and 'cost of transportation', is consistent with the findings of Debski and Nasierowski (2017), who highlighted that price and convenience were the most important for student travelers based on mean values. The study's result on safety and security as a priority, is consistent with the findings of Mohamada and Jamilb (2012), and Mim et al. (2022), who found a strong relationship between safety and destination attractiveness. The emphasis placed by tourists on perceived safety, cultural experiences and culinary richness in Vlora is consistent with the results of Braimllari (2017), who found that tourists' online evaluations are more influenced by destination, and accommodation category and size than by other facilities or services. This consistency suggests that reputation and value of experience remain very important factors in influencing tourist satisfaction in Albania. Our results showing the importance of security, infrastructure and cultural attractions closely align with the findings of Gaspari and Çela (2015) that local support, skilled workforce and planning-management are essential for sustainable tourism growth in Albania.

Among the four factors determined by factor analysis, 'sustainable practices' explained the largest percentage of variance, followed by 'cultural attractions and infrastructure', 'cost and value for money', and 'safety'. In his study, Qefalia (2024) emphasizes the need for a more integrated approach to sustainability in destination branding. According to him, sustainability efforts should be closely linked to the tourist experience, to influence destination choice. According to Lamçe (2024), 'destination attraction', and 'tourism infrastructure of the destinations' were the two most valued factors by domestic tourists for the destination of Vlora. In their research, Son, Nguyen and Hoang (2023), showed that 'safety' was one of the factors that positively influenced tourists' satisfaction with agritourism in the Mekong Delta.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study was based on a survey conducted with foreign tourists who visited Vlora during the summer of 2024. European tourists made up the majority of respondents. According to the responses, the Vlora region, besides the coast, is valued for its cultural and historical attractions and rich cuisine. The findings showed that visitors prefer destinations with a sense of safety, rich cultural experiences, and good infrastructure. In particular, 'culinary experience', 'road conditions', and 'tourism services', were key in choosing a destination, highlighting the importance of offering unique and attractive experiences. The study highlighted the importance of accessible transport networks. Tourism infrastructure plays a crucial role in attracting and

retaining visitors. The least highly rated items were 'over tourism concerns', 'crime rates', 'conservation efforts', and 'eco-friendly accommodation'. The moderate interest in these issues suggests the need for initiatives that promote sustainable tourism, such as environmentally friendly accommodation, waste management systems, etc.

Factor analysis identified four factors that explain a total of 65.38% of the variance. 'Sustainable practices' factor includes four items explaining 21.21% of the variance. 'Cultural attractions and infrastructure' factor includes four items explaining 16.64% of the variance. 'Cost and value for money' factor includes three items explaining 14.81% of the variance. The 'Safety and security' factor includes two items explaining 12.73% of the variance. When planning a trip, tourists visiting Vlore were mindful of costs but also prioritized other aspects such as safety, cultural experiences, and accessibility. Given the interest in cultural heritage, events, and local and Mediterranean cuisine, further promotion is recommended to highlight these aspects of this region. It is also necessary to offer as many unique local experiences as possible to attract tourists seeking authenticity. Visitors always desire a safe and welcoming environment.

Although the cost items were not among the most important, tourists are still sensitive to accommodation and transportation costs. It is therefore recommended that tourism businesses consider offering competitive prices while maintaining high-quality services to achieve a balance between cost and value. In this way, the destination will remain attractive to a wide range of visitors. To improve tourism in this region, in addition to increasing promotion and improving marketing strategies, cooperation between the local and central government is needed to improve infrastructure and make investments at an appropriate time so as not to hinder the tourist season, which is vital for the city of Vlorë. Additionally, local authorities and tourism stakeholders can enhance cooperation to continuously monitor tourist satisfaction indicators, as well as invest in training programs for service staff in the tourism sector, particularly in intercultural communication, sustainability awareness, and emergency response. Introducing digital platforms to guide and inform tourists in real time about attractions, transportation and cultural events can improve their overall experience and extend the length of their stay.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES**

The relatively small sample size, which limits the generalizability of the findings, is one of the limitations of this study. Furthermore, the selection was not random but appropriate. The scope of the study is only in the Vlorë region, which does not allow for comparisons with destinations within or outside the country, which would help identify unique or common features among similar destinations. Data was collected through self-report questionnaires, allowing for

subjective responses influenced by momentary factors, such as tourists' emotions, expectations, or recent experiences.

For further studies, it is recommended to expand the study along the entire Ionian coast, to increase the number of respondents, and to include experts from the tourism sector in the study. In addition to descriptive analysis and factor analysis, the study should also include multi-criteria decision-making methods. New items can be added to the study to better understand the underlying preferences of tourists.

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