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Formulating a Service Quality Strategy to Strengthen Revisit Intention through Visitor Satisfaction: A Case Study of Istana Maimun, Medan

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan kerangka strategis dalam meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan guna memperkuat minat berkunjung kembali melalui peningkatan kepuasan pengunjung di Istana Maimun, salah satu destinasi warisan budaya terkemuka di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), dengan pengumpulan data dari 100 pengunjung yang disurvei pada periode Januari hingga Maret 2025 menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur. Selain itu, wawasan kualitatif diperoleh melalui wawancara dengan pengunjung dan pihak pengelola untuk mendukung perumusan strategi yang aplikatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas pelayanan berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kepuasan pengunjung ($\beta = 0.802$, $p < 0.001$), serta kepuasan pengunjung berpengaruh signifikan terhadap minat berkunjung kembali ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.05$). Namun, kualitas pelayanan tidak berpengaruh langsung secara signifikan terhadap minat berkunjung kembali ($p > 0.05$), yang menegaskan peran mediasi penuh dari kepuasan pengunjung. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan beberapa strategi yang dapat diimplementasikan, antara lain revitalisasi fasilitas, integrasi layanan digital, peningkatan responsivitas staf, serta penyelenggaraan acara budaya secara rutin. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur mengenai kualitas pelayanan dalam pariwisata warisan budaya dengan memberikan bukti empiris dari konteks destinasi warisan budaya serta menawarkan strategi manajerial berbasis data. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi pengelolaan pariwisata budaya dan memperkaya pemahaman mengenai peran kualitas pelayanan dan kepuasan dalam membentuk perilaku kunjungan kembali pada destinasi warisan budaya.

Kata Kunci: kepuasan pengunjung; kualitas pelayanan; minat berkunjung Kembali; pariwisata budaya; strategi pengembangan

Abstract

This study aims to develop a strategic framework for improving service quality in to strengthen revisit intention through enhanced visitor satisfaction at Istana Maimun, one of Indonesia's prominent cultural heritage destinations. A quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed, with data collected from 100 visitors surveyed between January and March 2025 using a structured questionnaire. In addition, qualitative insights were obtained through interviews with visitors and site management to support the formulation of practical strategies. The results showed that service quality had a significant positive effect on visitor satisfaction ($\beta = 0.802$, $p < 0.001$), and visitor satisfaction significantly influenced revisit intention ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.05$). However, service quality did not have a significant direct effect on revisit intention ($p > 0.05$), confirming the full mediating role of visitor satisfaction. Based on these findings, this study proposed several actionable strategies, including revitalization of facilities, integration of digital services, improvement of staff responsiveness, and the introduction of regular cultural events. This study contributes to the literature on service quality in cultural heritage tourism by providing empirical evidence from a heritage destination context and offering data-driven managerial strategies. The findings provide practical implications for cultural tourism management and enhance the understanding of how service quality and satisfaction shape revisit behavior in heritage destinations.

Keywords: Cultural tourism; revisit intention; service quality; strategic development; visitor satisfaction

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism has become an increasingly important sector in Indonesia, contributing to economic growth, employment, and cultural preservation. Medan, the capital of North Sumatra, possesses strong heritage tourism potential, particularly through Istana Maimun, a historical landmark representing the legacy of the Deli Sultanate and Malay cultural identity. Despite its cultural value and architectural appeal, Istana Maimun has not yet succeeded in encouraging repeat visitation, which is essential for sustainable destination development.

Recent tourism dynamics in North Sumatra demonstrate substantial growth in visitor arrivals. Official statistics indicate that international tourist arrivals increased from 74,498 in 2022 to 197,015 in 2023, reflecting significant growth and intensifying competition among destinations. This trend underscores the urgency for heritage destinations such as Istana Maimun to strengthen service quality and enhance visitor experience in order to remain competitive. However, preliminary observations indicate that visitor satisfaction at Istana Maimun remains inconsistent, suggesting shortcomings in perceived service quality.

Empirical evidence supports this concern. A preliminary survey of 35 visitors revealed that 68.57% expressed dissatisfaction with service quality, 62.86% reported a lack of enjoyment during the visit, and 60.00% stated they were unwilling to revisit in the near future. Visitors highlighted issues related to inadequate facilities, poor cleanliness, limited interpretive information, and unprofessional service behavior. These weaknesses directly threaten destination sustainability, as revisit intention is widely recognized as a key indicator of long-term tourism performance. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which confirm that service quality significantly influences visitor satisfaction and behavioral intention [1].

From a theoretical perspective, revisit intention is commonly shaped by perceived service quality and visitor satisfaction [2]. Service quality is conceptualized through dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy [3]. When service performance fails to meet visitor expectations, satisfaction decreases and the likelihood of repeat visitation declines [4]. Prior research consistently demonstrates that visitor satisfaction plays a mediating role between service quality and revisit intention [5]-[6]. Moreover, heritage tourism contexts exhibit distinctive characteristics, as perceptions of authenticity and cultural experience interact with service quality in shaping visitor evaluations [7]. Additionally, perceived quality, value, and satisfaction significantly influence revisit intention in tourism contexts [8].

Despite growing scholarly attention to revisit intention, empirical research focusing on cultural heritage destinations in Indonesia—particularly in North Sumatra—remains limited. Most previous studies have concentrated on coastal, recreational, or urban tourism contexts. This gap highlights the novelty of the present study, which examines service quality, visitor satisfaction, and revisit intention within the specific context of a heritage destination.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does service quality significantly influence visitor satisfaction?
2. Does service quality directly influence revisit intention?
3. Does visitor satisfaction influence revisit intention?
4. Does visitor satisfaction mediate the relationship between service quality and revisit intention? and
5. What service development strategies can strengthen revisit intention through enhanced satisfaction?

This study employs a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), supported by qualitative insights from interviews with visitors and site management. The objectives are twofold: first, to examine the structural relationships between service quality, visitor satisfaction, and revisit intention; and second, to formulate practical service development strategies based on empirical findings. This study contributes to tourism literature by extending empirical evidence within the heritage tourism context, while also offering practical implications for policymakers and destination managers in managing cultural tourism sustainably.

Based on the theoretical framework and prior empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on visitor satisfaction.
H2: Service quality does not have a significant direct effect on revisit intention.
H3: Visitor satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on revisit intention.
H4: Service quality has a significant indirect effect on revisit intention through visitor satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Service Quality

Service quality is widely recognized as a critical determinant of visitor evaluation in tourism settings. It reflects the degree to which service performance meets or exceeds visitor expectations [3]. In tourism contexts, these dimensions encompass both physical attributes (e.g., facilities, cleanliness, accessibility) and interpersonal elements (e.g., staff courtesy, responsiveness, and professionalism).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that higher perceived service quality leads to more positive visitor evaluations. Riadi et al. [1] found that service quality significantly influences visitor satisfaction. Similarly, Berlianto [4] reported that

inadequate service delivery reduces perceived value and negatively affects behavioral intentions. **Dewantara & Aksari also emphasized that service quality indirectly affects revisit intention when mediated by satisfaction in heritage tourism contexts [9].** These findings suggest that service quality remains a foundational component in shaping tourist experience, particularly in destinations where service encounters are central to the overall visit.

2.2 Visitor Satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction represents a psychological evaluation arising from the comparison between expected and actual experiences [2]. In tourism satisfaction is not only an outcome variable but also a key predictor of future behavior. Satisfied visitors are more likely to develop emotional attachment, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty toward a destination [6]. Satisfaction is shaped by service quality, perceived value, destination image, and emotional engagement (Sun, Ryan, & Pan, 2013 [16]; Choo, Ahn, & Petrick, 2016 [8]). Ayuningsih et al. [15] also confirmed that service quality significantly influences visitor satisfaction in Indonesian tourism contexts.

Satisfied visitors are more likely to return, provide positive word-of-mouth, and recommend destinations (Yoon & Uysal, 2005 [2]). Evren et al. (2020) [6] and He & Luo (2020) [5] found a significant positive association between satisfaction and revisit intention. Rahmayanti et al. (2022) [11] and Saragih et al. (2022 [12]) emphasized that satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and revisit intention, while also fostering long-term loyalty.

Moreover, in heritage tourism, satisfaction is influenced by experiential authenticity and cultural engagement (Chen & Tsai, 2007 [7]; Evren et al., 2020 [6]) showed that perceived authenticity strengthens visitors' emotional attachment and revisit intention.

2.3 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to a visitor's willingness or plan to return to a destination in the future. It is widely regarded as an indicator of destination loyalty and long-term sustainability [2]. Revisit intention is influenced not only by cognitive evaluations of service quality but also by affective responses such as satisfaction and emotional connection [6].

In heritage tourism contexts, revisit intention tends to be more complex than in recreational tourism because visitors often seek meaningful experiences, cultural learning, and authenticity [6]. Recent studies in Indonesian heritage sites confirm that satisfaction fully mediates the effect of service quality on revisit intention, reinforcing the centrality of emotional and experiential factors (Huda et al., 2022 [13]; Mardawan & Enawadi, 2024 [14]). As a result, revisit intention is more strongly driven by overall experiential satisfaction than by technical service performance alone. This reinforces the importance of positioning satisfaction as a central mechanism linking service quality to behavioral outcomes.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical foundation and previous empirical findings, this study proposes a conceptual model in which service quality influences visitor satisfaction, and visitor satisfaction subsequently affects revisit intention. Service quality is positioned as the exogenous variable, visitor satisfaction as the mediating variable, and revisit intention as the endogenous variable. This framework reflects the assumption that service encounters shape overall evaluation, which in turn determines future behavioral intention in heritage tourism contexts.



Figure 1. Research Framework

3. Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach to examine the relationships between service quality, visitor satisfaction, and revisit intention at Istana Maimun, Medan. The population consisted of visitors to Istana Maimun, while the sample comprised 100 domestic tourists selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria that respondents had visited the destination at least once.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed directly to visitors. The measurement items were adapted from established scales in previous studies: service quality indicators were based on the SERVQUAL dimensions [3], visitor satisfaction items were adapted from Yoon & Uysal [2], and revisit intention items were adapted from Petrick [10]. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity (factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted), discriminant validity, and reliability tests (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability). The structural model was assessed by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure.

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative insights were also obtained through informal interviews with several visitors and site management. These insights were used to support the formulation of service development strategies and strengthen the practical implications of the study.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 100 valid questionnaires were analyzed. The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (n = 100)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	47	47.0
	Female	53	53.0
Age	17–25 years	54	54.0
	25–34 years	21	21.0
	34–44 years	13	13.0
	> 44 years	14	14.0
Domicile	Medan	33	33.0
	Binjai	22	22.0
	Deli Serdang	25	25.0
	Tebing Tinggi	11	11.0
	Others (outside North Sumatera)	9	9

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Of the 100 respondents, 53% were female and 47% were male. Most respondents were aged between 17 and 44 years (86%), indicating that Istana Maimun is predominantly visited by productive-age tourists. In terms of domicile, the majority of visitors came from Medan and surrounding areas, suggesting that the destination currently attracts mainly local and regional tourists rather than national visitors.

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated by assessing convergent validity and construct reliability. Convergent validity was confirmed as all indicator loadings exceeded 0.70 and all AVE values were above the recommended threshold of 0.50. Construct reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha, both exceeding 0.70 for all constructs.

Table 2. Construct Validity and Reliability

Construct	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Service Quality	0.742	0.966	0.961
Visitor Satisfaction	0.661	0.854	0.743
Revisit Intention	0.787	0.948	0.932

These results indicate that the measurement instruments demonstrate strong validity and reliability, and are therefore appropriate for structural model analysis.

4.3 Structural Model Evaluation

4.3.1 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The explanatory power of the model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2).

Table 3. R-Square Values

Endogenous Variable	R^2
Visitor Satisfaction	0.643
Revisit Intention	0.596

The R^2 value of 0.643 indicates that service quality explains 64.3% of the variance in visitor satisfaction. Meanwhile, service quality and visitor satisfaction jointly explain 59.6% of the variance in revisit intention. These values suggest that the model demonstrates moderate to strong explanatory power.

Hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
Service Quality → Visitor Satisfaction	0.802	13.814	0.000	Supported
Service Quality → Revisit Intention	0.361	1.550	0.121	Not supported
Visitor Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.452	2.324	0.020	Supported
Service Quality → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.362	2.234	0.026	Supported

Table 4 presents the results of hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure. Service quality has a significant positive effect on visitor satisfaction ($\beta = 0.802$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. The direct effect of service quality on revisit intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.361$, $p = 0.121$), thus H2 was not supported. Visitor satisfaction significantly influences revisit intention ($\beta = 0.452$, $p = 0.020$), supporting H3. The indirect effect of service quality on revisit intention through visitor satisfaction was significant ($\beta = 0.362$, $p = 0.026$), confirming H4 and indicating a full mediation effect.

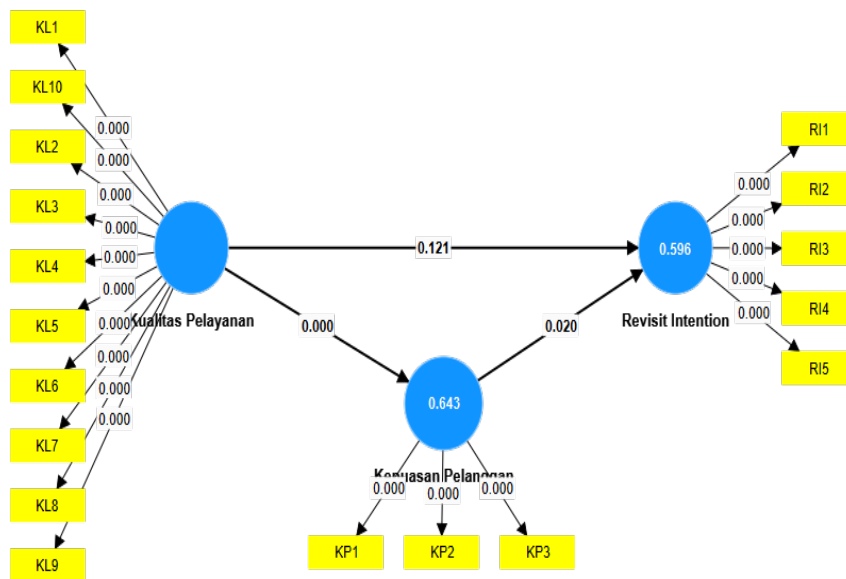


Figure 2. Structural Model (PLS Bootstrapping Output)

Figure 1 illustrates the structural model and path relationships between constructs based on the bootstrapping results. The model shows that service quality has a strong effect on visitor satisfaction, while visitor satisfaction significantly influences revisit intention. The direct relationship between service quality and revisit intention is weaker, supporting the mediating role of visitor satisfaction. The R^2 values indicate that the model explains a substantial proportion of variance in both satisfaction and revisit intention.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Effect of Service Quality on Visitor Satisfaction

The results confirm that service quality exerts a strong and significant influence on visitor satisfaction at Istana Maimun. This finding implies that improvements in tangible aspects (e.g., cleanliness, facilities, spatial arrangement), as well as intangible aspects (e.g., staff responsiveness, empathy, and assurance), play a critical role in shaping visitors' overall evaluations of the destination.

This outcome aligns with the SERVQUAL framework, which posits that satisfaction emerges when perceived service performance meets or exceeds visitor expectations [3]. The result also strengthens prior empirical evidence in tourism contexts, confirming that service quality remains a fundamental determinant of satisfaction even within heritage destinations [1], [5], [6]. Choo, Ahn, & Petrick [8] also found that service quality significantly predicts visitor satisfaction and loyalty in festival tourism contexts.

Qualitative insights from visitor interviews reinforce these statistical findings. Visitors frequently mentioned dissatisfaction related to cleanliness, the lack of spatial organization, limited interpretive information, and the shortage of professional guides. These issues correspond directly to weaknesses in the tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance dimensions of service quality. Such deficiencies reduce the perceived professionalism of the destination and weaken the emotional comfort experienced by visitors, thereby lowering overall satisfaction. Therefore, enhancing service quality at Istana Maimun is not only operationally necessary but also strategically important for strengthening visitor experience.

4.4.2 Effect of Service Quality on Revisit Intention

Interestingly, the direct relationship between service quality and revisit intention was found to be statistically insignificant. This indicates that improvements in service attributes alone are insufficient to directly motivate visitors to return to Istana Maimun.

Revisit intention in heritage tourism contexts may be driven by more complex psychological mechanisms beyond functional service evaluation. Qualitative findings revealed that many visitors were primarily motivated by the historical value, architectural

uniqueness, and symbolic cultural meaning of Istana Maimun rather than the quality of services received. As a result, even when service shortcomings were recognized, they did not immediately translate into the decision to revisit.

Persistent issues such as disorganized spatial layout, inadequate cleanliness, limited information delivery, and minimal guidance services appear to weaken visitors' emotional attachment to the destination. This aligns with previous studies, which suggest that experiential authenticity and cultural meaning often outweigh service functionality in shaping revisit behavior [6], [7], and that satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and revisit intention [6].

4.4.3 *Effect of Visitor Satisfaction on Revisit Intention*

The results demonstrate that visitor satisfaction has a significant positive effect on revisit intention, indicating that satisfaction functions as a psychological foundation for the development of long-term behavioral loyalty toward a destination.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the expectancy–disconfirmation paradigm, suggesting that visitors are more likely to develop favorable behavioral intentions when their experiences meet or exceed expectations [3]. Empirically, this is consistent with prior studies, confirming that satisfaction is a robust predictor of revisit intention [5]–[7]. Perovic et al. [17] also reported a strong positive association between visitor satisfaction and revisit intention.

Qualitative evidence further highlights that visitors' satisfaction with Istana Maimun is currently more influenced by the inherent historical and cultural value of the site than by service or facility quality. This implies that satisfaction is relatively fragile and may decline without continuous improvement in service quality and experience design. Therefore, enhancing experiential quality through improved interpretation, cultural programming, and visitor engagement is essential for sustaining long-term loyalty.

4.4.4 *Mediating Role of Visitor Satisfaction*

The mediation analysis confirms that visitor satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between service quality and revisit intention. Service quality does not directly drive revisit intention but exerts its influence indirectly through satisfaction formation.

This finding emphasizes that satisfaction functions as a psychological mechanism rather than merely an outcome variable. Improvements in facilities, staff performance, and information systems only translate into higher revisit intention if visitors perceive them meaningfully, generating positive emotional and cognitive evaluations of the visit.

These results strengthen existing empirical evidence, which consistently highlights the mediating role of satisfaction in tourism behavior models [5]–[7]. Perovic et al. [17] similarly confirmed that visitor satisfaction strongly predicts revisit intention. For heritage destinations such as Istana Maimun, managerial strategies should therefore focus not only on technical service enhancement but also on experience creation, storytelling, cultural interpretation, and emotional engagement to ensure service improvements genuinely elevate visitor satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1 *Conclusion*

This study demonstrates that service quality significantly influences visitor satisfaction, and visitor satisfaction significantly affects revisit intention. However, service quality does not directly influence revisit intention; instead, its effect operates fully through visitor satisfaction. These findings confirm that improving service attributes alone is insufficient to foster visitor loyalty unless such improvements meaningfully enhance the overall experience and emotional evaluation of the destination.

The results further indicate that in the context of heritage tourism, experiential value, cultural meaning, and emotional engagement play a crucial role in shaping satisfaction and revisit intention. Therefore, the sustainability of heritage destinations such as Istana Maimun depends not only on functional service improvements but also on the ability to create meaningful cultural experiences.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Based on the empirical findings and qualitative evidence from visitors and management, several strategic managerial implications can be proposed to enhance service quality, strengthen visitor satisfaction, and increase revisit intention at Istana Maimun.

First, management should prioritize the improvement of the physical environment and tangible service elements. Cleanliness, facility maintenance, spatial organization, and aesthetic quality of the heritage environment strongly influence visitors' first impressions and overall comfort. The clear separation between commercial activities (e.g., souvenir vendors) and heritage areas is essential to preserve the authenticity of the palace atmosphere and enhance the perceived cultural value. Enhancing interpretive infrastructure, such as informative signage and visually engaging historical displays, can also strengthen visitors' understanding and appreciation of the site.

Second, strengthening human resources is fundamental to improving service quality. The shortage of tour guides and inconsistent staff performance observed in the field indicate the need for structured recruitment, continuous training, and the implementation of clear standard operating procedures (SOPs). Well-trained personnel who are responsive, knowledgeable, and hospitable can significantly enhance visitors' perceptions of professionalism and care, which are central to the development of satisfaction in heritage tourism settings.

Third, the development of experience-based cultural programs should be emphasized as a strategic priority. Cultural experiences such as traditional Malay performances, heritage storytelling, thematic exhibitions, and culturally embedded culinary activities can enhance experiential authenticity and emotional engagement. Such programs are particularly important because this study shows that visitors are strongly motivated by cultural meaning rather than service functionality alone. By enriching cultural interpretation and engagement, management can transform Istana Maimun from a passive sightseeing location into an active cultural experience space.

Fourth, the integration of digital interpretation and information systems can strengthen visitor experience without compromising the heritage character of the site. The use of QR-code-based information, audio guides, and mobile-accessible content allows visitors to access historical narratives in an interactive manner. Digital interpretation is especially relevant for younger visitors and can improve the accessibility of knowledge for both domestic and international tourists.

Finally, collaboration with external stakeholders should be strategically strengthened. Partnerships with local government institutions, cultural communities, educational institutions, and private-sector organizations can support funding opportunities, cultural programming, and destination promotion. Such collaborations are important not only for addressing financial limitations but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of heritage tourism development.

Overall, these managerial implications emphasize that improving revisit intention at Istana Maimun requires a holistic strategy that integrates service quality enhancement with experience creation, cultural authenticity, and emotional engagement.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample size was limited to 100 respondents, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this research focused on a single heritage destination, meaning that the results may reflect contextual characteristics specific to Istana Maimun. Data collection was also conducted within a particular time frame and may not fully capture changes in visitor perceptions across different seasons or tourism conditions.

Future studies are encouraged to conduct comparative research across multiple heritage destinations in Indonesia, such as Istana Maimun, Keraton Yogyakarta, and Taman Sari, to enhance the robustness of findings. Further research may also incorporate additional variables such as destination image, perceived value, experiential quality, cultural authenticity, and emotional attachment to develop a more comprehensive model of revisit intention in heritage tourism contexts.

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