



Okinawa Blue and Omotenashi: A Qualitative Exploration of Memorable Experiences and Revisit Intention among Marine Tourists at Renaissance Okinawa

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Abstract: This study explores how marine tourists perceive, experience, and respond to premium marine tourism at Hotel Renaissance Okinawa, a Marriott resort located in Onna-son on the western coast of Okinawa Island, Japan. While Okinawa is internationally recognised as one of the leading marine destinations in the Asia Pacific, emic and qualitative inquiry into the lived experience of tourists at premium marine resorts in Japan remains limited. Adopting a single embedded case study design, the research draws on the accounts of fourteen informants comprising six international guests, two domestic Japanese guests, five hotel staff on the marine service line, and one tourism expert. Data were gathered through semi-structured questions, supported by observation and documentation, and analysed using six-phase thematic analysis. Three thematic clusters emerged. First, destination choice arose from the interaction of internal push factors, especially the need for escape and restoration that was stronger among domestic guests, with external pull factors dominated by the clarity of the water locally known as Okinawa Blue, brand trust, and digital information. Second, experience quality was perceived as an integrated whole that combined professional and empathetic marine service, memorable encounters with the underwater world, the sincere hospitality expressed as omotenashi, and an emerging awareness of marine sustainability. Third, satisfaction and perceived premium value shaped strong revisit and recommendation intentions, although a segment of international guests displayed variety-seeking that decoupled recommendation from return. The study extends understanding of the integrated luxury and nature value proposition in premium marine tourism and offers practical guidance on activity variety, capacity, equipment renewal, inclusivity, and participatory conservation.

Keywords: Marine Tourism; Okinawa Tourism; Omotenashi; Revisit Intention; Tourism Experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Okinawa, the southernmost island prefecture of Japan, has long been recognised as one of the finest marine destinations in the Asia Pacific. Its archipelago of more than one hundred and sixty islands sustains rich coral reef ecosystems at the northern edge of the Pacific coral triangle, and it offers diving, snorkelling, sea kayaking, and a range of marine activities that are almost unmatched elsewhere in Japan. Tourism is the largest economic sector of the prefecture, and marine activities account for a substantial share of visitor engagement (Japan Tourism Agency, 2023; Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2023). Within this competitive landscape, premium resorts have come to occupy a distinctive position by combining world-class hospitality with direct access to a vibrant marine environment.

Hotel Renaissance Okinawa, located in Onna-son on the western coast of Okinawa Island, stands among the most frequently recommended premium properties for marine tourists. As part of Marriott International, the resort couples internationally standardised service with a comprehensive programme of beachfront marine activities, including diving, snorkelling, paddleboarding, banana boat rides, and an in-house dolphin programme supported by certified staff (Marriott International, 2023). Thousands of positive reviews on digital platforms attest to its reputation, yet that visibility is precisely what makes the absence of deeper scholarly understanding notable.

Although the popularity of the resort is well documented, academic work that explores why and how tourists perceive, interpret, and respond to the premium marine experience in Japan remains limited. Much of the existing research on marine tourism in Japan addresses macro-level concerns such as regional policy or sectoral economic impact, with comparatively little attention to the depth of tourist experience and perception that ultimately determines the success of a marine destination. Recent qualitative and mixed-method studies of marine and adventure tourism in Indonesia have begun to address this experiential depth, including work on self-identity construction among surf tourists and on the social motives that drive participation (Prasetyo, Pranoto, Sukrisno, & Dewi, 2024; Pranoto, Sukrisno, Supriyanto, Listyorini, Soehari, & Kundori, 2024), yet equivalent emic inquiry at premium marine resorts in Japan remains scarce. This gap is meaningful because the value of a premium marine resort is co-created in the lived encounter between guest, staff, and the sea, and that encounter is best understood through emic and interpretive inquiry.

This study therefore adopts an in-depth qualitative case study approach to understand, holistically, how Hotel Renaissance Okinawa is constructed and given meaning as a marine destination by different categories of tourists and the staff who serve them. The inquiry moves from initial perception and choice motivation, through the quality of the experience during the visit, to the formation of revisit intention and positive word of mouth. Three questions guide the study. First, which push and pull factors shape the choice of the resort as a marine destination, and how do they interact? Second, how do tourists describe and evaluate the quality of their marine experience, and which dimensions most influence satisfaction and perceived value? Third, what determines revisit intention and recommendation as indicators of loyalty? By answering these questions, the study contributes an emic account of how premium resorts integrate luxury hospitality with an authentic marine environment, and it offers evidence-based implications for hotel management, tourism regulators, and scholars of island marine tourism in the Asia Pacific.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Push and Pull Motivation in Marine Tourism

Push-pull theory remains one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding tourist motivation. The framework distinguishes internal forces that push people to travel, such as the desire for escape, novelty, and relaxation, from external forces that pull travellers toward a particular destination, such as natural attractions, facilities, and branding (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979). In nature-based and marine contexts, the quality of natural resources has been found to be among the strongest predictors of satisfaction, which positions the marine environment itself as a powerful pull factor (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). For a premium marine resort, push factors typically include the need to escape urban pressure and to restore physical and mental wellbeing, while pull factors include the clarity of the water, the richness of the reef, and the assurance conveyed by an established hospitality brand.

Service Quality in Premium Marine Tourism

The SERVQUAL model identifies five dimensions of service quality, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, that have proven relevant across service industries including hospitality and tourism (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). In a marine setting these dimensions take a distinctive form. Tangibles concern the condition of marine equipment and beach facilities, reliability concerns the consistency of activity programmes, responsiveness concerns the speed of staff response in a dynamic sea environment, assurance relates closely to the competence and certification of instructors, and empathy is expressed in the ability of staff to accommodate the ability level and comfort of each guest. Research on Japanese travellers further suggests that they hold high expectations of service quality and are sensitive to inconsistency, an insight that is directly relevant to a study conducted at a resort in Japan (Mok & Armstrong, 1995).

Memorable Tourism Experience

The concept of the memorable tourism experience has become central to contemporary tourism scholarship. Foundational work explored the essence of what makes certain experiences memorable through dimensions of affect, expectation, consequentiality, and recollection (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Subsequent scale development identified experiential dimensions that are widely applied in empirical work, including hedonism, refreshment, knowledge, involvement, and novelty, and demonstrated their cumulative influence on satisfaction and revisit intention (Kim, 2014). In a marine context these

dimensions are vivid, since the first encounter with coral reef biodiversity often combines knowledge of the marine ecosystem, physical involvement in diving or snorkelling, and a sense of refreshment that detaches the visitor from everyday life. Such experiences are best understood within the broader logic of the experience economy, in which staged and engaging encounters generate lasting value (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Recent studies continue to connect memorable experiences and tourism memory to the intention to revisit (Lai, Zhang, Zhang, Tseng, & Shiau, 2021; Kim, Koo, & Chung, 2021), and qualitative research on surf tourism shows how novelty-seeking and identity construction deepen such experiences (Prasetyo, Pranoto, Sukrisno, & Dewi, 2024).

Perceived Value and Behavioural Intention

Perceived value is commonly conceptualised as the trade-off between the benefits a customer obtains and the sacrifices of cost, time, and risk that the customer incurs (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997). In a premium resort, perceived value emerges from the combination of hedonic benefits, such as pleasure and tranquillity, and utilitarian benefits, such as the efficiency of accessing many activities in one location. Behavioural intention, in turn, is shaped by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control, as articulated in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Within tourism, perceived attractiveness and the quality of on-site performance have been identified as antecedents of revisit intention that may operate independently of overall satisfaction (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006), while destination image and memorable experience jointly influence the intention to return and to recommend (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018). Recent marine tourism research confirms that experiential quality shapes destination value and satisfaction, which in turn drive post-visit behaviour and the willingness to recommend (Fahlevi, 2025).

Sustainable Marine Tourism

Sustainable marine tourism is defined as a form of marine tourism that allows present generations to enjoy and benefit from marine resources without diminishing the capacity of future generations to do the same (Orams, 1999). As global awareness of marine environmental issues grows, the perceived commitment of a destination to sustainability increasingly influences destination choice, satisfaction, and revisit intention, particularly among educated and higher-income travellers who form the core segment of premium resorts (Garrod & Fennell, 2004). For a resort such as Renaissance Okinawa, sustainability is therefore not a peripheral concern but a potential dimension of the value that guests perceive, since recent evidence links a destination sustainability orientation to tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Kusumah, 2024).

Taken together, these five strands provide a complementary conceptual framework. Push-pull theory explains why tourists choose the destination, service quality and memorable experience explain how they evaluate the visit, perceived value and behavioural intention explain the formation of loyalty, and sustainable marine tourism situates the entire experience within its ecological context. The present study uses this framework not as a set of variables to be tested, but as a sensitising lens through which the lived accounts of informants are interpreted.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a single embedded case study design (Yin, 2018). The case study design was selected for its capacity to generate a holistic, in-depth, and contextual understanding of a complex phenomenon, in this instance the marine tourism experience at a premium resort, which cannot be reduced to isolated variables. The qualitative approach was chosen on three grounds. The research questions are exploratory and interpretive, the unit of analysis is the subjective and nuanced experience of tourists, and the case possesses distinctive characteristics that call for idiographic exploration rather than nomothetic generalisation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Site and Unit of Analysis

The study was conducted at Hotel Renaissance Okinawa in Onna-son, with attention to the marine facilities and activity areas of the resort, including the private beach, the water sports centre, the diving and snorkelling areas, and the marine activity zone along the shoreline. The primary unit of analysis is the individual marine tourism experience of each informant at this site. Supporting units of analysis include the perspectives of staff and management, the physical condition of the marine facilities, and the surrounding marine ecosystem of Okinawa as the natural setting of the study.

Informants

The study used purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling to select informants able to provide the richest and most relevant perspectives. Fourteen informants participated, comprising six international guests, two domestic Japanese guests, five hotel staff on the marine service line, and one tourism expert. Data collection ceased at the fourteenth account, when additional responses no longer generated substantial new codes or themes, so that thematic saturation

was considered to have been reached within the range recommended for qualitative case study research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). To protect confidentiality, the identity of each informant was anonymised through a code, and the profile of informants is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants.

Code	Category	Origin	Age	Relevant Role or Note
IG1	International guest	Australia	18-25	Returning visitor, chef, experienced snorkeller
IG2	International guest	Malaysia	18-25	First visit to Japan, drawn to the dolphin programme
IG3	International guest	Germany	18-25	Student, diver, loyal to the Marriott network
IG4	International guest	Indonesia	18-25	Family travel, emphasised water clarity and halal food need
IG5	International guest	Indonesia	18-25	Employee, first resort visit
IG6	International guest	Netherlands	26-35	Finance assistant, valued snorkelling and calm
DG1	Domestic Japanese guest	Yokohama	18-25	Second visit, motive of recovery from work stress
DG2	Domestic Japanese guest	Saitama	18-25	Student, first visit, relaxation motive
HS1	Hotel staff	Japan	18-25	Restaurant service, one to three years of tenure
HS2	Hotel staff	Japan	26-35	Club floor manager, nine years of tenure
HS3	Hotel staff	Japan	36-45	Diving instructor, sixteen years of tenure
HS4	Hotel staff	Hong Kong	26-35	Marine activity guide, four to six years of tenure
HS5	Hotel staff	Japan	26-35	Front-line supervisor, one to three years of tenure
EX1	Marine tourism expert	Indonesia	36-45	Travel operator, focus on sustainable tourism

Data Collection

In-depth semi-structured questions formed the primary data collection technique, organised around eight dimensions covering motivation, perception of attractions, quality of marine activities, the relationship between hotel and marine experience, the natural environment, digital information and word of mouth, satisfaction and value, and revisit and recommendation. The instrument was administered in Japanese for domestic informants and in English for international informants, with attention to semantic accuracy, and the accounts of Japanese and Indonesian informants were translated into English for reporting while preserving their original meaning. Non-participant observation and document study, including the analysis of marketing materials and guest reviews, were used for triangulation and contextualisation.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006), combined with within-case and cross-case analysis consistent with case study logic (Yin, 2018). The process began with thorough familiarisation with the data, proceeded through open coding that generated data-driven initial codes, then the grouping of codes into candidate themes, the review and validation of themes, the definitive naming of themes, and finally the writing of an analytic narrative that integrated themes with informant accounts and the conceptual framework.

Trustworthiness

The four trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied consistently. Credibility was supported through triangulation across interview, observation, and documentation, through member checking with key informants, and through prolonged engagement. Transferability was supported through thick description of the research context. Dependability was supported through a complete audit trail of methodological decisions. Confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling that recorded the position, assumptions, and potential biases of the researcher throughout the study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The six-phase thematic analysis produced three thematic clusters that correspond to the three research questions. The first cluster concerns push and pull motivation in destination choice, the second concerns the quality of the marine experience during the visit, and the third concerns satisfaction, perceived value, and the determinants of loyalty. Each cluster is presented below, illustrated with informant accounts and interpreted through the conceptual framework.

Push and Pull Motivation in the Choice of Renaissance Okinawa

The accounts of informants show that the decision to visit was formed through the interaction of an internal drive for restoration and escape with the external appeal of a distinctive marine ecosystem, brand reputation, and destination imagery circulating on digital channels.

Okinawa Blue and the Marine Ecosystem as the Dominant Pull Factor

The clarity of the Okinawan sea, known locally as Okinawa Blue, emerged as the pull factor most consistently mentioned across categories of informants. Most guests placed the quality of the marine environment, rather than the accommodation alone, at the centre of their choice. The image of Okinawa as the marine paradise of Japan distinguished the destination from other domestic options such as Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Kyoto.

“I wanted to see Japan from a different angle. Japan is associated with mountains, snow, temples, and the night city of Tokyo, but Okinawa offers something different, namely Japan as a tropical archipelago. Okinawa has such a good name in marine tourism that it is called the Hawaii of Japan.” (IG4)

“The image of Okinawa as the marine paradise of Japan strongly influenced my decision. I wanted to enjoy its beautiful ocean and relaxing island atmosphere, which made Okinawa stand out from other destinations.” (DG2)

These accounts reinforce the proposition that the quality of natural resources is among the strongest predictors of satisfaction in nature-based and marine tourism (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). The physical appeal of the destination functions as the primary pull factor that awakens the desire to visit, consistent with the motivational framework that distinguishes internal drives from the external attraction of the destination (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979). For international guests from Southeast Asia, the clarity of Okinawa Blue was judged to surpass tropical destinations that are more widely known.

“The water quality that is so admired, the Okinawa Blue with a clarity that looks almost transparent, became an aspect that is hard to match by the marine destinations I had visited before, such as Bali or the coastal areas of Southeast Asia.” (IG4)

Escape and Restoration as the Push Factor

The most prominent internal drive was the need to escape work pressure and to restore mental wellbeing. This push factor appeared stronger among domestic Japanese guests from dense urban areas such as Yokohama and Saitama. For this group, the Okinawan sea was given meaning as a space of refreshment that differs radically from daily routine.

“I wanted to relieve the stress of work and rest quietly. I also wanted to see beautiful scenery to refresh my mood.” (DG1)

“I wanted to take a break from work and enjoy a peaceful atmosphere. I hoped this trip would help me relax, refresh my mind, and experience something new.” (DG2)

This pattern affirms the relevance of escape and refreshment in tourist motivation, and it accords with recent findings that escape and relaxation are prominent motives among Japanese travellers (Dann, 1977; Mitsuhashi & Wada, 2025). International guests also mentioned a need for relaxation, yet their motive tended to combine with curiosity about Japanese culture and a desire for new experiences. This difference in emphasis indicates that the push factor is not uniform, but is shaped by the cultural background and geographic distance of informants.

Brand Trust and the Influence of Digital Information

The reputation of the Marriott and Renaissance network served as a pull factor that lowered perceived risk before arrival. Several guests stated that positive past experience with the network nurtured trust in the service standards they would receive.

“Yes, the brand was quite significant because it is reliable and consistent. Compared to other resorts, it feels more professional.” (IG6)

Brand trust, however, was not the sole determinant. One international guest placed the uniqueness of the marine programme and the commitment to sustainability above brand considerations, citing the presence of a marine research centre and a child-friendly policy as the main differentiators.

“Not really because of the brand. This hotel applies the principles of sustainable development and is child-friendly, and what most distinguishes it is the presence of the Okinawa marine research centre.” (IG2)

Beyond the brand, online reviews and social media played a large role in shaping expectations. Guests stated that visual content on social media and reviews on TripAdvisor and Google were the main references before booking. This role of digital information is consistent with the understanding that destination image formed from external sources influences the attitudes and behavioural intentions of tourists (Chen & Tsai, 2007), and it reflects the influence of subjective norm in the formation of intention (Ajzen, 1991). The decision to visit was therefore formed through the simultaneous interaction of internal push, natural appeal, brand reputation, and digital information that reinforced one another.

The Quality of the Marine Experience

The second cluster addresses how tourists described and evaluated the quality of their marine experience. The findings are interpreted through service quality, memorable experience, the synergy of hospitality, and awareness of ecosystem sustainability.

Service Quality Through the Lens of SERVQUAL

Assurance and empathy were the two service quality dimensions most frequently appreciated. Guests regarded instructors and guides as professionals who prioritised safety while adapting their approach to the ability of each guest. This competence was supported by the formal certification of marine staff, as affirmed by a senior diving instructor.

“I check beforehand whether the guest has prior experience and conduct a stress check. Daily training keeps us ready to provide a safe and comfortable experience.” (HS3)

“The instructors adjusted their guidance to my comfort level and made sure I felt safe and confident throughout the activity.” (DG2)

Safety standards were judged to be higher than those at marine resorts elsewhere, with the application of age, height, and weight limits and close supervision in the swimming area. A manager recounted a rescue of a guest who nearly drowned, with the use of a resuscitation device, which demonstrates the readiness of emergency procedures. This appreciation of service consistency aligns with the finding that Japanese tourists hold high expectations and are sensitive to inconsistency (Mok & Armstrong, 1995), and it confirms the relevance of the five service quality dimensions in premium marine tourism (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

On the dimension of tangibles, an important gap in perception emerged. Most guests judged the equipment to be clean, complete, and of good quality, yet front-line staff highlighted the worn condition of some equipment and the need to manage heat in the activity area. This difference in viewpoint between guests and staff serves as an early signal for management to renew equipment before complaints reach the guest side.

“The equipment we use is too worn out, and the management of heat needs improvement.” (HS4)

Memorable Experiences

The most memorable experiences reported by informants centred on four activities, namely snorkelling in clear water, the dolphin interaction programme, banana boat rides with family, and the reflective moment of walking along the beach at sunset. The first encounter with underwater life was often given meaning as a moment that united the dimensions of knowledge, involvement, hedonism, and refreshment at once.

“I will not forget snorkelling in the very clear water and seeing colourful fish swimming around me. It was peaceful, beautiful, and unlike anything I had experienced before.” (DG2)

“Being underwater in extremely clear water without a single piece of plastic waste, surrounded by thousands of fish living in peace because they are protected, gave me a sense of tranquillity.” (IG4)

These findings confirm the experiential dimensions of memorable tourism experience, namely knowledge of the marine ecosystem, physical involvement in the activity, hedonic enjoyment, and refreshment from routine (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Kim, 2014). Several informants reported a transformative dimension that moved beyond ordinary enjoyment, in the form of a sense of connection with nature and a new awareness of the importance of marine conservation. The cumulative nature of these dimensions was evident among informants who reported the highest satisfaction when several dimensions were fulfilled together, which is also consistent with the logic of the experience economy and with recent evidence that tourism memory strengthens the intention to revisit (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Lai, Zhang, Zhang, Tseng, & Shiau, 2021).

Omotenashi and the Synergy of Hospitality and the Sea

The marine experience did not stand alone, but was integrated with the comfort of the accommodation and the distinctively Japanese culture of service. Guests felt that the proximity of the room to the dock and the beach reduced logistical complexity, while sincere hospitality reinforced overall comfort. The concept of *omotenashi* was named explicitly as the element that made the experience feel complete.

“The distinctly Japanese thing that made me comfortable was the practice of omotenashi, a sincere hospitality that focuses on anticipating guest needs and paying remarkable attention to the smallest detail.” (IG4)

“The comfort of the room, the good facilities, and the calm atmosphere made it easy to enjoy the marine activities. Returning to a clean and comfortable room after the sea enriched the whole experience.” (DG2)

This integration of luxury hospitality with the marine experience forms the core of the resort value proposition. The synergy reinforces the view that the overall quality of the hotel and the quality of marine activities are perceived by guests as a single, mutually supportive package rather than two separate components.

Awareness of Marine Ecosystem Sustainability

Awareness of marine environmental sustainability emerged as a dimension that enriched the quality of the experience. Guests mentioned several practices they observed, including a coral restoration programme, education on the use of reef-safe sunscreen, signage asking visitors not to touch marine life, and the presence of a marine research centre. Such practices left a positive impression and reinforced the perception of a responsible destination.

“Renaissance Okinawa is actively involved in coral reef restoration through a coral transplantation programme, and the hotel also educates guests to use reef-safe sunscreen.” (IG4)

From the operational side, staff described the application of environmentally responsible principles in daily activities, including rules against feeding and touching the fish that follow the Green Fins principles, as well as beach cleaning combined with environmental learning. Yet several staff also voiced concern about ecological pressure, particularly the rise in sea temperature and the impact of visitation on the condition of the coral reefs.

“For the coral reefs, the rise in sea temperature is a serious problem. In recent years there have been no major typhoons in Okinawa, so the seawater is not stirred and its temperature rises.” (HS2)

The tourism expert affirmed that the commitment to sustainability is not a mere complement, but the foundation of the credibility and long-term appeal of the destination. This view aligns with the framework of sustainable marine tourism that places the preservation of marine resources as a condition for the continuity of tourism benefits (Orams, 1999), and with the finding that the perceived commitment of a destination to sustainability influences tourist choice and satisfaction (Garrod & Fennell, 2004).

“A strong commitment to environmental sustainability not only protects marine resources but also enhances the credibility and long-term attractiveness of the destination.” (EX1)

Satisfaction, Perceived Value, and the Determinants of Loyalty

The third cluster addresses the determinants of revisit intention and recommendation. The analysis focuses on perceived value, revisit intention, and the behaviour of recommendation and online review.

Perceived Premium Value as Commensurate

Almost all guests judged the premium price to be commensurate with the quality of service, facilities, and experience received. The justification of expenditure rested on considerations of instructor quality, safety, environmental cleanliness, and the uniqueness of marine activities. The value perceived varied with the motive of the visit, ranging from relaxation and family togetherness to knowledge and a sense of achievement.

“Overall, the price I paid was very commensurate with the quality of the experience provided.” (IG4)

This pattern confirms value as a trade-off between the benefits obtained and the sacrifices of cost, time, and risk (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997). In the premium resort context, hedonic benefits of pleasure and tranquillity combined with utilitarian benefits of efficiency, since a range of activities was available in one location, so that perceived value was formed from the combination of both. This resonates with recent marine tourism findings that destination value mediates the path from experiential quality to satisfaction and post-visit behaviour (Fahlevi, 2025).

Revisit Intention and the Phenomenon of Variety-Seeking

Most guests expressed a strong intention to return, with comfort, staff professionalism, and natural beauty as the main drivers. The barrier most frequently mentioned was cost, which functioned as a perceived behavioural control.

“I plan to return because of the excellent marine activities and high-quality service. The only barrier is cost, but I think the experience is worth the price.” (DG2)

On the other hand, a segment of international guests displayed a pattern of variety-seeking. They acknowledged their satisfaction, yet tended to want to try a new destination on their next trip rather than return to the same place. Interestingly, this group still expressed a willingness to recommend Renaissance Okinawa to others.

“Although I was satisfied with my stay at Renaissance Okinawa, I might not return because I want to try something different elsewhere. Even so, I would certainly recommend it.” (IG2)

These findings show that revisit intention and recommendation intention do not always align. The positive attitude and subjective norm that nurture recommendation can coexist with a perceived behavioural control in the form of a desire to try new experiences that restrains revisit (Ajzen, 1991). This pattern complements the understanding that the antecedents of revisit intention are not determined by satisfaction alone (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006), and it aligns with recent studies showing that memorability, nostalgia, and destination attachment shape revisit intention beyond mere satisfaction (Lu, Lai, Liu, & Wang, 2022; Lin, 2024).

Positive Recommendation and Electronic Word of Mouth

All guests expressed a willingness to recommend the destination, with specific targets such as couples, families with children, and friends who enjoy diving. What they most often shared was the beauty of the sea, the quality of service, and the friendliness of staff. Some guests had not yet written a review, but planned to do so on platforms such as Google and TripAdvisor.

“I most often talk about the beauty of the sea and the friendly service of the staff. I have not written a review yet, but I plan to share my experience on Google or TripAdvisor.”

(DG1)

This willingness to recommend and to write reviews reinforces the cycle of digital influence, because the expectations of future guests are in turn shaped by the reviews of previous guests. This pattern aligns with the model that links image, memorable experience, and revisit intention in destination marketing (Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018).

Thematic Matrix and Integrative Discussion

Cross-case synthesis reveals convergence on two points, namely the clarity of the water and the distinctively Japanese quality of service as the core of the experience that determines satisfaction. At the same time there is meaningful divergence. Domestic Japanese guests emphasised safety and restoration, while a segment of international guests emphasised thrill and novelty, as also observed by staff. The gap in perception between guests and staff on the aspects of equipment and programme capacity is an important operational note. A summary of the themes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Matrix, Summary of Findings, and Theoretical Framework.

Question Cluster	Theme	Summary of Main Findings	Theoretical Framework
Push and pull motivation	Okinawa Blue as dominant pull	Water clarity and ecosystem uniqueness were the main reasons for choice over domestic and other tropical options	Push-Pull Theory (Dann, 1977; Kim et al., 2003)
Push and pull motivation	Escape and restoration	The need to escape work pressure was prominent among domestic Japanese guests	Push-Pull Theory (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979)
Push and pull motivation	Brand trust and digital information	Marriott reputation and online reviews lowered risk and shaped pre-arrival expectations	Destination image (Chen & Tsai, 2007); TPB (Ajzen, 1991)

Experience quality	Assurance, empathy, and safety	Professional and adaptive instructors and high safety standards, with an equipment note from staff	SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Mok & Armstrong, 1995)
Experience quality	Memorable experiences	Snorkelling, the dolphin programme, and reflective moments united knowledge, involvement, hedonism, and refreshment	MTE (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Kim, 2014); Pine & Gilmore (1999)
Experience quality	Omotenashi and synergy	Comfortable accommodation and sincere hospitality reinforced the marine experience as one whole	Perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988)
Experience quality	Sustainability awareness	Conservation practices enriched the experience, while climate and visitation pressure concerned staff	Sustainable marine tourism (Orams, 1999; Garrod & Fennell, 2004)
Loyalty	Commensurate premium value	Price judged commensurate through a combination of hedonic and utilitarian benefits	Perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997)
Loyalty	Revisit and variety-seeking	Revisit intention was strong, yet some international guests sought variety while still recommending	TPB (Ajzen, 1991); Um et al. (2006)
Loyalty	Recommendation and e-WOM	All guests were willing to recommend and planned to write online reviews	MTE and revisit (Zhang et al., 2018)

The findings offer several conceptual contributions. First, the dominance of the natural resource pull factor reinforces earlier propositions in the premium resort context, which until now have been tested mainly at public nature destinations (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). Second, the memorable experience in premium marine tourism is cumulative and often carries a transformative dimension that moves beyond enjoyment, which extends understanding of memorable tourism experience (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Third, perceived value is formed from the integration of luxury hospitality with an authentic natural experience, which shows that the value proposition of a premium marine resort cannot be understood apart from its ecological context.

The study also raises two theoretical notes relevant for further development. Ecosystem sustainability appears not merely as a backdrop, but as a dimension of value that helps shape guest perception, which strengthens the argument for sustainable marine tourism in the premium segment (Orams, 1999). In addition, the difference in emphasis between domestic and international guests indicates a cross-cultural nuance in the evaluation of experience, consistent with the sensitivity of Japanese tourists to service consistency (Mok & Armstrong, 1995). Recent research on Japanese travellers further indicates a tendency to prioritise safety and a connection with nature while placing less emphasis on interaction with locals than Western travellers, which helps to explain the divergent emphases observed in this study (Nakajima & Oguchi, 2025; Mitsuhashi & Wada, 2025). On the practical side, the study identifies several actionable gaps, namely the limited

variety of activities, the frequent full booking of programmes, dependence on weather, the condition of some equipment, the limited multilingual pre-trip information, and the need for inclusivity such as the availability of halal food for Muslim travellers.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The choice of Hotel Renaissance Okinawa as a marine destination is formed through the interaction of internal drives and external appeal. The most prominent internal drive is the need to escape work pressure and to restore mental wellbeing, which is stronger among domestic Japanese guests. The most dominant external appeal is the clarity of the water and the uniqueness of the Okinawan marine ecosystem, reinforced by the reputation of the hotel network and by information circulating on social media and online reviews. These four elements operate simultaneously and reinforce one another in shaping the decision to visit.

The quality of the marine experience is understood by tourists as an integrated whole that joins professional marine service, memorable moments, comfortable accommodation, and the sincere hospitality that is distinctive to Japan. The dimensions of assurance and empathy in instructor service, the high standard of safety, and the water clarity that exceeded expectations were the main determinants of satisfaction. The most memorable experiences united knowledge, involvement, enjoyment, and refreshment, and in some tourists they evoked a sense of connection with nature and an awareness of marine conservation. Awareness of ecosystem sustainability further enriched the quality of the experience and strengthened the perception of a responsible destination.

Revisit and recommendation intentions are formed from satisfaction and from a premium value that is perceived as commensurate. Most tourists expressed a strong desire to return, with cost as the main barrier, while a segment of international tourists tended to seek new destinations. Even so, the willingness to recommend the destination was comprehensive, including among tourists who might not return. This finding affirms that recommendation intention can stand apart from revisit intention, so that positive recommendation and online reviews become important assets of loyalty for the sustainability of the destination reputation.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Hotel Management

Management is encouraged to expand the variety of marine activities and to add sessions and operating hours for popular programmes so that complaints about fully booked programmes can be reduced. The renewal of marine equipment and the provision of shaded rest areas should be prioritised on the basis of front-line staff observations. The preparation of alternative programmes during poor weather would maintain guest satisfaction on rainy days. Inclusivity of service should be strengthened, among others through the provision of halal food options for Muslim travellers and multilingual information support. Conservation programmes that involve guests directly should be developed so that educational and sustainability value becomes part of the experience proposition. Loyalty programmes and special packages for returning guests can strengthen revisit intention.

Suggestions for Regulators and Tourism Stakeholders in Okinawa

Tourism stakeholders are encouraged to strengthen the governance of the carrying capacity of the coral reef ecosystem, given the visitation pressure and the threat of rising sea temperature voiced by practitioners in the field. The provision of complete pre-trip information in several languages and improved transport accessibility would widen the reach of international tourists. Collaboration among the resort, marine research institutions, and the local government can position Okinawa as a model of sustainable premium marine tourism.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research is encouraged to test the relationships among the variables that emerged from these findings quantitatively, for example the influence of experience quality and perceived value on revisit and recommendation intentions in a larger sample. Comparative research across premium resorts in the Asia Pacific would strengthen the transferability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to capture the dynamics of sustainability perception as ecosystem conditions change. The limitations of this study lie in the limited number of informants and the contextual nature of the findings, so that generalisation should be undertaken with care.

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