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Factors Motivating Domestic Tourists to Visit Destinations within Cambodia During the Green Season

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Abstract.

This study investigates the primary push (socio-psychological) and pull (destination-based) factors influencing Cambodian domestic tourists' intentions to travel during the "Green Season". Despite the government's strategic promotion of this period, academic research on the specific motivations of local travelers remains scarce. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, involving in-depth interviews with 27 participants, including domestic travelers, tourism business owners, and employees of the Ministry of Tourism. Data were gathered through purposive non-probability sampling and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that primary push factors include the need for stress reduction, mental restoration, and social bonding with family and friends, and pull factors are driven by the aesthetic appeal of lush landscapes and waterfalls, coupled with economic incentives such as lower accommodation and food costs. The results suggest that the green season is perceived as a "value season" that fulfills both psychological and social needs through digital sharing. This research provides evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders to enhance year-round tourism sustainability in Cambodia.

Keywords: Domestic Tourist, Tourist Motivation, Push-Pull Factors, Green Season, Cambodia.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

The tourism industry contributed 7.5% of Cambodia's GDP in 2023. By 2029, the travel and tourist market is projected to grow to US\$348.00 million, with online sales accounting for 73% of total revenue (GoWithGuide, 2025). Growth in the services sector in Cambodia in 2025 and 2026 is expected to slow to 2.8% and 2.6%, respectively. In the first half of 2025, tourism continued to improve, with more visitors from the People's Republic of China. However, in the second half of the year and beyond, it is anticipated that persistent border tensions with Thailand will reduce tourism and have an impact on more general service activity (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2025), but in 2025, Cambodia also receive more than 5.5 million international tourists, a decrease of approximately 16.9% compared to 2024, which had 6.7 million. Despite a decline of more than 10% in the number of international tourists, international tourism revenue is estimated at \$3.7 billion in 2025, an increase of 3% from 2024 (Fresh News, 2026).

But travel within the nation has increased dramatically. A 20.1% increase over 2023, Cambodians made 22.52 million domestic trips in 2024, of which 18.20 million occurred during the high season and 4.32 million during the green season (Workshop at Ministry of Tourism, 12 May 2025). With 9.46 million visits from May to October, the "Visit Cambodia in the Green



Season" campaign's pilot program in 2025 demonstrated robust domestic tourism development, up roughly 64.7% from the same period in 2024 (Khmer Time, 12 Dec. 2025). The Kingdom of Cambodia uses the term "Green Season" to refer to the rainy or wet season, which is often characterized by higher rainfall and lush greenery and is considered the tourism season. "The initiative reinforces the idea that tourism can be a force for good when aligned with local interests by highlighting sustainable practices and encouraging community involvement in the tourism industry." (Khmer Times, 2 June 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tourist Motivation

Every tourist has more or less resources and wants to spend some of the money they have earned to go on vacation and someone people don't want to go without someone to guide or encourage them, but there must be some motivating factor that makes them want to leave home to go on vacation but it hard to determine why people travel and what they want to enjoy because a paradigm of tourism is constantly connected to people and human nature (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and one of the main factors influencing human behavior is motivation (Whyte, 2017). At the same time, for tourists, the motivation for them to want to travel to this or that place can be internal or external factors, or a combination of both (Mehmetoglu, 2011; Uysal, & Jurowski, 1994), that tourism marketers must do everything in their power to increase travelers' motivation in order to foster a favorable perception of the place (Pereira, et al.2022).

2.2 Push and Pull Theory

The push-pull theoretical framework is a widely accepted framework that explains why visitors choose one destination over others, as well as the experiences and activities they hope to engage in. When selecting a location, travelers typically categorize their options according to several factors, including self-motivation (push factor), perceptions of a destination's dominance (pull factor), and the time and money available (situational restrictions) (Said & Maryono-Maryon, 2018).

Push factor

Push factors are more important in understanding the need for holidays (Mehmetoglu, 2011). Domestic travelers are "pushed" toward tourism by their spare income, a sense of family unity, and the opportunity to unwind made possible by their employer's sponsorship (Bui, & Jolliffe, 2011) and the associations between ecotourism purpose and four travel motives—knowledge-seeking, self-development, excitement, and escape—are considerably strengthened by eco-destination image (Chi, & Pham, 2024), the psychological, societal, and individual demands that give rise to a desire to travel are referred to as push forces. They are intrinsic motivators that encourage people to venture outside of their homes and pursue novel experiences. It emphasizes escape from routine or stress, exploration and adventure, socialization, self-discovery and personal growth, prestige and status, rest and relaxation, cultural and educational experiences, religious or spiritual goals, and health and wellness (Crompton, 1979). This factor is also related to values, lifestyles, images, and personality characteristics of a tourist (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994)



Pull Factor

The most critical value can not be absent from a pull factor (Mehmetoglu, 2011). Usually, travelers' willingness to select a sustainable tourism destination was significantly influenced by motivation, place image, reputation, and local culture (Guha, et al. 2025) and local hospitality and services, trip cost and convenience, perceptions of a safe/secure environment, change in daily life environment, recreation and sporting activities, entertainment and drinking opportunities, personal and historical link, cultural and shopping services, unusual and distant vacation spot were also play an important role to encourage tourist (Sirakaya, & Mclellan, 1997). Moreover, street food and nostalgia play a major role in the development of positive behavioral intentions. Incorporating nostalgic features into the street food experience can be a huge potential for locations (Cankül & çıtak, 2025), and food festivals are also influenced by destination image (Crompton, 1979). Actually, destination brand image can not be absent in motivating tourists to visit any attractive destination ((Juliana, et al., 2023; Guha, et al. 2025) in which the relationship between behavioral intention and destination image is largely mediated by travel experience and moderated by media exposure (Nazir, et al., 2022) as mention by Keelson, et al., (2024), travelers use social media sites to learn about places, including reviews, suggestions, itineraries, and advice from other tourists. Travelers are encouraged to use social media platforms to further investigate and validate their selections when a destination offers a wealth of information through multiple channels, such as official tourism websites, travel blogs, or online forums. Furthermore, the beneficial effects of accessible information on social media use are consistent with the evolving nature of travel arrangements. Due to the widespread use of smartphones and the ease with which they can access the internet, tourists are increasingly using social media to obtain up-to-date information and insights from other travelers, thereby improving their overall experience. Moreover, travel agents' marketing may influence travelers' motivation, but they were also searching for affordable vacations and the weather has an impact on travel as well (Bui, & Jolliffe, 2011) and pull factor also focus on constraints, marketing mix, influences of family and reference groups, social class, household-related variables such as life-style, power structure, and group decision-making style (Uysal, & Jurowski, 1994).

2.3 Dissecting the "Pull" of the Green Season in Cambodia

The "Green Season" in Cambodia (May to October) possesses specific attributes that function as powerful pull factors for the domestic market. The most heavily advertised factor is the visual transformation of the natural environment, characterized by vibrant emerald rice paddies and lush jungles. Historical monuments, such as those in the Angkor region, take on a distinct aesthetic appeal as temple stones become covered in moss and lichens. Beyond aesthetics, pragmatic and financial incentives are central to the appeal. Domestic travelers are attracted by "value for money" propositions, with substantial savings of up to 30% to 50% on flights, lodging, and tours compared to the peak dry season. Furthermore, the lack of large crowds is a significant practical advantage for those seeking tranquility. Finally, the season offers unique experiential opportunities, such as observing the Chol Vossa (Buddhist rain retreat) or experiencing the traditional rice-planting cycle (Living Cambodia, 2025).



3. Method

3.1 Research Design

Since the purpose of this research is to understand the reasons behind travel decisions, to see the world from the viewpoint of domestic visitors in Cambodia. This study was structured as a qualitative case study (Yin, 2014). Travel motivation is one of those complicated, individualized, and culturally rooted phenomena that are best explored using a qualitative approach rather than relying solely on quantitative indicators (Dahles et al., 2020). This methodology, which provides a rich, comprehensive narrative that addresses the main research questions while honoring Cambodia's cultural and social context, also enables the identification of emerging themes (ResearchGate, 2024).

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

A phenomenological research design will be employed in this investigation. In this case, the decision was to travel within Cambodia during the green (or rainy) season. By emphasizing participants' firsthand experiences, perceptions, and emotions, this design will enable the study to identify the fundamental reasons and significance people attach to their travels during the green season over the last year. For this study, several tourist attractions in Cambodia were selected, including Battambang province, Siem Reap province, Preah Sihanouk province, Koh Kong province, Pousat province, Mondulkiri province, and Phnom Penh city.

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to pick the participants (Patton, 2015), with gender, positions, and organizational factors considered. This non-probability strategy entails intentionally selecting persons with specialized knowledge or experience relevant to the study topic (ResearchGate, 2024). The study will employ the following inclusion criteria: be a Cambodian citizen and have taken at least one domestic trip during the green season (May-October) in the previous year, with a sample size of twenty.

Table 1. Participants' profile

No	Code	Gender	Position
1	P1	M	Private company staff
2	P2	M	Company Manager
3	P3	F	Public officer
4	P4	F	Private company staff
5	P5	F	Public officer
6	P6	F	Private company staff
7	P7	M	Public officer
8	P8	F	Students
9	P9	F	Public officer
10	P10	M	Students
11	P11	F	Business owner
12	P12	M	Private company staff
13	P13	F	Private company staff



No	Code	Gender	Position
14	P14	F	Students
15	P15	M	Students
16	P16	M	Public officer
17	P17	M	Business owner
18	P18	F	Students
19	P19	F	Public officer
20	P20	F	Business owner
21	P21	M	Private company staff
22	P22	M	Public officer
23	P23	F	Public officer
24	P24	F	Private company staff
25	P25	M	Public officer
26	P26	F	Private company staff
27	P27	F	Business owner

3.3 Data Collection Method

Interviews are anticipated to run 45 to 60 minutes, be conducted in Khmer to ensure participants' comfort and clarity, and be documented and audio-recorded with a consent form. Additionally, the Semi-Structured Interview Guide is the primary tool for data collection. The face-to-face interviews will be guided by the following five question areas. Their open-ended format encourages participants to provide in-depth, narrative answers. The first part refers to introduction & general travel behavior and its objective refers to build rapport and understand the participant's general travel context.); second part focus on exploring push motivations (The "Why" behind travel) that its objective is to understand the internal, socio-psychological drivers for travel.); third sector emphasize on exploring pull motivations (The appeal of the green season destination) and its objective focus on understand the specific attributes of the destination and the season that attracted the participant.); fourth part of question mention about decision-making and perceptions with its objective refers to understand the planning process and how participants weigh pros and cons.)and last refers to concluding question

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to examine the data. The following are part of this methodical process: First, getting to know the data: Reading the transcripts several times over to fully understand the material, second, making the first codes: methodically locating and classifying intriguing data elements that are pertinent to the study questions, third refers to look for themes: Organizing the codes into possible broad themes, fourth, examining the themes: Making a thematic map and determining whether the themes apply to the coded extracts and the complete dataset, fifth, specifying and labeling themes: continuous examination to improve the details of every theme and the narrative the analysis conveys as a whole, and last, putting together the report.



3.5 Ethical Research

To ensure the quality and validity of the findings, this study will adhere to the reliability principles for qualitative research established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This will be accomplished through credibility, ensuring the findings are a credible interpretation of the data, which will be enhanced by member verification and transferability (presenting results to participants to verify accuracy). By providing a "thick description" of the participants and the environment, readers can assess the validity and applicability of the results in other circumstances. Moreover, Confirmation was used to maintain a precise and comprehensive audit trail that includes raw data, transcripts, and notes on the analysis process, ensuring that the research process is logical, traceable, and documented.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Participants' Profile

The study recruited 27 research participants to explore the motivations behind domestic travel during Cambodia's green season. The demographic composition and travel behaviors of the sample are detailed in Table 1 below. The sample is predominantly female, representing approximately 60% of the total respondents. In terms of travel frequency, the data indicates that the majority of participants are frequent domestic travelers, with nearly 30% visiting destinations two to three times and over 25% traveling four to six times annually. Regarding professional backgrounds, the largest groups identified were public officers (33.33%) and private company staff (29.63%). This distribution suggests that the research findings are closely aligned with the travel habits of Cambodia's urban professional and working classes. Furthermore, the data reveal a strong preference for group-based travel. Domestic tourists are most likely to travel with friends (44.44%) or family members (29.63%). These findings are significant for understanding travel motivation, as they suggest that the primary drivers of these journeys are social bonding, relationship building, and collective experiences suitable for family or peer groups.

Table 2. Profile of participants

Factor	Value	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	11	40.74%
	Female	16	59.26%
Frequency of Visit	1 time	2	7.41%
	2 to 3 times	8	29.63%
	4-5 times	2	7.41%
	4-6 times	7	25.93%
	7-8 times	4	14.81%
	9 times	1	3.70%
	Over 10 times	1	3.70%
	Rarely	2	7.41%
Position (Occupation)	Public officer	9	33.33%



Factor	Value	Frequency	Percentage
	Private company Staff	8	29.63%
	Students	5	18.52%
	Business owner	4	14.81%
	Company manager	1	3.70%
Travel Companion	Friends	12	44.44%
	Family	8	29.63%
	Study Tour	5	18.52%
	Alone	2	7.41%

4.2 Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data indicate that the primary motivations (push factors) are deeply rooted in personal well-being, social connection, and an escape from the daily routine. Three main themes emerge from these codes. For the natural environment, and the financial benefits associated with visiting Cambodian destinations during the green season (often the low season). Two primary themes emerge from this pull factor data, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Thematic analysis of push and pull factors

Categories	Description	Codes	Theme
Push factor analysis	The fundamental need to strengthen bonds, create shared happy memories, and enhance social status through shared experiences	Reduce stress, relax, escape work, pressure, and absorb fresh air	Personal well-being and escape
	The inherent curiosity to discover new places, particularly those with natural beauty, and the derived satisfaction from capturing and sharing these discoveries.	Enhancing society, happy with family, close relationship	Social and relational needs
	The fundamental need to strengthen bonds, create shared happy memories, and enhance social status through shared experiences.	Exploring new places; seek out on Facebook/TikTok/YouTube and share good photos/videos of attractive views.	Exploration and novelty seeking
Pull factor analysis	The aesthetic and sensory qualities unique to the rainy season focus on lushness, natural beauty, tranquility, and a clean environment.	Aesthetic appeal, quiet, fresh, waterfall, green view, fresh atmosphere, clean.	Distinct green season appeal (The 'Fresh Experience')
	The financial benefits and logistical upsides of traveling during the low season, particularly related to cost savings and reduced crowds.	Good prices for accommodation and food, low prices for goods, and no growth in tourism.	Economic and practical advantages



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The synthesis of qualitative data follows the established framework in the tourism literature, in which push factors initiate the desire to travel and pull factors determine the choice of destination (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981).

4.3 Discussion

The findings of this study on Cambodian domestic tourist motivations during the green season provide valuable insights into the interplay between personal needs and destination attributes. The model confirms that domestic travel is a complex activity driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Fodness, 1994). The dominance of the personal well-being and escape theme aligns with general tourist motivation theory, which holds that escaping the mundane and seeking psychological rejuvenation are fundamental drives (Dann, 1981). The codes "reduce stress" and "work pressure" suggest that for the dominant demographic of officers and company staff, the green season break serves a critical therapeutic function. This finding supports studies that classify escape motivations as a core component of travel demand (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Motivations related to social and relational needs ("happy with family," "close relationship") were extremely strong. This reflects the collectivist culture often observed in Asian societies, where group travel (with friends or family) is prioritized over solo experiences (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Therefore, the travel destination is primarily a setting for relationship enhancement rather than solely for individual pursuits. The fact that most respondents traveled with family or friends reinforces this cultural orientation. The most compelling finding concerns the pull factors, particularly the synergy between the distinct green-season appeal and the economic and practical advantages. In which aesthetic and sensory appeal play an important role in attracting tourists. The strong preference for "green view," "waterfall," and "fresh atmosphere" indicates that rain is perceived as enhancing natural beauty rather than as an impediment (Gössling et al., 2012). Tourists are intentionally seeking the lush, vibrant landscape of the low season. And, in terms of visitor attraction, it cannot be absent from the Power of Affordability sector. The repeated mention of "good price of accommodation" and "low price of goods" shows that the green season is leveraged as the value season. This affordability makes frequent domestic travel financially viable for the working class and students, directly linking the pull of a lower cost to the push factor of frequent relaxation (Oakes, 1993). And another one, social media as a push-pull bridge. The code "sharing good photo/video" acts as a bridge. Tourists are pushed to explore new places for novel experiences, and they are pulled to the visually attractive "green view" to create shareable content, fulfilling both the novelty-seeking drive and the social recognition need (Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2015).

5. Conclusion

This study, based on in-depth interviews with 27 domestic tourists, reveals that travel motivation during Cambodia's green season is a strategic choice driven by a powerful synergy among personal, social, and economic factors. The primary incentive is psychological and physical restoration, as domestic tourism serves as an essential antidote to the stresses of urban professional life for officers and company employees. Furthermore, the green season is regarded as the "value season," where the aesthetic appeal of nature—such as waterfalls and lush green views—is accessed at a significantly lower cost. The findings also emphasize the collectivist nature of Cambodian travel, where journeys are primarily social activities aimed at establishing and maintaining "happy" relationships with family and friends. Finally, social



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media acts as a significant driver, with the urge to document and share photogenic "green views" fulfilling a secondary need for social recognition.

6. Recommendations

To capitalize on the growing domestic market during the green season, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed for tourism stakeholders. Marketing the period from May to October as the "green gold season" with clear discount structures for lodging, food, and transportation to encourage return visits. Digital marketing plays a vital role in attracting tourists by collaborating with local influencers to promote photogenic areas and create designated "selfie spots" to facilitate social media (Facebook/TikTok/YouTube) sharing. Actually, management methods such as time-slotting to regulate visitor numbers at popular sites should press the "quiet" and "low-crowd" pull factor identified by travelers. Local authorities should prioritize maintaining safe, all-weather road access to popular nature sites, such as waterfalls, to reduce traveler risk during heavy rains.

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