African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Year 2025, Vol. 14 No. 1 pp. 16-24
ISSN: 2223-814X

Exploring the Psychological Drivers of Adventure Tourism in South Africa: Travel Motives and Repeat Participation

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Abstract

Adventure tourism is a growing segment of the global tourism industry, blending physical challenges, nature, and cultural exchange. This study examines the psychological drivers motivating adventure tourists in South Africa and the factors influencing repeat participation, focusing on thrill-seeking, personal achievement, and social interaction. Using a quantitative approach, data from South African adventure tourists (2020-2021) was analysed through various motivational models to assess how travel motives impact repeat engagement. The findings reveal that thrill-seeking and personal achievement are central motivators, with participants often using adventure tourism as a break from routine. Those engaging in hard adventure activities showed higher levels of repeat participation, driven by a desire to escape daily stress and pursue new challenges. The study also found that overcoming fears and mastering new skills significantly contribute to self-discovery and personal growth, as reflected in a high Cronbach alpha for the personal growth factor ($\alpha = 0.95$). These insights have practical implications for tourism operators aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and retention by balancing risk and safety in their offerings. This study contributes to the understanding of adventure tourism motivation, providing valuable perspectives for both industry stakeholders and scholars exploring evolving tourist behaviours.

Keywords Adventure tourism; travel motives, repeat participation, psychological drivers, tourist behaviour

How to cite this article: Mba, F., Venter, D. & Erasmus, T. (2025). Exploring the Psychological Drivers of Adventure Tourism in South Africa: Travel Motives and Repeat Participation. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 14(1):16-24. DOI: https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.581

Introduction

According to Chauke et al. (2024), adventure tourism was a small, inaccessible sector in tourism but has grown into one of the most rapidly expanding sectors within the broader tourism industry. The latter growth is driven primarily by global interest in unique and physically demanding activities that have led to the commodification of adventure tourism (Giddy, 2020). According to Grand View Research (2024), the global adventure tourism market was estimated at USD 406.12 billion in 2024, with a compound annual growth of 16.8% projected between 2025 and 2030. According to Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa (2018), adventure tourism contributes significantly to national economies, with Chauke et al. (2024) remarking that the success of adventure tourism in Africa appears promising. Some 8.8% of tourist arrivals to South Africa during 2023 were for adventure purposes, constituting 722 900 out of 8.2 million (South Africa.net, 2024). Furthermore, international adventure tourists visiting South Africa stay five nights longer and spend three times more than other types of international tourists (South Africa.net, 2024). Adventure tourists also accounted for 23% of paid bed nights in South Africa. Adventure tourism in South Africa combines all the required elements of physical exertion, perceived risk, and engagement in a natural setting, which create an appealing environment for domestic and international tourists. Research by Janowski et al. (2021) revealed that the primary drivers of adventure participation include feelings of thrill, excitement, challenge, and the opportunity for personal growth. These primary drivers align with several motivational theories in tourism, such as the push and pull model (Dann, 1977), which suggests that intrinsic motivations such as self-improvement and personal challenge *push* individuals to engage in adventure activities, while the unique features of adventure destinations *pull* tourists who seek novel experiences (Duong et al., 2023). Furthermore, Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model (1982) highlights how adventure tourism meets both the need to escape everyday routine as well as pursue novelty, which makes for an attractive option enticing repeat participation to rejuvenate and achieve a feeling of accomplishment.

Lötter & Welthagen (2020) highlight the wellness benefits derived from adventure tourism, including emotional rejuvenation, physical fitness, and improved mental health, underscoring the broader lifestyle benefits of engaging in these activities. Tourism scholars have increasingly focused on the psychological motivations that underlie tourists' decisions to engage in adventure activities (Ghanem & Elgammal, 2017). Motivation in tourism has long been understood as a critical determinant of participation, experience, and satisfaction (Giddy & Rogerson, 2018). According to Carvache-Franco et al. (2022), motivations for adventure tourism include learning, social interaction, relaxation, and competence mastery, with relaxation being the most influential predictor of return, recommendation, and positive tourism experiences. Therefore, repeat participation, a crucial aspect of adventure tourism, is shaped by factors such as consumer satisfaction, trust in the destination, and the quality of the experience (Bhattacharjee et al., 2024). By examining these psychological drivers and patterns of repeat visitation, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the motivations and experiences that make adventure tourism in South Africa a compelling choice. This article delves into the psychological models that explain adventure tourists' motives and investigates how these motives influence decisions to repeatedly engage in adventure tourism activities.

Literature review

Adventure tourism

Historically, adventure tourism can be traced back to the mid-19th century, when early explorers embarked on expeditions to remote areas, driven by scientific exploration and personal challenges (Rantalaa et al., 2016). Pomfret & Bramwell (2016) noted the complexity of adventure tourism research due to difficulties in defining adventure tourism and because of contradictory views about the range of activities involved. Likewise, Chauke et al. (2024) stated that diverse definitions of adventure tourism exist, which illustrate the different understandings and perspectives of the type of tourism. More studies are looking into the commercialisation of adventure activities, which is believed to dilute the true essence of adventure (Deb et al., 2024; Giddy, 2020; Mckay, 2016; Zheng, 2018). The focus of many tour companies is the marketing of packaged adventure tours where risks associated are managed (Deb et al., 2024). What further blurs the lines between adventure and other tourism types, such as ecotourism, is the types of activities and the environments wherein they occur (Giddy & Webb, 2018; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016). These tourism types may overlap as both involve air-, land- and water-based activities; however, adventure tourism is distinguished by its unique elements, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Unique elements identified in adventure tourism

Definition elements	Venter (2017)	Giddy (2018)	Giddy & Webb (2018)	McKay (2014; 2018)	Janowski et al. (2021)	Van Vuren (2022)	Commonality among authors
Outdoor pursuit	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Physical exertion; physically demanding; challenging	X	X		X	X	X	5
Personal growth; personal accomplishment				X		X	2
Excitement; exhilarating		X		X	X	X	4
Novelty			X		X		2
Risk	X			X	X	X	4
Uncertainty	X			X			2
Authors' composition							

Regarding Table 1, it is evident that the most frequently mentioned elements were outdoor pursuits (n = 6) and physical activities (n = 5), followed by excitement (n = 4) and risk (n = 4). McKay (2018) defines adventure tourism as any outdoor pursuit that involves physical exertion and has the potential for personal growth and excitement, emphasising its experiential value. Similarly, Van Vuuren (2022) states that adventure tourism provides exciting experiences that are physically demanding and lead to personal accomplishment through achieving goals in challenging environments. According to Janowski et al. (2021), adventure tourism extends beyond mere physical activities to encompass psychological dimensions of risk, excitement, and novelty. Van Vuuren (2022) found that most scholars agree that adventure tourism is characterised by risk, distinguishing it from everyday experiences while offering excitement and enjoyment. McKay (2014) describes the risk, uncertainty, and challenges associated with adventure tourism as its primary appeal, as it elicits strong emotions in the form of fear and excitement. Venter (2017) notes that adventure tourism consists of a combination of elements found in leisure, tourism, travel, sport, and recreation, where the latter is merged with physically challenging activities involving elements of physical and emotional risk and uncertainty performed by individuals or groups of tourists in man-made or natural environments. Furthermore, he argues that factors such as danger levels, stress, anxiety, fear, and excitement are contingent on the skill level of adventure tourists. McKay (2018) highlights that the perception of risk is crucial as participants do not wish to be exposed to real danger. The term 'adventure' can be traced to the Latin word *ad venjo*, meaning 'whatever comes'. This is particularly relevant as risk and uncertainty are significant driving forces behind adventure tourism (Venter, 2017). Several authors (Beckman et al., 2017; Mba, 2022; McKay, 2018; Michela et al., 2017) point out that adventure tourism has expanded to include both hard and soft adventure activities.

According to the South African Adventure Industry Association (SAAIA, 2021), hard adventure necessitates professional guides and advanced skills, catering to thrill-seekers confronted with physical and mental challenges in extreme settings (George, 2019). Mohamed et al. (2018) and Giddy & Webb (2018) echo this sentiment, emphasising the importance of high skill levels for participation in high-risk adventure tourism activities, which could impact a participant's safety and well-being. Examples of hard adventure include caving, mountain climbing, rock climbing, skydiving, and scuba diving. In contrast, soft adventure, such as wildlife safaris, requires minimal technical skills and attracts those seeking nature engagement without high risks or challenges, thereby making it widely accessible (SAAIA, 2021; Nyikana, 2017). Chauke et al. (2024) and Mohamed et al. (2018) note that soft adventure requires no specialised skill sets to participate, only safety equipment and professional guidance when the activity is prescribed. Van Vuuren (2022) observes that some adventure tourism activities can be categorised as hard or soft depending on where, when, and how they are conducted. For instance, kayaking on a calm river is considered soft adventure, while undertaking the same activity through fast-flowing rapids is deemed a hard adventure activity. The psychological appeal of adventure tourism is equally significant, as tourists often seek experiences that challenge their comfort zones and provide opportunities for self-discovery. As Lötter & Welthagen (2020) note, adventure activities enhance wellness by fulfilling core needs such as autonomy and competence, as well as connecting tourists to nature. Various authors (Buckley, 2021; Mackenzie & Hodge, 2020; Mackenzie et al., 2021; Hodge & Filep, 2021) have highlighted that adventure tourism bolsters psychological well-being by satisfying fundamental psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and fostering a connection with nature. Tourists are motivated not only by physical challenges but also by the emotional satisfaction derived from overcoming obstacles (Thiumsak & Ruangkan, 2016), building confidence (Truckey, 2022), and engaging with new environments (Mohamed et al., 2018).

Models of travel motives

A variety of psychological, social, and environmental factors drive tourists' travel motives. Several models have been developed to better understand the complex interplay of these motives in tourism, namely the push and pull model (Dann, 1977), Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model (Iso-Ahola, 1982) and the integral approach to motivation (Wilber, 1997).

Push and pull model

Originally proposed by Dann (1977), the push and pull model remains a cornerstone in tourism motivation research, with recent studies emphasising its adaptability to diverse travel contexts. The model distinguishes between push factors (internal motivations that *push* individuals to travel) and pull factors (external attributes of a destination that *pull* travellers toward it). Push factors, i.e. intrinsic motivations, drive individuals to escape their routines, seek novelty, or engage in self-exploration (Giddy, 2018). These factors often reflect personal desires such as self-improvement, skill acquisition, relaxation, and socialisation. In adventure tourism, individuals may be pushed by the desire to challenge themselves, develop new skills, or improve their physical fitness, as seen in statements such as *"Adventure activities help me challenge myself*" (Reid & Kampman, 2020) or *"I participated in adventure activities to acquire skills"* (Reid & Kampman, 2020). These intrinsic desires also push individuals to seek new social interactions as reflected in the question, *I participated in adventure activities to gain social interactions and relationships"* (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). Furthermore, push factors include psychological motives, such as escaping from unhappiness, reducing stress, and improving mental health. This aligns with responses like *"I participated in adventure activities to escape from unhappiness"* (Giddy & Webb, 2017). For example, Chinese tourists to Melbourne prioritise resting, relaxing, and family activities as key motivations (Soldatenko et al., 2023). Similarly, tourists visiting Oluminrin Waterfalls in Nigeria are driven by socialisation and the need to escape from work (Arowosafe et al., 2021). Pull factors, conversely, pertain to the external attributes of a destination, including its cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and overall image. These factors appeal to individuals' intrinsic motivations by providing opportunities for the experiences they desire. For example, Giddy & Rogerson (2018) emphasise New Zealand's success in leveraging its natural attractions, marketing them as exciting and adventurous, which resonates with the question *"I travel to adventure destinations to experience the natural environment"*. The natural beauty of the Changbai Mountain Biosphere Reserve in China is another example, attracting tourists due to its environmental conservation focus and natural landscapes (Duong et al., 2023). Pull factors, therefore, complement the internal motivations by providing an attractive destination with features that satisfy their psychological needs. At the same time, those seeking personal fulfilment might be drawn to destinations that offer unique and enriching experiences (*"I travel to adventure destinations to ensure my personal fulfilment"*).

Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model

The Iso-Ahola escape-seeking model (1982) examines the dual motivations of escaping routine and seeking new experiences. Adventure tourism closely aligns with this model, offering activities that provide both physical and psychological challenges while enabling tourists to break free from the monotony of daily life. Activities such as mountaineering and skydiving exemplify this dynamic, where participants discover opportunities for personal mastery and self-discovery. As Kuroda et al. (2017) suggest, these activities fulfil a dual need: the relief from everyday stress and the pursuit of novelty and achievement, making them particularly appealing within the context of adventure tourism. Snepenger et al. (2006) report that personal escape is one of the cornerstones of the Iso-Ahola escape-seeking model. For instance, tourists motivated by personal escape may be attracted to a remote destination that offers peace and isolation (*"I travel to adventure destinations for personal escape"*). Wan (2017) postulates that tourists seek adventure activities for intrinsic rewards and to escape everyday problems, tension, routines, and stress (*"I participated in adventure activities to alleviate personal stress"*). Other intrinsic motivations include prestige, fitness, and self-exploration, all of which can be key drivers of adventure tourism (*"I participated in adventure activities to gain prestige"* or *"for fitness"*) (Jawabreh, 2017).

Integral approach to motivation

Ryan & Deci (2020) describe integrated motivation as behaviour undertaken to attain an external reward while remaining aligned with an individual's interests and values. The integral approach to motivation builds upon earlier theories by exploring various dimensions of tourist motivation, which encompass psychological, physiological, and social factors (McKay, 2016) (*"I participated in adventure activities for self-exploration"*). In adventure tourism, these dimensions are crucial as tourists pursue physical challenges (e.g. trekking) (*"Adventure activities help to improve individual motivation"*), psychological growth (e.g. overcoming fears) (*"Adventure activities help me challenge myself"*), and social interaction (e.g. shared experiences in group adventures) (*"Adventure activities help me to improve crew motivation"*). Social elements are particularly significant since adventure tourists frequently cherish camaraderie and connection with others, fostering a sense of community and encouraging repeat participation (Janowski et al., 2021) (*"I participated in adventure activities to gain social interactions and relationships"*). These collective experiences not only enhance the immediate enjoyment of the activities but also establish lasting social bonds that influence future travel decisions. The push and pull model (Dann, 1977) serves as the foundational framework for understanding how intrinsic (push) and extrinsic (pull) factors affect individuals' travel motives. In adventure tourism, push factors such as thrill, personal achievement, and self-improvement are particularly important, as participants are driven by a desire to challenge themselves (Reid & Kampman, 2020). Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model (1982) further complements this by exploring how participants simultaneously seek to escape everyday stress while seeking novel, emotionally fulfilling experiences. This aligns with the findings of this study, where repeat participants reported higher

satisfaction when they felt both physically and mentally challenged. The integral approach to motivation (Wilber, 1997) provides a holistic view, integrating psychological, physiological, and social dimensions. By integrating these models, researchers can better understand the complex motivations driving adventure tourists, enabling destinations to craft experiences that resonate deeply with their target audience. Furthermore, the models discussed provide the basis for understanding how travel motives influence repeat participation.

Repeat participation in adventure tourism

Due to the rapid growth in the tourism industry's adventure sector, adventure activities have become increasingly commercialised (Mackay, 2016:3). This commercialisation has shifted the focus of adventure activities towards post-adventure, commercialised, and guided experiences (Giddy, 2018:42). Gardiner & Kwek (2017) and Zheng (2018:25) note that the notion of true adventure has been diluted by commercialisation in adventure tourism, as supported by Gardiner & Kwek (2017:498). According to Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa (2018:219), modern adventure tourism frequently lacks its core elements – risk, challenge, novelty, excitement, and exploration – which are essential for creating authentic emotional contrasts and escapism. Mason et al. (2016) argue that, unlike other products and services, where risk discourages purchases, the inherent risk in adventure tourism may encourage tourists to return, particularly if their safety is assured *("I will redo adventure activities only if there is an improvement in safety management"*). Gibby & Webb (2017) state that for hard adventure tourists engaging in adrenaline-driven activities such as bungee jumping, the primary motivation stems from the associated risks (*"I prefer participating in adventure activities with more risk"*). The telic-paratelic theory explains the emotional states that drive repeat participation (Chandel et al., 2018). This theory suggests that individuals alternate between goal-oriented (telic) states and fun-seeking (paratelic) states (Chandel et al., 2018). Adventure tourists who can balance these states during their experiences report greater satisfaction and are more likely to return for future adventures. Mackenzie et al. (2013) conducted qualitative interviews with white-water surfing novices to demonstrate how participants alternated between telic (serious) and paratelic (playful) states, particularly in challenging rapids. These dynamic shifts enabled individuals to manage risk, maintain focus, and ultimately enhance their enjoyment and motivation for further participation in adventure activities. Optimal psychological experiences, also referred to as flow, occur when adventure tourists achieve the highest level of satisfaction during energetic participation, encouraging repeat visits (Giddy & Webb, 2018:2127).

Amuquandoh (2017) discovered that satisfaction and destination image are significant factors influencing behavioural intentions, including social motives (*"I repeat adventure activities for socialisation"*). Baniya et al. (2017) revealed that the characteristics of adventure destinations can shape tourists' perceived quality, thereby impacting their satisfaction and intentions to engage in future activities (*"I repeat adventure activities to maintain my prestige"*). Usamah & Anuar (2017:159) indicate that key factors such as emotional responses, environmental elements, and satisfaction strongly influence the intention to return to adventure destinations. Repeat participation in adventure tourism is influenced by a complex interplay of satisfaction, emotional engagement, and the overall experience. Tourists who have positive, fulfilling experiences are more likely to return. Satisfaction encompasses both the activity's thrill and the overall experience's quality (Mason et al., Gos & Moretti, 2016). Operators who provide well-managed and exhilarating adventures can foster emotional bonds with tourists, thereby increasing loyalty and repeat visitation. Baniya et al. (2017:24) noted that the travel motives of adventure tourists and their perception of risk can significantly affect their intention to participate again (*"I repeat adventure activities to satisfy my previously unmet expectations"*). Thiumsak & Ruangkan (2016) remarked that the three phases of tourist experiences during visits – pre-visitation, visitation, and post-visitation – determine their motivation for repeat visits and participation in adventure tourism activities (*"I visit adventure destinations to do something different from my daily activities"*). Furthermore, they point out that the motivation for repeated visits is often linked to the satisfaction derived from past experiences and the fulfilment of expectations during earlier visits (*"I repeat adventure activities because they previously satisfied my expectations"*).

Methodology

This study employed a purposive sampling method as it specifically targeted individuals who had participated in adventure tourism activities in South Africa during 2020 and 2021. The survey was available online and shared via a researcher-built Facebook page titled *South African Adventure Tourism Research* (SAATR). Coincidentally, the latter would prove to be the most appropriate due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as completion thereof was possible remotely. A link to the survey was also shared among various adventure tourism Facebook pages. Only participants who were older than 18 and took part in an adventure tourism activity during the preceding three years were eligible to respond. The most apt sampling method was snowball sampling, in which respondents were encouraged to share the survey link within their adventure networks. The latter assisted in reaching a wider pool of potential participants in a short time. A target of 400 respondents was envisaged, with a total of 396 complete responses gathered, which formed the basis of the statistical analysis. The online self-administered questionnaire was designed and hosted in Google Forms. The latter consisted of four sections (A-D), namely demographics (Section A), travel motivation (Section B), risk perceptions (Section C) and repeat participation intentions (Section D). Responses in Sections B, C and D were measured on a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). To ensure validity and reliability, the measuring instrument was pre-tested with 10 participants. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi software, with descriptive statistics summarising demographic characteristics. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) identified underlying dimensions of travel motives, while t-tests compared responses between hard and soft adventure tourists. ANOVA tested for significant differences based on demographic factors such as

gender and age. Before commencement, the study was submitted to and approved by the Vaal University Ethics Committee, which assigned the study an ethics clearance number (FREC/HS/26/02/2021/6.4.2).

Data analysis

The factor loadings, presented in Tables 1 and 2, were rotated using a direct Oblimin method with Kaiser normalisation. Furthermore, principal axis extraction (Revelle, 2019) was applied during the analysis. The data was analysed using Jamovi for Windows, version 2.3 (Jamovi, 2022), which generated the factor structures and results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). This analysis produced factor loadings without any cross-loading concerns. The EFA was conducted to identify latent variables and underlying relationships between the measured variables, as assessed through a Likert scale. A five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) was employed, following the recommendations of DeVellis (2012). According to DeVellis (2012), a Cronbach alpha (α) coefficient exceeding 0.7 is the minimum threshold for acceptable reliability when using a Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha, a widely used measure of internal consistency, categorises reliability as follows: < 0.5 = unacceptable, > 0.5 = poor, > 0.6 = questionable, > 0.7 = acceptable, > 0.8 = good, and > 0.9 = excellent (George & Mallery, 2003:231). The factors identified in this study demonstrated satisfactory reliability based on their Cronbach alpha coefficients. Using Jamovi, two key statistical measures were calculated to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis: Bartlett's test of sphericity (BTS) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure. Pallant (2010) states that BTS is significant at $p < 0.001$, while KMO values should range between 0 and 1. The results of both tests in this study indicated statistical significance, with KMO values classified as good (> 0.7), great (> 0.8), or superb (> 0.9), according to Hutcheson & Sofroniou (1999). Tables 1 and 2 include statements addressing travel motives and repeat participation. These statements underwent principal component analysis, confirming the dataset's suitability for EFA. DeVellis (2012) suggests that factor loadings of ≥ 0.3 in the correlation matrix are appropriate and should be retained. Clark and Watson (1995) recommend that the mean inter-item correlation values for identified factors fall within the range of 0.15 to 0.55, though Pallant (2010) notes that for scales with fewer than ten items, the acceptable range increases to 0.48 to 0.76. Standardised regression coefficients (β) were used to determine the strength of the relationship between latent and manifest variables, as suggested by Rootenberg (2012:36). Pallant (2010:161) explains that β-values making a significant contribution to prediction are classified at $p \leq 0.05$, while β-values > 0.05 indicate no unique contribution.

Results

Respondents

The data analysis revealed that the sample predominantly consisted of male respondents (57%), with females comprising the remaining 43 per cent. Amuquandoh's (2017:165) studies in Ghana indicated that 57% of adventure tourists are male, with no significant differences in adventure activities. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 56 years, with a significant majority (59%) falling within the 18 to 25 age group, followed by 32 per cent aged 26 to 35 years, and the remaining nine per cent aged 36 years or older. Regarding home language, over two-thirds (69%) of respondents identified English as their primary language, followed by Afrikaans (12%), international languages (11%), and other indigenous African languages (8%). Regarding activity preference, soft adventure tourism accounted for slightly more than half of the responses (55%), while hard adventure tourism represented the remaining 45 per cent. Nearly half (43%) of respondents indicated that they take part in an adventure tourism activity at least once a year. This was followed by those who do so two (34%) and three (19%) times a year. The remaining four per cent indicated more frequent participation.

Exploratory factor analyses of travel motives and repeat participation

Table 2 depicts the EFA of *travel motives*.

Table 2: Travel motives

Question statements	Personal growth and well-being through adventure	Social connection and emotional well-being
1. Adventure activities help me challenge myself. ***(IAM)		
2. I participated in adventure activities to acquire skills. (*PP)		
3. I participated in adventure activities to gain social interactions and relationships. ***(IAM)		0.526
4. I participated in adventure activities to escape from unhappiness. **(ISM)		0.851
5. I participated in adventure activities to reduce personal stress. **(ISM)		0.518
6. Adventure activities help me to improve crew motivation. ***(IAM)		0.596
7. Adventure activities help to improve individual motivation. ***(IAM)	0.588	
8. Adventure activities support my mental health. **(ISM)	0.813	
9. I participated in adventure activities for relaxation. **(ISM)	0.784	
10. I participated in adventure activities to gain prestige. **(ISM)	0.492	
11. I participated in adventure activities for fitness. (*PP)	0.711	
12. I participated in adventure activities for self-exploration. ***(IAM)	0.896	
13. I travel to adventure destinations to experience the natural environment. (*PP)	0.810	
14. I travel to adventure destinations for personal escape. **(ISM)	0.813	
15. I travel to adventure destinations to ensure my personal fulfilment.***(IAM)	0.959	
Cronbach alpha	**0.95**	**0.89**
Mean inter-item correlation	**0.81**	**0.77**
Mean & std. deviation	**3.58 ± 0.99**	**3.48 ± 1.03**

** Push and pull model ** Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model *** Integral approach to motivation*

Plog (1976) proposed the personification of respondent groups as a means of creating a vivid and relatable profile, enhancing understanding and market segmentation. Venter (2010) further elaborates that personification enables marketers to construct a detailed and relatable *living profile* of a target market, thereby improving marketing strategies and efforts. Applying Plog's

approach to this study's respondents, the typical adventure participant can be personified as 'John Doe' (male) and 'Jane Doe' (female). John Doe is a 25-year-old male who speaks English as his home language. His preference between hard and soft adventure tourism is nearly equal, though he slightly favours soft adventure activities. John typically engages in adventure tourism at least once per year. Jane Doe is a 26-and-a-half-year-old female whose home language is English. She has a clear preference for soft adventure tourism but occasionally participates in hard adventure activities. Jane is more active than John in her participation, engaging in adventure tourism at least twice annually.

The KMO test for this factor was statistically significant (0.94) and BTS (p=≤0.001). The factor *personal growth and well-being through adventure* obtained an excellent α (0.95), followed by *social connection and emotional well-being*, which leans towards excellent (0.89) and *skill development and personal challenge* with an acceptable α (0.76). The α of the labelled factor affirms the reliability of the five-point Likert scale used. The three factors accounted for 70.1 per cent of the total variance explained. Table 3 depicts the EFA of *repeat participation*. The KMO test for this factor was statistically significant (0.85) and BTS (p=≤0.001). The factor *determinants of adventure activity re-engagement* obtained an excellent α (0.89). The α of the labelled factor affirms the reliability of the five-point Likert scale used. The factor accounted for 54.3% of the total variance explained.

Table 3: Repeat participation

Question statements	**Determinants of adventure activity re-engagement**
1. I will redo adventure activities only if there is an improvement in safety management.	0.729
2. I prefer participating in adventure activities with more risk.	0.691
3. I repeat adventure activities for socialisation.	0.803
4. I repeat adventure activities to maintain my prestige.	0.721
5. I repeat adventure activities to satisfy my previously unsatisfied expectations.	0.743
6. I visit adventure destinations to do something different from my daily activities.	0.739
7. I repeat adventure activities because they previously satisfied my expectations.	0.725
Cronbach alpha	**0.89**
Mean inter-item correlation	**0.69**
Mean & std. deviation	**3.58 ± 0.86**

Gender differences in adventure tourism factors: Personal growth, social connection, skill development, and re-engagement

Table 4 compares male and female responses to the different identified factors related to adventure tourism, presenting the mean scores, standard deviations (SD), and Cohen's D-values to measure the effect size between genders. Regarding *personal growth and well-being through adventure,* a large negative effect (-0.71) was observed, suggesting that female respondents rated their personal growth and well-being through adventure activities slightly higher than their male counterparts. Concerning *social connection and emotional well-being*, a negative effect (-0.18), leaning towards a small effect, can be seen, which indicates that females value social connection and emotional well-being slightly more than male respondents. Viewing *skill development and personal challenge,* the result leans towards a small effect (0.18), which indicates that males rate skill development and personal challenges slightly higher than the female respondents. Regarding the *determinants of adventure activity re-engagement,* a small effect (0.027) can be observed, which indicates that both genders rate re-engagement in adventure activities similarly, with no meaningful difference between them.

Table 4: Gender differences in adventure tourism factors: Personal growth, social connection, skill development, and re-engagement

Identified factors of adventure tourism	Type of adventure	N	Mean	SD	Cohen's D-value
Personal growth and well-being through adventure	Male	227	3.54	1.21	**-0.71
	Female	169	3.63	1.08	
Social connection and emotional well-being	Male	227	3.46	1.22	-0.18
	Female	169	3.51	1.13	
Skill development and personal challenge	Male	227	3.25	0.95	0.18
	Female	169	3.22	0.66	
Determinants of adventure activity re-engagement	Male	227	3.59	1.08	0.027
	Female	169	3.58	1.14	

*Note. Effect sizes: *0.2: Small, not significant; **0.5: Medium or visible difference; ***0.8: Large difference*

Discussion

The study examined the psychological drivers and travel motives of adventure tourists in South Africa, focusing on how these factors influence repeat participation. Employing EFA and statistical reliability testing revealed three primary motivational dimensions: personal growth and well-being through adventure, social connection and emotional well-being, and skill development and personal challenge. *Personal growth and well-being through adventure* emerged as the most significant motivational dimension, particularly for female respondents. Participants highlighted the benefits of adventure tourism in supporting mental health, stress relief, and personal escape. These results align with findings by Lotter & Welthagen (2020), who emphasise wellness outcomes such as emotional rejuvenation and physical health. These intrinsic push motivations are supported by Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model, which underscores the psychological need to break from routine and engage in new challenges (Kuroda et al., 2017; Janowski et al., 2021). The high Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.95) corroborates its significance. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism demand has further reinforced the importance of these motivations. Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) highlight how the pandemic has heightened tourists' desire for open spaces and nature-based experiences due to safety concerns and a shift towards domestic tourism. This aligns with the study's findings that adventure tourism provides an essential avenue for mental well-being and escape, especially as travellers prioritise outdoor experiences post-pandemic. *Social connection and emotional well-being* exhibited slight gender differences, with female respondents indicating a marginally higher level of emotional well-being. This echoes Janowski et al.'s (2021) emphasis on camaraderie in

adventure tourism, and Bhattacharjee et al. (2024) highlight how shared experiences foster loyalty among participants. The high reliability score ($\alpha = 0.89$) indicates that many participants' motivations centre on socialising and relaxation, characteristics typical of soft adventure tourism (Giddy & Rogerson, 2018). Moreover, Deb et al. (2024) provide additional insights by identifying social interaction as a key motivation in package adventure tourism. While this study concentrates on independent adventure tourists, their research suggests that structured adventure experiences with opportunities for social engagement also drive participation. This perspective reinforces the role of group dynamics and interpersonal experiences as vital motivators in both independent and package adventure tourism. *Skill development and personal challenge* were prominent among hard adventure tourists who prioritised opportunities for skill acquisition and personal achievement. These motivations align with push factors in the push-and-pull model, highlighting the importance of physical and mental challenges (Duong et al., 2023; Giddy, 2018). The reliability for this factor was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.76$), and highlighted its relevance, especially for younger male participants. These results are supported by Deb et al. (2024), who highlight challenge and novelty as the two main factors that drive adventure tourists. According to their research, adventure tourism's exciting yet structured format has a significant influence on tourists' activity preferences. Combining their viewpoint, our results demonstrate that hard adventure tourism engagement is influenced by both extrinsic (i.e. structured thrill experiences) and intrinsic (i.e. personal achievement) motives.

The analysis of repeat participation revealed that respondents were likely to repeat adventure activities if their prior experiences satisfied their expectations. The latter is evident when looking at the *determinants of adventure activity re-engagement* factor ($\alpha = 0.89$), which showed that factors such as improved safety management, socialisation, and satisfaction with prior activities significantly influenced repeat participation. Satisfaction and trust, as highlighted by Bhattacharjee et al. (2024), are crucial determinants of loyalty and intention to revisit, particularly when safety and social aspects are managed effectively. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the trend of safety being a particularly important element in repeat participation. According to Rogerson & Rogerson (2021), travellers' preferences for controlled adventure settings have grown as a result of risk perceptions and safety concerns becoming more significant factors in travel decisions. Furthermore, safety is identified by Deb et al. (2024) as a crucial motivating factor in package adventure tourism, suggesting that both independent and package tourists are increasingly looking for experiences that are safe and well-managed. Looking at gender differences, the largest differences were observed in the motivations for participating in adventure tourism. Female respondents placed higher importance on *personal growth and well-being*, with a large negative effect size (-0.71). Although the effect size was small (0.18), male respondents rated *skill development and personal challenge* slightly higher. Gender differences in motivations reflect broader trends, noted in McKay's (2022) observations of how men and women prioritise different aspects of adventure tourism. There were no significant gender differences in the *determinants of adventure activity re-engagement*, with both male and female respondents leaning towards similar intention levels to re-engage in adventure activities. This study confirms that adventure tourists are driven by psychological, social, and physiological motives. Thrill-seeking and personal achievement are the most significant factors influencing participation in hard adventure activities, while social interaction and relaxation are more important for soft adventure tourists. These findings suggest that adventure tourism operators need to tailor their offerings to meet the diverse needs of their adventure tourists.

Conclusion and recommendations for future research

This study confirms that adventure tourism is driven by a complex mix of psychological, social, and experiential factors, with motivations centred on thrill-seeking, personal achievement, and social interaction. The findings highlight the need to understand these different motivations to enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty through repeat participation. The integration of several motivational models emphasises the dual role of intrinsic motivations (such as self-discovery and thrill-seeking) and extrinsic destination features (such as natural landscapes and safety) in shaping tourist behaviour. For adventure tourism operators, creating tailored experiences that address both psychological drivers and the need for safety can significantly improve repeat participation. Future research can explore how these motivational models apply to other adventure tourism activities, which will deepen our understanding of the evolution of these factors post-pandemic. Personalised marketing campaigns, loyalty programmes, and customer engagement strategies can foster long-term relationships with adventure tourists. Additionally, offering well-structured, memorable experiences can strengthen the emotional connection between tourists and destinations, increasing the likelihood of return visits. Furthermore, understanding the distinct motivations of hard and soft adventure tourists allows operators to craft more targeted marketing strategies and develop customised packages that cater to different segments of the market. As global interest in adventure tourism continues to rise, staying responsive to these psychological and experiential drivers will be key to sustaining growth and enhancing customer satisfaction. Future research could focus on qualitative methodologies in capturing diverse motivations through participants' own experiences, offering richer insights into risk-taking behaviour. Future research should expand on this approach by developing more comprehensive and refined methodologies to deepen the understanding of adventure participation and its complexities.

Limitations

Data collection was conducted from 2020 to 2021, a period significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This timeframe is crucial for understanding shifts in travel behaviour, as the pandemic led to a surge in interest in adventure and nature-based tourism due to safety concerns associated with crowded environments (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Adventure tourism during this period represents a key transitional moment for the industry, making this dataset particularly valuable for understanding the evolving preferences of tourists as they seek outdoor, socially distant experiences. The data remains relevant in 2025, as

many of the trends that emerged during the pandemic – such as a preference for adventure and outdoor experiences – continue to influence tourism behaviours.

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