

Customers' Preference for a Beach Resorts in East Coast Davao Oriental: A Conjoint Analysis

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Abstract

This study analyzed customer preferences for beach resorts on the East Coast of Davao Oriental using conjoint analysis. It was anchored in Consumer Behavior Theory, Random Utility Theory, revealed-preference theory, and Howard's Theory of Consumer Problem Solving, which collectively explain how customers evaluate service attributes and make trade-offs in selecting tourism offerings. The study employed a quantitative-descriptive, cross-sectional design and involved 300 purposively selected domestic vacationers and non-resident beach visitors who had visited or planned to visit beach resorts in Cateel, Baganga, and Caraga. Data were gathered through a structured survey questionnaire that included demographic profiling, conjoint analysis tasks based on 20 hypothetical resort profiles, and a 5-point preference scale. Key informant interviews and pilot testing were conducted to refine the instrument, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, part-worth utility estimation, and relative importance scoring. The findings revealed that location was the most important resort attribute, followed by booking facility, amenities, and accommodation. Respondents most preferred resorts located near the beach, booked through a travel agency, offering premium amenities, and providing family villa accommodation. The results also showed variation in individual preference patterns, although the aggregate model confirmed a dominant market preference for convenience, accessibility, and enhanced resort experiences. The most preferred resort profile combined the highest-valued attribute levels, while the least preferred profile reflected less attractive combinations of features. The study concluded that resort operators should use these findings to improve service design, strengthen booking systems, refine marketing strategies, and enhance accommodation features, particularly standard rooms. It also recommended future studies with larger samples and additional resort attributes. The study aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) because it supports tourism competitiveness, place-based planning, and more responsive resort development. Its sustainability impact lies in providing evidence-based guidance for socio-economic, community, institutional, and tourism sustainability in emerging coastal destinations.

Keywords: Accommodation, Amenities, Beach resorts, Booking facility, Conjoint analysis, Customer preferences, Davao Oriental, Location, Tourism development

1. Introduction

Beach resorts operate in a highly competitive tourism environment where owners must develop differentiated marketing strategies and service designs that respond to customer needs and expectations. Because beach resorts combine location, accommodation, amenities, and service access into one tourism product, understanding customer preference is critical for improving satisfaction, loyalty, and competitiveness. In East Coast Davao Oriental, where tourism and eco-tourism development continue to expand, identifying the resort attributes most valued by visitors is essential for evidence-based planning and market positioning (Hutami and Narottama, 2021; Jhobeil et al., 2020; Bagcal, 2022).

Beach resorts are popular destinations because they offer varied amenities and experiences that appeal to different types of travelers. Their success, however, depends not only on natural attractions but also on how well resort operators understand and respond to customer preferences. If resort owners know which features customers value most, they can improve service design, enhance customer satisfaction, and strengthen business performance (Jhobeil et al., 2020). In Davao Oriental, tourism has become an important industry, and more areas are shifting toward eco-tourism development because of their natural attractions and comparative advantage. As a result, investors and resort owners in the East Coast of Davao Oriental have increasing interest in developing beach resorts based on user interests and expectations (Bagcal, 2022). Customer preference is a significant influence on purchase decisions and is central to consumer-focused marketing. In tourism, understanding what travelers value helps businesses design offerings that match market demand. For beach resorts, such preferences may involve location, lodging, amenities, activities, pricing, and accessibility. Since Davao Oriental has a long

coastline and increasing resort investments, understanding tourist preferences is particularly useful for shaping competitive resort development in the province (Zhou, X., and Xu, Y., 2020; Guzel's, 2021).

Related literature shows that beach resort preferences are shaped by multiple attributes and that their relative importance may vary across settings and visitor groups. Some studies emphasize beach quality, sanitation, and safety, while others identify location as the most important factor in resort choice. Tourists also consider accommodation type, amenities, pricing, accessibility, and service quality when choosing where to stay. These findings suggest that customer preferences are context-dependent and must be studied within specific destinations to support accurate planning and marketing decisions (Apritado and Borbon, 2021; De Guzman et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). Literature also indicates that specific resort attributes contribute to visitor satisfaction and behavioral intention. Location affects accessibility, scenery, and overall travel convenience. Accommodation influences comfort, safety, and loyalty. Amenities such as swimming pools, spas, gyms, and leisure facilities enhance the guest experience. Booking facilities also matter because simple, secure, and accessible reservation systems improve convenience and trust. Collectively, these attributes shape the perceived value of a resort and influence whether customers choose, revisit, or recommend it (Lim, Zahari, and Abidin, 2022; Wang & Chan, 2025; Nguyen & Cheung, 2022; Rahman, Gani, and Alwi, 2023; Kumar & Bhaskar, 2021; Li, Zhang, and Law, 2023; Kim, Lee, and Han, 2022; Sharma & Singh, 2024). Another key insight from the literature is the usefulness of conjoint analysis in examining how consumers make trade-offs among product or service attributes. Rather than evaluating factors independently, conjoint analysis allows researchers to estimate the relative importance of specific attribute levels and identify the combinations most preferred by consumers. This makes it a strong method for studying decision-making in tourism and hospitality settings (Sharma, 2021).

Globally, tourism remains a major economic resource, and the success of destinations increasingly depends on market-oriented strategies that respond to changing visitor expectations. The tourism sector continues to grow despite challenges, making competitiveness and customer-centered development essential for long-term improvement (Bagcal, 2022). Beach resorts around the world compete not only through natural attractions but also through differentiated service offerings, convenience, and quality experiences (Hutami and Narottama, 2021). Nationally, the Philippine tourism industry has expanded in recent years, but much of the available research on customer preferences focuses on established destinations such as Boracay, Palawan, Samal, and Siargao. These areas already benefit from stronger infrastructure and more developed tourism marketing systems. In contrast, emerging destinations receive less scholarly attention despite their growing potential. Locally, the East Coast of Davao Oriental, particularly Cateel, Baganga, and Caraga, represents a promising coastal tourism corridor in Mindanao. The area is known for white-sand beaches, clear waters, scenic landscapes, and developing tourism facilities. It is increasingly attracting domestic tourists and private investment, yet it remains understudied compared with more established resort destinations. This makes the area strategically important for examining customer preferences that can guide future resort planning, investment, and tourism development.

This study is anchored in John B. Watson's (1913) Consumer Behavior Theory, later refined by Philip Kotler (1973), which explains that internal and external factors shape customer preferences, attitudes, and decisions regarding products and services. In the context of beach resorts, this means travelers evaluate features such as pricing, location, amenities, cleanliness, and service quality before making a booking or visitation choice. Kotler's buyer behavior model further suggests that cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors interact with marketing stimuli to produce consumer responses, including preference and selection. These assumptions support the study's examination of how specific resort attributes influence customer choice. The study is also grounded in the Random Utility Theory of Domencich and McFadden (1975), which explains that the probability of selecting a service depends on both observable attribute-based utility and unobservable factors. This theory provides the mathematical basis for linking resort attributes to the likelihood of customer choice. Relatedly, revealed-preference theory suggests that consumer selections under varying conditions reflect their underlying preferences. Howard's Theory of Consumer Problem Solving (1963), discussed by Hirschman (1989), further supports the study by explaining that consumers use varying levels of information processing depending on the complexity of the decision. Resort selection involves comparing alternative attributes and making trade-offs to maximize utility. In line with this, the conceptual basis of the study centers on four key resort attributes: booking facility, location, accommodation, and amenities. These attributes represent the independent variables expected to shape customers' preferences for a beach resort. Booking facility relates to ease, safety, and convenience of reservation (Lim, Zahari, and Abidin, 2022; Wang & Chan, 2025). Location reflects accessibility and travel convenience (Nguyen & Cheung, 2022; Rahman, Gani, and Alwi, 2023). Accommodation concerns quality, comfort, and reliability (Kumar & Bhaskar, 2021; Li, Zhang, and Law, 2023). Amenities refer to supplementary services and facilities that enhance the guest experience (Kim, Lee, and Han, 2022; Sharma & Singh, 2024).

A major gap in the literature is the lack of empirical studies on emerging coastal tourism destinations such as the East Coast of Davao Oriental. Most existing studies focus on well-developed destinations, leaving limited evidence on customer preference patterns in areas that are still building their tourism identity and infrastructure. In addition, studies on resort selection in the region often rely on basic descriptive surveys or anecdotal observations, which are insufficient for capturing

the trade-offs travelers make when evaluating multiple resort features simultaneously. There is also a methodological gap. Few studies in the regional context use conjoint analysis to determine the comparative significance of resort attributes such as location, facilities, accommodation, and booking options. This leaves resort developers, tourism planners, and investors with limited evidence for making strategic decisions. The present study addresses this gap by using conjoint analysis, a choice-based modeling approach that mirrors real-world consumer decision-making and provides more precise estimates of attribute importance and utility. Its rationale lies in supporting strategic, sustainable, and customer-focused resort development in a growing tourism area.

The study aligns most directly with SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, which are also identified in the thesis abstract. By examining customer preferences for beach resorts and generating evidence that can improve resort planning, service design, and tourism competitiveness, the study supports local enterprise growth, employment generation, and more responsive tourism development. Better alignment between tourism services and consumer demand can contribute to sustainable economic opportunities in coastal communities. The study also indirectly relates to SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities because it promotes place-based tourism planning in an emerging coastal destination. Its emphasis on development that is strategic, sustainable, and customer-focused supports more balanced local tourism growth rather than unmanaged expansion.

This study contributes to multidisciplinary sustainability primarily through socio-economic, community, institutional, and tourism sustainability. Socio-economically, it provides resort owners, investors, and tourism stakeholders with evidence that can improve competitiveness, visitor satisfaction, and potential job creation. At the community level, it supports tourism development that responds to actual visitor needs while maximizing the value of local natural assets. Institutionally, it offers data-driven guidance for tourism offices and planners in designing policies and programs that strengthen coastal tourism destinations. The study is also relevant to sustainability in marketing and service innovation because it applies conjoint analysis to improve decision-making in tourism development. By identifying which resort features travelers value most, it helps stakeholders allocate resources more effectively and avoid poorly targeted resort investments. In this sense, the study supports more efficient, evidence-based, and sustainable tourism planning not only in East Coast Davao Oriental but also in other emerging destinations facing similar development conditions. The primary objective of the study is to analyze customer preferences for beach resorts on the East Coast of Davao Oriental using conjoint analysis. Specifically, it seeks to determine the most valued resort attributes and the utility estimates of each attribute level. Through this, the study aims to guide resort developers, tourism stakeholders, and policymakers in aligning services and infrastructure with customer expectations. Its broader significance lies in contributing to tourism marketing and consumer behavior research while supporting strategic and sustainable development in an emerging coastal destination.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative-descriptive research design using Conjoint Analysis as its specific analytical model. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to collect measurable data and analyze customer preferences for beach resorts based on selected attributes. As explained by Creswell and Creswell (2022), quantitative research is suitable when statistical tools are used to examine patterns, preferences, and behaviors. The descriptive-conjoint approach was aligned with the study's objective of determining how customers value resort features and how these features influence their choices. Conjoint analysis, as a multivariate technique, is useful in identifying the relative importance of product or service attributes and in estimating part-worth utilities for each attribute level (Orme, 2021). Grounded in utility theory, this method assumes that consumers make trade-offs among multiple features when choosing a product or service, making it particularly suitable for tourism and hospitality research (Sharma, 2021). The study was also applied and cross-sectional in nature, since it addressed a practical tourism planning concern and gathered data at one point in time from 300 respondents, which is appropriate for capturing current customer preferences and behaviors (Saunders et al., 2022).

2.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in selected beach resort areas along the East Coast of Davao Oriental, particularly in the municipalities of Cateel, Baganga, and Caraga. These coastal municipalities are located in the eastern part of the Davao Region facing the Pacific Ocean and are known for white-sand beaches, clear waters, scenic landscapes, and developing tourism facilities. The area was chosen because it represents a growing tourism corridor with emerging beach resorts but remains less studied than more established destinations such as Samal Island and Siargao. Its increasing visitor volume, local government support for tourism development, and diversity of resort types made it a strategic location for examining customer preferences through conjoint analysis.

2.3 Respondents

The respondents were domestic vacationers and non-resident beach visitors who had visited or planned to visit beach resorts along the East Coast of Davao Oriental. They were at least 18 years old, resided outside the East Coast, and had firsthand experience with or a strong interest in beach resort travel. These participants were considered capable of providing informed

evaluations of resort features and amenities based on prior leisure travel experience. The study treated the respondents as one unified group in order to identify general preference trends among domestic tourists rather than comparing subgroups. To ensure relevance and validity, inclusion criteria required respondents to be at least 18 years old, to have visited or planned to visit beach resorts in Cateel, Baganga, or Caraga, and to have prior experience with beach resort accommodations in the Philippines. Excluded from the study were East Coast residents, resort owners, managers, employees, persons with no beach resort experience, and those unable to understand the consent and survey instructions. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw voluntarily at any time, and any identifiable data would be removed if withdrawal occurred before anonymization and aggregation. A total of 300 respondents were selected through purposive sampling. This nonprobability technique was used because the study required participants with specific experience and decision-making capacity relevant to beach resort selection. The use of purposive sampling is supported by Etikan and Bala (2021), who emphasize its value in studies requiring knowledgeable participants, and by Campbell et al. (2021), who note its usefulness in consumer behavior research. The sample size was based on Sharma's (2021) recommendation that a minimum of 200 respondents is adequate for conjoint analysis. The selection process involved pre-screening questions to confirm that respondents met the study criteria and could provide meaningful judgments on attributes such as price, amenities, and location. This procedure supported the goal of developing accurate consumer preference profiles for resort planning and marketing.

2.4 Research Instruments

The primary instrument was a structured survey questionnaire designed to collect data on customer preference and its related attributes. The instrument had two main parts. The first gathered demographic information such as age, gender, income, place of residence, travel frequency, and previous beach resort experience to establish eligibility and contextualize the responses. The second part consisted of conjoint analysis tasks using 20 placards, each showing hypothetical resort profiles with different combinations of attributes and levels, such as price per night, room type, beach access, and amenities. Respondents selected their most preferred options from these profiles. This part of the questionnaire was developed according to the guidelines for choice-based conjoint analysis in hospitality research (Sharma, 2021). To support follow-up measurement, the instrument also included a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 – Most Preferred to 1 – Not Preferred. Before finalization, the researcher conducted Key Informant Interviews with five resort establishments on the East Coast and pilot-tested the preliminary instrument. Insights from these interviews and the literature review informed the final survey design. The study adopted the full-profile method in presenting complete attribute sets, a method valued for realistic assessment of consumer trade-offs. This approach, supported by fractional factorial design, helps reduce respondent fatigue while maintaining data quality (Snyder et al., 2023). Although each task requires cognitively demanding evaluations, this strengthens the depth of preference data gathered (Peterson & Lu, 2024). The study also applied the additive utility model, which estimates total preference as the sum of the part-worth values of attribute levels and is widely used for its simplicity and interpretability (Nguyen & Torres, 2023).

2.5 Data Collection

Data were gathered through an ethically guided and systematic process. After identifying qualified participants using the inclusion criteria, the researcher presented the purpose and benefits of the study and secured informed consent using clear, translated, and non-technical language. Participation was strictly voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could refuse or discontinue participation without penalty. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data gathering process, and all data were coded and anonymized before analysis. The researcher also used formal letters to secure authorization for data collection in the selected locations. The study did not use online data collection or online panels. Ethical safeguards addressed privacy, confidentiality, and time commitment, and the researcher ensured that no deception, dishonesty, falsification, plagiarism, or conflict of interest affected the conduct of the study.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and conjoint analysis techniques. Responses to the Likert-scale items were analyzed through mean and standard deviation to describe perceived importance and satisfaction. For the conjoint analysis data, responses were numerically coded and examined through part-worth utility estimation and relative importance scoring to determine which resort attributes and attribute levels most strongly influenced customer preference. The additive utility model was used to estimate overall preference scores by summing the part-worth values of the attribute levels. This allowed the study to identify the most preferred combinations of resort features and to model consumer decision-making in selecting beach resorts.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study observed full ethical standards in dealing with respondents and data. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was protected, and all identifiable data were removed when necessary, before aggregation. The study minimized risks related to privacy and time burden, avoided deception and coercion, and upheld proper authorship, originality, and responsible use of sources. These measures ensured that the welfare of participants and the integrity of the research process were maintained throughout the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Relative Importance and Utility of Customer Preferences for a Beach Resort

3.1.1 Relative Importance of Resort Attributes

The findings showed that location was the most important attribute in choosing a beach resort, with a relative importance of 29.526%, followed by booking facility at 25.014%, amenities at 14.801%, and accommodation at 14.326%. Under location, the most preferred level was near the beach with a utility estimate of 0.019, followed by beachfront at 0.011, while remote and secluded was the least preferred at -0.032. For booking facility, travel agency was the most preferred at 0.077, while walk-in was the least preferred at -0.067. For amenities, premium amenities had the highest utility at 0.012, while standard and basic amenities had negative utilities. For accommodation, family villa was the most preferred at 0.058, while standard room was the least preferred at -0.046. These results indicate that customers prioritize accessibility and convenience more than room type alone when selecting a beach resort. The strong preference for location supports the view that coastal tourists value proximity to the beach and the experience associated with it. This aligns with the discussion that visitors associate location with accessibility, visual appeal, and destination attractiveness, which influence satisfaction and return intention (Macrothink Research, 2024). The ranking of booking facility as the second most important attribute also suggests that ease of reservation matters in consumer choice, consistent with Garcia et al. (2025) and Gaur (2024). The preference for premium amenities corresponds with Nguyen and Lee's (2023) postulation and Patel et al. (2024), while the lower importance assigned to accommodation suggests that guests may prioritize the overall resort experience over the room itself, as also noted by Huynh Van et al. (2025).

3.2. Individual and Aggregate Conjoint Models of Customer Preferences

3.2.1 Individual Preference Patterns

The results showed that individual respondents differed in the attributes they valued most. Customer 73 was most booking facility-conscious, assigning 56.667% importance to this attribute, followed by location at 29.143%, amenities at 7.803%, and accommodation at 6.387%. Customer 199 was most location-conscious, with 54.580% importance for location, followed by booking facility at 21.678%, amenities at 16.049%, and accommodation at 14.366%. Customer 219 was most accommodation-conscious, assigning 29.293% importance to accommodation, followed closely by location at 28.944%, booking facility at 23.327%, and amenities at 18.436%. The measures of fit for the individual models were positive, with Pearson's r values ranging from 0.726 to 0.922 and Kendall's tau values from 0.570 to 0.632. These findings confirm that customer preference behavior is not uniform and that different tourists evaluate resort attributes differently depending on their personal priorities. The discussion in the manuscript notes that some travelers prefer certain booking methods, locations, or amenity types based on their experiences and expectations. This supports the argument that resort planning should consider varied customer segments rather than assuming a single preference pattern. The observed variation is consistent with the discussion citing Martinez and Chen (2024), Nguyen and Roberts (2023), Kim et al. (2022), and Lopez and Singh (2025), which all suggest that booking behavior, preferred setting, online reviews, and wellness-related amenities can shape resort choice differently across customers.

3.2.2 Aggregate Preference Model

At the aggregate level, the model showed that customers in East Coast Davao Oriental were generally location-conscious, with location again emerging as the top attribute at 29.526%, followed by booking facility at 25.014%, amenities at 14.801%, and accommodation at 14.326%. The aggregate utility estimates also indicated preference for near the beach, travel agency booking, premium amenities, and family villa accommodation. The aggregate model had strong fit statistics, with Pearson's r at 0.972 and Kendall's tau at 0.895. The aggregate results suggest a dominant market pattern in which customers prefer a resort that is conveniently located and easy to book, while also offering enhanced amenities and more spacious accommodation. The discussion interprets this overall profile as a resort with a five-star online rating, direct website booking, water activities, and a seaside location, and relates this to the persuasive role of service quality cues and positive customer feedback in shaping pre-booking evaluation (Wang and Li, 2024). Although this narrative slightly extends the utility profile, the core implication remains that customer favor resort combinations that communicate convenience, quality, and experiential value.

3.3. Most and Least Preferable Combinations of Resort Preferences

3.3.1 Most Preferred Resort Combinations

The results showed that among the 20 resort plan cards, Card 5 had the highest total utility of 1434 and a mean utility of 4.78, making it the most preferred overall combination. This was followed closely by Card 2 with a total utility of 1422 and mean utility of 4.74, and Card 17 with a total utility of 1408 and mean utility of 4.69. Other highly rated combinations included Cards 1, 20, 6, and 4, all of which had mean utility scores above 4.50, indicating broad respondent approval. These results show that customers consistently favored resort profiles that combined the most valued attribute levels. The discussion explains that the most preferred combination was a resort near the sea, bookable through a travel agency, offering premium amenities and family villa accommodation. This interpretation aligns with Lopez and Martinez (2023), who noted the appeal of travel-agency booking for upgraded packages, and with Kim and Huang (2024), who linked near-the-beach

location to positive customer impressions and perceived resort excellence. The preference for premium combinations suggests that customers seek not just basic lodging but a more complete and satisfying resort experience.

3.3.2 Least Preferred Resort Combinations

The least preferred resort combination was Card 3, which had the lowest total utility of 997 and mean utility of 3.32. Card 12 ranked 19th with a mean utility of 3.68, while Card 8 ranked 18th with a mean utility of 3.88. These lower-ranked cards reflected resort combinations that respondents considered less attractive compared with the higher-ranked alternatives. The lower utility scores indicate that certain combinations of attributes did not match what customers were looking for in a beach resort. As the manuscript explains, lower-ranked cards represent less interesting combinations and reveal which configurations are less likely to attract guests. This finding reinforces the usefulness of conjoint analysis in distinguishing desirable from undesirable resort profiles and gives resort managers a practical basis for avoiding features or combinations that do not align with consumer expectations.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that, for customers in East Coast Davao Oriental, location is the most important attribute in choosing a beach resort, while accommodation is the least important. Among the attribute levels, a resort located near the beach is the most preferred, whereas a resort offering only a standard room is the least preferred. Overall, the sample results indicate that customers favor a resort near the beach, with a booking facility through a travel agency, premium amenities, and family villa accommodation, and the additive model further showed how both individual and overall customers rank their resort preferences. Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends that resort management use the significant results as a guide for improving and innovating quality services and for strategic planning in operations management geared toward growth and future expansion. Resorts should recognize changing customer needs, realign their operations management and marketing strategies with the study's findings, improve accommodation services despite their lower preference ranking, encourage customers to provide online ratings, and use the results as a basis for marketing strategies, customer retention, and future decision-making. It is also recommended that resorts strengthen easy-to-use online booking systems, partner with reputable travel agencies, promote advanced booking options through social media and mobile apps, and improve standard rooms by enhancing aesthetics, essential amenities, and environmentally friendly designs. The study also recognizes that, although the sample of 300 customers was sufficient based on the cited literature, it would be more realistic and effective for future studies to involve a larger sample of respondents using the same conjoint analysis tool and to generate additional information on resort attributes.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The study adhered to general ethical standards throughout the research process by ensuring voluntary participation, securing informed consent, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, and using the collected data solely for academic purposes. It also upheld honesty, transparency, and integrity in data gathering, analysis, and presentation of findings, while avoiding any form of coercion, deception, plagiarism, or misrepresentation.

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