

## Cinematic Influence: The Role of Film in Shaping Malaysians' Travel Intentions and Destination Choices

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**Abstract:** Film tourism has emerged as a significant factor in enhancing tourist numbers by drawing visitors to locations depicted in movies and dramas. This study explores films' influence on Malaysians' perceptions and intentions to travel to these destinations. Utilizing the push and pull theory, the research examines how movies affect Malaysians' travel motivations and destination choices. Data were gathered through an online survey involving 267 Malaysian moviegoers, selected via convenience sampling. The findings indicate that several factors, including the reflection of personal values and interests in movies, significantly influence the intention to travel. Respondents expressed a stronger connection and likelihood to visit destinations featured in films that resonate with their interests. The study suggests that future research could employ different methodologies further to explore the impact of movies on tourist perceptions globally. Additionally, the findings underscore the potential for filmmakers, destination marketing organizations (DMOs), and local authorities to leverage films as powerful marketing tools to enhance tourist demand for real-life film locations.

**Keywords:** *Film tourism, destination awareness, visit motivation, intention to travel*

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### 1. Introduction

Film tourism has experienced significant growth worldwide, offering substantial benefits to destinations by attracting tourists to locations where films are set (Kolasinska, 2020). This phenomenon, where tourists are drawn to visit locations, they have seen in movies, has been observed for decades (Riley et al., 1998; Florido-Benitez, 2023). Defined by Hudson and Ritchie (2006), film tourism results from a destination or attraction being showcased in cinema, influencing individuals to travel based on the particular characteristics and destinations portrayed (Iwashita, 2003). Movies have the unique power to entice travelers to explore diverse locations, cultures, and experiences. Macionis (2004) described film tourism as a postmodern experience where tourists visit sites portrayed through media, highlighting the compelling visuals, cinematic landscapes, and cultural portrayals that serve as potent tools for destination marketing and promotion.

The ability of movies to transport viewers to different destinations and offer immersive visual experiences can motivate them to explore new landscapes, cultures, and attractions in real life. This motivation is often driven by the emotional connections and personal attachments viewers form with the storylines and characters (Ismail et al., 2017). When travelers emotionally connect with a film's narrative, it can create a desire to visit the real-life locations depicted. Over the past decade, there has been growing interest in studying this form of travel motivation (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Hamzah et al., 2016; Yen & Croy, 2016; Wen et al., 2018; Vila et al., 2021). The impact of films on travel destination choices has been acknowledged since the 19th century, with Tooke and Baker (1996) exploring the potential for increased visitor numbers to locations featured in films.

In line with the above notion, the film industry significantly contributes to global tourism by drawing travelers to visit real-life locations featured in their favorite movies. According to Future Market Insights (2018), tourists visiting Northern Ireland to see the filming sites of 'Game of Thrones' contributed over \$50 million to the local economy in 2018. Similarly, New Zealand has become a popular filming destination for productions such as "The Lord of the Rings," "The Hobbit," "The Chronicles of Narnia," and "The Last Samurai." Films create demand for tourism by enhancing the destination's image and segmentation elements (Vagionis & Loumiotis, 2011). When audiences are captivated by movie settings and narratives, they may be motivated to visit those locations in reality. In 2017, 80 million travelers chose their destinations based on movies they had watched, leading to international visitors' numbers being 2.5 times higher than average in these destination countries (TCI

Research, 2018). The influence of movies on tourists' travel motivation is significant, with 13% of tourists choosing to visit a country after seeing it in a film (Vila et al., 2021). Since the first public film screening by the Lumiere brothers in 1895, films have captured the public's imagination (Bolan et al., 2011). Most studies on film-induced travel intention utilize push and pull factors, where push factors are internal motivations to travel and pull factors are destination characteristics (Crompton, 1979).

However, despite the potential benefits, there are concerns about the expectations set by film portrayals of destinations. Cohen (2012) found that social media platforms like Instagram create unrealistic expectations, as curated and filtered photos often differ from reality, leading to disappointment among film tourists. This disparity can create negative push factors, as noted by Itoo and Nagar (2019). Hamzah et al. (2016) found that while Malaysian travelers were motivated by unique experiences and scenery at film locations, many were disappointed when the reality did not match their expectations. Such discrepancies can lead to negative perceptions and push travelers away due to concerns about authenticity and misrepresentation (Bolan et al., 2011).

Despite this, movies set high expectations for destinations, which may lead to disappointment if the real-life experience differs from the cinematic portrayal. The image of a destination is crucial for the tourism industry and can be influenced by word of mouth (Horrigan, 2009). Movies can create positive or negative stereotypes of destinations in terms of hospitality, safety, cultural richness, and cuisine.

Additionally, the intention to travel to destinations seen in movies can be affected by negative genres like crime, horror, and disaster. Itoo and Nagar (2019) suggest that negative portrayals in films can deter tourists due to safety concerns. However, for some, these portrayals may spark curiosity and serve as pull factors. Negative storylines can influence travel decisions by associating destinations with negative emotions (Beeton, 2010). Itoo and Nagar (2019) also noted that negative storylines could influence tourists interested in dark tourism and historical exploration, highlighting individual differences in travel preferences (Azevedo et al., 2023; Dann, 1977).

Moreover, the influence of movies on travel intentions among Malaysians needs further exploration, considering socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and income. Understanding these differences can help tailor tourism marketing and destination offerings. For instance, Buchman et al. (2010) found that female "Lord of the Rings" fans were more likely to visit New Zealand than male fans, and higher education levels correlated with increased interest in film-induced tourism. Ng (2020) highlighted that Korean TV dramas significantly motivated young Malaysian adults, especially females and those with higher education levels, to visit South Korea. These findings underscore the importance of socio-demographic segments in shaping film-induced travel intentions in Malaysia.

Therefore, comprehensive research on the influence of movies on Malaysians' travel intentions is deemed necessary. Understanding this impact can inform targeted marketing strategies that leverage the cinematic appeal of destinations within Malaysia. Furthermore, by highlighting how films can influence domestic tourism, the study underscores the importance of integrating film tourism into the broader tourism development plans of the country. Moreover, with the increasing consumption of global and local films among Malaysians, the study offers a timely exploration of how these cinematic experiences can be harnessed to promote lesser-known destinations within the country, thus contributing to the decentralization of tourism and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices.

## 2. Literature Review

### Push and Pull Factors

The concept of push and pull factors is a well-established framework in tourism studies, initially proposed by Crompton (1979) and further developed by Dann (1977). Push factors are intrinsic motivations that drive individuals to travel, such as the need for escape, adventure, or relaxation. These factors are internal and psychological, motivating tourists to seek experiences away from their routine environment. Conversely, pull factors are external attributes of a destination that attract tourists, such as natural beauty, cultural attractions,

and entertainment options. These factors are destination-specific and influence tourists' decisions on where to travel.

Studies have shown that push and pull factors influence tourists' travel behaviors and decisions. For instance, Uysal and Jurowski (1994) demonstrated that both push and pull factors play a critical role in shaping tourists' motivations and destination choices. Similarly, Yap, Teoh, and Tan (2017) utilized the push and pull framework to understand the travel motivations of tourists visiting Penang, highlighting the interplay between internal desires and external attractions in the decision-making process.

### **Film Tourism**

Film tourism, also known as film-induced tourism, refers to the phenomenon where tourists visit destinations that they have seen in movies or television series. This form of tourism leverages the popularity and emotional connections viewers have with films and TV shows to promote real-world locations featured on screen. Film tourism is a growing niche within the broader tourism industry, driven by the significant impact of visual media on viewers' perceptions and travel intentions.

Research by Riley, Baker, and Van Doren (1998) highlighted the potential of movies to induce tourism by showcasing attractive locations and creating a desire among viewers to visit these places. More recent studies, such as those by Yen and Croy (2016), and Vila, Brea, and de Carlos (2021), have explored the specific mechanisms through which films influence tourists' destination awareness and motivations. These studies emphasize the role of emotional engagement, celebrity involvement, and the portrayal of destinations in shaping tourists' perceptions and travel intentions.

### **Destination Awareness**

Destination awareness refers to the extent to which potential tourists are familiar with and recognize a particular destination. It is a critical factor in the decision-making process, as higher awareness increases the likelihood of a destination being considered and chosen by tourists. Film and television play a significant role in enhancing destination awareness by providing extensive visual exposure and creating strong associative links between the destination and the film.

Studies have shown that film tourism can significantly boost destination awareness. For example, TCI Research (2018) reported that films influence the travel decisions of millions of international tourists annually, highlighting the substantial reach and impact of visual media on destination marketing. Vila et al. (2021) further demonstrated that destinations featured in popular TV series experienced increased tourist visits due to enhanced awareness and interest generated by the shows.

### **Visit Motivation**

Visit motivation encompasses the various reasons and driving forces behind tourists' decisions to visit specific destinations. It is influenced by a combination of push and pull factors, as well as other contextual and personal factors such as past experiences, social influences, and media exposure. In the context of film tourism, visit motivation is particularly driven by the desire to experience locations seen on screen, follow in the footsteps of favorite characters, and engage in unique activities associated with the film.

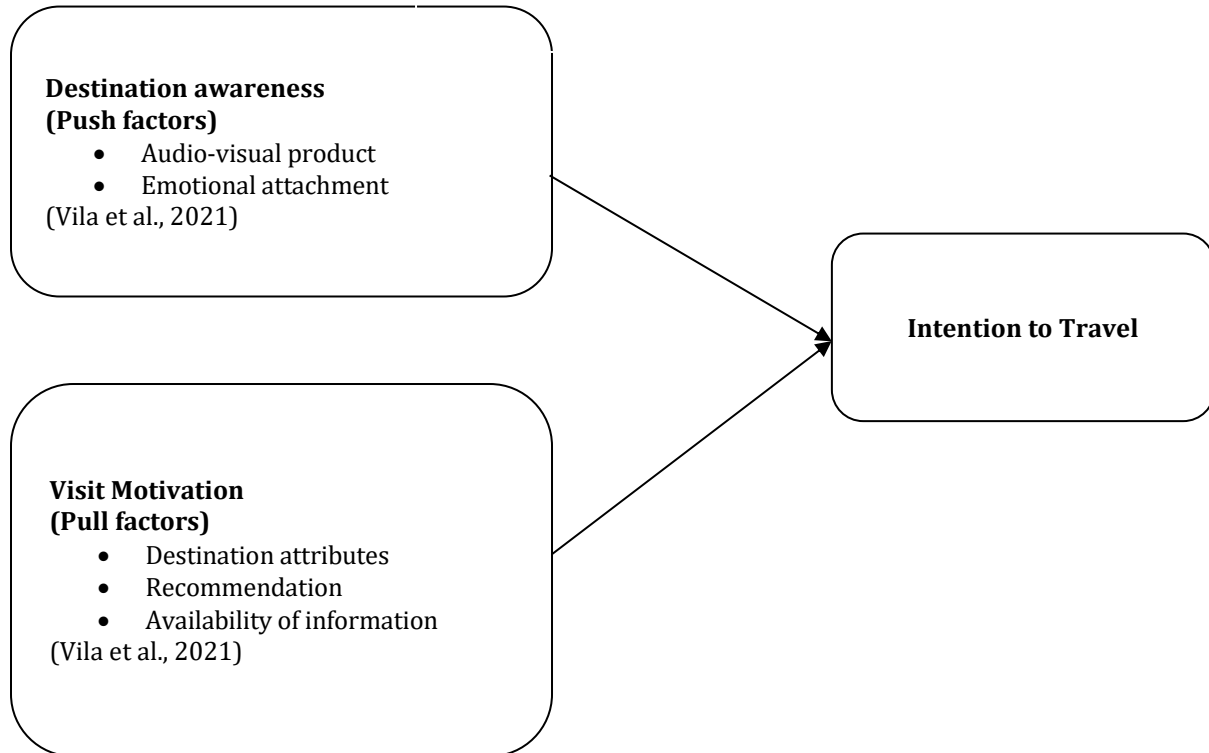
Research by Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) explored the travel motivations of film tourists, identifying factors such as nostalgia, novelty, and the search for memorable experiences as key drivers. Similarly, Suni and Komppula (2012) found that the emotional and psychological connections viewers form with films significantly influence their motivations to visit the filmed locations.

### **Intention to Travel**

Intention to travel refers to the likelihood that individuals will visit a specific destination in the future. It is a critical predictor of actual travel behavior and is influenced by various factors, including destination awareness, visit motivation, and the perceived attractiveness of the destination. In the context of film tourism, the intention to travel is significantly shaped by the influence of films on viewers' perceptions and desires.

Studies have shown that films can enhance the intention to travel by creating positive images of destinations and fostering emotional connections with viewers. For example, Wen et al. (2018) found that movies and television significantly influence Chinese tourists' perceptions and intentions to visit international destinations. Tassiello and Tillotson (2020) also demonstrated that subjective knowledge gained from films positively impacts the intention to travel by increasing familiarity and reducing perceived risks associated with the destination.

### Movie and Travel Decision



The constructed hypotheses based on the framework are.

H1: There is a relationship between destination awareness and intention to travel.

H2: There is a relationship between visit motivation and intention to travel.

### 3. Methodology

#### Research Design

This study employs a comprehensive research design encompassing data collection and analysis, guided by a detailed action plan to address the research objectives. The primary aim is to explore the relationships between destination awareness, visit motivation, and intention to travel among Malaysians, utilizing quantitative data collected through an online survey distributed via Google Forms. This method facilitates efficient data collection from a geographically diverse population. The research methods and survey instruments were reviewed and approved by the university's ethics committee before data collection.

A descriptive research approach was adopted, focusing on analyzing the mean scores of each item related to the first research objective and question. Descriptive analysis effectively captures the demographic characteristics of respondents, as well as their perceptions, motivations, and intentions to travel after watching

movies. Variables such as cultural understanding, historical landmarks, food and beverage preferences, safety, and leisure activities were considered. This approach also evaluates how different movie genres impact perception and interest in travel destinations. Sociodemographic factors like age, gender, education level, and income were examined to provide context and detail, investigating how these variables moderate the relationship between movie influence and tourism destinations. Descriptive analysis is straightforward to implement, user-friendly, and allows for clear articulation of the influence of movies on tourism destination choices among Malaysians.

### **Sample and procedure**

The target population for this study comprised Malaysian movie or drama viewers aged 18 and above. The survey was disseminated through various channels, including social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, utilizing non-probability sampling with convenience sampling methods. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents motivated to travel based on movies. Participation was voluntary.

Primary data were collected through a quantitative survey. The questionnaire, developed before data collection, featured multiple-choice questions in the first section and a 5-point Likert scale in the second section. This method was chosen for its compatibility with the variables being measured and its prevalence in past related research (Wen et al., 2018; Vila et al., 2021; Hamzah et al., 2016; Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). Data collection included both online surveys and face-to-face interactions with a filtered questionnaire. The online survey approach aimed to achieve a broader and more generalized respondent base across Malaysia at a lower financial cost, as suggested by Evans & Mathur (2018) for its convenience and low administration costs.

A pilot test involving 30 sets of questionnaires was conducted before the final data collection. Feedback from the pilot test informed revisions to the survey instrument, ensuring internal consistency and reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha. The final revised survey was then distributed in areas with high tourist activity in Malaysia.

### **Measures**

The survey instrument was developed based on extensive literature reviews and previous studies on film-induced tourism (Wen et al., 2018; Vila et al., 2021; Hamzah et al., 2016; Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). The questionnaire comprised two main sections: the first collected respondents' sociodemographic background, including gender, age group, marital status, ethnicity, state of origin, occupation, education level, and monthly income. It also gathered information on respondents' travel experiences, frequency of travel, preferred movie or drama genres, and whether they visited tourist destinations due to movies or dramas. Respondents were asked to specify any tourist destinations influenced by movies or dramas.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize key variables from the data set, including measures of central tendency and variability such as range, variance, mean, and standard deviation. Data analysis was performed using SPSS (Version 29.0), chosen for its comprehensive data summarization capabilities and its widespread use in related past studies (Wen et al., 2018; Vila et al., 2021; Hamzah et al., 2016; Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). This software provided the necessary tools to conduct a detailed examination of the variables at hand, supporting the study's objectives to investigate the influence of movies on Malaysians' perceptions and interests in tourism destinations.

## **4. Results**

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the influence of movies on Malaysians' perceptions and interests in tourism destinations. The descriptive analysis section is divided into two main parts: destination awareness and visit motivation. Destination awareness further includes audio-visual products and emotional attachment, while visit motivation encompasses destination attributes, recommendations, and the availability of information.

The sample comprised 267 valid responses collected via Google Forms. The demographic breakdown revealed a higher proportion of male respondents (76%) compared to female respondents (24%). The majority of respondents were aged between 18 to 29 years (80%), and a significant portion were single (65%). The racial composition included 70% Malay, 15% Indian, and 15% Chinese, reflecting the diversity of the Malaysian population. Most respondents had tertiary education and were employed in the private sector (30%) or were students (24%). The household income distribution showed that 51.7% of respondents earned between RM4850 and RM10959 monthly.

The descriptive statistics indicated that younger respondents, those with higher household incomes, and those who were not married were significantly more likely to travel to destinations featured in movies or dramas. This finding aligns with the study by Hamzah et al. (2016), which suggested that young travellers aged 18 to 25 are more inclined to visit film-induced tourist destinations to gain experiences.

### Multiple Regression

**Table 1: Multiple Regression Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.799 <sup>a</sup>	.639	.636	.33520

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1(Constant)	.701	.159		4.422	<.001		
Destination Awareness	.390	.060	.362	6.548	<.001	.447	2.238
Visit Motivation	.500	.056	.492	8.885	<.001	.447	2.238

a. Dependent Variable: Intention Travel

Based on Table 1, the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is 0.639 showing that the result of this study is generalizable to other populations. The R<sup>2</sup> value is 0.639, which implies that approximately 63.9% of the variability in the dependent variable is explained by the predictors. Considering the value of R<sup>2</sup> and the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is close in value, it appears that no overfitting of the model to the sample occurred. The standard error of the estimate is relatively low, indicating that the predictions are, on average, close to the actual observed values.

It was stated by Petchko, (2018) that if the p-value is smaller, the coefficient is interpreted as being statistically significant. However, if it is greater, the coefficient is interpreted as being nonsignificant, or as not being significant. Based on Table 1, both destination awareness and visit motivation variables have a coefficient of less than 0.001 in value. Therefore, the variables are indeed significant.

### Pearson Correlation

**Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Output**

		mA	mIT
mA	Pearson Correlation	1	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	267	267
mIT	Pearson Correlation	.710**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	267	267
mE	Pearson Correlation	1	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	267	267
mIT	Pearson Correlation	.611**	1



	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	267	267
		mDA	mIT
mDA	Pearson Correlation	1	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	267	267
mIT	Pearson Correlation	.710**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	267	267
		mC	mIT
mC	Pearson Correlation	1	.674**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	267	267
mIT	Pearson Correlation	.674**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	267	267
		mI	mIT
mI	Pearson Correlation	1	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	267	267
mIT	Pearson Correlation	.612**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	267	267

Table 2 shows the Pearson Correlation output for the relationship between the variables. Most of the relationships between audio-visual, emotional attachment, destination attributes, recommendations, and availability of information are ranked in the range of 0.60 to 0.70. Pearson's for the correlation between emotional attachment and intention to travel has the lowest value of 0.61 which is highly correlated. Next, followed by the relationship between availability of information and intention to travel is 0.612 which is also highly correlated. The relationship between recommendation and intention to travel also is highly correlated with a value of 0.67. The correlation between destination attributes value at 0.71 which is highly correlated. Lastly, the relationship between audio-visual products and intention to travel set the highest correlation value with a value of 0.71.

### Discussion & Implications

The present study investigates the influence of movies on Malaysians' travel intentions, examining how cinematic portrayals impact destination awareness, visit motivation, and overall intention to travel. The findings indicate a significant relationship between exposure to movie-induced imagery and the heightened interest in the depicted locations. This aligns with the push and pull theory, suggesting that movies serve as powerful external stimuli (pull factors) that enhance the attractiveness of a destination, while internal motivations (push factors) such as the desire for novel experiences drive the decision to travel.

The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents who frequently watch movies are more likely to develop an interest in visiting the destinations featured in these films. This suggests that movies play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and travel aspirations, acting as a bridge between the viewer and the destination. The multiple regression analysis further supports this, demonstrating that movie-induced awareness significantly predicts travel intention, with motivation serving as a mediator in this relationship.

Additionally, the implications of these findings are profound for destination marketers, film producers, and tourism stakeholders. For destination marketers, leveraging film tourism can be a strategic tool to enhance destination branding and attract a broader audience. By collaborating with filmmakers, tourism boards can ensure that their destinations are portrayed in an appealing light, thereby driving interest and visitation.

Film producers can also benefit from these insights by recognizing the potential impact of their work on tourism. By creating compelling narratives set in real locations, they can indirectly contribute to the economic

development of these areas. Furthermore, tourism stakeholders can develop targeted marketing campaigns that highlight the connections between popular films and travel destinations, thereby tapping into the existing fan base of these movies.

## 5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study, while comprehensive, is not without its limitations. Firstly, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, such as social desirability bias, where respondents might overstate their interest in travel influenced by movies. Secondly, the sample is limited to Malaysian tourists, which may not be representative of other cultural contexts. Lastly, the study primarily focuses on the immediate impact of movies on travel intentions, without considering the long-term effects or the influence of other media forms such as television series and online streaming content.

Therefore, future research should aim to address these limitations by employing a more diverse and international sample to generalize the findings across different cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the lasting impact of movie-induced tourism and how it evolves. Additionally, examining the influence of other media forms, including television series and online streaming platforms, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how media content shapes travel behavior. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could also enrich the findings by providing deeper insights into the motivations and perceptions of tourists influenced by films.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of movies in shaping travel intentions among Malaysian tourists. The findings underscore the importance of film as a powerful tool for destination marketing, capable of enhancing destination awareness and motivating travel. By understanding the dynamics between movie exposure and travel behavior, stakeholders in the tourism and film industries can develop more effective strategies to capitalize on this relationship, ultimately driving economic benefits for the destinations featured in films. The study's limitations provide avenues for future research to further explore and validate these findings in different contexts and through various methodological approaches. Furthermore, by analyzing the influence of movies on Malaysians' travel intentions, the research provides empirical evidence on how cinematic experiences can drive tourism demand. The study advances the application of the push and pull theory in the realm of film tourism, demonstrating how internal motivations (push factors) and external attractions (pull factors) work together to influence destination choices among Malaysian moviegoers.

Additionally, the study expands the existing literature on destination awareness and visit motivation by focusing on the specific sociocultural dynamics of Malaysian tourists. The findings offer a pragmatic understanding of how movies resonate with local audiences and shape their travel behaviors, thereby filling a gap in the literature concerning non-Western perspectives on film tourism. On the other hand, policy-makers and tourism authorities in Malaysia should also strategically incorporate film tourism into national tourism strategies, fostering collaborations between the film and tourism industries. Promoting destinations featured in films through targeted marketing campaigns, particularly for lesser-known locations, enhances destination visibility, attracts a broader range of tourists and ensures that on-screen portrayals align with real-life experiences to boost tourist satisfaction and sustainable tourism growth.

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