

From Who They Are to How They Feel: Profiling Visitor Emotions in Coastal Tourism

De quiénes son a cómo se sienten: Perfilando las emociones de los visitantes en el turismo costero

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Abstract

Positive emotional experiences play invaluable roles in advancing tourism sustainability by fostering deeper visitor engagement, loyalty, and favourable destination revisit intentions. This study examines how user profiles and travel-related characteristics shape visitors' emotional experiences at coastal destinations. Drawing on 602 beach visitors surveyed in Ghana, Ordinary Least Squares regression and Independent Samples T-test were used to assess the differences and predictive influence of visitors' age, gender, education, income, origin, travel purpose, visit type, length of stay, and travel party on seven emotional constructs: awe, joy, calmness, affective attachment, love-affection, sadness, and regret. The results indicate that positive (joy, calmness, love-affection, awe) and reflexive (attachment) emotions are significantly influenced by higher income, tertiary education, leisure travel, and longer stays, whereas negative emotions (regret, sadness), although less prevalent, are associated with younger age, lower income, and shorter visits. The results contribute to the theoretical explanations of emotional variability in tourism and offer insights for designing emotionally resonating and inclusive coastal tourism experiences that enhance destination satisfaction. Identifying key affective drivers will provide destination managers with tools for tailoring experience designs to diverse visitor profiles while advancing emotion research by providing evidence from an underexplored West African context that highlights the affective dimensions of coastal tourism experience.

Keywords: *emotional experience; tourists profiling; beach tourism; Plutchik's emotional framework; affective events theory.*

Resumen

Las experiencias emocionales positivas desempeñan un papel fundamental en el avance de la sostenibilidad turística al fomentar una mayor participación de los visitantes, su lealtad y una mayor intención de volver al destino. Este estudio examina cómo las características demográficas y relacionadas con los viajes influyen en las experiencias emocionales de los visitantes en destinos costeros. A partir de una encuesta realizada a 602 visitantes de playas en Ghana, se utilizó la regresión de mínimos cuadrados ordinarios para evaluar la influencia predictiva de variables como la edad, el género, la educación, los ingresos, el origen del visitante, el propósito del viaje, el tipo de visita, la duración de la estancia y el grupo de viaje sobre siete constructos emocionales: asombro, alegría, calma, apego afectivo, afecto amoroso, tristeza y arrepentimiento. Los resultados indican que las emociones positivas (alegría, calma, afecto amoroso, asombro) y reflexivas (apego) están significativamente influenciadas por mayores ingresos, educación superior, viajes de ocio y estancias más largas, mientras que las emociones negativas (arrepentimiento, tristeza), aunque menos frecuentes, se asocian con una edad más joven, menores ingresos y visitas más cortas. Estos resultados contribuyen a las explicaciones teóricas de la variabilidad emocional en el turismo y ofrecen perspectivas para diseñar experiencias turísticas costeras inclusivas y con gran impacto emocional que mejoren la satisfacción del destino. La identificación de los principales factores afectivos proporciona a los gestores de destinos herramientas para adaptar sus experiencias a diversos perfiles de visitantes, al tiempo que impulsa la investigación sobre las emociones al aportar evidencia de un contexto poco explorado de África Occidental que pone de relieve las dimensiones afectivas de la experiencia turística costera.

Palabras clave: *experiencia emocional; perfilado de turistas; turismo de playa; marco emocional de Plutchik; teoría de los eventos afectivos.*

1 Introduction

Coastal tourism remains one of the most dynamic and emotionally resonant forms of travel, offering visitors a unique blend of natural beauty, sensory immersion, and symbolic meaning (Hu & Chen, 2024). Beyond its experiential appeal, coastal tourism also holds considerable global significance. Available statistics point to its substantial economic and tourism importance. The 2022 High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy estimated that coastal and marine

tourism accounts for approximately 50% of global tourism activity and contributes around US\$4.6 trillion annually, or 5.2% of global Gross Domestic Product. More recent tourism data further underscores the continued scale of the sector: UN Tourism reports that international tourism recovered to about 1.4 billion arrivals in 2024, while the broader blue economy supports around 100 million jobs, and Travel & Tourism overall contributed about US\$10.9 trillion and 357 million jobs globally in the same year (WTTC, 2025; UNCTAD, 2025). Regionally, Africa recorded 74 million international tourist arrivals in 2024, exceeding its 2019 level by 7%, while Europe received 747 million arrivals and remained the world's largest tourism region, and the Americas recorded 213 million arrivals, recovering to about 97% of pre-pandemic levels (UN Tourism, 2025). These figures suggest that although Africa operates at a smaller tourism scale than Europe and the Americas, it is an increasingly important and fast-recovering region within global tourism. The Sustainable Travel International (2024) also projected that approximately 80% of global tourism activity will occur in coastal areas, with beaches remaining among the most visited and emotionally resonant environments for travellers. In this context, the growing economic, experiential, and regional centrality of coastal destinations within the blue economy underscores the urgency of understanding coastal tourist experiences, particularly the emotional outcomes of those seeking sun, sea, and sand, and how such outcomes are shaped by visitor profiles in these settings, despite the limited scholarly attention given to this issue (Alipour et al., 2020).

Within this broader global context, coastal destinations in the Global South, especially in Africa, are becoming increasingly important. Yet they often operate under conditions different from those of more mature tourism markets in Europe and North America, where destination infrastructure, branding systems, and service ecosystems are generally more established (UN Tourism, 2025). In many African coastal destinations, including those in Ghana (where beaches remained the most important tourism resource segment) (Akyeampong, 2006), the physical environment itself often plays a more central role in shaping visitor experience. In contexts such as Ghana and Africa, emotional engagement with the beach setting has become especially important, not only because of the natural beauty of these destinations, but also because emotional resonance may compensate for limitations in tourism infrastructure or destination amenities (Dzitse & Amoah, 2024). This makes African coastal destinations an important setting for examining the affective dimensions of tourist experience.

Beaches are emotionally evocative. They offer opportunities for relaxation, nostalgia, awe, social connections, and emotions that are not merely incidental but integral to the tourism experience (Pearce et al., 2017; Zeng & Xu, 2021). These affective responses influence not only immediate but also long-term behavioural outcomes, such as destination attachment, word-of-mouth

advocacy, and environmental stewardship (Razzaq & Akhtar, 2024; Nguyen & Duong, 2025). However, while traditional models have focused on the cognitive evaluations of service quality or destination attributes, recent studies have shown that affective responses often mediate or even outweigh these cognitive judgments (Rivera et al., 2019; Mou, 2022). In emerging coastal destinations, where infrastructure may be limited but natural beauty is abundant, emotional experiences can be the primary driver of tourist satisfaction and advocacy (Dzitse & Amoah, 2024; Rangel-Buitrago & Ben-Haddad, 2024). Nevertheless, despite the growing scholarly attention paid to visitor experiences in tourism research, relatively little is known about how tourists' emotional experiences unfold (Volo, 2021; Wang et al., 2021), particularly in relation to their demographic and travel-related characteristics in sun, sea, sand destination settings (González-Reverté, 2022; Kelly, 2023). Consequently, Cassidy and Kennedy (2024) and Severin et al. (2022) observed that coastal beach environments are emotionally charged landscapes in which sensory stimuli (sunlight, waves, breeze), symbolic meanings (escape, healing), and personal expectations create deeply individualised emotional responses, yet remain scarcely assessed. Moreover, traditional models reduce this coastal richness to surface-level satisfaction metrics, ignoring how background and orientation, such as age, gender, and travel purpose, shape tourists' emotional reality (Pasaco-González et al., 2023).

Emotional experiences in growing destination environments are not only central to individual satisfaction but also influence broader sustainability outcomes, including destination loyalty, revisit intentions, and community support for tourism development (Robinson, 2021; Li et al., 2024). Moreover, variables such as age, gender, education, income, travel purpose, and group composition may significantly shape how tourists perceive and emotionally engage in coastal spaces (Câmara et al., 2023). Understanding these influences is critical for profiling and designing inclusive, emotionally resonant, and sustainable beach experiences. This study explored how socio-demographic and travel-related characteristics influence the emotional experiences at coastal beaches. By examining the emotional responses of diverse tourist profiles, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of visitor experiences and support the development of targeted strategies for destination management, marketing, and sustainability. It also offers new grounds for a psychometrically valid profile of beach emotional experiences, offering in an under-researched region, West Africa's emerging coastal destinations of Ghana. Ultimately, this study bridges the gap between affective tourism theory and practical destination governance by offering insights that are enriched theoretically and operationally relevant.

2 Literature Review

The centrality of emotion in tourism is no longer a peripheral consideration but a foundational pillar in understanding how tourists engage with destinations. Emotions are not simply reactions to stimuli; they are the fabric through which tourists interpret meaning, assign value, and construct memories. Hosany and Gilbert (2019) and Hosany and Gilbert (2010) argued that emotional responses are pivotal in shaping satisfaction, loyalty, and post-visit behaviours, which are critical for both destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. Unlike utilitarian consumption, in which functionality and efficiency dominate, tourism is inherently hedonic, symbolic, and experiential (Volo, 2021). It is the emotional resonance of a destination, not merely its physical attributes, that determines whether a tourist feels transformed, indifferent, or disappointed (Dzitse & Amoah, 2024). However, emotional experiences in tourism are complex and layered, encompassing a wide range of affective states such as joy, awe, nostalgia, serenity, and even negative emotions such as regret or frustration (Han & Hyun, 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2020). Hosany et al. (2015) noted that emotions are not isolated events but are embedded in the broader narrative of the tourist's identity, expectations, and social context at a given destination.

This recognition has prompted a critical shift in the tourism literature from static, one-size-fits-all models of satisfaction to dynamic, individualised understanding of affective engagement (Johnson & Brown, 2020; Clarke & Bowen, 2021). Emotional responses are not universally experienced or interpreted; rather, they are deeply personal, contextually embedded, and filtered through the lens of who a tourist is and how they perceive and emotionally process a destination (Tsai, 2023; González-Reverté, 2022; Filep & Laing, 2019). Ignoring this variability risks oversimplifying the emotional landscape of tourism and undermining the potential for designing context-specific experiences that resonate with diverse visitor segments. This is because these variabilities are influenced by different visitor segments. Therefore, understanding the emotional dimension of tourism requires a more nuanced, person-centred approach that recognises how tourists feel inseparable from who they are and how they experience a destination (Yuan & Vui, 2023; Šagovnović & Kovačić, 2021). This perspective is particularly vital in emotionally charged environments, such as coastal beach destinations, where sensory stimuli, symbolic meanings, and personal expectations converge to produce highly individualised emotional outcomes (Gounden, 2021; Hosany et al., 2020). Hence, affective tourism research must move beyond a surface-level satisfaction view and engage with emotional outcomes that shape tourist behaviour, memory, and meaning-making based on background and orientation in distinctive destinations such as coastal areas, when such studies seldom exist.

2.1 Emotional experience in tourism

Among all tourism environments, coastal beach destinations are uniquely positioned to evoke powerful emotional responses owing to their multisensory richness and symbolic associations (Dzitse & Amoah, 2024; Wang et al., 2023). Beach is not merely a physical space; it is an affective landscape in which natural beauty, rhythmic sounds, tactile sensations, sunlight, waves, breeze, symbolic meanings of escape and healing, and cultural meanings converge to create an emotionally immersive experience (Rangel-Buitrago & Ben-Haddad, 2024; Rivera et al., 2019). Research has consistently shown that coastal settings elicit a wide range of positive emotions, including joy, calmness, awe, and nostalgia (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2025; Pearce et al., 2017). These emotional states are often amplified by the sensory stimuli of the beach, sunlight, sea breeze, and sound of waves, which contribute to a heightened sense of presence, relaxation, and emotional clarity (Hall & Page, 2019). For many tourists, the beach functions as a restorative environment, offering psychological escape, emotional healing, and spiritual renewal (Fredline et al. 2019). According to Hu and Chen (2024), Güzel et al. (2020), and Pestana et al. (2020), the emotional salience of coastal destinations is so profound that it often becomes the defining feature of the travel experience, shaping not only satisfaction but also long-term attachment to a place. However, the emotional experience of coastal/beach tourism, usually referred to as sun, sea, and sand tourism, is not uniform. This is deeply influenced by tourists' sociodemographic and travel-related characteristics (Yuan & Vui, 2023; Gounden, 2021). A solo traveller may experience introspective serenity, while a family group may associate the beach with joy and bonding. First-time visitors may be overwhelmed by awe, whereas repeat visitors may experience a deeper sense of nostalgia, disappointment, and sadness (Shavanddasht & Allan, 2019). Cultural background also plays a critical role: what is liberating and joyful for one tourist may be unfamiliar or even uncomfortable and regretful for another (Vada et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2021). However, despite this emotional richness, much of the literature treats beach tourism as a passive pleasure-seeking activity, overlooking the personal and affective dimensions that define an experience. This gap calls for a more nuanced exploration of how tourists mediate their emotional responses to coastal destinations and engage with the environment. Understanding these emotional dynamics is not only academically valuable but also essential for destination managers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to design emotionally engaging, culturally sensitive, and psychologically restorative beach experiences, especially in emerging destinations such as Ghana and West Africa, where coastal tourism holds untapped potential for both economic development and emotional enrichment.

2.2 Conceptual framework

Understanding emotional experiences in sun, sea, and sand tourism requires a multidimensional theoretical lens that captures both the internal psychological processes of individuals and the external stimuli embedded in a given coastal environment. This is because emotions are not incidental byproducts of tourism encounters; they are central to how tourists interpret, evaluate, and remember their experiences (Tiwari et al., 2023). Therefore, this study integrates three theoretical perspectives to construct an emotionally grounded model: Affective Events Theory (AET), Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions, and Experience Economy Theory. Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) postulates that emotions emerge from situational experiences activated by discrete environmental events and are filtered through individual characteristics. Although developed in organisational psychology, AET has gained traction in tourism research owing to its explanatory power in experience-driven contexts, as experience is the main product sold in tourism (Stylos et al., 2024). In the tourism context, destination experiential platforms trigger visitor emotions through the interaction between visitor characteristics and destination attributes (Dzitse et al., 2025). Tourist profiles shape how external stimuli (such as coastal settings and environmental encounters) are emotionally processed and interpreted. Accordingly, AET provides logic for linking variables such as age, gender, education, and travel purpose to emotional and behavioural outcomes at destinations (Stylos et al. 2023; Pestana et al. 2020). Thus, AET supports the study's investigation into the interplay between visitor profiles and emotional responses, affirming that emotional engagement is not merely destination-based but also individually nuanced (Carvache-Franco, 2020; Ren & Pan, 2024). This dual influence underscores the need to assess visitors' characteristics and engagement with a destination. In doing so, AET enables a deeper understanding of emotional reactions, which are critical predictors of destination satisfaction, behavioural intentions, and loyalty.

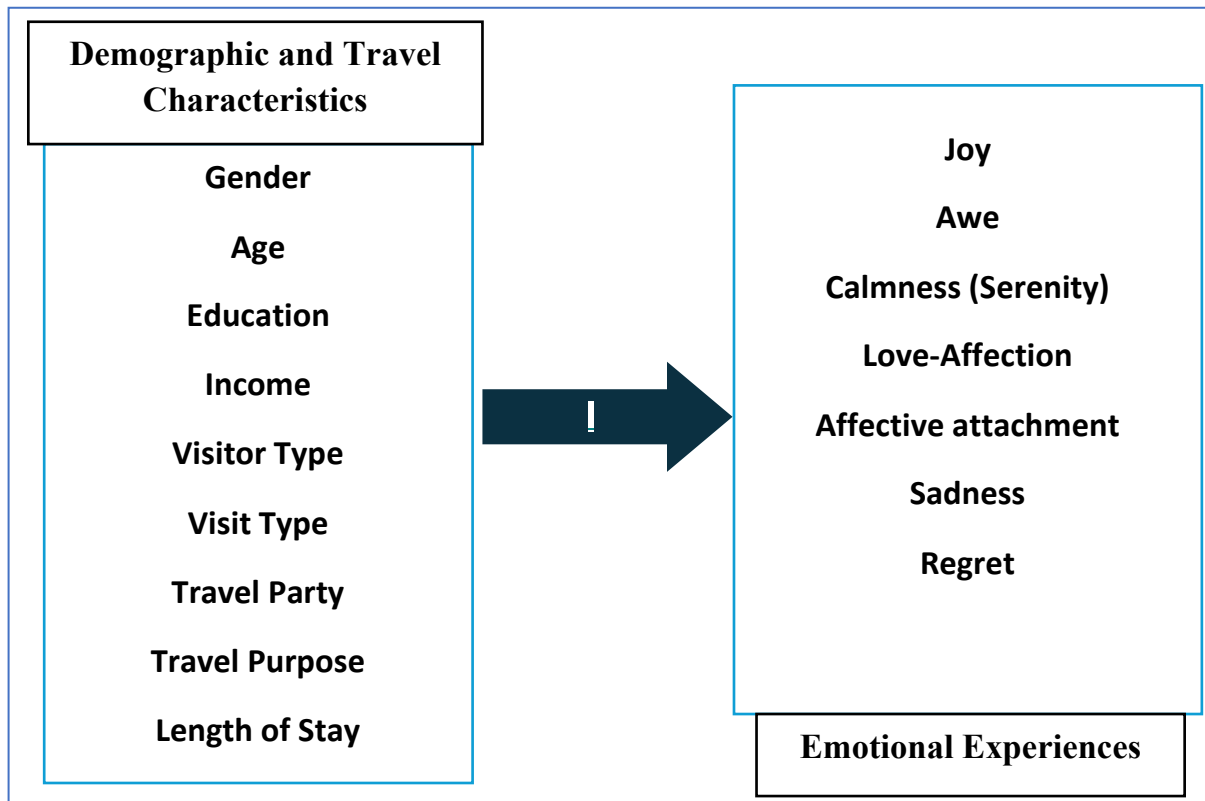
While AET explains the factors that can lead to emotion formation, Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion (1980) specifies a taxonomy of eight emotions (joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, anticipation, anger, and disgust) that are formed or experienced at destinations and their dyadic relationships. Consequently, this model has been widely adopted and adapted in tourism research to categorise emotional responses (Yang et al. 2020). In this study, seven emotional constructs (joy, awe, calmness, nostalgia, love and affection, sadness, and regret) were mapped onto Plutchik's framework. Reflective, joy, and love affect the primary emotions of joy and trust. Awe embodies surprise, whereas calmness captures anticipation. Nostalgia embodies the blended effect of anticipation, joy, and sadness. Regret and sadness capture negative valence states (anger, disgust, sadness), which influence memory and behavioural intentions (Rahmani et al., 2019).

Thus, Plutchik's structure allows for a clear categorisation and comparison of visitor profiles. Moreover, it is descriptive rather than explanatory, making its integration with AET essential for a contextualised understanding of emotional diversity at beach destinations. Thus, in this study, Plutchik's framework was used to operationalise the dependent variable, emotional experience, as it offers analytical clarity and enables comparisons and influences of various tourist profiles across positive and negative emotional outcomes.

However, Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy Theory emphasises that experience is the primary source of value creation in service design. This suggests that well-designed experiences, particularly in natural and sensory-rich environments such as beaches, generate emotional satisfaction and behavioural loyalty. It emphasises the design of engaging experiences (aesthetic, entertainment, and escapism) within which well-being and emotional experiences are embedded, even at beach destinations (Dzitse & Ahiagbah, 2025; Nawijn & Biran, 2019). This embedded emotional engagement drives destination loyalty, word-of-mouth, and sustainable tourism behaviour. This theory justifies focusing on emotional experience as a core tourism outcome, which supports the practical relevance of understanding how different tourist profiles emotionally engage with beach environments, thereby informing destination designs, marketing strategies, and policy interventions, particularly for incipient destinations, such as the coastal regions in West Africa and Ghana (Şeker & Unur, 2022; Torres-Moraga et al., 2021). Therefore, while the theory tends to adopt a consumer-centric lens, its integration with AET and Plutchik's model ensures that emotional experiences are understood not only as marketable outcomes but also as deeply personal and affectively grounded phenomena.

Theoretically, the three theories are synergistic. By integrating these theories, this study provides a framework to understand the emotional dimensions of sun, sea, and sand tourism. This theoretical combination enables an analysis of how tourists emotionally experience coastal environments and why these experiences matter for satisfaction and destination sustainability. It establishes that beach emotional experiences (Plutchik) are shaped by tourist demographics (AET) and their significance (Experience Economy) for the sustainability of coastal destinations (Figure 1). These advances affective tourism research while providing insights for designing enriching beach emotional experiences in coastal destination settings. In other words, while previous studies have largely focused on what tourists think, this study captures how tourists feel and why it matters. The established variables in profiling these emotions in coastal tourism, as operationalised in the study, are therefore elaborated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Social and Affective Factors in Profiling Emotion in Coastal Tourism



Source: author's elaboration

3 Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research methodology using a cross-sectional survey design to engage respondents over a specific period of time in their participation and responses to the research objectives. A structured, two-part questionnaire was developed to guide the data collection for this study. The first part focused on the dependent variables and comprised 45 statements designed to capture tourists' emotional experiences across seven affective dimensions: joy, calmness (serenity), awe, affective attachment, love (affection), sadness, and regret (Table 1). These dimensions reflect the multifaceted nature of emotional engagement on coastal beaches. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The second part of the questionnaire captured the independent variables, comprising nine items related to respondents' sociodemographic and travel characteristics. These included nationality, age, gender, education level, income level, purpose of travel, visitor origin, visit type, travel party, and length of stay.

Table 1: Construct and measurement

<i>Construct</i>	<i>No of Items</i>	<i>Sample Measurement Items</i>	<i>Source</i>
<i>Joy</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>I found happiness in the simple pleasures of this beach." "I experienced moments of pure bliss as I was on this beach," and "The beach environment excites me and makes me feel carefree."</i>	<i>Han & Hyun, 2018; Hosany & Gilbert, 2019; Güzel et al., 2020; Smith & Johnson, 2020.</i>
<i>Calmness</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>"I experience feelings of tranquillity here at the beach," "The gentle sound of the waves and the soothing sea breeze helped me relax," and "This beach provides a welcome arousal of a feeling of harmony</i>	<i>Pearce et al., 2017; Fredline et al., 2019; Hall & Page, 2019; Smith & Johnson, 2020.</i>
<i>Awe</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>Facilities are clean; Beach environment is attractive; Toilets are hygienic.</i>	<i>Pearce et al., 2017; Han & Hyun, 2018; Rivera et al., 2019; Smith & Johnson, 2020</i>
<i>Affective attachment</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>"This beach fascinates me." "I have experienced a distinctive, desirable feeling." "The experience made me develop a passionate drive for the beach." "This beach provides a perfect setting to free myself from boredom." "I feel relief and ease as I am on this beach."</i>	<i>Hosany et al., 2015; Shavanddasht & Allan, 2019; Güzel et al., 2020; Pestana et al., 2020; Johnson & Brown, 2020,</i>
<i>Love-Affection</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>"I develop a sense of affection toward this beach destination," "It offers breathtaking scenery that kept me attached," and "This beach environment made me develop a fondness for this place."</i>	<i>Hosany et al., 2015; Pestana et al. 2020; Hosany & Gilbert, 2019; Güzel et al. 2020.</i>
<i>Sadness</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>"The state of the beach environment made me feel unhappy," "I feel insecure or unsafe being at a beach like this," and "The state of this beach environment gets me frustrated."</i>	<i>Han & Hyun, 2018; Nawijn & Biran, 2019; Shavanddasht & Allan, 2019.</i>
<i>Regrets</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>"I feel regret for travelling to this kind of beach," "The quality of this beach left me feeling unfulfilled," and "I felt irritated over experiencing a beach destination like this."</i>	<i>Han & Hyun, 2018; Nawijn & Biran, 2019; Shavanddasht & Allan, 2019; Pestana et al., 2020; Smith & Johnson, 2020.</i>

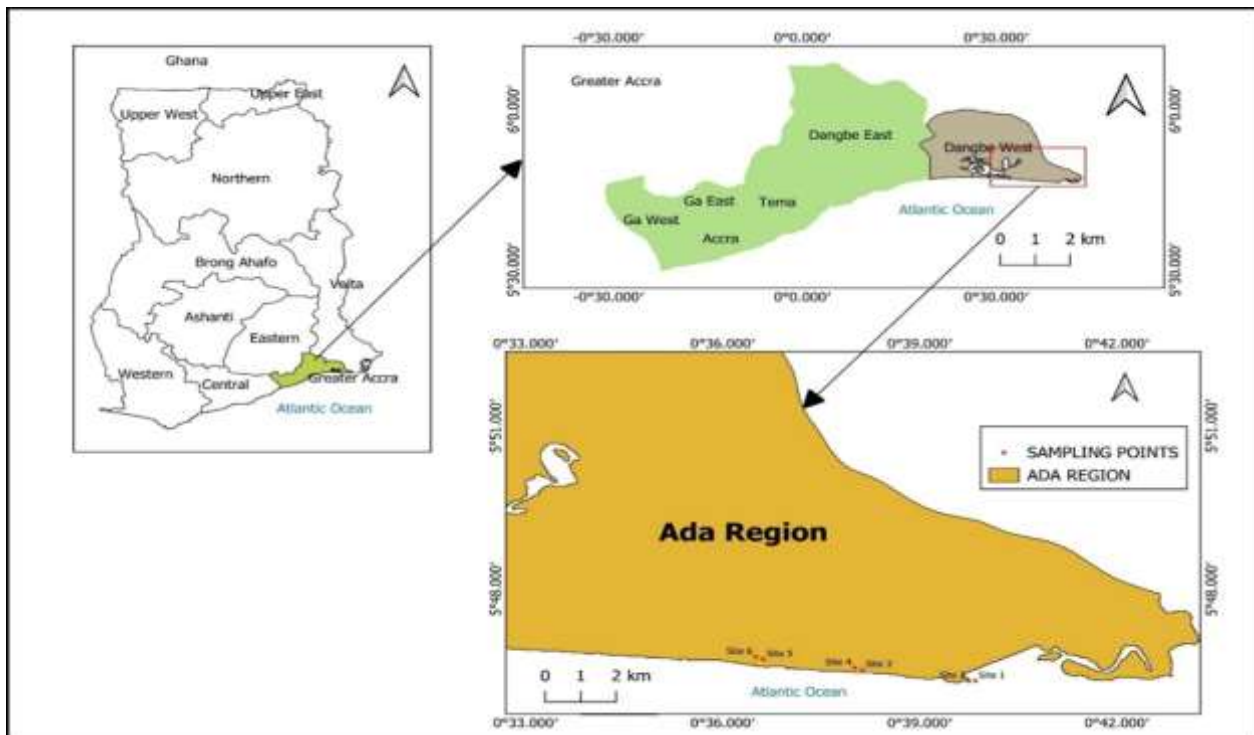
Source: author's elaboration

3.1 Pre-test and Data Collection

Before data collection, a pre-test questionnaire was administered from July 6 to July 30, 2021, with a sample of 38 beach users at site 4 (Figure 2) in the Ada Tourist Region of Ghana. This pretest was instrumental in refining the instrument, identifying contextual ambiguities, and enhancing content validity in a Ghanaian setting. During the main data collection phase, self-administered questionnaires were distributed to beach visitors who were actively at the beach and had spent a minimum of one night at beach destination facilities in the Ada region. Data were collected from all six operational beach sites in the Ada Tourist Region of Ghana, located

approximately between latitudes 5°45' and 6°00' North and longitudes of 0°20' to 0°35' East. This region has been designated as a uniquely promising tourism enclave by the Ghana Tourism Authority since 2018, making it a strategically relevant site for examining beach-based tourism experiences. By covering all operational beaches within the enclave, the study attained comprehensive site coverage within the selected tourism zone.

Figure 2: A map of Ghana showing the data collection point in the Ada Tourist Region



Source: Dzitse & Ahiagbah (2025)

A total of 615 questionnaires were distributed across two beaches over a six-month period using a convenience sampling technique (from November 3, 2021, to April 26, 2022). This approach was necessary because of the absence of a sampling frame and the transient nature of tourists and beachgoers, which makes probability sampling impractical. After excluding 13 incomplete responses, a final sample of 602 valid questionnaires was retained for the analysis. In line with Hair et al. (2013), a minimum of 100 respondents was considered sufficient for statistical estimation in the quantitative research. Thus, the final sample size of 602 was deemed adequate and purposeful for the analytical objectives of the study.

3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and Amos 23. First, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on a set of 45 emotion-

related items on a sample of 100 responses. This reduced the items to 41 steps under seven latent factors with eigenvalues greater than one (≥ 1), corresponding to the emotional constructs of Awe, Joy, Calmness, Affective attachment, Love–Affection, Sadness, and Regrets, with all variables with factor loading of 0.50 or above (Stevens, 1992). Each factor demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Kaiser, 1974) (Table 2), and its normality values were also appropriate. Following the EFA, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 23 was conducted on the remaining 502 sampled responses to further validate the dimensional structure of beach emotional experiences, with the summary results captured in Table 3. After the factor analyses, a composite score was computed for each emotional construct based on the retained items in the CFA. These composite scores were derived by averaging the items that loaded significantly on each factor, thereby creating continuous variables that represented the intensity of each emotional experience. These scores served as dependent variables in the subsequent regression and within-group analyses. The use of composite scores ensured that the emotional constructs were statistically valid and psychometrically sound, allowing for a more precise modelling of their relationships with tourists' demographic and behavioural characteristics.

Descriptive statistics were then calculated to provide an overview of the sample profile and distribution of emotional experiences. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise categorical variables such as gender, age group, education level, income, travel purpose, visit type, length of stay, and travel party composition (Table 1). For emotional constructs, means and standard deviations were computed to assess the central tendency and variability of each emotional response. This step offers a foundational understanding of the emotional landscape of beach tourism in the context of this study. To examine the influence of tourists' sociodemographic and travel-related characteristics on their emotional experiences, seven separate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models were estimated, one for each emotional construct. The independent variables included age ($< 30 = 0$, 30 , and $\text{above} = 1$), gender (male = 0, female = 1), education (high school = 0, tertiary = 1), income level (less than \$200 = 0, more than \$200 = 1), travel purpose (others = 0, holiday/leisure = 1), visit type (first time = 0, repeat = 1), length of stay (less than three days = 0, three or more days = 1), and travel party (alone = 0, group = 1). Each model produced unstandardized coefficients (β), standard errors, and p-values that were used to assess the direction, strength, and significance of each predictor. The R-squared (R^2) values were also reported to indicate the proportion of variance in each emotional construct explained by the model.

This multistep analytical approach allowed us to understand how different tourist profiles influence emotional engagement at coastal destinations. By combining factor analysis with regression modelling, the study not only validated the emotional constructs but also provided empirical evidence of their socio-behavioural determinants. This approach enhances the theoretical and practical relevance of our findings, particularly in the tourism context of Ghana and West Africa.

4 Results

Out of the total of 602 responses used in the study, it was made up of relatively balanced gender involvement, with 52.4% male and 47.6% female tourists (Table 2). Most respondents (62.0%) were over 30 years old, whereas 38.0% were 30 years old or younger. In terms of educational attainment, a significant proportion (76.8%) had completed tertiary education or higher, whereas 23.2% had completed high school education or less. Income levels were nearly evenly split, with 50.5% of respondents earning \$200 or less and 49.5% earning above \$200. Regarding travel characteristics, 52.2% of tourists were domestic visitors, while 47.8% were international (inbound). The travel party composition showed that 52.8% of the respondents travelled alone and 47.2% travelled in groups. The sample was evenly divided between first-time (49.3%) and repeat visitors (50.7%). Most tourists (63.3%) stayed for less than three days, whereas 36.7% stayed for three or more days. Finally, 46.5% of the respondents travelled for holidays or leisure purposes, whereas 53.5% indicated other travel motivations.

Table 2. Socio-demographic and travel characteristics of respondents (N = 602)

Socio-demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	316	52.4
	Female	286	47.6
Age	≤30 years	229	38.0
	>30 years	373	62.0
Education	≤ High School	140	23.2
	≥ Tertiary	462	76.8
Income	≤ \$ 200 (Ghs 2000)	304	50.5
	>\$ 200 (Above GHS 2000)	298	49.5
Travel Characteristics			
Visitor Type (Visitor Origin)	Domestic	314	52.2
	Inbound	288	47.8
Travel Party	Alone	318	52.8
	Group	284	47.2
Visit Type	First Time	297	49.3
	Repeat visit	305	50.7
Stay Length	<3days	381	63.3
	≥ 3days	221	36.7
Travel Purpose	Others	322	53.5
	Holiday/Leisure	280	46.5

Source: author's elaboration

Following a factorial analysis, the reliability of the variables measuring the emotional experience constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha values above the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that all constructs were reliable (Table 3). Additionally, the normality of this data was assessed to serve as a basis for further analysis. This revealed skewness and kurtosis values (z-values) within the -2 to +2 range ($p > 0.05$) (Shapiro-Wilk test), which is indicative of a normal distribution of the used dataset (Table 3). Tourists' emotional responses revealed predominantly positive affective experiences at the coastal destinations. Tourists strongly agreed with feelings of attachment ($M = 1.85$) and agreed to have experience calmness ($M = 1.88$), awe ($M = 2.19$), and love–affection ($M = 2.46$), indicating that the beach environment evoked emotional reflection, tranquillity, admiration, and social connection. Joy ($M = 2.73$) and sadness ($M = 2.82$) fell within an indifferent range, suggesting a more neutral emotional response, possibly influenced by contextual or individual factors. Regret ($M = 3.78$) was notably low, falling within the disagreement range, implying that most tourists were generally satisfied with their experiences and did not feel disappointed or sad (Table 3). Overall, the results suggest that coastal tourism fosters emotional enrichment and satisfaction with opportunities to further enhance joy through improved engagement and experiential design.

Table 3. Reliability and normality of emotional experience constructs based on preliminary data

Latent Constructs	No of Items	Eigen-value	Cronbach alpha	Variance explained (%)	Mean	Std. D	Skewness	Kurtosis
Joy	6	8.11	.789	13.26	2.73	0.882	0.711	1.416
Calmness	9	7.22	.893	12.11	1.88	0.963	0.514	0.542
Awe	8	5.49	.712	9.48	2.19	1.021	0.612	1.426
Affective attachment	5	4.04	.765	8.63	1.85	0.844	0.816	1.313
Love-Affection	4	2.13	.812	8.25	2.46	0.835	0.651	1.656
Sadness	5	2.45	.733	7.18	2.82	0.831	-0.521	0.186
Regrets	4	1.84	.754	6.06	3.78	1.433	-0.525	0.255
Total	41							

KMO = 0.889; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (X^2) = 14821.21; $p = 0.001$; Total Variance = 64.97 %

Note: Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation; mean values range from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly agree.

Source: authors' elaboration

To validate the dimensional structure of beach emotional experiences, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted before the regression analysis. The CFA specification followed the seven-factor structure identified in the EFA, namely joy, serenity, awe, affective attachment, love/affection, sadness, and regret. The results indicated that the measurement model achieved an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 1216.48$, $df = 584$, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA

= 0.042, and SRMR = 0.058. These indices suggest that the proposed seven-factor model adequately represented the observed covariance structure. The standardised factor loadings ranged from 0.49 to 0.88, confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (For a complete list of items and loadings, see Appendix A). The strongest loadings were observed for the love/affection and serenity dimensions, while sadness and regrets showed comparatively weaker item performance. The calculated composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.732 to 0.833, indicating acceptable internal consistency across the constructs (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The average variance explained (AVE) values were strongest for affective attachment, joy, love/affection, awe, and serenity, while sadness and regret showed lower convergent validity (Table 4), but were all above the 0.50 threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Overall, the CFA provided reasonable support for the multidimensional measurement structure used in the study. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating adequate discriminant validity among the study constructs.

Table 4. Summary of CFA results and discriminant validity

(CR)	(AVE)	Construct	JOY	SER	AWE	ATT	LOV	SAD	REG
0.781	0.692	Joy (JOY)	0.832						
0.822	0.618	Serenity (SER)	0.624	0.786					
0.752	0.653	Awe (AWE)	0.571	0.603	0.808				
0.833	0.712	Affective attachment (ATT)	0.446	0.512	0.538	0.844			
0.744	0.681	Love/Affection (LOV)	0.667	0.641	0.589	0.554	0.825		
0.732	0.536	Sadness (SAD)	-0.214	-0.286	-0.173	0.118	-0.241	0.732	
0.762	0.546	Regrets (REG)	-0.176	-0.201	-0.154	0.164	-0.192	0.483	0.739
Cronbach α			0.811	0.912	0.741	0.778	0.861	0.764	0.783

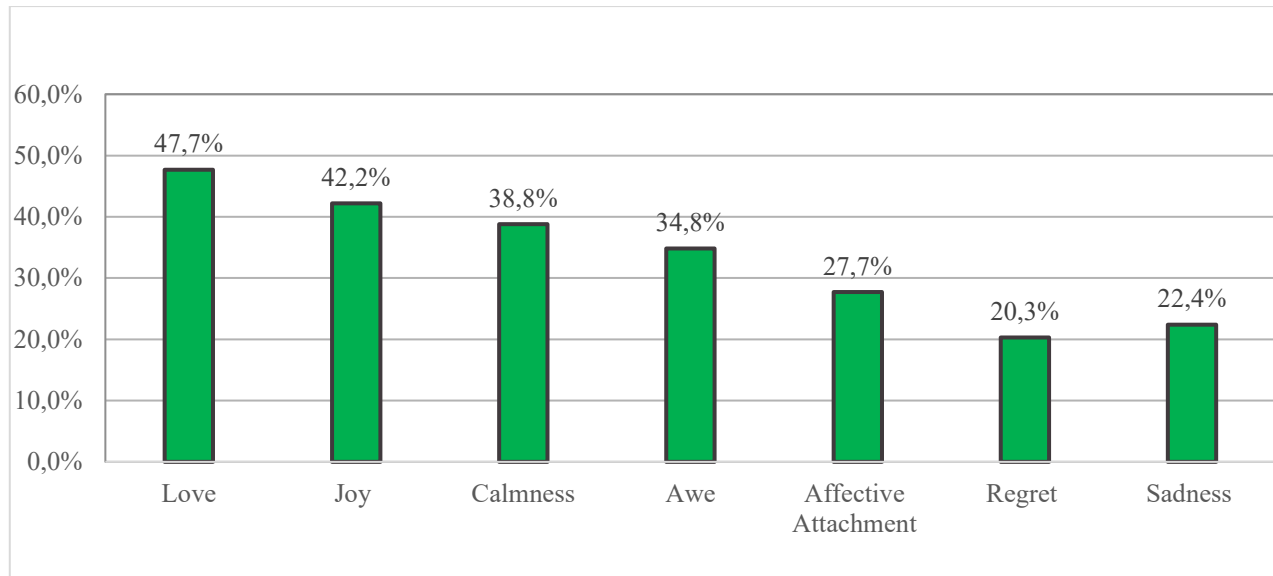
Note: $\chi^2 = 1216.48$, $df = 584$, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.042, and SRMR = 0.058.

Source: authors' elaboration

In a further analysis, seven separate OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) regression models were used to examine the influence of sociodemographic and travel-related characteristics on tourists' emotional experiences at the beach. The predictors included age, sex, education, income level, travel purpose, visit type, length of stay, and type of travel party. The results revealed meaningful patterns in how sociodemographic and travel-related characteristics influenced tourists' emotional experiences at the beach (Table 5). Among the seven emotional constructs, positive emotions such as Joy, Love, Calmness, and Awe recorded the highest R^2 values, indicating that the selected predictors explained a substantial portion of the variance in these emotional

responses (Figure 3). Specifically, Love–Affection had the strongest model fit ($R^2 = .48$), followed closely by Joy ($R^2 = .42$), Calmness ($R^2 = .39$), and Awe ($R^2 = .35$).

Figure 3. R^2 values by emotional experience constructs



Source: authors' elaboration

The regression results indicate that tourists' emotional engagement with the beach environment is shaped primarily by socio-demographic and travel-related characteristics (Table 5). Positive emotional outcomes were more consistently associated with the explanatory variables than negative emotions. In particular, higher income, tertiary education, holiday travel, and longer stays emerged as the most consistent predictors of positive emotional experiences, suggesting that emotionally rewarding coastal experiences are more common among better-resourced and leisure-oriented visitors. Group travel also contributed to stronger positive responses, especially love/affection, pointing to the socially immersive nature of sun, sea, and sand tourism. Nostalgia showed a more specific pattern, being most strongly associated with repeat visitation and older age, which suggests that familiarity with the destination deepens reflective and memory-based responses. By contrast, sadness and regret were less well explained by the model overall, indicating that these negative emotions may depend more on factors not captured in the present analysis.

Table 5. Summary of the relationship between visitor profile, travel characteristics and emotional experiences

Predictor	Awe	Joy	Calmness	Attachment	Love	Sadness	Regrets
Age (>30 = 1)	0.15*	0.13*	0.10*	0.16**	0.13*	-0.09	-0.11*
Gender (F = 1)	0.10	0.15**	0.13*	0.09	0.11*	-0.12*	-0.08

Education (Tertiary = 1)	0.18*	0.24**	0.20**	0.10	0.21**	-0.06	-0.12
Visitor Type (Inbound = 1)	0.14	0.15	0.19	0.18*	0.25	-0.10	0.11
Income (>\$150 = 1)	0.23**	0.30***	0.18**	0.07	0.21**	-0.08	-0.18*
Travel Purpose (Holiday = 1)	0.20**	0.28**	0.22**	0.12*	0.25***	-0.11*	-0.12*
Visit Type (Repeat = 1)	0.06	0.10	0.12*	0.27***	0.09	-0.09	-0.07
Stay Length (≥ 3 Days = 1)	0.19**	0.24**	0.20**	0.16*	0.21**	-0.12	-0.16*
Travel Party (Group = 1)	0.10*	0.25*	0.11*	0.07	0.30***	-0.07	-0.05
R^2	.348	.422	.388	.277	.477	.224	.203

Note: Entries are β coefficients. *** $p \leq .001$, ** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$

Source: authors' elaboration

An independent-samples t-test was used to complement the OLS regression results by comparing mean emotional scores across key socio-demographic and travel profile groups. While the regression models estimate net effects, the t-tests provide a simpler comparison between the two categories within each grouping variable. For ease of interpretation, the original five-point response scale was recoded into three categories: agree, neutral, and disagree. To avoid repetition, only statistically significant results are discussed (the full in-group analysis is presented in the Appendix). Table 6 shows that significant group differences were limited and occurred mainly for calmness, joy, and love/affection. Female visitors and those over 30 reported significantly higher calmness than male and younger visitors. Inbound visitors reported significantly higher joy, calmness, and love/affection than domestic visitors, while repeat visitors showed significantly higher calmness and love/affection than first-time visitors. Holiday/leisure visitors also reported significantly higher joy and love/affection than those travelling for other purposes. No significant differences were found for education, income, travel party, or stay length. Overall, these results indicate that emotional experiences at the beach vary more by travel-related characteristics and selected demographic factors than by socio-economic profile alone.

Table 6. Group differences in beach emotional experiences

Grouping Variable	Emotional outcome	Group means	p-value
Gender	Calmness	Male = 1.92 : Female = 1.46	.044*
Age	Calmness	≤ 30 years = 1.87 : > 30 years = 1.44	.035*

Visitor Type (Origin)	Joy	Domestic = 1.88 : Inbound = 1.45	.048*
Visitor Type (Origin)	Calmness	Domestic = 1.48 : Inbound = 1.44	.039*
Visitor Type (Origin)	Love	Domestic = 1.48 : Inbound = 1.42	.048*
Visit Type	Calmness	First-time = 1.77 : Repeat visit = 1.46	.034*
Visit Type	Love	First-time = 1.78 : Repeat visit = 1.47	.033*
Travel Purpose	Joy	Others = 2.17 : Holiday/Leisure = 1.44	.029*
Travel Purpose	Love	Others = 1.51 : Holiday/Leisure = 1.41	.048*

Note: 1.0 -1.49 = Agreed; 1.50 – 2.50 =Neutral; 2.50 – 3.0 =Disagree; * $p \leq 0.05$ (significant)

Source: authors' elaboration

5 Discussion

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that tourists' sociodemographic and travel-related characteristics significantly shape their emotional experience at coastal beach destinations. The findings reveal that positive emotional constructs, particularly love-affection, joy, calmness (serenity), and awe, are strongly predicted by variables such as income level, travel purpose, education, and length of stay. Among all emotional constructs, love-affection ($R^2 = .48$) and joy ($R^2 = .42$) emerged as the most strongly predicted, suggesting that beach tourism in this context is deeply affective and socially enriching. These results align with those of previous studies that have emphasised the emotional richness of leisure travel. Hosany and Gilbert (2010) found that joy and love are dominant emotions in memorable tourism experiences, particularly in natural and coastal settings. Similarly, Tung et al. (2011) identified emotional connections and social bonding as key components of memorable tourism experiences, supporting the strong influence of group travel and holiday purposes observed in this study. These findings underscore the importance of designing tourism experiences that foster emotional connections and social interactions, particularly for leisure travellers, which can guide destination managers in creating emotionally resonant and loyalty-enhancing experiences. The significant role of income and education in predicting joy, awe, and serenity also supports the notion that tourists with greater resources and cultural capital are more likely to engage deeply with their environment. This finding is consistent with that of Wang et al. (2021), who noted that higher-income tourists tended to seek and appreciate emotionally rewarding experiences. The influence of tertiary education may also reflect greater emotional literacy and openness to affective engagement (Câmara et al., 2023). These results imply that emotional engagement is not only a function of the destination but also of the visitor's capacity to interpret and internalise experiences. This highlights the need to tailor

experiences to different visitor segments to ensure that both high- and low-income tourists emotionally access opportunities through inclusive pricing, interpretation, and design.

The results also showed that female tourists reported significantly higher levels of joy, serenity, and love, and lower levels of sadness. This aligns with gender-based emotion research (e.g. Wang et al., 2023). However, it contrasts with studies in more individualistic societies where gender differences in emotional expression are less pronounced (e.g. Hosany et al., 2020). This suggests that cultural norms surrounding emotional openness and gender roles may be more salient in the West African context, influencing how emotions are experienced and reported. The implication here is that emotional tourism research must be culturally grounded, and that destination marketing and experience design should be sensitive to gendered emotional preferences and expressions. Nostalgia was most strongly predicted by repeated visits and age, reinforcing the idea that emotional memory and familiarity enhance reflective emotional state. This finding is consistent with that of Zeng and Xu (2021), who found that nostalgia is a key driver of destination loyalty, particularly among older and returning tourists (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2025). The emotional depth associated with nostalgia also aligns with Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions, which conceptualises nostalgia as a complex blend of joy and sadness, a duality evident in the emotional profiles of repeat visitors. However, repeated visits had a limited influence on joy, awe, love, and affection. This contrasts with the findings of Clarke and Bowen (2021) and Shavanddasht and Allan (2019), who found that repeat visitors often reported stronger emotional attachment and satisfaction because of familiarity and deeper engagement. The weaker effect observed in this study may reflect a different visitor motivation structure in Ghanaian coastal tourism, in which first-time visitors may be emotionally stimulated by novelty and discovery. This nuance challenges the assumption that emotional intensity always increases with repeat visits and suggests that destination managers should not rely solely on loyalty-based emotional engagement but also invest in designing emotionally impactful first-time experiences.

While the current study found that sadness and regret were influenced by factors such as income, age, and travel purpose, the overall explanatory power for these emotions was relatively low ($R^2 = .22$ and $.20$). This deviates from studies such as Nawijn and Biran (2019), who suggested that negative emotions, particularly post-trip regret, can be strongly shaped by unmet expectations and travel constraints. One possible explanation is that, in the Ghanaian context, the restorative and socially immersive nature of beach tourism may buffer against intense negative effects, even among lower-income or short-stay visitors. This indicates a potential cultural or environmental moderating effect that warrants further exploration in future studies. Moreover, regret and sadness, although less strongly predicted, were still meaningfully influenced by income, age, and

purpose of travel. Tourists with lower incomes, shorter stays, and non-leisure travel purposes are more likely to report regret, suggesting that unmet expectations or limited engagement may contribute to negative affect. This ratifies Oliver's (1980) assertion that satisfaction, and by extension emotional response, is shaped by the gap between expectations and actual experience. The buffering effect of leisure travel and longer stays on regret and sadness also echoes findings by Nawijn and Biran (2019), who observed that vacationers experience a "post-trip mood boost" that is stronger among those who travel for pleasure and relaxation. These findings suggest that emotional sustainability, minimising negative affect while enhancing positive emotional outcomes, should be a strategic priority in tourism planning, particularly in emerging destinations, where visitor expectations and resource constraints vary widely.

The further group difference results indicate that emotional experiences at Ghana's beaches are not uniform across all visitor categories. In particular, calmness appears to be more strongly associated with female visitors, older visitors, and repeat visitors, suggesting that familiarity, life stage, and possibly differing expectations of the beach environment shape how emotive the experience feels. Similarly, inbound visitors and holiday/leisure travellers reported stronger positive emotions such as joy and love/affection, which may reflect a greater orientation toward leisure, novelty, and destination appreciation (Dzitse & Ahiagbah, 2025). The results indicate that beyond multivariate effects, some emotional responses are also visibly differentiated across visitor groups at the mean-comparison level. This strengthens the profiling dimension of the study and suggests that emotional experiences in coastal tourism are partly structured by both visitor profile and travel characteristics.

It is, however, important that these findings should be understood in relation to the developmental stage of the destination. As an emerging coastal tourism destination, Ghana may evoke emotional responses that differ from those reported in more mature destinations such as parts of the Mediterranean (Alipour et al., 2020) and South America (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020), where tourism saturation, crowding, and perceived loss of authenticity may shape visitor experiences differently. Thus, in emerging destinations, visitors may respond more strongly to novelty, place distinctiveness, and relatively less commercialised settings. This comparison is only suggestive in the present study, since no direct cross-destination analysis was undertaken, but it highlights an important direction for future comparative research.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study offer meaningful contributions by bridging three influential frameworks: Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

(Plutchik, 1980), and Experience Economy Theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Consistent with AET, the results demonstrate that situational factors such as travel purpose, length of stay, and group composition significantly shape tourists' emotional responses, affirming the theory's core proposition that discrete events trigger affective reactions. However, the influence of stable individual characteristics such as age, gender, and education suggests that AET alone may be insufficient to explain emotional variability in tourism and destination contexts fully. This finding highlights the need to integrate dispositional and contextual variables to capture the entire spectrum of emotional outcomes. Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions provides a useful taxonomy for interpreting the identified emotional constructs of joy, awe, serenity, nostalgia, love, sadness, and regret. Emotions such as joy, love/affection, and serenity align with Plutchik's primary emotions of joy and trust, whereas awe reflects a blend of surprise and admiration. Nostalgia, which was strongly predicted by age and repeated visits, represents a complex emotion that blends joy and sadness, which is consistent with Plutchik's notion of emotional dyads. Moreover, the relatively low levels of sadness and regret, particularly among older, higher-income, and leisure travellers, suggest that negative emotions were peripheral in the emotional spectrum. This observed polarity between positive and negative emotions aligns with his structural model, and the presence of complex emotions, such as nostalgia and regret, supports Plutchik's notion of blended affective states. However, the framework's descriptive nature limits its ability to explain the antecedents of these emotions, particularly in culturally specific tourism settings, such as Ghana. Most importantly, while Plutchik's model effectively categorises these emotions, it does not explain why certain tourists are more likely to experience specific emotions, which is an explanatory gap addressed by the sociodemographic and behavioural predictors in this study. Thus, the results also suggest that emotional experiences are not only biologically rooted but also socially and contextually constructed, requiring a more dynamic emotional model.

Finally, Experience Economy Theory is also substantiated, particularly through the strong association between leisure-oriented travel and heightened emotional engagement, reinforcing the idea that emotionally rich experiences are central to tourism value creation. The significant role of group travel and repeat visitation in enhancing positive emotions such as love, affection, and joy further supports the theory's emphasis on co-created, memorable experiences of escapism and social immersion. Nonetheless, the theory's normative focus on positive emotions overlooks the significance of negative affective states of individuals, such as sadness and regret, which this study finds to be meaningful components of the emotive experience. These negative emotions, while less intense, still shape post-visit reflections and future behavioural intentions, suggesting that emotional value in tourism is multidimensional. This highlights the importance of

designing experiences that not only meet functional expectations but also stimulate emotional depth across diverse visitor profiles.

Based on the results of this study, a theoretical contribution emerges by advancing the integration of emotional frameworks in tourism. This study uniquely projects that emotional experiences in tourism are best understood through an integrative lens that combines the event-driven mechanisms of AET, structural clarity of Plutchik's emotional taxonomy, and the value-centred perspective of the Experience Economy. This study thus extends the affective tourism theory through a demographically grounded lens and provides destination managers with tools to design emotionally intelligent, culturally resonant, and sustainable experiences that foster loyalty, advocacy, and stewardship. Moreover, while the Experience Economy theory leans toward optimising positive affect, this study broadens its lens by incorporating both high and low-valence emotional outcomes to reflect tourism's full emotional spectrum within a coastal destination setting. Finally, this integrative theoretical approach allows for a more holistic understanding of how both personal/individual factors interact to shape the full emotional spectrum of tourism experiences, particularly in under-researched contexts such as Ghana and West Africa, where cultural norms, communal travel patterns, and destination familiarity play a unique role in emotional engagement.

Managerial/Practical Implications

The findings of this study also offer valuable guidance to tourism managers, destination marketers, and policymakers aiming to enhance the emotional appeal and competitiveness of coastal destinations in Ghana and West Africa. By identifying the sociodemographic and travel-related factors that shape tourists' emotional experiences, this study provides a foundation for designing emotionally resonant, inclusive, and sustainable tourism strategies. One of the most important insights from this study is the strong influence of income, education, and travel purpose on positive emotional outcomes such as joy, love, affection, and serenity. Tourists who are well-resourced, leisure-oriented, and socially engaged are more likely to experience emotionally fulfilling visits. Therefore, destination managers should design premium and emotionally immersive packages tailored to these segments. This could include wellness retreats, cultural immersion programs, and guided natural experiences. Additionally, promoting longer stay packages that bundle accommodation, activities, and local experiences can deepen emotional engagement. Group-friendly offerings such as beach games, bonfire nights, and cultural performances can further enhance social bonding and emotional satisfaction.

Although repeat visits are a strong predictor of nostalgia, this study also found that first-time visitors were not significantly disadvantaged by experiencing joy or awe. This suggests that

novelty and discovery evoke powerful emotional responses. To capitalise on this, destination managers should develop orientation programs or welcome experiences that help first-time visitors to form immediate emotional connections. Prearrival storytelling and destination branding that evoke curiosity and wonder can also enhance anticipatory emotions and set a stage for memorable visits. The study also highlights the need to address negative emotions such as sadness and regret, which are more likely among younger, lower-income, and short-stay visitors. Although these emotions were less prevalent overall, they still represent important dimensions of the tourist experience. To mitigate these effects, tourism planners should ensure that affordable, high-value experiences are available to budget-conscious travellers. These include free, low-cost cultural activities, scenic walking tours, and community-hosted events. Additionally, providing emotional support, such as friendly staff, clear signage, and responsive services, can help reduce confusion and disappointment. Encouraging longer stays through flexible pricing, off-peak discounts, or loyalty incentives may reduce post-visit regret.

Emotion-based marketing is another area in which this study's findings can be applied. The emotional constructs identified, particularly joy, love, serenity, and nostalgia, can be strategically leveraged in destination branding and promotional campaigns. Tourism marketers should use emotional evocative imagery, storytelling, and visitor testimonials to highlight the benefits of such visits. Marketing messages can also be segmented by demographics; for example, serenity and wellness can be emphasised for older travellers, whereas joy and group bonding can be promoted for younger or group travellers. Highlighting stories of repeat visitors can evoke nostalgia and encourage destination loyalty. Again, the findings suggest that beach managers and tourism planners should adopt more visitor-sensitive experience design strategies. For example, interventions aimed at enhancing calmness and attachment may be particularly relevant for repeat and older visitors, while programming targeted at holiday/leisure and inbound tourists may emphasise elements that intensify joy, affection, and memorable emotional engagement. More broadly, the results imply that emotional profiling can support segmentation in coastal tourism planning by helping destination managers align beach experiences with the expectations and emotional tendencies of different visitor groups.

This study underscores the importance of culturally grounded tourism in Ghana and West Africa. Emotional experiences are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by cultural norms, communal travel patterns, and destination familiarity. Tourism experiences should, therefore, reflect and celebrate local traditions, music, and storytelling. Community-based tourism initiatives that allow for emotional connections with local hosts can enhance authenticity and deepen emotional engagement. Policymakers should support local entrepreneurship and cultural

preservation to ensure tourism development contributes to emotional satisfaction and inclusive economic growth. Thus, there is a need for emotionally intelligent tourism planning that recognises the diverse emotional needs of visitors and designs inclusive, culturally resonant, and emotionally rewarding experiences. By doing so, Ghana and West Africa can position their coastal destinations not just as places to visit but as places to feel.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study offers a foundational understanding of how demographic and travel-related factors influence tourists' emotional experiences. However, further investigation is required in these two areas. First, the use of cross-sectional data limits the ability to capture the dynamic nature of the emotions that can shift before, during, or after a travel experience. Future studies should adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs to trace emotional trajectories across the travel cycle and examine how anticipatory emotions (e.g., excitement), on-site emotions (e.g., awe, joy), and post-visit emotions (e.g., attachment, regret) interact to shape satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Second, while the study identified significant predictors of emotional outcomes, the relatively modest explanatory power of negative emotions such as sadness and regret suggests the influence of unmeasured factors. Future research should incorporate psychological and contextual variables, such as emotional intelligence, coping styles, cultural background, and perceived crowding, to better understand the antecedents of negative affect in tourism and improve the predictive strength of emotional models. Another limitation of this study is the limited disaggregation of key visitor characteristics, particularly within the international tourist category. The available data distinguish only between domestic and international visitors and do not further identify whether international tourists originate from other African countries, the diaspora, or Western countries. This limits the study's ability to account for differences in cultural background and related variations in how tourists may perceive and experience coastal destinations. As a result, the findings should be interpreted with caution, since the broad categories used in the analysis may obscure important differences across sub-groups of visitors. Future research should incorporate more detailed classifications of tourist origin, as well as age and purpose of visit, to strengthen the validity, explanatory depth, and interpretive precision of the findings. A further avenue for future research would be to complement the Likert-scale measures with visual methodologies such as Visitor-Employed Photography (VEP) or photo-elicitation, which may capture the emotional, sensory, and spatial dimensions of beach experiences more richly. Finally, this study does not compare visitors' emotional experiences in an emerging destination such as Ghana with those in more mature coastal destinations, such as established Mediterranean resorts or North American destinations. Such comparisons could help clarify whether emotional responses in emerging destinations are shaped by greater novelty, lower tourism saturation, or

stronger perceptions of authenticity. Future research could therefore adopt a comparative design to examine how destination maturity influences emotional experiences in coastal tourism.

5 Conclusion

This study explored the influence of sociodemographic and travel-related characteristics on tourists' emotional experiences at coastal destinations in Ghana, offering valuable insights into the emotional dynamics of beach tourism. The findings revealed that positive emotions, such as joy, love, affection, serenity, and awe, were significantly shaped by factors such as income, education, travel purpose, and length of stay. Although less prevalent, negative emotions were influenced by age, income, and travel. The study also showed there is variability in the emotional experiences across visitor profiles, which must be considered by destination managers for experience design and management. This study contributes by integrating Affective Events Theory, Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions, and the Experience Economy framework to explain how situational and personal factors interact to shape emotional outcomes. Practically, the results offer guidance in designing emotionally engaging, inclusive, and culturally grounded tourism experiences. However, the cross-sectional nature of the data and the limited explanatory power for negative emotions highlight the need for longitudinal and psychologically enriched future research. Overall, this study advances the understanding of emotional tourism in the under-explored West African context.

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Appendix

Table 1. CFA results for tourists' emotional experience

Construct	Item	Standardized loading
Joy (JOY)	Joy1	0.67
	Joy2	0.63
	Joy3	0.65
	Joy4	0.74
	Joy5	0.82
	Joy6	0.62
Serenity (SER)	Ser1	0.75
	Ser2	0.74
	Ser3	0.73
	Ser4	0.65
	Ser5	0.66
	Ser6	0.60
	Ser7	0.70
	Ser8	0.76
	Ser9	0.78
Awe (AWE)	Awe1	0.59
	Awe2	0.67
	Awe3	0.75
	Awe4	0.77
	Awe5	0.71
	Awe6	0.69
	Awe7	0.67
	Awe8	0.61
Affective Attachment (ATT)	Att1	0.61
	Att 2	0.82
	Att 3	0.76
	Att 4	0.73
	Att 5	0.60
Love/Affection (LOV)	Lov1	0.88
	Lov2	0.84
	Lov3	0.73
	Lov4	0.61
Sadness (SAD)	Sad1	0.61
	Sad2	0.59
	Sad3	0.69
	Sad4	0.56
	Sad5	0.49
Regrets (REG)	Reg1	0.58
	Reg2	0.57
	Reg3	0.62
	Reg4	0.60

Table 2. Relationship between socio-demographic and travel characteristics and emotional experiences

Predictor	Awe			Joy			Calmness			Attachment		
	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Age ($>30 = 1$)	0.15	0.06	.022	0.13	0.05	.030	0.10	0.06	.048	0.16	0.06	.008
Gender ($F = 1$)	0.10	0.06	.058	0.15	0.05	.006	0.13	0.06	.046	0.09	0.05	.070
Education (Tertiary = 1)	0.18	0.07	.012	0.24	0.08	.002	0.20	0.09	.007	0.10	0.06	.078

Visitor Type (Inbound=1)	0.14	0.05	.054	0.15	0.06	.211	0.19	0.07	.114	0.18	0.07	.031
Income (> \$150 = 1)	0.23	0.08	.008	0.30	0.09	.001	0.18	0.08	.010	0.07	0.07	.270
Travel Purpose (Holiday = 1)	0.20	0.07	.006	0.28	0.08	.002	0.22	0.07	.004	0.12	0.06	.045
Visit Type (Repeat = 1)	0.06	0.06	.340	0.10	0.07	.130	0.12	0.06	.046	0.27	0.07	.001
Stay Length (≥ 3 Days = 1)	0.19	0.07	.009	0.24	0.09	.004	0.20	0.08	.006	0.16	0.07	.028
Travel Party (Group= 1)	0.10	0.05	.035	.025	0.06	.025	0.11	0.05	.038	0.07	0.05	.260
<i>R</i> ²	.354			.435			.396			.277		

Table 2 Continued

<i>Predictor</i>	Love			Sadness			Regrets		
	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Age (>30 = 1)	0.13	0.06	.035	-0.09	0.05	.060	-0.11	0.05	.041
Gender (F = 1)	0.11	0.06	.045	-0.12	0.05	.042	-0.08	0.05	.085
Education (Tertiary = 1)	0.21	0.07	.004	-0.07	-0.06	.230	-0.12	0.06	.052
Visitor Type (Inbound=1)	0.25	0.08	0.31	-0.10	0.08	.112	0.11	0.09	0.53
Income (> \$150 = 1)	0.21	0.08	.005	-0.08	0.07	.170	-0.18	0.07	.030
Travel Purpose (Holiday = 1)	0.25	0.07	.001	-0.11	0.06	.050	-0.12	0.06	.038
Visit Type (Repeat = 1)	0.09	0.06	.120	-0.09	0.06	.078	-0.07	0.05	.095
Stay Length (≥ 3 Days = 1)	0.21	0.08	.007	-0.12	0.07	.055	-0.16	0.07	.040
Travel Party (Group= 1)	0.30	0.07	.001	-0.07	0.06	.210	-0.05	0.05	.300
<i>R</i> ²	.468			.221			.243		

Source: authors'elaboration

Table 3: Group differences in visitors' emotional experiences

Socio-demographic		Awe	Joy	Calmness	Nolstagia
Gender	Male	1.48	1.53	1.92	1.48

	Female	1.47	1.51	1.46	1.46
		T= 2.12 df=2 p=0.152	T= 7.01 df=2 p=0.541	T= 9.11 df=2 p= 0.044*	T= 7.09 df=2 p=0.155
Age	≤30 years	2.12	1.56	1.87	1.68
	>30 years	1.98	1.61	1.44	1.71
		T= 4.21 df=2 p=0.262	T= 2.12 df=2 p= 0.158	T= 5.19 df=2 p= 0.035*	T= 3.12 df=2 p=0.063
Education	≤ High School	2.54	1.67	2.01	1.99
	≥ Tertiary	2.51	1.58	1.94	1.96
		T= 2.88 df=2 p=.117	T= 7.01 df=2 p=0.213	T= 1.49 df=2 p=0.221	T= 6.09 df=2 p=0.432
Income	≤ \$ 200	1.82	1.76	1.88	1.78
	>\$ 200	1.86	1.65	1.67	2.10
		T= 8.11 df=2 p=0.066	T= 3.12 df=2 p=0.431	T= 6.01 df=2 p=0.211	T= 3.32 df=2 p=.0122
Travel Characteristics					
Visitor type (Origin)	Domestic	1.48	1.88	1.48	2.18
	Inbound	1.50	1.45	1.44	1.99
		T= 6.12 df=2 p=0.062	T= 8.44 df=2 p=0.048*	T=12.11 df=2 p=0.039*	T= 9.11 df=2 p=0.057
Travel Party	Alone	2.31	1.49	1.98	2.11
	Group	2.22	1.58	2.12	2.41
		T= 3.90 df=2 p=0.381	T= 4.03 df=2 p=0.056	T= 2.49 df=2 p=0.231	T= 1.11 df=2 p=0.112
Visit Type	First Time	1.94	1.88	1.77	1.55
	Repeat visit	1.88	1.79	1.46	1.69
		T= 2.22 df=2 p=0.188	T= 3.19 df=2 p=0.066	T= 9.08 df=2 p= 0.034*	T= 6.32 df=2 p=0.081
Stay Length	<3days	1.84	1.98	1.98	2.11
	≥ 3days	1.76	2.11	1.94	1.97
		T= 5.12 df=2 p=0.111	T=1.12 df=2 p=0.064	T=2.54 df=2 p=0.312	T= 3.44 df=2 p=0.212
Travel Purpose	Others	2.11	2.17	1.52	2.01
	Holiday/Leisure	1.96	1.44	1.56	1.94
		T= 1.44 df=2 p=0.115	T= 11.01 df=2 p=0.029*	T= 3.66 df=2 p=0.221	T= 1.98 df=2 p=0.123

Table 3 continued

Socio-demographic		Love	Sadness	Regrets
Gender	Male	1.61	2.42	2.34
	Female	1.56	2.56	2.48
		T= 4.32 df=2 p=0.156	T= 1.08 df=2 p= 0.244	T= 2.06 df=2 p=0.132
Age	≤30 years	1.51	2.86	2.67

	>30 years	1.48	2.43	2.65
		T= 2.12 df=2 p= 0.151	T= 1.19 df=2 p= 0.350	T= 0.89 df=2 p=0.432
Education	≤ High School	1.64	2.10	2.49
	≥ Tertiary	1.59	1.99	2.46
		T= 6.21 df=2 p=0.113	T= 2.91 df=2 p=0.211	T= 1.09 df=2 p=0.324
Income	≤ \$ 200	1.66	2.32	2.18
	>\$ 200	1.55	2.22	2.10
		T= 2.12 df=2 p=0.342	T= 2.01 df=2 p=0.212	T= 2.32 df=2 p=.0241
Travel Characteristics				
Visitor Type (Origin)	Domestic	1.48	2.68	2.77
	Inbound	1.42	2.71	2.69
		T= 8.44 df=2 p=0.048*	T=3.11 df=2 p=0.139	T= 2.01 df=2 p=0.152
Travel Party	Alone	1.66	2.55	2.14
	Group	1.58	2.41	2.33
		T= 3.03 df=2 p=0.061	T= 3.01 df=2 p=0.321	T= 2.61 df=2 p=0.121
Visit Type	First Time	1.78	2.38	2.25
	Repeat visit	1.47	2.29	2.16
		T= 8.98 df=2 p=0.033*	T= 2.08 df=2 p= 0.144	T= 3.32 df=2 p=0.134
Stay Length	<3days	1.56	2.66	2.02
	≥ 3days	1.53	2.44	1.94
		T=7.12 df=2 p=0.058	T=1.44 df=2 p=0.266	T= 2.04 df=2 p=0.411
Travel Purpose	Others	1.51	1.52	2.11
	Holiday/Leisure	1.41	1.56	2.66
		T= 14.2 df=2 p=0.048*	T= 3.66 df=2 p=0.221	T= 2.81 df=2 p=0.213

Note: 1.0 -1.49 = Agreed; 1.50 – 2.50 =Neutral; 2.50 – 3.0 =Disagree; * $p \leq 0.05$ (significance)