Article

The Case of the Maldives: Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Changed Luxury Consumers' Behavior Toward Sustainability?

Evangelia (Lia) Marinakou [ORCID]

The Bournemouth University Business School, Bournemouth University, Dorset BH12 5BB, UK; emarinakou2@bournemouth.ac.uk

Abstract: This study examines luxury tourists' behavior toward sustainability in the aftermath of the pandemic, with a particular focus on the Maldives, a destination renowned for both its luxury offerings and commitment to sustainable practices. A qualitative approach was employed, featuring structured interviews with one hundred European tourists who had visited the Maldives and stayed at luxury resorts, alongside semi-structured interviews with three tour operator managers who sell the destination. In addition, secondary data provided by the tour operator were used to support the analysis and triangulate the data for more robust findings. The results show a significant shift in consumer attitudes: luxury travelers have become increasingly sensitive to sustainability and the protection of the environment since the pandemic. The tourists in the sample reported heightened awareness of their personal environmental impact and a greater desire to mitigate it. Furthermore, participants expressed a willingness to pay a premium for environmentally sustainable services and products, demonstrating a clear preference for businesses that can substantiate their eco-friendly practices through credible certifications and accreditations. These findings highlight the growing importance of sustainability in shaping luxury consumer behavior in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: sustainability; mindfulness; luxury; consumer behavior; COVID-19; environment; Maldives

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the travel and tourist industry, prompting travel marketers and businesses to adapt, rebuild, and innovate new strategies to meet evolving customer needs. The pandemic has also sparked a heightened sense of global awareness, with [1,2] suggesting that travel and tourism could become more positive and sustainable if individuals adopt a more mindful and conscientious approach to the planet as a unified entity. Furthermore, the pandemic has been recognized as a turning point in history for environmental, social, and economic change. Sustainability has become a key concern for all stakeholders, including consumers who have changed their travel behaviors as a result [3]. Sustainability is becoming a key concern in the tourism and hospitality industry [4], as key issues are related to tourism production and consumption. Ref. [5] (p. 1022) states "the issue of eco-friendly consumption and sustainable product development is becoming more important than ever in the contemporary tourism and hospitality industry". Tourists now demand green products and demonstrate sustainable consumption [4–6]. Similarly, tourism and hospitality organizations have identified the need to be more eco-conscious and become proactive in making their business greener and more sustainable [7]. Environmental sustainability is challenged by irresponsible consumer

behavior in tourism [4,7], suggesting that environmental challenges may be resolved by changing human behaviors [5]. This paper examines the concept of sustainability and consumer behavior, exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced shifts in consumer attitudes towards environmental sustainability, particularly within the expanding luxury hospitality sector. Although there is a lot of research on sustainability in tourism and hospitality, studies on luxury travelers' environmental behavior are limited [3,5]; this could help inform the development of effective strategies to reduce the negative environmental impacts of tourism [7]. Studies on customer perceptions on sustainability in hospitality have focused on sustainability dimensions or on consumers from specific geographic regions [8]. This study advances the current literature on sustainable luxury hospitality by offering key factors that contribute to positive luxury travelers' attitudes towards the provision of sustainability-focused hospitality services after the pandemic.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainability and Luxury Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior literature defines environmentally sustainable behavior as 'green consumption', encompassing a range of actions aimed at reducing environmental impacts. In general, it refers to consumer behaviors that contribute to the preservation and protection of the environment [5,9]. Several studies have been conducted on consumer behavior, with focus, for example, on green hotels [6], green restaurants [10], or eco-friendly sustainable destinations [11]. These studies propose that forms of green products fulfil tourism consumers' needs for going green; therefore, the destination that offers such green environmentally friendly products enhances its competitiveness [3]. Several studies have focused on forms of environmentally sustainable consumer behaviors. Such studies include, among other sustainability-related practices, water conservation, towel reuse, energy conservation, [12], buying local products, reusing plastic bottles and bags, and reducing food waste at tourist attractions. These aspects have been extensively studied in the tourism and hospitality industries [5,13]. Variables such as social norms, perceived effectiveness, and green value are essential components for understanding environmentally sustainable consumer behavior and decision making [9,14].

Luxury tourism entails several products and services, ranging from gastronomy, distinctive landscapes, aesthetics, personalization, sustainable practices, and integrated experiential trips that facilitate travelers' positive perceptions of themselves in engaging physically and mentally with genuine and authentic experiences [15]. Ref. [16] studies travelers' pre-environmental behavior and proposes that luxury consumers preferred sustainable hotels over less sustainable ones. As a result, luxury travelers are increasingly inclined to choose hotels that demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability when they are conscious of environmental protection. Ref. [14] proposes that customers' incomes affect their sustainability perception and choice of sustainable hotels. Nevertheless, luxury travelers do not necessarily make purchase decisions on price, as they seek the best quality for the most suitable services and experiences. They also add that new generations are more aware of sustainability and have greater expectations from hospitality brands and tourism destinations. Ref. [17] now proposes that luxury is no longer about exclusivity, as luxury brands have been extended, providing affordable luxury without compromising quality. In addition, the profile of luxury consumers and their expectations has expanded [18], making the definition of luxury challenging. Research conducted by [19] shows that it is difficult for luxury consumers to make informed sustainable travel choices. Studies propose that luxury is used as a method of self-expression, where luxury is about quality and experiences and reflects culture, lifestyle, and taste [20]. Studies also propose that it is challenging to provide one definition of a luxury tourist [18]. A luxury tourist is described as someone who is

experienced with high expectations and has high cultural capital, who is seeking value, exceptional services, and excellent physical surroundings, is wealthy (e.g., has extensive purchasing power), and, in some cases, is someone with a middle or high level of income who is seeking meaning in the luxury experience. Hence, luxury consumers may have different economic backgrounds and may be influenced by their cultural background [17]. Luxury is no longer only for the elite, as "it has been disconnected from social class" [18] (p. 11).

Many argue that luxury and sustainability are incompatible, as sustainable practices may hinder luxury hotels' financial performance [3]. This may be due to several factors, including the lack of industry standards and multiple sustainability programs. Our study deviates from this point of view, as we argue that luxury consumers find certification programs an important factor in holiday decision making, which provides a degree of quality and reliability. In addition, sustainability is found to influence consumer behavior perceptions and decision making, including their loyalty and their willingness to pay exceptional prices [21]. Moreover, luxury hotels operate in an environmentally friendly manner, as consumer segments like millennials and well-educated consumers are looking for sustainable travel options. Ref. [3] further adds that sustainability enhances employees' organizational citizenship behaviors within their organizations. In view of this, sustainable practices are now adopted by many hospitality and tourism organizations [3,14].

2.2. Mindfulness-Driven Tourism

Mindfulness-driven tourism has the potential to shape the future of long-term sustainability. Ref. [22] (p. 230) defines mindfulness as "a method for raising awareness and skillfully addressing mental processes that underlie emotional suffering and dysfunctional behavior". Mindfulness has a significant influence on the tourism industry's sustainability agenda and employees' performance [23]. Increased awareness and mindfulness are practices travelers use to show interest in local impacts of their behavior and how they contribute to the local economy and to sustainability [24]. Moreover, [25] argue that mindfulness practices can encourage destinations to adopt more sustainable approaches by fostering a sense of "mindful deviation" from past practices, which were often profit-driven and unsustainable. This shift opens the door to a new focus on environmental conservation and sustainability. COVID-19 has helped people reflect on their lives and become more sustainable and responsible individuals [7]. A shift towards mindfulness has resulted in seeking more environmentally friendly experiences [5]. Ref. [26] suggests that throughout the pandemic, values of compassion and solidarity have emerged amongst individuals, and as a society, people have become more thoughtful and protective of others. This research is a positive step forward, as it proposes that individuals' compassion is a powerful aspect of enabling sustainable tourism. The increase in consumer mindfulness will encourage tour operators and other travel-related enterprises to modify their unsustainable product offerings and trips.

2.3. The Maldives as a Sustainable Tourism Destination

The Maldives was chosen for this study as it is known to be an expensive tourist destination offering luxury accommodations and with expensive and exotic resorts targeting a niche market [27]. The destination ranked as one of the most popular destinations for the 17th consecutive year in Kuoni's Worldwide Trends Report [28]. Tourism activity in the Maldives opened earlier than other destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Maldives is a tourism-dependent economy, with several strategies implemented to increase demand, especially during and after the pandemic. Ref. [29] describes the biodiversity in the Maldives and state that, for example, the coral system is considered as the seventh largest in the world, demonstrating the importance of the ecosystem in sustainability.

A report from [30] describes the Maldives as a destination leading the way to sustainability. The Maldives acknowledges the critical role of stakeholder engagement and participation in effectively achieving the SDGs. In this regard, efforts have been focused on raising awareness and involving stakeholders at every stage of the SDG process, including implementation, monitoring, and evaluation [31]. We chose the Maldives as it has been reported as a success story of a tourism destination after the pandemic but also as having high occupancy rates during the peak and off-peak seasons [27]. Total arrivals in the Maldives pre-pandemic (2019) were 1.702.887, during the pandemic (2020–2021) were 1.877.426, and on 25 January 2022 were 106.816 [32]. Our study is one of the first to capture real customer experiences with the sustainability of luxury resorts of the Maldives, combining data from other stakeholders such as tour operators and accommodation providers.

2.4. Sustainability and Luxury Provision

Sustainability in luxury resorts has recently been researched to explore luxury activities in terms of corporate social responsibility and environment sustainability [3]. The hotel sector has adopted a number of environmental sustainability practices, such as water and energy saving, solar water heating, the environmentally friendly drying of clothes, better waste and food waste management, and recycling, i.e., cooking oil [33]. Other practices include the use of smart cards and motion sensors for lights. Adopting green practices is beneficial for the hotel sector, as costs are reduced, their brand and brand image are enhanced, and they increase corporate social responsibility (CSR). Differentiation is also demonstrated, as customers perceive the product or service to be unique and authentic, and hence the provider gains a competitive advantage [33]. Redefining luxury experiences in the era of thoughtful travel requires brands to sustain the thoughtful and fast diversification learned during the pandemic and enable all customers to travel with meaning in a sustainable way [5]. In its 2020 Customer Trends Survey, Holiday Habits, ABTA examined consumer attitudes toward sustainability. Compared to just a fifth of customers in 2011, the research showed that 50% of customers now prioritize sustainability when choosing a provider to book their holidays with. Many customers are more aware of the hotel industry's "greenwashing" techniques, in which providers exaggerate their efforts to protect the environment while their true motivation is cost-cutting [34]. Some hoteliers may engage in activities that can harm the environment to obtain the status of luxury [35]. Luxury managers in fear of losing their hotel's perceived luxury value and brand image may adopt practices that harm the environment, such as daily towel laundering rather than towel reuse and limitless water usage in hotel rooms [36]. Ref. [5] proposes that consumer attitudes towards green behaviors and their overall perception of the hotel resulted in positive feedback in terms of word-of-mouth recommendations to friends and family and willingness to pay for such services. Hotel branding and advertising is also an important part of informing consumers, with green logos and icons being the most informative way to communicate a hotel's eco-friendly credentials [37].

Over the years, the discussion and implementation of sustainable initiatives has resulted in global improvements such as reducing energy consumption, recycling, and reducing food waste. On the other hand, some may argue that sustainable tourism is an 'intellectually appealing' concept, which points at the impact of tourism whilst allowing the same behavior as before [5,7]. Ref. [33] confirms that luxury tourism has not received adequate attention in research, and sustainability studies are focused mainly on large business organizations. The intersection of sustainability and consumer behavior constitutes a massive research area; hence, the length of this paper does not allow space for a thorough review of the two concepts. Nevertheless, considering the definition by [38] (p. 406) that "sustainable luxury entails the scope of design, production and consumption that is

environmentally or ethically conscious (or both) and is oriented toward correcting various perceived wrongs within the luxury industry, including animal cruelty, environmental damage and human exploitation", we aim to explore luxury tourists' behavior towards sustainability after the pandemic with a focus on the luxury destination the Maldives. The research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: What types of luxury travelers in the Maldives are interested in sustainability?

RQ2: Have their behaviors changed towards sustainability after the pandemic and how?

RQ3: What are the key environmentally sustainable practices used by luxury resorts/destinations (i.e., the Maldives)?

This study contributes to the literature on sustainability practices of luxury resorts and destinations after the pandemic. It also adds to the existing limited knowledge of luxury travelers' expectations and behaviors towards sustainability.

3. Materials and Methods

For this study, a qualitative approach was adopted with the use of qualitative methods for data collection. Due to the nature of the research, qualitative interviews enabled reciprocity between the interviewer and the participants [39]. The research design included three stages, which were found to be effective for meeting the research objectives. To gain insights into luxury travelers' perceptions of sustainability and gather detailed information about their profiles, interviews were conducted. In the first stage, a purposive sampling technique was employed [40], with the key criterion for participation being that individuals had visited the Maldives after 2020. Online structured interviews were conducted with 100 visitors in the Maldives. The researcher shared a link on their social media accounts including LinkedIn and Instagram. This online tool was chosen due to the large number of participants required to provide reliable responses and to the various locations such participants reside. The structured interviews included a list of questions to explore the participants' views on sustainability and determine their behaviors towards sustainability and any changes that they may have experienced after the pandemic. The first section included questions on participants' demographics and profiles.

In order to confirm that the luxury hotel sector offers appropriate products and services to luxury sustainable tourism customers, a tour operator that specializes in organizing trips to the Maldives was chosen. At stage two, Kuoni's Facebook page (which has over 1000 members and was used with the permission of the company) was the platform used to approach employees at Kuoni who engage with sustainability practices at luxury hotels for further interviews (three participants, managers). Convenience sampling was used to include participants who had access to information relevant to the study and were willing to participate [40]. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Zoom (which allowed for recording and transcription) after participants agreed to take part in the study. These interviews followed the tourists' interviews to ensure relevant key areas on sustainability practices would be explored so that both parties offered their views on sustainability. These lasted between 40 and 70 min. The interviewees were asked ten questions from the interview guide, which led to other emerging topics of discussion.

Finally, at stage three, secondary data provided by Kuoni including photographs were used to support the discussion and data analysis with more evidence. Secondary data were collected to supplement the sustainable practices in and by luxury resorts in the Maldives.

A thematic analysis was used to examine the transcriptions, which is useful as it identifies patterns across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views, behaviors, and practices [41]. Details on the themes and the codes used are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Data analysis—structured interviews (*n* = 100).

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	No. of Participants
Tourism	The target market	Luxury: honeymooners and couples	45
		Families	27
		Multi-generational	8
		Educational/corporate	20
	Motivations to visit the Maldives	Landscape and scenery	43
		Activities (watersports)	18
		Hospitality and food	26
		Marine life	13
Sustainability	Environmental impact	Carbon footprint offsetting	68
		No-fly holidays/slow travel	17
		Plastic pollution and waste	10
		Food importation	5
	Authentic and sustainable experiences	Coral reef preservation/propagation	43
		Wildlife conservation	51
		Local community projects	6
	Tour operators	Travel life accreditation	6
		Offers/pricing	21

Table 2. Data analysis—semi-structured interviews.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Manager 1	Manager 2	Manager 3
Tourism	The target market	Luxury: honeymooners and couples	1		1
		Families	1		
		Multi-generational		1	
		Educational/corporate		1	1
	Motivation to visit the Maldives	Landscape and scenery	1		
		Activities (watersports)		1	
		Hospitality and food	1	1	1
		Marine life	1	1	
Sustainability	Environmental impact	Carbon footprint offsetting	1	1	1
		No-fly holidays/slow travel	1	1	
		Plastic pollution and waste			1
		Food importation	1	1	
	Authentic and sustainable experiences	Coral reef preservation/propagation	1	1	
		Wildlife conservation			1
		Local community projects	1		
	Tour operators	Travel life accreditation			1
		Offers/pricing	1		

4. Results

4.1. Tourism—Target Segments

Tourism is the most significant driver of economic growth in the Maldives. Based on the participants' profiles, consumers who visit the destination are honeymooners and couples (45%), families (27%), corporate travelers (20%), and multi-generational travelers (8%). KuoniP1 said that "*Indian Ocean destinations are by far and away our best-sellers right now, but the big shift is that it's not just honeymooners who are booking. The appeal reaches all sorts of customers no matter what life stage they are at, whether people traveling solo or families looking for something extra special as they return to overseas holidays for the first time in years*".

Findings by [23] suggest that a honeymoon is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and honeymooners therefore search for luxurious, romantic, and unique destinations to fulfil their romantic desires. As illustrated in Figure 1, one of the properties called The Standard has an innovative program of activities and experiences such as a coral breeding station, DIY mud masks at the spa, and the overwater Beru Bar featuring the largest disco ball in the Maldives [42].

Figure 1. Beru Bar, The Standard (reprinted from Ref. [42]).

Parents in this study claimed that they wanted to rest but also have fun whilst on holiday, with emphasis on participating in interesting and engaging activities. Refs. [43,44] suggests that children and young travelers are central to selecting the holiday destination and pay attention to the environment and conservation projects [28]. This study confirms the findings of previous studies on families that include factors such as the natural environment and sustainability practices among the key factors in choosing a destination and a resort [5].

The multi-generational holiday (8% of the participants) is a specific form of family tourism, which is undertaken by people of various ages, usually multiple generations of one family including parents, children, and grandparents. Ref. [28] proposes that multi-generational bookings in 2020 increased by 8%, where grandparents paid for holidays to celebrate special occasions. In addition, the rise of workcations—the hybrid type of tourism where tourists travel for business and leisure—has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, and many are undertaking working holidays to escape from mundane work environments [9]. To serve these markets, Kuoni has created several activities, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Kuoni Instagram account (reprinted from Ref. [42]).

4.2. Tourism—Motivations for Destination Choice

Participants were asked to identify the main reasons they visit the Maldives, and the key reason identified was the scenery (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Word cloud of motivations to visit the Maldives.

The most popular words included 'beach', 'island', 'relaxation' 'sea', and 'snorkel', which are all typically associated with a beach holiday. Descriptive adjectives such as 'stunning', 'unique', 'idyll', 'quiet', and 'beautiful' were used, which convey a sense of paradise that the Maldives is best known for. Activities were also a motivation, with a focus on snorkeling, diving, and kayaking. Resorts offer a variety of relevant recreational activities. For example, one of the participants (P21) stated: *"It was so much fun snorkeling with my husband on our honeymoon. It was an unforgettable experience. I have snorkeled all over the world, but the Maldives has to be the best place—teaming with fish and colorful coral*

beneath us." Marine life and the quality and variety of fish were also part of the discussion. Finally, participants referred to the food and hospitality, with a focus on fresh food offered and the friendly and cozy environment at the hotels. Refs. [45,46] say that hotel customers, particularly those with an environmental focus, are increasingly seeking hotels designed with sustainability in mind. Moreover, some are even willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly hotel amenities. Refs. [44,46] add that guests are becoming more aware of energy efficiency and frequently opt to reuse towels and sheets during their stay rather than contributing to the environmental impact of daily laundering. Motivations to visit a tourism destination are provided in seven factors, learning, exhibition, food, facilities, recreation, service, and souvenirs [9,14,45,46], which demonstrate that there are a number of motivations that influence the complex concept of travel behavior, which may change under different circumstances, as new dimensions of motivation have emerged after the pandemic [47].

4.3. Sustainability—Environmental Impact

Participants in the study expressed their concern about the environmental impact of their travel. We found that 80% of respondents voted in favor of paying more for a holiday that actively offsets carbon emissions, and 15% were on the fence, as they could change their mind depending on price and how much of a difference it makes in the long run. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed nature to reset, and there was evidence of a significant decline in carbon emissions [5]. As illustrated in Figure 4, KuoniP3 explained that employees visited the island of Meedhoo to engage with locals and plant trees to help with carbon emissions.

Figure 4. Kuoni staff helping plant a tree in Meedhoo, a local island near Shangri-La Villingili Resort & Spa (reprinted from Ref. [42]).

Interestingly, 90% of the participants would consider no-fly holidays closer to home. No-fly holidays have been made a talking point in the media, with BBC's Race Across the World giving travelers the opportunity to race to a destination using any transport other than a plane. In addition, 60% said they take a long-haul trip 1–2 times a year. Slow travel has also gained popularity in recent years; [43] proposes that slow travel connects us to the soul of a place through its history, food, language, and people. Participants highlighted their efforts to go plastic-free during their holidays in the Maldives, even though the tourism industry is one of the biggest polluters of single-use plastic. For example, P11 said, *"I take my reusable bottle on every holiday and refill from jugs/water dispensers instead of using plastic bottles. Don't take too much food at buffets. Limit the amount of meat or fish consumed."* Actions are already taken in the Maldives, such as phasing out single-use plastic and

tackling plastic pollution [32]. The farther food travels, the more emissions are generated to get food to remote islands in the Maldives. Some of the participants were very mindful when it came to this, with many saying they opt for locally sourced fish and vegetables that have been grown on neighboring islands.

4.4. Sustainability—Authentic and Sustainable Experiences

Participants talked about their favorite experience of an ocean clean-up dive at Kuramathi. Similarly, KuoniP2 described a similar experience, as evidenced in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Coral reef regeneration project (reprinted from Ref. [42]).

More than half of the participants included wildlife conservation as a major factor in choosing their holiday destination and resort. P56 said that he stayed with the family at Kuramanthi Resort, which had an eco-center to educate guests on marine life, including snorkeling tours on how to protect and look after the corals. There were also turtle sanctuaries and whale shark and manta ray projects conducted with care: *"Diving with whale sharks, no touching or interaction allowed at all only watching the marine life from a distance"* (P73). Ref. [48] proposes that locals' friendliness and welcoming attitude has a positive impact on visitors' overall satisfaction with the destination. Several luxury resorts encouraged tourists to visit the island of Meedhoo to help with local community projects, which contributed positively to travelers' attitudes to social sustainability.

4.5. Sustainability—Tour Operators

Participants in this study travelled to the Maldives via reputable travel agencies such as Kuoni, Trail Finders, etc. They were mainly concerned about the sustainability accreditation their resort holds and booked their accommodation based on such accreditations. For example, Travelife Accreditation includes training and certification for tourism companies committed to sustainability [5,6,31]. This accreditation is part of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Kuoni is aware of such customer preferences; hence, they ensure they contract hotels with relevant accreditation. To show the importance of such terms for collaboration, KuoniP2 said, *"Sustainability is very important in contracting any hotels and we are actively encouraging those hotels that are not currently GSTC accredited to works towards becoming so."* Finally, in contrast to other studies (i.e., [49]), participants in our study stated that price influences the participants' buying decisions, but they were willing to pay more if the travel agency and the resorts offered sustainable solutions and activities. For example, P50 said, *"£2500 to £3000 per person depending on the resort and activities, although I would consider paying more for a resort which is accredited by the GSTC."* Our study confirms the findings of [46], who support the view that consumers are willing to pay a premium for services from luxury hotels that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. However, [49]

note that their findings may not be applicable to consumers outside the United States, as American consumers often exhibit distinct attitudes and behaviors toward green products compared to those in other regions of the world. For instance, studies indicate that European consumers are 50% more likely than American consumers to buy environmentally friendly, sustainable products [7,49,50]. Participants in our study were mainly from Europe; hence, their responses and attitudes towards sustainability are justified.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion and Key Findings

Luxury hospitality consumers are mindful, are found to demonstrate concerns about sustainability, and prefer environmentally friendly resorts with initiatives and processes to protect the environment. We support the view that luxury hospitality has shifted from being conspicuous to being conscientious [47]. We contribute to the paucity of literature on motivations towards visiting sustainable tourism destinations, and we provide further insights into suitable activities and sustainable practices expected by luxury tourists in terms of their travel intention. Our study confirms the findings of [46], who propose the impact of environmental concerns on tourists' consumption habits with an increasing interest in purchasing environmentally friendly hospitality services and products. We add to [6]'s suggestion that luxury consumers adopt environmentally friendly behavior because they feel responsible for the damage resulting from their tourist activity. We add to this theory by providing further understanding of the dimensions of luxury tourists' motivation and behavior in association with their activities and behavior at the destination. Our study provides evidence that activities are linked to destination choice, in line with [9], as participants in this research were more likely to engage in sustainable practices and activities organized either by the resort or the tour operator.

Although such green resorts charge price premiums, they provide the value of reduced impact to the environment [5,7]. Our study provides insight into luxury consumers' behavior and factors that motivate them towards environmentally sustainable resorts and destinations after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of data collected from European consumers show a significant positive impact on luxury consumers' satisfaction and decision making, loyalty, and willingness to pay higher prices for environmental and social sustainably practices. The findings suggest that sustainability is one of the main factors when visiting the Maldives on a holiday for all target audiences presented above; hence, the intention to visit and stay at sustainable-friendly resorts is linked to a hotel's green and sustainable practices, in agreement with other studies (i.e., [5,46]). Our study, in agreement with [48], proposes that honeymooners are more likely to interact with local people, and the locals' friendliness and warm attitude can affect the honeymooners' behavior towards the destination. Interestingly, our study emphasizes that children are driving the agenda more than ever in choosing activities that are eco-friendly [28]. The rise in workcations has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, and many are undertaking working holidays to escape from mundane work environments [2,5]. We therefore propose that socio-demographic characteristics such as age, in agreement with [14], and income [4] have a positive effect on behaviors towards sustainability. We confirm the findings of [42] that luxury tourists who value sustainability and are concerned about the environment are willing to pay a premium to stay in such hotels.

Our study confirms other recent studies (i.e., [2,5,27,42]) and proposes that people are concerned about their quality of life, and they are mindful of their contribution to global environmental protection. Although health and safety measures for COVID-19 forced hospitality organizations to use more detergents for cleaning and sanitizing, they have adopted several environmentally sustainable practices. We argue that since younger generations have

greater expectations for sustainable tourism and hospitality services and products [14], they expect hospitality brands, and more importantly luxury hospitality, to develop ethical and sustainable hospitality models. Hence, luxury resorts must change their strategies in line with the changes in consumer behavior and their needs; they should try to balance the relationship between business, revenue, and the environment, as evidenced in this study of the Maldives. We strongly recommend that they focus on increasing consumers' awareness of environmental sustainability, as mindful consumers often find that engaging in sustainable activities not only fosters a positive self-identity but also enhances their sense of purpose and meaning in life.

5.2. Practical Implications

This study has several practical implications. Sustainable consumption provides a better quality of life and involves a decision-making process that explains the social responsibility of both hospitality organizations and consumers. In view of this, we propose that organizational mindfulness-based strategies can enhance the value of luxury hotel services and activities, demonstrating responsible accountability to the environment and sustainability. Such strategies transform consumers' perspectives and thinking and enhance their decision making towards sustainable destinations and organizations. Hospitality companies should prioritize their sustainability initiatives to positively influence consumers' behavior after the pandemic. There is evidence of increasing acceptance of green practices in Asia; hence, hotel managers in such countries should adopt green practices that inform, train, and/or engage consumers as well. Luxury resorts should focus on offering more sustainable local experiences, which include educational elements for younger guests. Climate change is a topic that is high on the agenda for the youngest generation of travelers. Moreover, ongoing training should be provided to employees to enhance their knowledge and awareness of sustainability and hence provide hospitality experiences with invaluable value-added benefits to their guests. Tour operators should collaborate with and encourage hotels to acquire accreditations such as Travelife, with criteria that set global standards for sustainable tourism. They should also promote their sustainable programs and their commitment to sustainability.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Future studies could acknowledge sustainable experiences and their impact on consumer awareness and knowledge when they visit other holiday destinations, such as other luxury holiday destinations in the Indian Ocean like Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and the Seychelles. Through analyzing other luxury holiday destinations in the same region, researchers could compare which destinations or hospitality organizations are leading the way in terms of sustainability. Future research could explore whether different types of tourists are drawn to specific destinations for particular activities, offering valuable insights for destination marketers. Future studies could explore the intention to visit tourism destinations for sustainable consumption among various segments beyond those focused on luxury services. This research would also be useful for tour operators, consumers, and the travel industry. Additionally, incorporating other sample types and research approaches, beyond European travelers and interviews, could help validate and confirm this study's findings, enabling broader generalizations. Further studies could also analyze the profiles of luxury tourists and explain how each segment impacts the tourism offer, spending, and sustainability of the destination. Luxury tourism research has the potential to be a pioneer in the tourism and hospitality field, setting a benchmark for how customer experiences can be integrated into other service industries.

References

1. Lew, A.A. Why travel?—Travel, tourism, and global consciousness. *Tour. Geogr.* **2018**, *20*, 742–749. [CrossRef]
2. Galvani, A.; Lew, A.A.; Perez, M.S. COVID-19 is expanding global consciousness and the sustainability of travel and tourism. *Tour. Geogr.* **2020**, *22*, 567–576. [CrossRef]
3. Amatulli, C.; De Angelis, M.; Stoppani, A. The appeal of sustainability in luxury hospitality: An investigation on the role of perceived integrity. *Tour. Manag.* **2021**, *83*, 104228. [CrossRef]
4. Wang, S.; Wang, J.; Li, J.; Yang, F. Do motivations contribute to local residents' engagement in pro-environmental behaviors? Resident-destination relationship and pro-environmental climate perspective. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2020**, *28*, 834–852. [CrossRef]
5. Han, H. Consumer behavior and environmental sustainability in tourism and hospitality: A review of theories, concepts, and latest research. In *Sustainable Consumer Behaviour and the Environment*; Routledge: London, UK, 2021; Volume 29, p. 22.
6. Wang, L.; Wong, P.P.; Narayanan, E.A. The demographic impact of consumer green purchase intention toward green hotel selection in China. *Tour. Hosp. Res.* **2020**, *20*, 210–222. [CrossRef]
7. Xu, F.; Huang, L.; Whitmarsh, L. Home and away: Cross-contextual consistency in tourists' pro-environmental behavior. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2020**, *28*, 1443–1459. [CrossRef]
8. Chin, C.H.; Chin, C.L.; Wong, W.P.M. The Implementation of Green Marketing Tools in Rural Tourism: The Readiness of Tourists? *J. Hosp. Mark. Manag.* **2018**, *27*, 261–280. [CrossRef]
9. Douglas, A.; Hoogendoorn, G.; Richards, G. Activities as the critical link between motivation and destination choice in cultural tourism. *J. Hosp. Tour. Insights* **2024**, *7*, 249–271. [CrossRef]
10. Moon, S. Investigating beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding green restaurant patronage: An application of the extended theory of planned behavior with moderating effects of gender and age. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2021**, *92*, 102727. [CrossRef]
11. Werner, K.; Griese, K.; Bosse, C. The role of slow events for sustainable destination development: A conceptual and empirical review. In *Events and Sustainability*; Routledge: London, UK, 2022; pp. 175–193.
12. Sourvinou, A.; Filimonau, V. Planning for an environmental management programme in a luxury hotel and its perceived impact on staff: An exploratory case study. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2018**, *26*, 649–667. [CrossRef]
13. Choi, H.; Jang, J.; Kandampully, J. Application of the extended VBN theory to understand consumers' decisions about green hotels. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2015**, *51*, 87–95. [CrossRef]
14. Brandao, A.; Cupertino de Miranda, C. Does sustainable consumption behavior influence luxury services purchase intention? *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 7906. [CrossRef]
15. Correia, M.S. Sustainability: An overview of the triple bottom line and sustainability implementation. *Int. J. Strateg. Eng.* **2019**, *2*, 29–38. [CrossRef]
16. Kim, J.; Kim, S.; Lee, J.S.; Kim, P.B.; Cui, Y. Influence of choice architecture on the preference for a pro-environmental hotel. *J. Travel Res.* **2020**, *59*, 512–527. [CrossRef]
17. Kumar, A.; Paul, J.; Unnithan, A.B. 'Masstige' marketing: A review, synthesis and research agenda. *J. Bus. Res.* **2020**, *113*, 384–398. [CrossRef]
18. Iloranta, R. Luxury tourism—A review of the literature. *Eur. J. Tour. Res.* **2022**, *30*, 3007. [CrossRef]
19. Esparon, M.; Gyuris, E.; Stoeckl, N. Does ECO certification deliver benefits? An empirical investigation of visitors' perceptions of the importance of ECO certification's attributes and of operators' performance. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2014**, *22*, 148–169. [CrossRef]
20. Kapferer, J.N. The future of luxury: Challenges and opportunities. *J. Brand Manag.* **2014**, *21*, 716–726. [CrossRef]
21. Teng, C.C.; Horng, J.S.; Hu, M.L.; Chien, L.H.; Shen, Y.C. Developing energy conservation and carbon reduction indicators for the hotel industry in Taiwan. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2012**, *31*, 199–208. [CrossRef]
22. Bishop, S.R.; Lau, M.; Shapiro, S.; Carlson, L.; Anderson, N.D.; Carmody, J.; Segal, Z.V.; Abbey, S.; Speca, M.; Velting, D.; et al. Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clin. Psychol. Sci. Pract.* **2004**, *11*, 230–241. [CrossRef]
23. Jang, J.; Jo, W.; Kim, J.S. Can employee workplace mindfulness counteract the indirect effects of customer incivility on proactive service performance through work engagement? A moderated mediation model. *J. Hosp. Mark. Manag.* **2020**, *29*, 812–829. [CrossRef]

24. Bechwati, N.N.; Baalbakl, A.M.; Nasr, N.I.; Baalbaki, I.B. Mindful consumer behaviour: A cross-cultural comparison. *J. Int. Interdiscip. Bus. Res.* **2016**, *3*, 100–113.

25. Gill, A.; Williams, P. Mindful deviation in creating a governance path towards sustainability in resort destinations. *Tour. Geogr.* **2014**, *16*, 546–562. [CrossRef]

26. Cheng, K.K.; Lam, T.H.; Leung, C.C. Wearing face masks in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic: Altruism and solidarity. *Lancet* **2022**, *399*, e39–e40. [CrossRef]

27. Kaushal, V.; Yadav, R. Exploring luxury hospitality customer experience of Maldives tourists amidst COVID-19 pandemic. *Consum. Behav. Tour. Hosp.* **2024**, *19*, 140–165. [CrossRef]

28. Kuoni. *The Worldwide Travel Report*. 2020. Available online: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/images.cloud.kuoni.co.uk/brochure/reports/2020report.pdf (accessed on 14 January 2021).

29. Hilmi, N.; Basu, R.; Crisóstomo, M.; Lebleu, L.; Claudet, J.; Seveso, D. The pressures and opportunities for coral reef preservation and restoration in the Maldives. *Front. Environ. Econ.* **2023**, *2*, 1110214. [CrossRef]

30. WTO. *Maldives: Leading the Way to Sustainable Environmental Health*. 2023. Available online: https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/feature-stories/detail/sustainable-environmental-health-maldives (accessed on 22 January 2025).

31. UNWTO. *Voluntary National Review 2017. Maldives*. 2017. Available online: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/maldives (accessed on 13 January 2025).

32. Statistics. *Maldives Tourism Key Indicators*. 2024. Available online: https://www.tourism.gov.mv/en/statistics/dashboard (accessed on 24 January 2025).

33. Pereira, V.; Silva, G.M.; Dias, A. Sustainability Practices in Hospitality: Case Study of a Luxury Hotel in Arrábida Natural Park. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 3164. [CrossRef]

34. Ponnapureddy, S.; Priskin, J.; Ohnmacht, T.; Vinzenz, F.; Wirth, W. The influence of trust perceptions on German tourists' intention to book a sustainable hotel: A new approach to analysing marketing information. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2017**, *25*, 970–988. [CrossRef]

35. Line, N.D.; Hanks, L. The effects of environmental and luxury beliefs on intention to patronize green hotels: The moderating effect of destination image. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2016**, *24*, 904–925. [CrossRef]

36. Peng, N.; Chen, A. Luxury hotels going green—The antecedents and consequences of consumer hesitation. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2019**, *27*, 1374–1392. [CrossRef]

37. Sparks, B.A.; Perkins, H.E.; Buckley, R. Online travel reviews as persuasive communication: The effects of content type, source, and certification logos on consumer behavior. *Tour. Manag.* **2013**, *39*, 1–9. [CrossRef]

38. Athwal, N.; Wells, V.K.; Carrigan, M.; Henninger, C.E. Sustainable luxury marketing: A synthesis and research agenda. *Int. J. Manag. Rev.* **2019**, *21*, 405–426. [CrossRef]

39. Galletta, A. *Mastering Semi-Structured Interviews and Beyond*; New York Press: New York, NY, USA, 2012.

40. Saunders, M.N.K.; Lewis, P.; Thornhill, A. *Research Methods for Business Students*; Pearson: London, UK, 2020.

41. Brown, V.; Clarke, V. *Thematic Analysis*; SAGE: London, UK, 2017.

42. Kuoni, Data provided by participant tour operator. Interview conducted in July 2022.

43. Kinsman, J. *The Green Edit: Travel: Easy Tips for the Eco-Friendly Traveller*; Ebury Digital: London, UK, 2020.

44. Chan, E.S.; Okumus, F.; Chan, W. The applications of environmental technologies in hotels. *J. Hosp. Mark. Manag.* **2017**, *26*, 23–47. [CrossRef]

45. Chang, A.Y.P.; Hung, K.P. Development and validation of a tourist experience scale for cultural and creative industries parks. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2021**, *20*, 100560. [CrossRef]

46. Galati, A.; Thrassou, A.; Christofi, M.; Vrontis, D.; Migliore, G. Exploring travelers' willingness to pay for green hotels in the digital era. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2023**, *31*, 2546–2563. [CrossRef]

47. Gupta, S.; Shukla, V.; Pandiya, B. Tourists' motivation towards destination visit intention post-pandemic: Scale development and validation. *Int. J. Tour. Policy* **2022**, *12*, 160–178. [CrossRef]

48. Tosun, J.; Wetzel, A.; Zapryanova, G. *Coping with Crisis: Europe's Challenges and Strategies*; Routledge: London, UK, 2015.

49. Xu, X.; Gursoy, D. Influence of sustainable hospitality supply chain management on customers' attitudes and behaviors. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2015**, *49*, 105–116. [CrossRef]

50. Thompson, A. *Survey: Europeans More 'Green' than Americans*. Live Science. Available online: http://www.livescience.com/4695-survey-europeans-green-americans.html (accessed on 5 September 2022).