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# What Motivates Luxury Cruise Passengers? Experience from Greece

## Abstract

Given the lack of empirical research in explicating luxury cruises and travellers' motivations, the present study adds knowledge to the industry by examining cruise passengers' profiles and reasons for taking a cruise in Greece. This study offers insights into the motivations of 456 tourists who travelled to Greece for a delightful cruise experience. The population of this research consisted of passengers who disembarked at the Port of Piraeus after an 8-day cruise in the Aegean Sea. The findings pointed out that the motivation dimensions of cruise passengers are structured along three significant factors, "escape and relaxation," "culture and tradition", and "enjoyment and shopping," with the initial one being the most important. In addition, the hierarchical cluster analysis identified three clusters and the k-means cluster analysis determined the association of each member to the cluster. Finally, essential policy recommendations are given to all relevant stakeholders.

**Keywords:** luxury cruise, cruise motivation, cruise passengers, Greece, Aegean Sea

## 1. Introduction

According to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA, 2022), the impact of the suspension of cruising in 2020 had far-reaching effects across the cruise community, which includes ports, destinations, service providers, tour operators, travel agents, and hundreds of thousands of small and medium-sized businesses. Passenger embarkations and cruise-supported jobs decreased by 81% and 51%, respectively, in 2020 compared to 2019. In addition, the total economic contribution of the cruise industry fell by 59% in 2020 because of the cruise suspension due to the pandemic tackle.

The positive aspect is that nearly 80% of tourists, who have already cruised before, will cruise again, reaching the same percentage as before the pandemic. By the end of 2023, the number of passengers is expected to recover and surpass 2019 levels. Passenger volume is projected to recover more than 12% above 2019 levels by 2026 (CLIA, 2022). Batat (2020) indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic caused changes in tourists' consumption practices, and luxury tourism was impacted in an incommensurate way facing an unprecedented fall in the luxury tourism market size (D'Arpizio et al., 2021). Generally, most cruise tourists spend less on the ports of call, which explains why the income in the local economies is not so significant compared to the revenue in the homeports (Papadopoulou et al., 2017).

The existing research associated with cruise tourist demand analyses mainly three determinants: motivation, satisfaction, and relaxation. The aspect of motivation has been widely explored in various fields (i.e., sociology, psychology, consumer behaviour, and tourism). Iso-Ahola and Clair (2000) defined 'motive' as 'an internal factor that arouses and directs human behaviour'. Motivation determines if consumers will engage in tourism activity and when, where, and what type of tourism they will pursue. Wall and Mathieson (2006) asserted that emotional, physical, or spiritual needs determine a tourist's motivations which are closely linked to satisfaction. Sukiman et al. (2013) stated that motivation has an impact on satisfaction, and Bruwer (2014) demonstrated

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that tourists were more likely to suggest a destination to their friends and relatives based on their satisfaction since experiences from prior visitors are indeed a reliable source for future tourists (Chi & Qu, 2008).

Many researchers have explored cruises from multiple angles, inclusive of the economic aspects of cruise tourism (Dwyer & Forsyth, 1998; Henthorne, 2000) and the predictors of intention to repeat a cruise trip (Petrick, 2004a; Duman & Mattila, 2005). Li and Petrick (2008), upon assessing the primary antecedents of brand loyalty, proposed that investment model which offers a solid theoretical foundation for tourist brand loyalty perception. Other studies concerning cruises investigated the safety evaluation of cruise ships (Lois et al., 2004; Vidmar & Perković, 2015), interaction and social space (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). Other topics previously examined in the cruise literature include the environmental sustainability of cruise tourism (Johnson, 2002) and cruise ship space (Wood et al., 2000).

Although travel motivation has been extensively studied in the tourism literature (Hsu & Li, 2017; Han & Hyun, 2018; 2019), Whyte (2016) highlighted the limited studies assessing the motivational factors influencing one's decision to cruise. Petrick et al. (2017) evaluated motivation's role in the intention to cruise by developing a measurement scale for cruise motivations. Dai et al. (2019) explained that if cruise tourists' motivation does not match their perceptions, then there are chances of them being less satisfied with their whole experience, and perceived satisfaction can predict intention to return (Duman & Mattila, 2005). Some reasons for passengers to take a cruise have been strongly linked to their post-satisfaction characteristics and the potential to share their experiences (Teye & Paris, 2011).

In this paper, we examine the motivations of luxury cruise passengers when cruising in Greece. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reflects the literature review, and Section 3 discusses the data and introduces the estimation technique for motivational attributes assessment and clustering luxury cruisers. Section 4 presents the results. Finally, sections 5 and 6 discuss the findings and conclusions.

## 2. Literature review

Hung et al. (2020) found that tourists with high expectations and perceptions of "luxury" are increasing their loyalty toward cruise tourism. Luxury tourists are those who experience a unique atmosphere and more personalized services. Travel experiences include escapism, education, entertainment, and aesthetic experiences. In addition, Greece's luxury cruise has the advantage of offering choices.

Recent studies have been made on luxury cruise motivation mainly focused on China and America, while scarce efforts have been noted for cruise tourism in Greece. For instance, Han and Hyun (2018) argued that despite the considerable growth of the cruise industry worldwide, empirical studies on cruises at ports are not abundant. Hence, there is a need to determine the motivational factors influencing a passenger's choice to cruise and how these factors intersect with cruise itinerary (cruise venue) and cruise experience (if they are first-time passengers or repeat cruisers). Despite the recent research in this industry, some severe gaps in the literature persist (Petrick et al., 2017; Zou et al., 2017; Hung, 2018; Han & Hyun, 2019).

Hung and Petrick (2011) claimed that motivations for luxury cruise travel had been undermined. However, several studies have investigated the underlying motivations for taking a cruise, wherein various factors have been found to influence one's choice to cruise. They discovered that relaxation, enhancing kinship relationships or friendships, and convenience are the primary motivations for taking a cruise. Qu and Ping (1999) asserted that the desire to travel is directly linked to the level of satisfaction. Additionally, critical incidents, price sensitivity, and the perceived image of cruise travel have been highlighted as crucial triggering factors that dictate the intention for cruising (Petrick et al., 2006). Satta et al. (2016) studied cruisers from multiple regions. They identified a cruising motivation measurement scale that can be used by cruise lines to define conscious and tailor-made segmentation strategies and target untapped markets.

Motivation had a positive influence on luxury cruising intention. Several past studies had assessed the factors that influenced the preferences of cruise passengers, while Petrick et al. (2007) concluded familiarity and loyalty as the main factors influencing passengers to travel by cruise. Li and Petrick (2008) found that loyalty was a factor in passenger satisfaction. Petrick (2004b) discovered that loyal cruise passengers were more willing to recommend the trip to others, while those less reliable and new passengers tended to be price sensitive. Similarly, Petrick and Sirakaya (2004) claimed that satisfied first-timers and loyal repeaters were more inclined to suggest cruises and displayed their intention to revisit.

The significance of luxury value in tourism points out the tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend a destination to others (Chi & Qu, 2008). Steenkamp et al. (2003) indicate that many tourists experience luxury cruises because of the prestige of the voyage itself, and they can express a more luxurious and distinctive image (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Generally, customers are willing to pay more to receive prestigious brands (Hwang & Hyun, 2012), and according to Kuenzel and Halliday (2008), they are very loyal to luxurious brands. In their study, Hwang and Han (2014) examine the strategies for maximizing and utilizing brand prestige in the luxury cruise industry. Hyun and Han (2012) comment that cruisers, who experience a luxury cruise, perceive high food quality, and feel that they obtain a quality-of-life improvement. Tourists on a luxury cruise ship feel that they appertain to a prestigious group of people, different from other tourists (Hyun & Han, 2013). As Han et al. (2018) indicate, previous studies have shown that conspicuous consumption is vital in customers' decision-making, particularly for luxury products/services (Piron, 2000; Truong et al., 2008).

Cruisers' strong motivations for travelling include self-esteem and social recognition, associated with passengers' feelings of consuming luxury products and services (Han & Hyun, 2018). Humagain and Singleton (2021), when referring to tourists' motivations, explain that nature and beautiful destinations are crucial factors for recreational trips.

The most crucial advantage of Greece is the climate. Therefore, this country is an attractive tourism destination (Papadopoulou, 2020). However, although tourists' motivations and preferences have been extensively analysed, only a handful of studies have investigated cruise motivation in Greece. This study identifies the motivational attributes of experiencing a luxury cruise trip in the Aegean Sea. Therefore, it is essential to examine the luxury cruise motivation of the tourists in Greece, their post-experience, and their interest in returning.

### 3. Methodology

The cruise industry is one of Greece's most critical sectors worldwide. The Port of Piraeus is an important destination for cruise ships within the Mediterranean, with 11 positions for simultaneous mooring, able to serve the largest cruise ships (Piraeus Port Authority, 2022). According to the Hellenic Ports Association (2022), cruise ship arrivals increased in 2021 compared with 2020.

In 2021, the number of cruise ship arrivals in Greek ports amounted to 1,957 and passengers to 1,316,662. The increase in arrivals and passengers amounts to 732% and 1,750%, respectively, compared to 2020. The year 2019 was a record year for Greek tourism. The difference between the number of cruise ships and passengers from 2019 onwards lies in the necessary measures to tackle the pandemic globally and nationally and to impose restrictions on the occupancy rate of boats.

We conducted an individual interview-based survey, following a convenience sampling technique on luxury cruisers in Greece in 2018. Our questionnaire included a wide range of socio-economic characteristics of the participants, who were requested to respond to a three-section survey. We used the motivation framework constructed by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) to explore various factors influencing luxury cruise motivation. Questions retrieved information regarding the past experiences of cruisers (where applicable), their mode of discovering their cruise, and their trip process.

We hypothesized that among motivational factors, relaxation is the most important one. We also hypothesized that passengers would be divided into clusters based on motivation factors and demographic characteristics. For example, personal annual income is the first among significant clustering factors, given that a luxury cruise is more expensive than a typical vacation.

The convenient sample consisted of 456 luxury cruise passengers who disembarked at the Port of Piraeus, one of the world's most popular destinations. It is also the biggest port in Greece. Therefore, it reflects faultless and extremely viable areas to evaluate overall cruise motivation. Consequently, we chose to use it as a case study. After an eight-day cruise across the Aegean Sea, visiting islands such as Santorini and Mykonos, considered luxury destinations worldwide, the respondents were asked to answer questions regarding their motivations regarding luxury cruising, alongside their demographic characteristics.

The employees at the Piraeus Port were selected as the administrators of this research survey. After completing their cruise, they were requested to distribute the survey questionnaires on the cruisers' return to the Piraeus Port. Furthermore, in assessing this study's feasibility and detecting potential issues that might arise from the survey, a pilot study was carried out onboard with 50 passengers before the survey. From the total of 600 survey questionnaires circulated, 456 were received in a proper and helpful form for further analysis.

Univariate statistics such as frequencies, standard deviations, and mean values were calculated. Finally, when deriving clusters, a combination approach using a hierarchical system followed by a non-hierarchical approach is often advisable. For example, Hair et al. (2014) suggest that a hierarchical approach is used to select the number of clusters and profile cluster centres that serve as initial cluster seeds in the non-hierarchical procedure; then, a non-hierarchical method clusters all observations using the seed points to provide more accurate cluster memberships. In this case, we used Ward's method (1963) and the k-means clustering analysis as hierarchical and non-hierarchical, respectively. The comparison between clusters was made with one-way ANOVA tests.

## 4. Findings

Table 1 presents the profile of the luxury cruise ship passengers who participated in the survey.

**Table 1**  
*Profiles of luxury cruise passengers*

	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	202	44.3
Female	254	55.7
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	70	15.4
Married	307	67.3
Divorced	44	9.6
Widowed	35	7.7
<i>Age</i>		
18-25	5	1.1
26-45	61	13.4
46-65	234	51.3
≥66	156	34.2
<i>Personal annual income</i>		
≤10,000	18	3.9
10,001-20,000	54	11.8
20,001-30,000	149	32.7
30,001-40,000	102	22.4
40,001-50,000	65	14.3
≥50,001	68	14.9

**Table 1 (continued)**

<i>Nationality</i>		
Europe	166	36.4
North America	123	27.0
South America	80	17.5
Asia	26	5.7
Australia	53	11.6
South Africa	8	1.8
<i>Companionship</i>		
Alone	34	7.5
With friends	93	20.4
With a group	116	25.4
With family	213	46.7
<i>Cabin Type</i>		
Standard inside	124	27.2
Premium inside	18	3.9
Standard outside	191	41.9
Premium outside	69	15.1
Deluxe	27	5.9
Suite	27	5.9
<i>A prior visit to Greece</i>		
No	361	79.2
Yes	95	20.8
<i>Prior experience with cruise</i>		
No	135	29.6
Yes	321	70.4
<i>Prior experience of the cruise in Greece</i>		
No	401	87.9
Yes	55	12.1

Table 1 shows that 55.7% of the passengers were women; most were middle-aged, married, and wealthy. Europeans are the most common answer concerning their nationality, and North Americans follow immediately. Most claimed to have experienced cruise trips with their family and a selection of standard external cabins. However, despite their experience in cruising, they had never been to Greece before.

Data retrieved from the survey were aggregated to assess motivation among tourists who visited Greece for cruise purposes. In addition, the passengers were requested to indicate the importance of the listed ten motivation factors in undertaking the specific cruise. Table 2 tabulates the overall responses to the motivation attributes.

**Table 2**  
**Overall responses to motivation attributes**

	Not at all important	Somewhat unimportant	Neither unimportant nor important	Somewhat important	Extremely important	Mean	Std. deviation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		
1. Discover new places	6.1	5.0	10.3	43.2	35.3	3.96	1.101
2. Change from routine	6.1	5.0	10.3	51.5	27.0	3.88	1.056
3. Relaxation	8.1	13.4	17.8	34.4	26.3	3.57	1.236
4. Visit historical and cultural sites	8.6	19.5	12.9	37.5	21.5	3.44	1.258
5. Learn about Greek history/culture	12.5	11.8	18.4	37.5	19.7	3.40	1.275
6. Visit museums and/or art galleries	10.7	11.0	30.5	39.9	7.9	3.23	1.097

**Table 2 (continued)**

7. Experience pleasant temperature	14.3	14.3	24.1	33.8	13.6	3.18	1.251
8. Learn about Greek traditions	13.8	14.5	25.7	35.3	10.7	3.15	1.209
9. Enjoy nature	18.0	16.7	22.4	30.5	12.5	3.03	1.301
10. Buy local gifts	19.3	41.9	19.5	13.8	5.5	2.44	1.114

Essential statements derived from the analysis worth highlighting are presented in descending order from the highest to the lowest mean values in Table 2. The frequency analysis is presented in percentages (columns 1 to 5) for each component, and mean values and standard deviations give the average importance level. According to mean values, the motivational factors of discovering new places, escaping from routine, and relaxing are the most critical factors with mean values above 3.5 (3.96, 3.88 and 3.77, respectively). The following three cultural factors, i.e., visiting historical and cultural sites, learning about Greek history and culture, and visiting museums, are also important, ranking second place according to their mean values (3.44, 3.40 and 3.23, respectively). Factors 7 to 9 relating to Greek climate and nature are lower at the importance level. Finally, the last element of buying local gifts seems relatively unimportant as a motivational attribute.

Next, factor analysis was conducted via varimax rotation to identify the dimensions of motivations in reducing the sizes of the observations. The outcomes of the factor analysis are tabulated in Table 3, where the criteria were based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important).

**Table 3**  
*Motivation dimensions of cruise passengers*

Factors	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance explained (%)	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Factor 1</b> <b>Culture and tradition</b>		3.514	35.1	.940	.919
Learn about Greek history/culture	.921				
Visit historical and cultural sites	.915				
Learn about Greek traditions	.903				
Visit museums and/or art galleries	.828				
<b>Factor 2</b> <b>Escape and relaxation</b>		3.163	31.6	.925	.893
Discover new places	.952				
Change from routine	.919				
Relaxation	.817				
<b>Factor 3</b> <b>Enjoyment and shopping</b>		1.515	15.2	.846	.808
Buy local gifts	.523				
Experience pleasant temperature	.939				
Enjoy nature	.907				

Note. KMO .707, Bartlett 3906.594,  $p < .001$ .

As a result, three factors accounted for 81.9% of the variance: factor 1 reflected the most variance (35.1%), the second, 31.6%, and the third, 15.2%. Factor 1 is labelled "culture and tradition" primarily because it signifies that culture and tradition are the passengers' most significant motivations, with a factor loading of the .828-.921 range. The second factor, "escape and relaxation," reflects the motivations of cruise passengers based on their desire to discover new places, relax, and take a break from their routine. The final factor, "enjoyment and shopping," based on the correlation between "buying local gifts" and "experiencing



pleasant temperature," indicates that the respondents took advantage of the pleasant temperature to go shopping.

Eigenvalues exceeding one were applied to identify the number of factors. Before factor analysis, data validity was evaluated by executing the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy (.707), which displayed that the number of variables and the sample size were appropriate for factor analysis. A KMO of .707 is described as "middling" to reflect relevant data for factor analysis. Factor loadings exceeding .60 (except the factor "buy local gifts") signify an excellent correlation between items and the factor grouping to which they belong. The reliability of the elements, which was determined using Cronbach's alpha, resulted as follows: .919, .893, and .808 for the first, second, and third factors, respectively. Composite reliability was determined to examine the internal consistency, which should exceed the benchmark of .70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 1998) or .60 (Bagozzi & Kimmel, 1995) to reflect adequacy. As a result, the composite reliability of all three factors exceeded .7 (factor 1 = .940, factor 2 = .925, and factor 3 = .846), indicating a reliable scale.

The factors' scores of motivation dimensions, as resulted previously, were used for the segmentation process. The hierarchical cluster analysis identified three clusters, and the k-means cluster analysis identified the association of each member to the cluster. The results of the one-way ANOVA are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**One-way ANOVA results**

	Total	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	One-way ANOVA
	(N=456)	(N=250)	(N=121)	(N=85)	
<i>Dimensions</i>	100%	54.82%	26.54%	18.64%	F (p-value)
Culture and tradition	.00	1.41	-1.01	-2.71	804.44 (.000)
Escape and relaxation	.00	.37	-2.17	2.00	436.92 (.000)
Enjoyment and shopping	.00	-.09	.31	-.17	5.43 (.0047)

As one can see, each motivation dimension is correlated to all clusters and used for the segmentation process. According to the sign carried by the dimension of culture and tradition, only members of cluster 1 are positively associated with the specific cluster. The same holds for the dimension of enjoyment and shopping with members of cluster 2. Concerning the dimension of escape and relaxation, a positive sign is carried for clusters 1 and 3; the value is far more significant for the last cluster, documenting a higher importance.

One-way ANOVA depicts the differences in the averages between the three clusters and the importance of each factor. All values depict the distance between the cluster center and the average of all participants. Cluster 1 is the largest and represents more than half of the sample (54.82%). For these members, "culture and tradition" have great importance (1.41) concerning "escape and relaxation" and "enjoyment and shopping" (.37 and -.09, respectively). The second cluster represents 26% of the sample and is the segment that classifies the factor "enjoyment and shopping positively", attaching higher importance when compared to other groups. Finally, cluster 3 is the smallest and comprises 18% of the sample. For its members, "escape and relaxation" is the factor with the greater importance among all groups (2.00).

The clusters are characterized based on the previous factor analysis. Each cluster differs based on the average scores and differences between dimensions presented earlier. Table 5 focuses on each cluster's sociodemographic characteristics, describing its participants. According to Ward's method, we used the analysis of variance to maximize the significance of differences between each cluster. Based on the most significant characteristic of each cluster, a label is given, while other characteristics are used to profile the group of passengers.

**Table 5**  
*Differences between clusters*

	Total (N=456) 100%	Cluster 1 Typical (N=250) 54.82%	Cluster 2 High incomers (N=121) 26.54%	Cluster 3 Repeaters (N=85) 18.64%	p-value
<i>Gender</i>					.8949
Male	44.3	44.00	44.63	44.71	
Female	55.7	56.00	55.37	55.29	
<i>Marital status</i>					.8716
Single	15.35	15.60	18.18	10.59	
Married	67.32	67.60	67.60	71.76	
Divorced	9.65	9.20	9.92	10.59	
Widowed	7.68	7.60	8.26	7.06	
<i>Age</i>					.645
18-25	1.1	1.20	1.65	.00	
26-45	13.38	13.60	17.36	7.06	
46-65	51.32	49.60	53.72	52.94	
≥66	34.21	35.60	27.27	40.00	
<i>Personal annual income</i>					.000
≤10,000	3.95	4.80	4.96	.000	
10,001-20,000	11.84	16.00	9.92	2.35	
20,001-30,000	32.68	31.60	18.18	56.47	
30,001-40,000	22.37	12.40	29.75	41.18	
40,001-50,000	14.25	18.80	14.88	.00	
≥50,001	14.91	16.40	22.31	.00	
<i>Nationality</i>					.2419
Europe	36.4	38.80	36.36	29.41	
North America	26.97	26.40	21.49	36.47	
South America	17.54	15.60	18.18	22.35	
Asia	5.7	4.80	11.57	.00	
Australia	11.62	12.00	10.74	11.76	
South Africa	1.75	2.40	1.65	.00	
<i>Companionship</i>					0.26
Alone	7.46	8.80	5.79	5.88	
With friends	20.38	18.80	19.01	27.06	
With a group	25.44	28.00	22.31	22.35	
With family	46.71	44.40	52.89	44.71	
<i>Cabin Type</i>					0.5541
Standard inside	27.19	30.80	21.49	24.71	
Premium inside	3.95	4.00	2.48	5.88	
Standard outside	41.89	37.60	47.93	45.88	
Premium outside	15.13	17.20	9.92	16.47	
Deluxe	5.92	5.60	7.44	4.71	
Suite	5.92	4.80	10.74	2.35	
<i>A prior visit to Greece</i>					.0918
No	79.17	81.20	80.17	71.76	
Yes	20.83	18.80	19.83	28.24	
<i>Prior experience with cruise</i>					.033
No	29.61	31.20	36.36	15.29	
Yes	70.39	68.80	63.64	84.71	
<i>Prior experience of the cruise in Greece</i>					.3465
No	87.94	86.00	91.74	88.24	
Yes	12.06	14.00	8.26	11.76	



As stated earlier and according to Ward's method, clusters are labelled based on statistically significant attributes. For example, a p-value of annual income demonstrates that differences between clusters are essential. Furthermore, one may notice that most cluster 2 belongs to high-income levels, i.e., almost 67% gain more than 30,001 euros per year and 22% more than 50,000 annually. Compared to other clusters, less than 48% and 42% are compensated with more than 30,0001 annually for clusters 1 and 3, respectively. Therefore, based on the significance of annual income, participants of cluster 2 are labelled as high incomers. Following the same reasoning, participants of cluster 1 are named as typical cruisers and those of cluster 3 as repeaters. Next, we profile the group of each cluster's passengers based on sociodemographic characteristics and other attributes.

Each cluster differs based on the average scores and differences between dimensions presented earlier in Table 4. Now, Table 5 focuses on the socio-demographic characteristics of each cluster and describes its participants. According to Ward's method, we used the analysis of variance to maximize the significance of differences between each cluster. Based on the most significant characteristic of each cluster, a label is given, while other parts are used to profile the group of passengers.

Cluster 1, labelled "typical cruisers", represents about 55% of the sample. Their members are women (56.00%), married (67.60%), and between the age of 46 and 65 years old (49.60%). They belong to the middle-income classes (31.60%) and are primarily European. In this cluster, the largest group of Australians (12.00%). Usually, they travel with their family (44.40%), but this group also includes the most significant number of individuals travelling with a group (28.00%). Their preferred cabin type is the standard outside (37.60%), followed by the standard inside (30.80%). Although they have prior cruise experience (68.80%), they visit Greece for the first time (18.80). Their primary motivation is culture and tradition. They are interested in learning about Greek history and tradition and visit cultural sites and museums.

Cluster 2, labelled as "high incomers", are also women (55.37%), married (67.60%), and between the age of 46 and 65 years old (53.72%). It is the youngest group since 19% of its members are below 45. In addition, this group has the highest number of individuals with higher incomes (22.31%). They are from Europe (36.36%) and travel with their family (52.89%). Although the preferred cabin type is the standard outside (47.93%), this cluster has the highest number of individuals choosing a deluxe cabin or a suite (7.44 and 10.74, respectively). Finally, only 63.64% have prior experience with cruises, and 19.83% have visited Greece before. Nevertheless, this group has the smallest percentage of individuals travelling to Greece for a cruise trip (8.26%). Their primary motivation is enjoyment and shopping. Some are interested in experiencing the pleasant climate and nature and buying local gifts and souvenirs.

Cluster 3, labelled "repeaters", comprises more women (55.29%) than men. Again, the majority are married (71.76%) and between the ages of 46 and 65. It is the oldest group, with 40% of its members above the age of 66. They belong to the middle-income classes, mainly from North America. Usually, like other clusters, they travel with their family (44.71%), but this group includes the most significant percentage of individuals travelling with friends (27.06%). Concerning their preferred cabin type, members of this group are like other clusters since the standard outside is their first choice, followed by the standard inside. Most have prior cruise experience (84.71%), and almost three out of ten (28.24%) have visited Greece. Their primary motivation is escape and relaxation. They are interested in discovering new places and changing their routine.

Overall, findings suggest that the differences between clusters are significant. However, there are minor alterations between clusters concerning passengers' demographic characteristics, choices referring to cabin type for the cruise, or to the company to travel with.

## 5. Discussion

Our results highlighted "exploration" and "escapism" as the primary motivations amongst luxury cruise travellers. Brida and Risso (2010) reported relevant outcomes derived from Pacific and Caribbean ports.

Jones (2011) stated that the impact of magnitude differs based on the cruise passengers' travelling experience. Finally, Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis (2010) depicted the cruise experience extensively in their study regarding motivation at the Port of Heraklion (Crete, Greece).

Luxury cruise travellers in our research were also interested in exploring culture, history, and nature, aside from enjoying some leisure time, which is the motivational factor to travel to Greece, aligned with previous studies (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Zhao & Timothy, 2017). Ramires et al. (2016) discovered that museums and monuments are crucial attractions that align with our findings, wherein "culture and tradition" is a motivational aspect for luxury cruise travellers. The motive of "routine change" in the current study is like that of Qu and Ping (1999).

Although there is an indication that the cruise industry is evolving into a phase of maturity, whereby the number of cruise passengers has been escalating gradually, albeit at a slow rate, it should be noted here that this slow growth could be an effect of the global recession that led to the financial crisis in the past decade. Upon reaching maturity, luxury cruise companies must recognize their customers' needs to continue providing the sought services and activities on cruise ships. The management of luxury cruise lines, along with the challenges faced by the rivals, seems to confront progressively advanced and challenging customers.

Our results were also aligned with previous studies concerning motivational attributes (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Brida & Riso, 2010; Bruwer, 2014). Our results may differ from relevant studies regarding motivational factors and their importance, but they are not surprising concerning profiles of luxury cruisers. For example, those travelling on a luxury cruise rarely can visit museums and mostly enjoy their free time relaxing. Regarding age, our results verify the findings reported by Marti (1991), which portrayed a false impression that cruise passengers consisted mainly of older persons over 65.

Nonetheless, some of the findings were unexpected, making the research even more enjoyable. The outcomes of this study revealed that although most participants had experienced a cruise trip before, they had never visited Greece. Every summer, with an exemption of the summer of 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19, Greece's visitors are numerous, so someone could assume that many of them have already visited Greece. Then the decision came to experience a cruise later around the Aegean Sea. However, this can make sense as most respondents generally prefer cruise trips as a vacation and decided to extend their experience to a cruise trip in some of the Greek islands. Another factor that was not so significant in the current research was that the visitors did not find it meaningful to purchase local gifts. This makes sense as the rest of the motivational attributes were far more critical for the respondents when asked to select the most significant.

This makes sense since cruising in Greece is not promoted or aligned with the Greek citizens' culture when selecting a vacation. Thus, this highlights the pressing need to promote Greek cruise tourism for those experienced cruise passengers, apart from concentrating on first-time travellers.

It is imperative to note that this study was conducted to analyse luxury cruisers' experience over a short duration. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to conduct similar studies examining if luxury cruise tourists have different demographic characteristics during the summer and/or behave differently regarding their pre-trip motivations. Additional research should be carried out better to understand the motivations of cruise passengers to Greek islands and perhaps other possible motives for exploration, such as self-esteem and social recognition attributes. This study was designed to test the relevant constructs as independent variables. Other factors, such as personal annual income, friend's recommendation, and self-satisfaction, may not have a direct association but strongly influence the motivation to travel. These factors may serve as mediators or moderators to enhance future studies. Finally, more relevant studies should assess the correlation between satisfaction, the likelihood of returning, and WoM (Word of Mouth). It would be interesting to observe if the experience amongst luxury cruise passengers in the same destination changes over the years or remains the same. Expenditures, intention to return and WoM attributes are significant concerning satisfaction (Parola et al., 2014).

The motivational factors amongst cruise passengers are closely linked with escapism and relaxation, culture and tradition, enjoyment, and shopping. Therefore, relaxation is critical, followed by the quality of culture and tradition. Thus, this study emphasizes that luxury cruise managers should strive to increase motivation among cruisers by adopting several viable measures, such as executing effective promotional campaigns to promote Greece as a unique destination that offers relation and escapism opportunities, with rich culture and historical places, alongside its characteristic climate and nature.

A precise concentration strategy is in need to improve destination satisfaction among cruisers (Brida et al., 2012). "Escape and relaxation" and "culture and tradition" appear to be the strongest motivations. Hence, cruise tourists with cultural and traditional motives should be encouraged to travel to Greece. Therefore, policymakers should promote Greek luxury cruise tourism with effective campaigns demonstrating the importance of culture and tradition. Furthermore, cruise companies should further improve programs concerning culture and relaxation during a cruise trip. Therefore, they will be able to assess the motivations of cruise passengers, thus providing more customized services and better-targeting luxury cruisers.

## 6. Conclusion

This research presents a solid theoretical framework from the stance of luxury cruise tourists travelling in the Aegean Sea by embedding the factors of travel motivations. This study advances past research on the topic. Furthermore, the findings add to the existing literature on luxury cruise tourism motivation since it is one of the very few studies, if not the first one, focusing on Greece and cruise motivation, and to our knowledge, the first one focusing on luxury cruisers at the most critical national port of Greece.

This study's contribution to marketers of luxury cruise lines in Greece is to develop promotional videos/messages by displaying passengers enjoying and relaxing on board, as well as escaping from their mundane life, to promote the idea of cruising amongst potential/existing customers effectively. Furthermore, Hui et al. (2007) discovered that tourists who were satisfied with their trip were likelier to recommend the destination to others instead of revisiting it in future. This suggests that the authorities should investigate upgrading their facilities by considering tourists' recommendations and feedback.

This study contributes knowledge of the luxury cruise industry in Greece to meet the demands and needs of the passengers. The wants of cruisers are crucial for local policymakers in facilitating the provision of the right environment. From the managerial aspect, destination managers and local government bodies are encouraged to cooperate and emphasise this information to develop effective marketing strategies. The parsimonious higher-order travel motivation typology addresses practitioners' and academics' need to conceptualize or theorise complex variables more concisely. Furthermore, policymakers and marketers of luxury cruise lines in Greece should develop videos or/and messages showing that cruisers enjoy their experience on the cruise ship but on shore. This could be very important for promoting the luxury cruise experience in the Greek islands.

Moreover, this study is one of the few discussing luxury cruise motivations in the Greek islands, if not the first one. As Greece is not so famous for its cruise industry, it is of high importance to the researchers dealing with tourism in Greece and the Mediterranean, in general, to observe such capabilities of Greece as a destination. Furthermore, the destination described in the current study is essential as it is a unique place in the Mediterranean Sea, where luxury cruising has not yet been analyzed in detail.

As with all studies, this one as well has several limitations. First, the sample concentrated only on luxury passengers who experienced a cruise in the Aegean Sea. Future research may investigate luxury cruise trips in other parts of Greece, such as the Ionian Sea, to evaluate possible variances or similarities in the demographic characteristics and/or cluster analysis via comparative study. Second, although there are significant similarities with other studies, this should not be considered a generic approach. Third, the study sample consisted

of both international and local cruise passengers, which prevented market-based comparisons, such as those made in the study conducted by Caber and Albayrak (2016). Hence, future studies should distinguish domestic tourists from international ones. Finally, the participants in this study responded to the questionnaire on returning to the Port of Piraeus, wherein several researchers have voiced out that motivation may change before, during, and after the activity (Prebensen et al., 2010; Wu & Pearce, 2014). Accordingly, future research should measure the motivations before, during, and after the cruise to identify the reasons for the changes in the motivation aspect.

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