

## Authenticity and Revisit Intention: A Study of Kota Lama Surabaya

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### ABSTRACT

*Urban heritage tourism has become one of the most significant trends in the global tourism industry, reflecting tourists' growing demand for meaningful, authentic, and memorable experiences in urban environments. Kota Lama Surabaya, with its colonial architecture, cultural narratives, and modern dynamics, represents a promising heritage destination. However, fluctuating visitation data, initially high after revitalization but declining in subsequent months raises concerns about the sustainability of tourist loyalty. This study examines the relationship between perceived authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention, and further tests the mediating role of satisfaction. A quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design was applied. Data was collected through an online questionnaire using purposive sampling, targeting visitors who had experienced Kota Lama Surabaya in the past year. A total of 200 valid responses were analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0. The measurement model confirmed that all constructions met validity and reliability standards. The findings show that authenticity significantly influences tourist satisfaction, and satisfaction strongly affects revisit intention. Satisfaction also mediates the link between authenticity and revisit intention, suggesting that authenticity must be accompanied by fulfilling experiences to build loyalty. Conceptually, the study reaffirms authenticity as a critical determinant of satisfaction and loyalty, while practically highlighting strategies such as credible storytelling, cultural festivals, and community engagement to ensure sustainable heritage tourism development.*

**Keywords:** *Urban heritage tourism, authenticity, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention*

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### INTRODUCTION

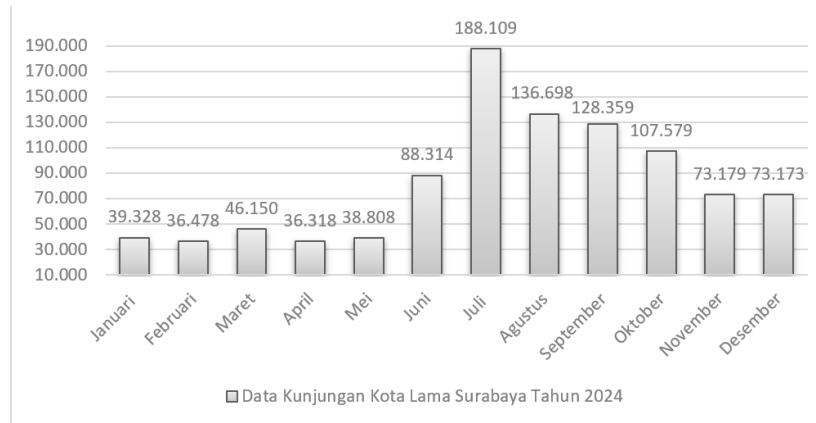
Urban heritage tourism has developed into one of the main trends in the global tourism industry over the past two decades. Changes in tourist behavior indicate an increasing interest in experiences that are not only recreational, but also rich in historical meaning, authenticity, and connection with urban spaces (Eck, Zhang, & An, 2023). Urban heritage tourism does not only showcase monuments, historical sites, or old buildings, but also presents a holistic experience that includes the spatial atmosphere, interactions with local communities, and ongoing cultural practices. This trend aligns with the concept of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), which emphasizes that tourists today seek memorable and meaningful experiences, rather than merely products or services.

This phenomenon is evident in various cities around the world, ranging from the Forbidden City in Beijing, which combines historical conservation with immersive technology-based experiences (Eck et al., 2023), to Old Towns in Europe that offer an integration of architectural heritage with modern urban dynamics. Thus, urban heritage tourism has become an important instrument for preserving culture while simultaneously enhancing the economic appeal of cities.

In Indonesia, one concrete example of urban heritage tourism is the Kota Lama Surabaya. This area preserves Dutch colonial architectural heritage, classical-style buildings, and the dynamics of a modern city that coexist side by side. The Surabaya City Government has implemented various revitalization programs, ranging from repainting buildings, arranging pedestrian pathways, to developing MSME areas. These efforts aim to transform the Old Town into both a tourist magnet and a vibrant cultural hub (JawaPos.com, 2024; Surabaya.go.id, 2024).

Visitor data indicate a relatively high initial enthusiasm. In July 2024, when the area was officially launched, the number of tourists reached 188,109 visits. However, this figure dropped significantly to 73,173 visits in December 2024. This sharp decline raises a fundamental question: why is the revisit intention of tourists low, despite the physical revitalization efforts that have been carried out?

Meanwhile, at the macro level, data from the Surabaya Office of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Disbudporapar) recorded that throughout 2023, the total number of tourists visiting Surabaya reached 17,425,476, exceeding the target of 13.7 million. Of this total, around 16.1 million were domestic tourists from Indonesia and 1.28 million were international visitors. These figures highlight Surabaya's great potential as a tourist destination, making the sustainability and increase of visits to the Old Town area a strategic issue for the city government (SuaraSurabaya.net, 2024).



Sumber : Disbudporapar Kota Surabaya (2024).

**Figure 1. Tourist Arrivals in 2024**

Preliminary field studies show that today's tourists are no longer satisfied with merely seeing old buildings or simply taking photos in front of monuments. They seek to experience perceived authenticity, interact with local communities, and immerse themselves in an atmosphere capable of creating lasting impressions. Authenticity has long been identified in the literature as a predictor of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention (Zhou, Chen, & Wu, 2022; Riptiono et al., 2023).

For example, a study in China found that authenticity not only directly influences revisit intention but also does so through memorable experiences and emotional attachment to a place (Zhou et al., 2022). This fact underscores that tourist satisfaction is determined not only by the physical aspects of a destination but also by the subjective experiences and meanings constructed during the visit.

Although large-scale physical revitalization of Surabaya's Old Town has been carried out, no systematic study has yet measured the extent to which authenticity influences satisfaction and revisit intention. This situation creates a knowledge gap. Meanwhile, fluctuating visitor data indicates that physical management alone is insufficient to build tourist loyalty. A more comprehensive approach is required one that places authentic experiences and perceptions as the central factors in destination development strategies.

The concept of authenticity is understood through Wang's (1999) typology: objective authenticity (the genuineness of objects/artifacts), constructive authenticity (socially constructed narratives), and existential authenticity (the feeling of being one's true self). Kolar and Žabkar (2010) demonstrated that perceived authenticity contributes to satisfaction and loyalty, both directly and through the mediation of satisfaction and emotional attachment to a place.

Tourist satisfaction itself is an affective-cognitive post-consumption evaluation that has been consistently shown to influence behavioral intentions, including loyalty (Oliver, 1997). The models of Chi and Qu (2008) and Yoon and Uysal (2005) highlight satisfaction as a key variable that links destination attributes with loyalty through revisit intention. Therefore, in the context of Surabaya's Old Town, satisfaction can be regarded as an important mediator between authenticity on revisit intention.

This study is relevant for at least three reasons. First, the Knowledge Gap: although the relationship between authenticity, satisfaction, and revisiting intention has been widely studied at the global level, research focusing on Surabaya's Old Town remains scarce. Yet, fluctuating visitation trends indicate a unique phenomenon that requires local understanding. Second, Practical Relevance: the research findings will assist the city government, MSME actors, and heritage managers in formulating strategies based on experiences rather than solely physical aspects. For instance, developing storytelling programs, cultural festivals, or interactive tours that strengthen memorable and authentic impressions. Third, the Socio-Economic Benefits: the successful management of heritage tourism not only impacts the increase in

visitor numbers but also supports local economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and the formation of a sustainable city image.

Based on the above, this study aims to comprehensively examine the relationship between perceived authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention in the Kota Lama Surabaya area. It investigates whether tourist satisfaction serves as a mediator in the relationship between authenticity and revisit intention. In doing so, the study is expected to provide a conceptual contribution to the literature on urban heritage tourism as well as practical recommendations for destination managers themselves.

## METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design. This approach was chosen as it is appropriate for testing causal relationships among psychological and perceptual variables of tourists in the context of urban heritage tourism, particularly in the Kota Lama Surabaya area. The main focus of the research is to analyze the influence of perceived authenticity on tourist satisfaction and its impact on revisit intention. In addition, the study examines the mediating role of satisfaction in the relationship among these variables.

The research was carried out through six systematically structured stages, namely:

1. **Problem Identification:** analyzing the phenomenon of low revisit rates in Surabaya's Old Town, despite the physical revitalization efforts. This stage is essential to formulate the research problem and determine the variables to be tested.
2. **Literature Review:** conducting an in-depth review of theories and previous studies related to perceived authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention.
3. **Development of Research Instruments:** a questionnaire was developed based on relevant empirical indicators. Perceived authenticity indicators include objective, constructive, and existential authenticity. Satisfaction was measured through expectation fulfillment, revisit interest, and willingness to recommend. Revisit intention was measured by willingness to return, inviting others, and prioritizing the Old Town as a travel destination. The instrument was pilot-tested and assessed for validity (AVE, factor loading) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability).
4. **Data Collection:** data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with the criteria being respondents who had visited Kota Lama Surabaya within the past year and were active digital media users. The minimum sample size was set at 200 respondents, following the recommendations for analysis using PLS-SEM.
5. **Data Analysis:** the collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. This method was chosen as it is capable of explaining complex relationships among perception-based latent constructs, including both direct and indirect effects.
6. **Conclusion and Recommendations:** drawing conclusions and providing recommendations based on the results of the analysis. The outcomes of this study are expected not only to enrich the academic literature but also to provide practical strategies for heritage destination managers.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### 1. Validity and Reliability Test

The following are the results of the validity and reliability test:

**Table 1. Validity Test Results**

Variable	Item	r-count	r-table	Remark
Authenticity	X2.1	0.765	0.361	Valid
	X2.2	0.829	0.361	Valid
	X2.3	0.582	0.361	Valid
	X2.4	0.679	0.361	Valid

	X2.5	0.793	0.361	Valid
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>	Z1.1	0.884	0.361	Valid
	Z1.2	0.847	0.361	Valid
	Z1.3	0.852	0.361	Valid
<b>Revisit Intention</b>	Y1.1	0.855	0.361	Valid
	Y1.2	0.867	0.361	Valid
	Y1.3	0.817	0.361	Valid

Source: Processed Data (2025)

The validity test results show that all items in the variables of authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention have r-count values greater than the r-table value (0.361), thus all items are declared valid.

In addition, the reliability test results also indicate that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, namely authenticity (0.788), tourist satisfaction (0.849), and revisit intention (0.845), as presented in the reliability test results table below.

**Table 2. Reliability Test Results**

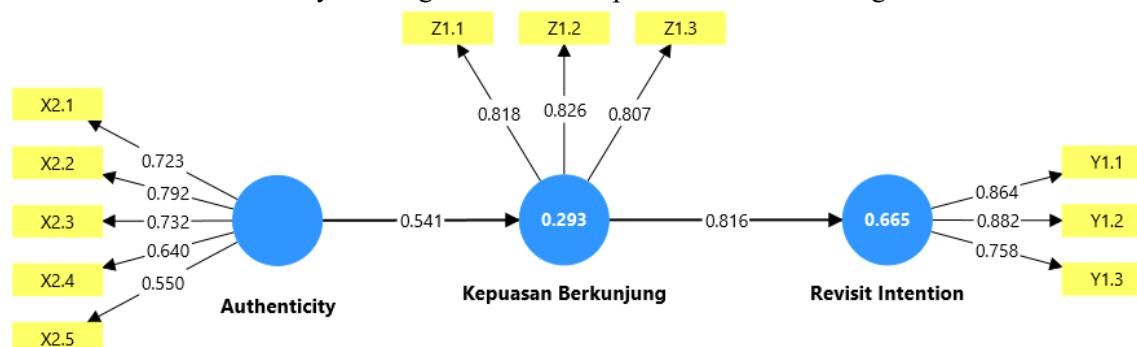
Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Standard Alpha	Remark
<b>Authenticity</b>	0.788	0.70	Reliable
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>	0.849	0.70	Reliable
<b>Revisit Intention</b>	0.845	0.70	Reliable

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Therefore, the results provide evidence that all research constructs are considered reliable.

## 2. Structural Model Test (Inner Model)

The PLS-SEM analysis using SmartPLS 4.0 produced the following model test results:



**Figure 2. Model Test Results**

Source: Processed Data (2025)

**Table 3. Inner Model Results**

Variable	R-square
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>	0.293
<b>Revisit Intention</b>	0.665

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on the table above, the R-square value for tourist satisfaction is 0.293 or 29.3%, which falls into the weak category. This value indicates that tourist satisfaction can be explained by authenticity by 29.3%, while the remaining 70.7% is influenced by other variables not included in this study.

Furthermore, the R-square value for revisit intention is 0.665 or 66.5%, which falls into the

strong category. This value indicates that revisit intention can be explained by authenticity by 66.5%, while the remaining 33.5% is influenced by other variables outside of this study.

### 3. Hypothesis Testing

**Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results**

Hipotesis	Original sample	T statistics	P values
<b>Authenticity -&gt; Tourist Satisfaction</b>	0.541	9.741	0.000
<b>Tourist Satisfaction -&gt; Revisit Intention</b>	0.816	26.729	0.000

Source: Processed Data (2025)

The research findings indicate that authenticity has a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction, with a beta coefficient of 0.541, a T-statistic value of 9.741, and a P-value of 0.000. Since the P-value < 0.05, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. This means that the higher the level of authenticity perceived by tourists in Kota Lama Surabaya, the greater the satisfaction they experience during their visit.

- a. Hypothesis 1: Authenticity → Tourist Satisfaction  
Coefficient: 0.541; T-statistics: 9.741; P-value: 0.000. Result: positive and significant effect
- b. Hypothesis 2: Tourist Satisfaction → Revisit Intention  
Coefficient: 0.816; T-statistics: 26.729; P-value: 0.000. Result: positive and significant effect
- c. Hypothesis 3: Authenticity → Revisit Intention through Tourist Satisfaction  
Coefficient: 0.441; T-statistics: 8.131; P-value: 0.000. Result: tourist satisfaction is proven to mediate the influence of authenticity on revisit intention

## Discussion

### Authenticity and Tourist Satisfaction

The findings of this study demonstrate that authenticity has a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction. This means that the higher the level of authenticity perceived by tourists, the greater their satisfaction when visiting heritage destinations. In the context of Kota Lama Surabaya, authenticity is reflected through well-preserved colonial buildings, historical narratives curated and presented by heritage communities, and distinctive social experiences such as interactions with local vendors or traditional art performances. This indicates that tourists are not merely pursuing visual aspects but are also seeking authentic cultural meanings from a destination.

This finding is consistent with the theory proposed by Wang (1999), who classified authenticity into three dimensions: objective authenticity, referring to the genuineness of physical objects or artifacts; constructive authenticity, which is shaped through social narratives and cultural interpretation; and existential authenticity, which is personally experienced by tourists through direct engagement in activities. Together, these three dimensions enhance satisfaction because tourists feel they have gained more meaningful experiences that meet or even exceed their expectations.

Previous studies reinforce this finding. Nurfajrina and Aprilia (2022) emphasized that perceived authenticity at cultural destinations in Indonesia significantly influences tourist satisfaction. Similarly, Zhang, Wu, and Buhalis (2021) found that authenticity is a key determinant in enhancing satisfaction and loyalty, especially at heritage destinations rich in historical value. In addition, Kolar and Žabkar (2010) stated that authenticity shapes value perception, which forms the basis of satisfaction as well as revisit intention. Thus, the present study further confirms the role of authenticity as a critical variable in building tourist satisfaction in urban heritage destinations.

For Kota Lama Surabaya managers, it is important to prioritize the preservation of original building façades, deliver credible historical narratives, and create spaces for direct interaction between tourists and local communities. Activities such as heritage walks, cultural festivals, and storytelling-based historical exhibitions can serve as effective strategies to strengthen perceptions of authenticity, thereby increasing tourist satisfaction and fostering long-term loyalty.

### Tourist Satisfaction and Revisit Intention

The results of this study show that tourist satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on revisit

intention. This means that the higher the level of satisfaction experienced by tourists during their visit to Kota Lama Surabaya, the greater the likelihood that they will return or recommend the destination to others. This finding emphasizes that satisfaction is not only the outcome of a travel experience but also a crucial factor in building destination loyalty through revisit intention.

Theoretically, this result is consistent with Oliver's (1997) perspective, which states that satisfaction is an affective-cognitive post-consumption evaluation, where the fulfillment or even surpassing of expectations produces a positive response in the form of loyalty. Satisfaction motivates tourists to return and to share their positive experiences through word of mouth, which in turn strengthens the destination's image. Chi and Qu (2008) also confirmed that tourist satisfaction is a key variable in destination loyalty models, directly influencing revisit intention as well as positive recommendations.

Empirical support for this result also comes from recent studies. Huu et al. (2024) found that tourist satisfaction is a strong predictor of revisit intention in cultural destinations in Southeast Asia. Similarly, Torabi et al. (2022) showed the same for heritage destinations in the Middle East, where tourists satisfied with cultural experiences tend to develop long-term loyalty. Thus, this study further reinforces the evidence that satisfaction is a fundamental variable linking the quality of experiences with the sustainability of tourist visits.

To enhance satisfaction, destination management must ensure the overall quality of the tourist experience. Physical aspects such as the comfort of pedestrian pathways, environmental cleanliness, and accessibility need to be well maintained. In addition, non-physical aspects are equally important, including the availability of credible historical information, service friendliness, and the diversity of cultural activities that emotionally engage tourists. When both aspects are fulfilled, tourist satisfaction can increase significantly, thereby encouraging revisit intention and positive recommendations for Kota Lama Surabaya.

### **The Mediating Role of Satisfaction in the Relationship between Authenticity and Revisit Intention**

The analysis results of this study show that tourist satisfaction mediates the influence of authenticity on revisit intention. This means that although authenticity can directly enhance tourists' intention to return, its effect becomes stronger when tourists feel satisfied with the experiences they gain. In other words, authenticity will only have an optimal impact on loyalty when accompanied by overall satisfaction derived from the tourism experience.

This finding is consistent with the tourist behavior model proposed by Silaban et al. (2020), which emphasizes that satisfaction serves as a bridge between authenticity and destination loyalty. In the context of Kota Lama Surabaya, the authenticity of the area such as colonial building façades, historical narratives, and cultural atmosphere needs to be packaged into enjoyable experiences, so that tourists not only perceive authenticity but also feel satisfied. This is also in line with the study of Kolar and Žabkar (2010), which found that perceived authenticity strongly influences loyalty, both directly and through satisfaction. Similarly, Zhang, Wu, and Buhalis (2021) highlighted that perceived authenticity strengthens the value of the experience, which is then translated into satisfaction and revisit intention.

It is therefore important for Kota Lama Surabaya managers to integrate aspects of authenticity with the creation of satisfying experiences. Such strategies may include historical storytelling, cultural exhibitions, community festivals, or direct interaction with local artists. By offering experiences that are both authentic and satisfying, the destination will be better able to foster emotional attachment among tourists and encourage the development of long-term loyalty.

Overall, this study confirms that authenticity is a crucial factor influencing tourist satisfaction, and in turn, satisfaction is proven to be a key determinant in shaping revisit intention. In other words, the authenticity perceived by tourists whether from physical aspects such as historical buildings or non-physical aspects such as cultural narratives and social interactions, not only provides meaningful experiences but also enhances satisfaction, which directly fosters loyalty. These findings are consistent with the heritage tourism literature, which positions authenticity as the foundation of the tourism experience, while satisfaction acts as the mediating variable that ensures the sustainability of the tourist destination relationship.

In the context of Kota Lama Surabaya, the results of this study provide important implications: area management strategies cannot rely solely on physical revitalization or visual promotion. The attractiveness and sustainability of the destination will be stronger if managers emphasize the preservation of cultural authenticity while simultaneously creating satisfying experiences for tourists.

This can be achieved through credible historical interpretation programs, the organization of cultural festivals involving local communities, and improvements in service quality and facilities. With such a holistic approach, Kota Lama Surabaya has the potential not only to become the city's heritage icon but also a destination capable of building long-term emotional bonds with tourists, encouraging repeat visits, and strengthening its image as a sustainable urban heritage tourism destination.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that authenticity plays a crucial role in influencing tourist satisfaction, which in turn serves as a key determinant of revisit intention. The perceived authenticity derived both from physical aspects such as preserved historical buildings and non-physical aspects such as cultural narratives and social interactions creates meaningful experiences that not only enhance satisfaction but also foster long-term loyalty.

The empirical findings show three main results. First, authenticity has a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction, indicating that well-preserved heritage elements, credible historical storytelling, and opportunities for local interaction increase visitor enjoyment. Second, tourist satisfaction significantly influences revisit intention, underscoring its importance as both an outcome of travel experiences and a driver of destination loyalty. Third, satisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between authenticity and revisit intention, proving that authenticity must be accompanied by fulfilling and enjoyable experiences to maximize its impact on loyalty.

These findings align with the broader literature on heritage tourism, which positions authenticity as the foundation of meaningful experiences and satisfaction as the mediating variable that ensures sustainable tourist–destination relationships. From a practical perspective, the study highlights that revitalization efforts in Kota Lama Surabaya cannot rely solely on physical improvements or promotional campaigns. Destination sustainability will be strengthened when management integrates cultural authenticity with strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction. Recommended actions include credible historical interpretation programs, community-based cultural festivals, storytelling-driven exhibitions, and improvements in service quality and infrastructure. With this holistic approach, Kota Lama Surabaya has the potential not only to be recognized as a heritage icon but also to establish strong emotional bonds with visitors, encourage repeat visits, and reinforce its image as a sustainable urban heritage tourism destination.

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