



Faculty of Tourism

Master Thesis

“Exploring the Emotional Benefits of Nature-Based Tourism Experiences in Montserrat for
Visitors with Emotional Distress”

Master in Tourism Management & Planning

Itinerary: Tourism Product Development

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“I will endure it, owning a heart within inured to suffering.

**For I have suffered much, and laboured much,
in war and on the seas: add this then to the sum.”**

Homer, *‘The Odyssey’ Bk V:192-261.*

"In Montserrat, all your ghosts come out and your real fears come out, your past wounds come out, the ones without healing or you get memories of repressed things that your mind has closed and you do not want to touch" (Interviewee 7).

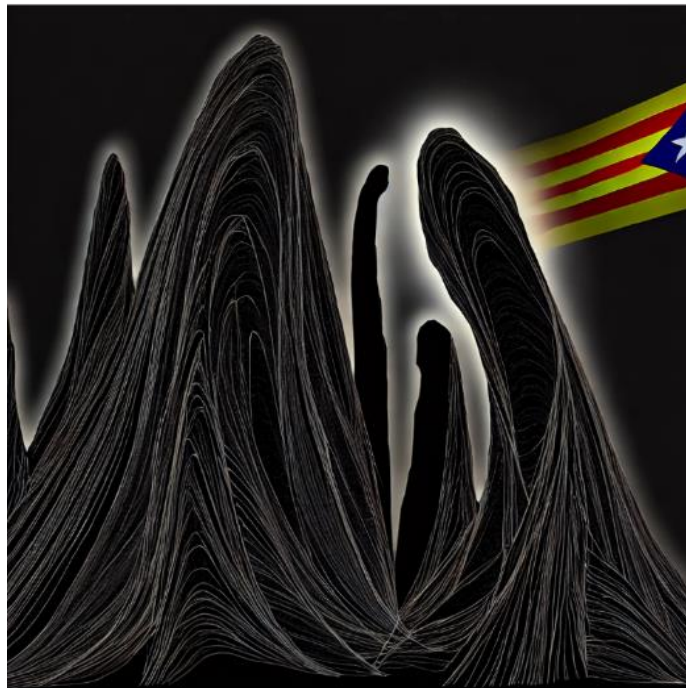


Figure 1: Surreal depiction of Montserrat’s jagged peaks, represented as mourning silhouettes, with a single line of light symbolizing hope. Catalonia’s flag subtly blends into the sky, evoking resilience and unity amidst sorrow. *Image created by the author.*

Acknowledgement

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Finally, I dedicate this work to my daughter, Toma, who has been the driving force behind this research and the reason for my grief. It is my hope that one day, when she reads this work, she will understand how deeply I wrestled with loss and how, through that pain, I tried to make sense and meaning. This thesis is a testament to the strength one can find in the midst of sorrow.

Abstract

This study addresses the gap in understanding how nature-based tourism, particularly in spiritually significant locations like Montserrat, can provide emotional benefits for visitors experiencing emotional distress. Using a qualitative approach, the research explores the pre-travel emotional states that motivate individuals to seek nature-based experiences, how visitors perceive and interpret their time in Montserrat, and the emotional outcomes of these experiences. The findings reveal that nature-based tourism can offer a profound sense of peace, emotional healing, and personal growth, especially for individuals coping with grief, stress, or emotional challenges. Visitors perceive Montserrat as a sanctuary for processing emotions, confronting inner struggles, and reconnecting with spirituality. The implications contribute to the broader discourse on tourism's potential to foster emotional well-being, suggesting that spiritually and nature-based tourism destinations can play a pivotal role in emotional recovery. Future research should investigate how similar emotional benefits manifest in other nature-based tourism contexts and explore strategies to enhance the therapeutic value of such experiences.

Key Words: Emotional Distress- Nature-based Tourism- Spiritual Sites- Tourist Motivations- Perception- Emotional Benefits.

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1. Introduction

In the post-pandemic world, people face a multitude of emerging challenges, not only physically but also emotionally, which impacts their overall well-being (Fernández-Rodríguez et al., 2024). As Sirois (2023) notes, "After the experience of a single stressful event, there is usually time for physiological recovery." This idea has deep historical roots, echoing the words of the Roman poet Terence, who wrote between 190-159 BC, "*Diem adimere aegritudinem hominibus*," meaning "time assuages human wounds," or more commonly known as "Time heals all wounds." This period of recovery that humanity, along with the tourism sector are going through is crucial for the present research. Moreover, Homere was one of the first to illustrate travel in his Masterpiece Odyssey as a journey of challenges, suffering and perhaps distress that leads to personal development (Homere, 1996). From these thoughts, the ink of the present paper started to flow. Today, many types of tourism emphasize the emotional experience that leads to the transformative power of travel.

The selection of wellness, nature-based tourism, spiritual tourism and religious tourism definitions in this section is justified by the need to explore how different forms of tourism impact emotional well-being or what can be defined by "emotional tourism". This choice is aligned with the destination of the study itself as it encompasses mainly these forms of tourism that are deeply interconnected with visitor motivations.

1.1 Wellness and Tourism

Given the growing interest in the emotional dimensions of travel, it was essential to consider the wellness domain. Wellness tourism, in particular, has become increasingly prominent as travelers seek experiences that enhance their overall well-being, including emotional health. As tourism evolves, there is a notable shift from traditional leisure pursuits such as sightseeing, visiting museums and city tours to experiences that prioritize mental and emotional rejuvenation like meditation retreats or spiritual journeys (Cooke et al., 2016).

Hence, it is evident that the emergence of wellness tourism has reshaped the tourism and hospitality industry, leading to the development of services and facilities tailored to meet the growing demand for holistic well-being. This sector is not just about physical health but encompasses a broader spectrum of well-being, including emotional, mental, spiritual, and cultural dimensions (Sirgy, 2019).

Emotional wellness, the topic of interest in this research, is defined as the ability to recognize, accept, and manage emotions effectively and is a critical component of this holistic approach (Russ, 2009). In the context of tourism, emotional wellness is closely tied to the concept of emotional experiences, which play a significant role in shaping travelers' perceptions and satisfaction (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Recent studies in tourism have highlighted the importance of positive emotional experiences in enhancing overall well-being and life satisfaction (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Prayag et al., 2017). This understanding is crucial for developing strategies that promote emotional wellness through tourism, particularly in nature-based and spiritual contexts.

1.2 Nature-Based Tourism

Nature-based tourism (NBT) is a rapidly growing sector characterized by travel to natural areas that emphasize conservation and the appreciation of nature. This form of tourism is not only about the physical environment but also about the emotional and psychological experiences that come with it. As aforementioned, tourists are seeking nowadays meaningful experiences and nature-based tourists are often motivated by the desire to escape daily routines, seek novelty, and pursue self-development, all of which can lead to a significant emotional benefit experience (Eagles, 1992; Mehmetoglu, 2007).

The emotional experiences associated with nature-based tourism are integral to understanding how tourists perceive and interact with natural environments. Research indicates that natural settings can have a profound impact on emotional states, offering restorative benefits

that reduce stress and improve mood (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1991). In the present research, I assume that in places like Montserrat, where the landscape holds both spiritual and cultural significance, the emotional responses of tourists are likely to be even more pronounced, which drives me to explore and dive deeper in the emotional experience of tourists there.

From a different angle, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of maintaining a positive psychological state, as individuals worldwide have faced increased levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation (Cheng et al., 2022; Zhang, Cheng, & Li, 2022). In this context, nature-based tourism can provide a valuable outlet for emotional healing and well-being. Studies have shown that exposure to natural environments can lead to emotional renewal, helping individuals cope with psychological distress and enhance their overall mental health (Berman et al., 2008; Bratman et al., 2012).

This study aims to address the gap in the literature by exploring how Montserrat, as a nature-based site, can provide emotional and psychological benefits to tourists, particularly those experiencing distress. By examining the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of tourists, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the emotional impacts of nature-based tourism and its potential to promote well-being.

1.3 Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism, as a subset of wellness tourism, focuses on travel experiences that promote spiritual growth, inner peace, and a deeper connection with oneself or a higher power. This form of tourism is closely linked with the concept of pilgrimage, where travelers seek destinations that hold spiritual significance to experience renewal, transformation, or enlightenment (Rinschede, 1992).

In the context of Montserrat, a place known for its natural beauty and spiritual significance, spiritual tourism plays a critical role in attracting visitors seeking both physical and spiritual renewal. The convergence of nature and spirituality in Montserrat makes it an ideal setting for

exploring how tourism can cater to the emotional and spiritual needs of tourists. This intersection is particularly relevant as research has shown that spiritual experiences can enhance emotional well-being, providing comfort and a sense of purpose (Willson et al., 2013; Dillette et al., 2019).

By integrating spiritual tourism within the broader framework of nature-based tourism, this study aims to evaluate how these experiences contribute to tourists' overall well-being. Montserrat's unique landscape and significant religious sites, offers a compelling environment for examining how natural and spiritual elements combine to create transformative experiences that promote emotional healing, self-reflection, and personal growth.

1.4 Religious Tourism

Religious tourism, closely related to spiritual tourism, encompasses travel to sites of religious significance for both personal devotion and cultural exploration. It is one of the oldest forms of tourism, deeply rooted in human history as individuals and groups travel to religious sites for pilgrimage, worship, and spiritual enrichment (Rinschede, 1992). Religious tourism is worthy of being mentioned as it often centers around specific religious practices, rituals, or sacred locations associated with organized faiths (Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

The emotional experiences gained through journeys of religious tourism are significant, with many tourists reporting feelings of inner peace, joy, and spiritual renewal during and after their travels (Griffin & Raj, 2017). In Montserrat, religious tourism plays a pivotal role due to the region's iconic religious landmarks, including the famous Benedictine abbey and the Virgin of Montserrat, a revered figure in Catalonia's Catholic tradition. Visitors come not only to experience the natural beauty but also to engage in religious practices, seek blessings, and partake in pilgrimages, which are deeply intertwined with the spiritual and emotional dimensions of their travel. Research suggests that religious tourism to sacred sites in general often leads to

transformative emotional experiences, fostering a sense of community, identity, and spiritual fulfillment (Collins-Kreiner, 2018).

This study aims to explore how tourism in the context of Montserrat contributes to the emotional well-being of its visitors in order to offer a deeper understanding of how tourism impacts travelers' emotional health, promotes inner peace, and enhances their connection to their faith and the surrounding environment.

1.5 Justification of the Study

First, the rationale for this study is rooted in the growing recognition of the importance of emotional wellness within the tourism industry, particularly in the context of nature-based and spiritual tourism. While there has been considerable research on the physical and psychological benefits of wellness tourism, there is a notable gap in understanding how nature-based tourism specifically addresses the emotional needs of tourists. Montserrat, with its unique combination of natural beauty and spiritual significance, provides an ideal setting for exploring these dimensions as aforementioned.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of maintaining a positive psychological and emotional state, as individuals worldwide have faced unprecedented levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation which symptoms are still manifesting in the long term. Bringing this matter up is important, because even though we overcame the COVID era, the emotional and mental effects of COVID-19 are still very much present. A recent study published in August 2024 by a group of researchers across the UK, led by the University of Oxford and the University of Leicester, and featured in *Lancet Psychiatry*, highlights the persistent and significant nature of these symptoms. The research also points out the emergence of new symptoms years after COVID-19 first appeared (Taquet et al., 2024). As the tourism industry adapts to this new reality, there is a critical need to explore how tourism can support

emotional and psychological well-being. Nature-based tourism, with its emphasis on reconnecting with nature and promoting emotional and spiritual wellness, is particularly well-suited to addressing these emerging needs.

Third, this study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on Montserrat as a case study for understanding how nature-based tourism can provide emotional and psychological benefits to tourists. By investigating the motivations and perceptions of tourists visiting Montserrat, this research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how tourism can promote emotional wellness. The insights gained from this study will have practical implications for the development of tailored programs and services within the tourism and hospitality industry, enhancing the support available to tourists and improving their overall well-being. Thus, the scientific contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, by focusing on the unique needs of tourists that manifest emotional distress, the study sheds light on how nature-based tourism can address their specific emotional needs, ultimately contributing to their healing process. For instance, grieving individuals often face overwhelming experiences of grief that significantly impact their overall well-being. This study focuses on a group of tourists to provide valuable insights into how nature-based tourism can provide the necessary attention and support to meet their unique needs.

Fourth, the study attempts to define and shed light on the concept of "Emotional Tourism," which, although not currently included in the glossary of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), is emerging as a neologism in the literature. This term refers to a form of tourism that emphasizes the emotional well-being and experiences of tourists, encompassing activities and services aimed at promoting emotional healing, self-reflection, and personal growth. As part of my academic journey, I was particularly intrigued by this emerging concept. My personal motivation for this research comes from a deep interest in trying to contribute to the definition of "Emotional Tourism" by exploring how emotional tourism can be

applied to unique destinations like Montserrat, where the natural and spiritual elements of the environment intersect.

Fifth, my exploration of the Portuguese-Galician concept of "saudade," which refers to a deep, nostalgic longing infused with a melancholic awareness that something may never return (Silva, 2012), further solidified my interest in emotional tourism. This concept resonated with me and served as a starting point for exploring how such profound emotions could be experienced and interpreted within the context of Montserrat. This study seeks to apply these emotional concepts to Montserrat, examining how the mountains' unique environment can evoke and address complex emotional states in tourists or can even create new emotions yet to be defined, just like "saudade".

Moreover, the findings of this study hold significant importance for me. My own reflections on Montserrat have deeply influenced my understanding of nature-based tourism as a means of embracing grief. This study is a precursor to my future PhD research, which will be an autoresearch focused on exploring how nature-based touristic sites like Montserrat can facilitate emotional healing and self-discovery. Through this research, I aim to uncover the therapeutic potential of these environments for people dealing with grief particularly.

On top of that, visiting Montserrat reminded me of a scene from an autofiction book, "Un Certain M. Piekenly" by François-Henri Désérable, where the author describes how certain places can trigger memories or bring back a name or a moment that is deeply relevant to the location (Désérable, 2017). This experience resonated with me profoundly in Montserrat, as it made me curious about the mechanisms behind such memories. This curiosity initially led me to study the effects of Montserrat on visitors, which eventually crystallized into my current research focus.

In conclusion, this study is both timely and necessary and the findings will provide valuable insights for both academia and the tourism industry, informing the development of strategies and services that enhance the emotional and spiritual well-being of tourists.

1.6 Research Questions

This study aims to explore the intersection of emotional distress and nature-based tourism in Montserrat, a unique destination known for its natural beauty and spiritual significance.

The research is therefore guided by the following key questions:

- 1. What are the specific emotional distress pre-travel experiences encountered by tourists and that motivate them to visit Montserrat?**

This question seeks to understand the motivations of the Montserrat visitors and explore the types of emotional distress tourists experience before deciding to travel to Montserrat. By identifying these specific emotional states, the research aims to uncover the underlying motivations that drive individuals to seek out nature-based tourism as a form of coping or healing.

- 2. How do tourists with emotional distress perceive and interpret nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat?**

This question focuses on the perceptions and interpretations of tourists who visit Montserrat while experiencing emotional distress. It aims to explore how these individuals engage with and make sense of their experiences in the natural environment of Montserrat on-site, particularly in relation to their emotional state.

- 3. How and why are nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat perceived as emotionally beneficial by tourists with emotional distress?**

This question investigates the perceived emotional benefits that tourists derive from their nature-based experiences in Montserrat. It seeks to understand not only the nature of these benefits but also the reasons why tourists with emotional distress find these experiences to be particularly therapeutic or restorative.

1.7 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore the role of nature-based tourism in addressing emotional distress among tourists visiting Montserrat. The study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To identify and characterize the pre-travel emotional experiences that motivate tourists to visit Montserrat.

This objective involves examining the specific emotional challenges that prompt individuals to seek out Montserrat as a travel destination. By understanding these pre-travel emotional states, the research aims to shed light on the motivations that lead tourists to choose nature-based tourism as a potential remedy for their distress.

2. To analyze the perceptions and interpretations of nature-based tourism experiences by tourists with emotional distress in Montserrat.

This objective focuses on understanding how tourists who are experiencing emotional distress perceive and interpret their encounters with Montserrat's natural environment. The study aims to explore the ways in which these individuals connect with nature and how their emotional states influence their interpretations of the experience.

3. To assess the emotional benefits that tourists with emotional distress perceive from their nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat.

The final objective is to evaluate the emotional outcomes of nature-based tourism for tourists in Montserrat. This involves identifying the specific emotional benefits that these tourists perceive and understanding why they consider these experiences to be beneficial for their emotional well-being.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into several chapters, each addressing a different aspect of the research questions and objectives. The structure is designed to systematically explore the relationship between emotional distress and nature-based tourism in Montserrat, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

- Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research, including the rationale, the justification of the study, research questions, objectives and the research structure. It introduces the key concepts of wellness, nature-based tourism, spiritual tourism and religious tourism, setting the stage for the subsequent analysis.

- Literature Review

The literature review examines existing research on emotional wellness in the contexts of nature-based tourism, and spiritual tourism. It highlights the gaps in the current literature and positions the study within the broader context of tourism and emotional well-being.

- Data Analysis:

- 1- Characterizing/Defining Emotional Distress Experienced by Tourists

This chapter delves into the Pre-travel experience of tourists, exploring specific emotional distress experiences that motivate tourists to visit Montserrat. It explores the nature of these emotional challenges and how they influence travel decisions, providing a foundation for understanding the motivations behind nature-based tourism.

- 2- Perception and Interpretation of Nature-Based Tourism Experiences

Focusing on the perceptions of tourists, this chapter analyzes how individuals experiencing emotional distress engage with and interpret their nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat. It examines the subjective meanings and emotional connections that tourists form with the natural environment on-site.

3- Emotional Benefits Derived from Nature-Based Tourism Experiences

This chapter assesses the emotional benefits perceived by tourists as a result of their nature-based experiences in Montserrat. It explores the therapeutic and restorative effects of nature-based tourism, highlighting the specific emotional outcomes that contribute to tourists' overall well-being.

4- Conclusion and Recommendations

The concluding chapter summarizes the key findings of the research, discusses their implications for theory and practice, and provides recommendations for future research and tourism development in Montserrat and similar destinations.

This structured approach ensures that each aspect of the research questions is thoroughly explored, leading to a holistic understanding of the emotional effects of nature-based tourism in Montserrat. The findings from this study are expected to contribute significantly to the fields of tourism studies, wellness, and emotional well-being, offering practical insights for both academics and practitioners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motivation: Experiences of Emotional Distress

The emotional effects of nature-based tourism have gained significant attention, particularly in how natural environments can evoke a spectrum of different emotions ranging from fear to joy and enjoyment. Studies have shown that natural environments can induce a wide range of emotional responses, such as awe, wonder, and relaxation, but also fear or discomfort when the natural setting presents challenges or unfamiliar elements (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Fredrickson's (1999) exploration of wilderness experiences offers a theoretical foundation for understanding the intense emotional responses that such environments can trigger. The study highlights that the raw, untamed nature of wilderness settings often leads to emotional distress

among individuals seeking solitude and connection with nature. This aligns with broader research on emotional distress in natural settings, which suggests that environmental factors such as isolation, unpredictability, and vast landscapes can provoke strong emotional reactions that can sometimes be negative (Williams & Harvey, 2001).

Zhang (2021) further explores attribution theory and its relationship to negative emotions in tourism such as shock, distress, anger, shame, sadness or disgust, providing valuable insights into how tourists might attribute their emotional responses to environmental factors encountered during their experiences, such as challenging hikes or unexpected weather conditions. This work establishes a connection between environmental triggers and emotional responses, suggesting that specific natural environments can significantly impact tourists' emotional states (Zhang, 2021).

From a different perspective, Pocock (2015) emphasizes the complexities and reflexivity involved in tourism research, particularly concerning emotional entanglements. His study highlights how emotional state can deeply affect both researchers and participants, making it pertinent to understanding tourists' experiences in challenging natural environments. Pocock's work contributes to a broader understanding of emotional responses in tourism by considering the relational dynamics between individuals and their environments (Pocock, 2015). There is always this manifestation of emotions in a concrete context, the tourist destination.

Additionally, Rezaei and Huang (2023) examine the emotional experiences of tourists visiting culturally and environmentally challenging regions. Their findings suggest that the intersection of cultural and environmental factors can significantly contribute to intense emotional response, drawing parallels to other natural settings where visitors may feel overwhelmed or challenged. This comparative framework is useful for understanding the dynamics at play in various spiritually and culturally significant landscapes (Rezaei & Huang, 2023).

2.2 Perception of Nature-Based Sites

Nature-based spiritual tourism has increasingly gained attention as tourists seek destinations that offer both natural beauty and opportunities for spiritual experiences. This type of tourism is often driven by the emotional experiences that such environments evoke, which can range from feelings of awe and wonder to a deep sense of peace and spiritual fulfillment as aforementioned. The emotional dimension of these experiences plays a critical role in the appeal of nature-based spiritual sites, as tourists often seek more than just visual or physical engagement with the environment—they seek emotional and spiritual transformation.

Prykhodko (2020) was one of the first researchers to conceptualize "Emotional Tourism," a framework that includes religious and spiritual tourism. This concept emphasizes the emotional and spiritual connections that individuals form with nature-based sites. Prykhodko's work underscores the significance of natural landscapes in fostering spiritual connections, highlighting how these environments can evoke profound emotional experiences that contribute to a sense of spiritual renewal. However, while Prykhodko's study lays a foundation for understanding the role of emotions in spiritual tourism, it does not delve into the specific attributes of individual sites, thereby leaving a gap in understanding how distinct natural environments contribute to their perception as spiritual destinations.

Building on the emotional dimensions of nature-based tourism, Moyle et al. (2019) explore the importance of emotions in tourism, particularly in destinations known for their natural beauty. Their research illustrates how emotional experiences, such as feelings of tranquility, awe, or spiritual awakening, are central to the tourist experience in natural settings. They argue that these emotional responses are not merely incidental but are fundamental to how tourists connect with and perceive these environments. However, while Moyle et al. provide a broad understanding of emotional responses to natural settings, they do not specifically address the unique spiritual perceptions that can arise in these contexts. This research aims to build on their

findings by exploring in greater detail how spiritual and emotional experiences intertwine in nature-based sites.

Buckley (2022) further examines how experiences in nature-based tourism generate lasting memories and evoke strong emotions, particularly in spiritually significant places. His research suggests that the combination of natural beauty and spiritual significance can create powerful emotional experiences that are remembered long after the visit. These experiences often involve a deep emotional connection to the landscape, which can foster a sense of spiritual enrichment and personal transformation. Thus, Buckley's work highlights the emotional impact of nature-based tourism and does not specifically address sites that have the combination of spirituality and nature. This gap presents an opportunity for further research to explore how the unique features of spiritual destinations contribute to these emotional and spiritual experiences.

Willson et al. (2013) provide a phenomenological analysis of tourism and spirituality, offering valuable insights into how tourists infuse their travel experiences with spiritual meaning. Their study emphasizes the role of emotions in shaping these experiences, noting that feelings of awe, peace, and connection are often integral to the spiritual experience in tourism. They argue that spiritual tourism is not just about visiting sacred sites but about the emotional and spiritual journeys that these sites facilitate. While their research provides a comprehensive exploration of spirituality in tourism, it does not specifically focus on the emotional experiences associated with nature-based settings. This research aims to address this gap by applying these concepts to understand how nature-based spiritual sites evoke emotional and spiritual responses.

Furthering the exploration of spirituality in natural settings, Singleton (2017) discusses how natural landscapes contribute to spiritual experiences, highlighting the importance of these environments in fostering a sense of spirituality. Singleton's study suggests that the emotional impact of being in a natural, sacred space can be profound, leading to feelings of transcendence,

peace, and spiritual connection. These findings are directly applicable to understanding how tourists perceive nature-based spiritual destinations. However, like other studies, Singleton's work does not specifically address individual sites, highlighting the need for research that explores how particular landscapes contribute to these spiritual and emotional experiences.

2.3 The Benefits Perceived by Tourists

Understanding the benefits tourists perceive from their experiences is crucial for assessing the impact of nature-based tourism. Moyle et al. (2019) review methods for measuring emotions in tourism experiences, providing a foundation for evaluating the perceived benefits of nature-based tourism. Their discussion of various tools that can be applied to measure tourists' emotional responses is particularly relevant for studies seeking to understand the specific benefits tourists perceive in natural settings (Moyle, Moyle, Bec, & Scott, 2019).

Lin (2024) explores how close encounters with nature contribute to emotional well-being, particularly in animal-based tourism contexts. Although the article focuses on animal-based tourism, its findings can be extrapolated to broader nature-based tourism, helping to understand the perceived benefits related to emotional well-being (Lin, 2024). The study emphasizes the therapeutic value of nature, which is a key component of emotional tourism.

Volo (2021) examines how emotional experiences influence the benefits tourists perceive from their travels, providing a foundation for understanding how positive emotional experiences might lead to perceived benefits such as spiritual fulfillment and emotional wellness. The article discusses the benefits of emotional experiences broadly, suggesting that transformative experiences can lead to lasting changes in individuals, contributing to their emotional and spiritual well-being (Volo, 2021).

Zhao (2023) explores how transformative experiences in tourism can lead to lasting changes in individuals, particularly focusing on the emotional and psychological benefits. This

perspective is crucial for understanding how tourists might perceive their experiences in spiritually significant natural sites as transformative, contributing to their emotional and spiritual well-being (Zhao, 2023).

As previously demonstrated, the current literature on nature-based tourism does not address adequately the complex emotional dynamics that arise from specific landscapes, moreover studies tend to reduce emotional responses to general categories like awe or distress (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Fredrickson, 1999). This oversimplification goes against the nuanced emotional spectrum that encompasses “saudade” and other emotions that this research try to explore. Furthermore, while spiritual tourism research (Willson et al., 2013) acknowledges spiritual connections, it fails to critically interrogate how these are deeply intertwined with emotional experiences in nature-based contexts. Hence, this study aims to challenge and expand existing frameworks, offering a deeper, more layered analysis of emotional experiences in nature-based spiritual tourism.

By integrating the previous articles into this literature review, a comprehensive framework for examining the emotional effects of nature-based tourism is established. Key research gaps are identified, particularly in how specific aspects of natural environments contribute to emotional distress, spiritual perceptions, and the perceived benefits of nature-based tourism. This approach not only strengthens the research foundation but also positions this study to make significant contributions to the existing literature on tourism and emotion.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research has been developed based on the synthesis of key elements identified in the literature review. The framework integrates the concepts of tourist motivations, emotional distress, and the perceived benefits of nature-based tourism. It illustrates how these elements interact within the context of nature-based sites, particularly those with spiritual and emotional significance.

According to Jennings (2010), conceptual frameworks in tourism research help to clarify the relationships between different elements and provide a structured approach to understanding complex phenomena. In this study, the framework was developed to capture the dynamic relationship between tourists' motivations, their emotional experiences, and the outcomes they perceive from their visits to nature-based sites.

The framework positions nature-based sites as central elements that facilitate the interaction between tourists' pre-travel motivations and the emotional benefits they experience post-visit. This interaction is framed within the context of therapeutic and restorative experiences provided by natural environments. As Buckley (2009) suggests, understanding the emotional dimensions of nature-based tourism requires a focus on how these environments can promote well-being and emotional restoration.

By visualizing the flow from pre-travel motivations (such as emotional distress or other personal reasons) to engagement with the nature-based site, and finally to the perceived emotional benefits (after travel), the framework provides a comprehensive view of the tourist experience. This aligns with the approach advocated by Pearce (2005), who emphasizes the importance of understanding the holistic nature of tourist experiences and the interconnectedness of various elements.

The conceptual framework serves as a foundation for exploring how nature-based tourism experiences can be both transformative and restorative. It guides the research process by helping to articulate the study's objectives and providing a clear pathway for examining the mechanisms through which natural environments can assist individuals in embracing grief or exploring deeper emotional states.

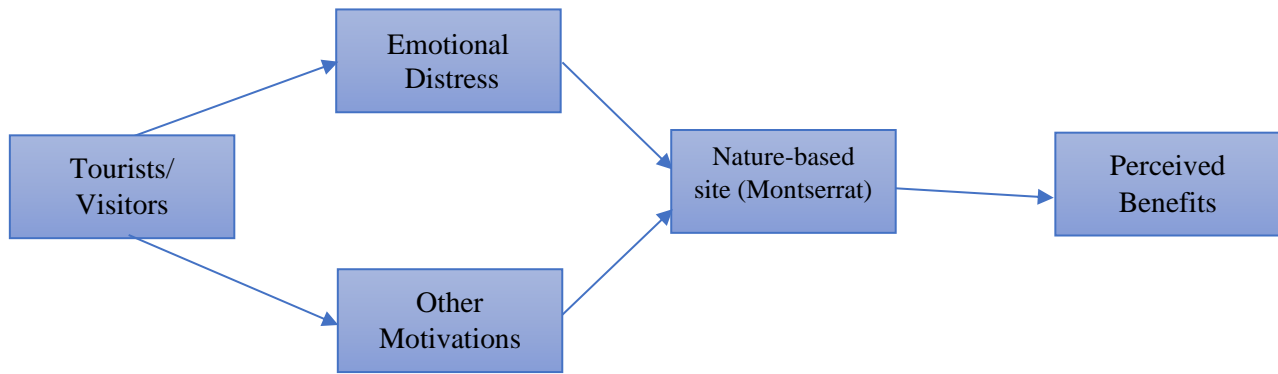


Figure 2: The Relationship Between Tourists' Motivations, Nature-Based Sites, and perceived Emotional Benefits.

3. Presentation of the destination

From Barcelona, just an hour away, lies the Monastery and the Sacred Mountain of Montserrat. Montserrat means "serrated mountain" in Catalan, or cut by a saw, due to its formation, which rises like a saw-shaped mountain (Moreno, 2012). The Monastery and Sanctuary are sheltered by a mountain of uncommon limestone origin as shown in Figure 3. Unlike any other mountain, these formations, which are very tall, are smooth and shaped like giant fingers of a hand that, as it is said, seem to rise in prayer. Legends say that it seems as if they were carved and shaped by a prodigious hand (Garrido & Soriano, 2008). These mountains are a perennial attraction for mountain climbers, who feel challenged by the nearly vertical climb up these steep massifs (Parks & Garcia, 2013).

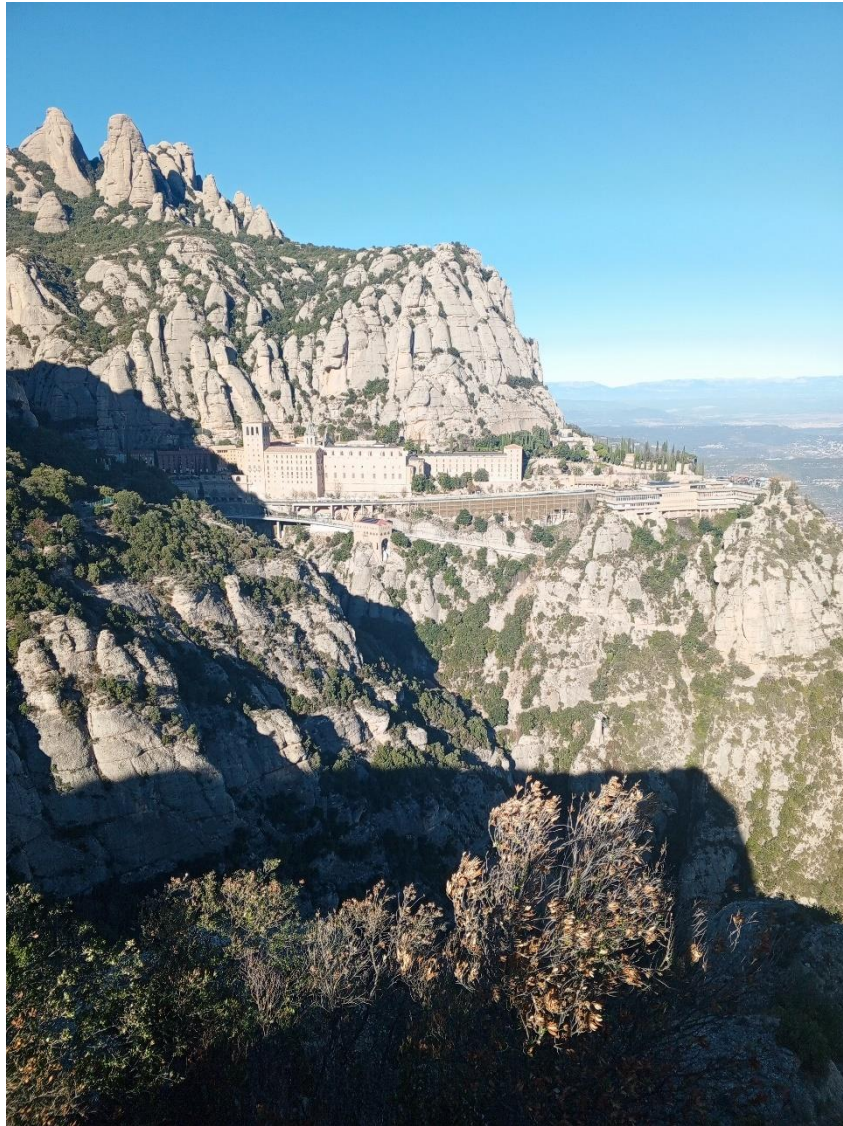


Figure 3: View of Montserrat Mountain and Monastery taken during my research visit.

The main tour operators include a visit to this emblematic site as part of their stays in the city of Barcelona. The visit, typically scheduled for a day, is accessible by car, bus, train, and on foot. Accessing the steep mountain by funicular is an attractive and beautiful experience. Tourists visit the place throughout the year, and it is also common to find groups of schoolchildren and retirees at the Monastery and the Mountain. However, one of the reasons visitors give for their stay in the area is the visit to the basilica of the Benedictine Monastery, which houses the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Montserrat, who is the Patroness of Catalonia. Montserrat is an identity symbol of Catalonia (Cànoves, 2006).

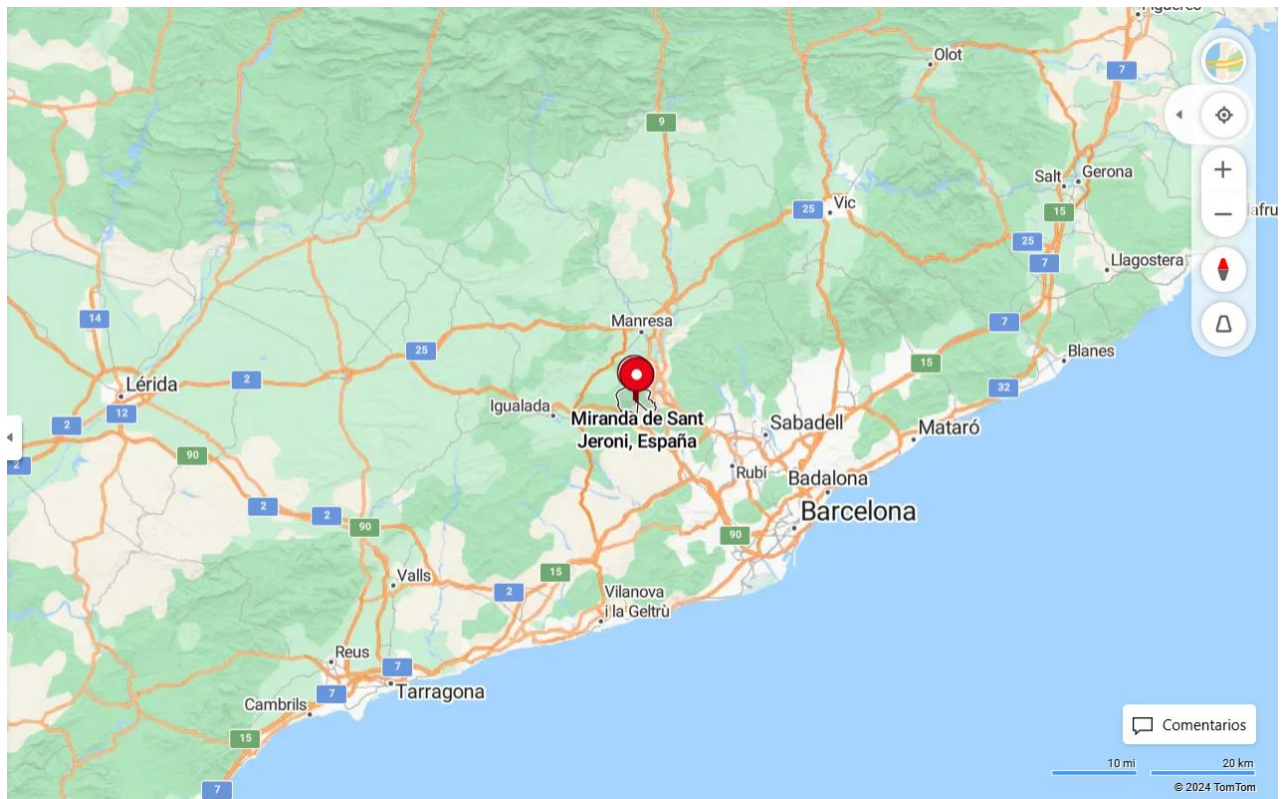


Figure 4: General map marking a part of Costa Brava and relatively Montserrat's geographical location. *Adapted from Google Maps.*

Another major attraction of the area is the Montserrat mountain itself, which constitutes a large geological massif of great natural beauty. Montserrat has been, and continues to be, a space for cultural and heritage promotion in Catalonia. Its Museum and its Choir are internationally recognized. This beautiful landscape has been a source of inspiration for many local and foreign artists (Garrido & Soriano, 2008). The Virgin of Montserrat, popularly known as "la Moreneta" due to the ebony color of the material from which she was made, is one of the most well-known and venerated by Catalans. It is a wooden sculpture, carved, polychromed, and gilded, probably dating from the late 12th or early 13th century. The black color is her main characteristic, hence the name "Moreneta." (Cànoves, 2006)

During the Franco era, Montserrat was a symbol of the defense of freedoms in Catalonia. Defying Franco's power, the Benedictine monks of the Monastery continued to hold weddings, baptisms, and masses in Catalan, a significant challenge to the "status quo". The mountain and

the Monastery also became a refuge for many intellectuals who advocated for democratic freedoms. Today, the place is emblematic, and it is difficult to find tourists and Catalans who have not visited the mountain and the Monastery (Cànoves, 2006).

3.1 The Park and Its Activities

The Montserrat Mountain Natural Park is a unique geographical unit in the natural environment of Catalonia. It is a perfectly individualized and homogeneous unit in terms of its geological and geomorphological characteristics, and it is a massif that is unique in the world for its dimensions and spectacular, singular forms. The mountain was officially declared a Natural Park in 1987 to ensure its conservation, which is managed by the Montserrat Mountain Board of Trustees (Parks & Garcia, 2013). The geological origin of the massif is sedimentary, and its rocks are made up of a conglomerate of pebbles settled in limestone cement. Over the millennia, tectonic movements, climate changes, and erosion have shaped a rugged relief with large walls and rounded blocks. Inside, physical agents have created caves, sinkholes, and caverns. The quintessential Mediterranean forest is also the predominant type of vegetation in Montserrat. The holm oak forest, along with up to 1,250 plant species, covers much of the mountain. However, there are many other types of vegetation that color the mountain: white pine, maple, linden, service tree, hazel, holly, boxwood, oak, strawberry tree, and yew (Cànoves, 2006).

The Montserrat Mountain Natural Park has a long-standing tradition of hiking. The massif is located in the Catalan pre-coastal range, extending 10 kilometers in length and 5 kilometers in width. The total perimeter, roughly elliptical in shape, is 25 kilometers. From the cooperative relationships between the municipalities of Tarbes, Lourdes, and Manresa, the Trans-Pyreanean Pilgrimage Route was born, connecting Lourdes and Montserrat (Llurdés, 1995). Each year, about eight million pilgrims visit one of these two Marian shrines. The route is complemented

by a rich cultural, gastronomic, and service offering throughout the entire journey (Parks & Garcia, 2013).

The surrounding areas of the mountain offer a diverse range of activities, allowing a wide audience to visit the area. This contributes to the monastery being one of the most visited places in Catalonia, apart from visits solely for religious reasons. On foot or with the help of the funicular, the Monastery's surroundings offer the possibility to enjoy an extraordinary landscape. The Montserrat Reservations and Information Center provides visitors with information on recommended itineraries and guided tours of the Natural Park. This is a clear example of the significance of the place beyond the religious phenomenon. Four routes are indicated, which are very popular among hiking and trekking clubs in Catalonia (Cànoves, 2006).

One of the most practiced routes is the trail from the Degollats Gorge to the Monastery of Montserrat. It is a 3 km route, taking about 50 minutes, with an easy difficulty level as it only overcomes a 20-meter elevation change. The Els Degollats trail skirts the walls that drop down from the Trinitat plains, located 200 m above the path. Below, with the Pyrenees in the background, the plain teems with vitality. The area's vegetation, the clear light of the shaded areas, and the impression of being suspended in mid-air make it an ideal place for contemplation. The route is adorned with monuments to artists and ceramics evoking different Marian devotions. The landscapes allow you to observe beautiful specimens of holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), yews (*Taxus baccata*), and maples (*Acer opalus*) (Cànoves, 2006).

The second most well-known itinerary is the one that runs from the Monastery to the Holy Cave. It is a very popular route, always busy with people of all ages and nationalities. It covers just about 3 km, takes approximately one hour, and overcomes a 120-meter elevation change, with a steep climb at the end, making it a bit more challenging than the previous route.

However, the excursion as it includes a visit to the cave of the Moreneta. Tradition places the discovery of the image of the Virgin of Montserrat at the site currently occupied by the

Holy Cave building. The chapel dates back to the 18th century. The route follows the Rosary Path, wide and flanked by monuments that depict the mysteries of the Rosary. After about 20 minutes, you pass by the El Paulí needle, under the Pla de Sant Miquel. Continue straight, and after a short while, you reach the Holy Cave (25 min) (Parks & Garcia, 2013).

The third route starts from the Sant Joan funicular station, passing through Sant Jeroni, the Pla del Ocells, and finally arriving at the Monastery. The journey takes 2 hours, covering 7.5 km, and overcomes a 150-meter elevation change, with a steep climb at the end of the trail. It is a peaceful walk through solitary corners, with beautiful views of the Llobregat Valley and the Sant Salvador, Puigventós, Sant Llorenç, and Montseny mountain ranges (Parks & Garcia, 2013).

The fourth route starts from the upper station of the Sant Joan funicular, follows the Camino de la Font Seca, Camino de les Bateries, and ends at the Monastery. It takes 1 hour and 35 minutes and covers 5 km. It is a route along the southern slope of Montserrat to the old Royal Road (Ral), which connected the Monastery with Collbató. The installation of cannons at various strategic points along the path during the French War (early 19th century) gave the current name of les Bateries. It is an easy route, although it has a steep descent at the end. Along the way, you can find abundant aromatic and medicinal plants (Parks & Garcia, 2013).

This extensive offering of excursions allows the Monastery of Montserrat to be a broad space for tourist consumption; from religious tourism, which gives meaning to the visit, to excursion tourism with a long tradition in Catalonia; passing through cultural tourism, no less important, as we will see below with the visit to the Sanctuary, the Museum, and the Choir, and traditional tourism of seniors and schoolchildren, who visit the area as one of the most significant symbols of Catalan identity (Cànoves, 2006).

3.2 The Sanctuary, Culture, and Identity

The sanctuary of the Virgin of Montserrat, the patron saint of Catalonia, has been a pilgrimage center since ancient times and is one of the most well-known in Catalonia. Its origin lies in the hermitage of Santa Maria. Historical evidence shows that in 888, a chapel dedicated to the Mother of God was established in Montserrat. Two hundred years later, in 1025, Benedictine monks founded a monastery there and took charge of the sanctuary, providing hospitality to the thousands of visitors who traveled each month to honor the ancient statue of Our Lady. No traces remain of this hermitage, but there are remnants of the later Gothic construction from the 12th century. The current structure has a Renaissance design with late Gothic elements from the 16th century and was consecrated on February 2, 1592. The main façade of the temple, in the Plateresque style, was inaugurated in 1901; the monumental façade that encompasses the sanctuary and monastery was built in the mid-20th century. The Virgin of Montserrat was declared the patron saint of the Diocese of Catalonia by Pope Leo XIII. The Benedictine community currently consists of about eighty monks who have been dedicated to prayer and the service of the sanctuary for nearly a thousand years. Visitors can participate in religious ceremonies: the conventual mass (11 a.m.) and vespers (6:45 p.m.). In addition to the monks, the Escolania, the oldest boys' choir in Europe, also resides in Montserrat. They can be heard daily during the Salve and Virolai (1 p.m.) and after vespers. Catalans sing to the Virgin: "*Rosa de Abril, morena de la sierra, de Montserrat estrella. Iluminad la catalana tierra, guiadnos hacia el cielo, guiadnos hacia el cielo.*" (Cànoves, 2006).

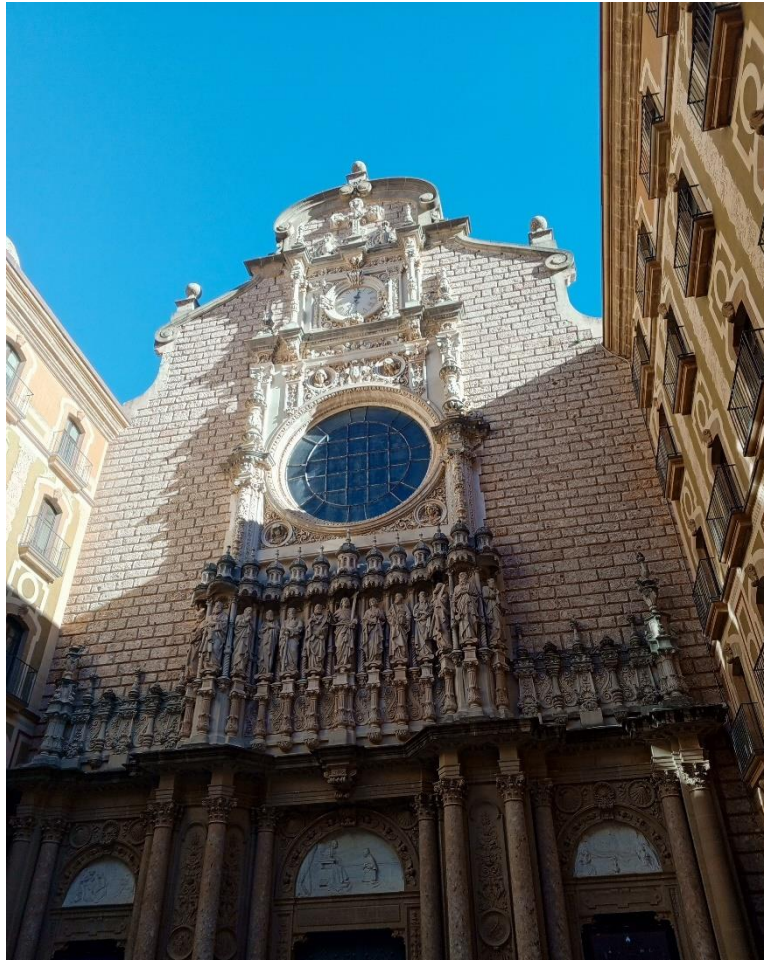


Figure 5: The entrance of the Sanctuary taken during my research visit.

The mountains have sheltered hermits since ancient times. One of these hermits, Bernat Boil, accompanied Christopher Columbus to the New World, becoming the first missionary in America. One of the abbots of the monastery was Giuliano della Rovere, who later became Julius II, the Renaissance pope for whom Michelangelo worked. All the kings of Spain have prayed at the sanctuary. Emperors Charles V and Philip II of Spain died holding blessed candles brought from the sanctuary. King Louis XIV of France requested prayers be offered in Montserrat to intercede for the queen mother; and Emperor Ferdinand III of Austria made significant contributions to the monastery. However, the monastery suffered near-total destruction during the Napoleonic invasion and the civil wars. More recently, the mountain and the Monastery have faced floods (2000) and fires (1986), but these have left hardly any trace in the area,

thanks to the Benedictine community, which is one of the guarantors of the conservation of this emblematic place (Cànoves, 2006).

"There is something that is historical and solid that preserves the history of the people"

(Interviewee 2).

Another distinctive feature of Montserrat has been its connection with the defense of Catalan culture, marked by two significant elements: language as a cultural heritage and identity as a claim, especially during the Francoist era. In 1970, three hundred intellectuals took refuge inside the Monastery to demand respect for human rights from the Franco dictatorship. The Benedictine monks' community has been one of the most important cultural references in Catalonia. The order has an ancient publishing house, which has been modernized and now publishes more than 140 books on various topics, as well as scientific and popular magazines. During the Franco era, the publishing house continued and supported publications in Catalan; much of the legends, stories, history, and traditions have been preserved thanks to the efforts of intellectuals and the help provided by the monastery. Today, it has a library with nearly 300,000 volumes. The museums of Ancient Painting and Archaeology and Modern Catalan Painting, located in the Abbot's Tower, are an important heritage and a must-visit for scholars and the public. These centers provide significant economic income for the Benedictine community, which manages it with great care. The constant renovations of the area's catering services, accommodation, the Basilica, the Museums, the young people who make up the Escolania, and the Montserrat community as a whole are a testament to a very well-managed and powerful administration. Tourism is an important economic source that allows the care and enhancement of Montserrat's rich social, cultural, and religious heritage (Cànoves, 2006).

4. Methodology

4.1 Paradigm

In the context of this research, the **Interpretivist Paradigm** was the most suitable choice for my study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm provides a worldview that guides the researcher in understanding the nature of reality and the relationships between the researcher and the subject. The interpretivist approach is grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed and that multiple realities exist, each shaped by individual experiences and perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Jennings, 2010). This aligns well with my research, as it involves understanding the diverse emotional experiences of tourists visiting Montserrat, particularly those dealing with emotional distress.

By employing an interpretivist paradigm, it is easier to engage with the subjective experiences of tourists, acknowledging that each visitor's perception of Montserrat's emotional benefits is unique and valid. This approach allows for a deep exploration of how these experiences are shaped by the natural environment and individual backgrounds, thus enabling a richer, more nuanced understanding of the emotional impacts of nature-based tourism.

Furthermore, from an epistemological standpoint, the interpretivist paradigm supports the idea that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. As noted by Jennings (2010), the relationship between the researcher and the subject is intersubjective, meaning that the research process itself influences and is influenced by both parties. This intersubjectivity is particularly relevant in my study, as my own experiences and insights as someone who has felt a deep connection to Montserrat inform my understanding of the data and my interactions with participants.

4.2 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing thematic analysis to explore the emotional experiences of tourists visiting Montserrat. The decision to adopt a qualitative approach was driven by the need to gain in-depth insights into the subjective emotional states and perceptions of tourists, which are best captured through rich, descriptive data. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how different individuals interpret their experiences in Montserrat, particularly in the context of emotional distress.

4.3 Participants

A total of 22 participants were interviewed for this study, encompassing a diverse range of demographics to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. The participants included both male and female tourists, ranging in age from early 20s to late 60s. The sample was purposefully selected to include a variety of visitor types, such as hikers, pilgrims, international and local tourists, thereby reflecting the diverse motivations and backgrounds of individuals who visit Montserrat.

4.4 Sampling Method

Participants were recruited through a combination of on-site interviews conducted in Montserrat and pre-planned interviews with tourists who had recently visited the site. In this study, a purposive sampling strategy was primarily employed to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of perspectives from visitors to Montserrat. Purposive sampling is widely regarded as effective in qualitative research for capturing in-depth insights into specific phenomena (Patton, 2002). By selecting participants who visited Montserrat for emotional, spiritual, or nature-based reasons, the study aimed to gather comprehensive data on the emotional benefits associated with the site.

To enhance the participant pool and ensure a thorough representation of visitor experiences, snowball and convenience sampling methods were also used. Snowball sampling, which

involves asking participants to refer others with similar experiences, was particularly helpful in reaching additional participants who might otherwise have been difficult to access (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). Convenience sampling, which allows for the selection of readily available participants, further facilitated the inclusion of tourists present on-site during my visits (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The interviews continued until data saturation was reached, which occurred after 22 interviews. Data saturation, as described by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), is the point at which no new information or themes are emerging from the data, ensuring the completeness and depth of the research findings.

4.5 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions in their own words while ensuring that the conversation remained focused on the research objectives. The interviews were conducted both in person in Montserrat and remotely, depending on the participants' availability. The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' pre-travel emotional states, their experiences during the visit, and the perceived emotional benefits gained from their time in Montserrat. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and English.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the participant's responses. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. The interviews were transcribed using Turboscribe online tool and then the Spanish interviews were translated into English. To ensure the reliability and accuracy of the data, the transcripts were cross-checked against the recordings by the researcher.

4.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, a method particularly suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Atlasti and

Delve as qualitative data analysis softwares, were simultaneously used to facilitate the organization and coding of the data. The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach.

Thematic Analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. It is particularly effective in capturing the complexities of meaning within a dataset and is widely utilized across various disciplines, including psychology and the social sciences. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) notably established a framework for thematic analysis in their seminal paper, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," which has since become a cornerstone for researchers conducting qualitative analysis. This method involves a reflexive process where the researcher's interpretation plays a crucial role in deriving meaning from the data, enabling a rich, nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Content Analysis, while also a qualitative method, differs significantly in its approach. Content analysis is more structured and involves quantifying the presence of certain words, phrases, or concepts within the data. This method is particularly useful for providing a detailed, objective analysis by counting the frequency of specific elements, thereby enabling a systematic comparison across different data sets. However, it may not capture the depth and complexity of meanings as effectively as thematic analysis, especially when the research aims to explore subjective experiences and underlying themes.

In the context of my research on the emotional experiences of tourists visiting Montserrat, thematic analysis was a suitable approach. The objectives of my study were to identify and characterize the pre-travel emotional experiences that motivate tourists, analyze how these individuals perceive and interpret their experiences in Montserrat, and assess the emotional benefits they derive from these experiences. Each of these objectives involves understanding not

just the explicit content of what participants say, but the underlying patterns of meaning, emotional responses, and personal interpretations that are best captured through thematic analysis. Therefore, thematic analysis enabled a comprehensive and flexible exploration of complex emotional themes, aligned with the study's objectives to understand the motivations, perceptions, and benefits associated with nature-based tourism. By choosing thematic analysis over content analysis, the study was able to delve deeper into the subjective experiences of participants, offering a rich, nuanced understanding of how Montserrat serves as a site of emotional and spiritual significance.

To analyze this data, I followed these steps:

1. **Familiarization with the Data:** I began by thoroughly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to become deeply familiar with the content. During this phase, initial thoughts and potential patterns were noted.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** In my research, I initially approached the data with an open-minded, inductive mindset, allowing unanticipated themes to emerge naturally from the dataset. Although no research can be purely inductive, as researchers are inevitably influenced by existing literature and theories, I ensured that the initial coding process remained flexible, without imposing strict theoretical categories from the outset (Thomas, 2006). While I was guided by general research interests, I did not create a predefined codebook, instead allowing the data to guide the development of initial codes. Once the initial coding was complete, I employed theoretical coding to organize and refine the large number of codes, which helped to better address the research questions and contribute to the knowledge base (Glaser, 1978). This combination of inductive and theoretical coding enabled me to remain open to emergent patterns while organizing the findings in a way that aligns with the study's objectives.

3. **Searching for Themes:** The codes were then examined to identify significant broader patterns or themes. This involved collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. This step involved checking that the themes worked in relation to both the coded extracts and the entire dataset.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Once the themes were finalized, they were defined and named to reflect the essence of each theme. This step also involved writing detailed analyses for each theme, which provided a clear narrative that connected the themes to the research questions.
6. **Producing the Report:** The final phase involved weaving together the thematic analysis into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions. The themes were presented in the Results section, with illustrative quotes from the participants used to support the findings.

Advantages of Thematic Analysis for This Study:

Flexibility: Thematic analysis allowed for a flexible approach to exploring a wide range of emotional experiences and perceptions among the participants. Unlike content analysis, which might limit the scope to quantifiable elements, thematic analysis enabled a deeper exploration of the nuanced emotional states that are central to the research questions.

Richness of Data: Thematic analysis is particularly effective in uncovering the complex, layered meanings within qualitative data. Given that my study aims to explore how tourists connect emotionally with Montserrat, including their feelings of peace, spiritual connection, and healing, thematic analysis was ideal for capturing these rich, subjective experiences.

Participant-Centered Interpretation: The reflexive nature of thematic analysis aligns well with the study's goal to understand participants' perspectives and interpretations.

This method allowed for an analysis that remains closely tied to the participants' own words and meanings, which is crucial for accurately representing their emotional and psychological experiences.

4.7 Limitations

While thematic analysis is highly beneficial, it does come with certain challenges, such as the potential for researcher bias in interpreting themes and the difficulty in determining which data are most significant. Moreover, given the sensitivity of the topic, which is emotional distress, it was quite challenging to let people open up freely and talk about what really is affecting them on the emotional level. To mitigate these issues, I employed a combination of theoretical and inductive coding. This approach began with an open-minded inductive coding process, allowing new themes to emerge from the data itself, and was later followed by the application of theoretical coding to organize the findings based on the research questions and existing literature. This hybrid method ensured that the analysis remained both theoretically grounded and open to the unique insights offered by the data. Concerning the sensitivity of the topic, I had to conduct semantic analysis sometimes to be able to understand between the lines and know what the interviewees were trying to express.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Montserrat Security Unit directly on-site, as I took permission to interview the visitors. Moreover, all participants were provided with a consent form before participating in the study. They were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and all data were anonymized to protect participants' privacy. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, with all data securely stored in accordance with institutional guidelines.

4.9 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. **Credibility** was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data and the use of participant quotes to support the themes identified. **Transferability** was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the participants and the context of the study, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. **Dependability** was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail of the research process, including decisions made during data collection and analysis. Finally, **Confirmability** was achieved through reflexive practices, where the researcher continuously reflected on potential biases and how they might influence the research process.

This methodological approach enabled a deep exploration of the emotional experiences of tourists visiting Montserrat, providing valuable insights into the motivations and perceived benefits associated with nature-based tourism in the context of emotional well-being.

5. Data Analysis

After conducting interviews with a diverse group of tourists and visitors, as explained in the sample part, several tags were assigned to the recorded interviews. The interviews were conducted in Spanish or English depending on the interviewee preference. The Spanish version was later translated into English. A sample of the tags generated from the initial labelling process includes:

Achievement	Grandiosity	Pride
Admiration	Gratitude	Promise
Ambivalence	Group cohesion	Reflection
Beauty	Happiness	Regret
Breaking Routine	Harmony	Routes
Connection	Hiking	Sacrifice
Cross Approach	History	Sadness
Culture	Hope	Satisfaction
Disappointment	Humanity	Self
Disconnection	Identity	Self-description
Emotions	Landscapes	Self-development
Esthetic	Long term challenges	Sighting
Excitement	Love	Sincerity
Experience	Mental health	Social influence
External influence	Nature	Social interaction
Faith	Night	Surprise
Fatigue	Nostalgia	Tranquility
Fear	Peace	Travel
Freshness	Personal background	Uncertainty
Freedom	Positiveness	Weather

Table 1: List of tags generated from the initial labelling process.

After an extensive process of filtering and refining the tags was undertaken, organizing the information into groups and categories. This led to the identification of seven key dimensions

that were then merged into three main categories to better structure the findings and highlight the main themes.

The Main Codes found after processing the data are:

- Peace and Tranquility
- Spiritual Connection
- Emotional Responses (Negative & Positive)
- Nature as Healing
- Emotional Distress and Challenges Pre-Travel Experiences
- Perception & Interpretation of Nature-Based Tourism Experiences
- Emotional Benefits

Initial Codes:

Although my initial codes were not exhaustive, it served as a practical starting point for exploring key concepts that were anticipated in the data. These initial codes were merely a starting point, and as I progressed through the data, I adapted my coding framework to capture additional themes and patterns as they emerged. The preliminary codes included:

I. Peace and Tranquility

- **Definition:** This code captures participants' descriptions and experiences of inner calm, serenity, and a profound sense of peace while at Montserrat. This feeling is often linked to the natural surroundings, including the serene landscape, as well as the site's spiritual ambiance.
- **Context:** Instances where participants mention feelings of quietude, relief from stress, or mental calmness directly attributed to their presence in Montserrat.

II. Spiritual Connection

- b. **Definition:** This code is used to identify references to a deep spiritual connection or religious experience that participants felt during their visit. It includes mentions of personal reflection, prayer, or a sense of connection to a higher power, often inspired by Montserrat's religious significance and the presence of the Virgin of Montserrat (La Moreneta).
- c. **Context:** References to spiritual practices, moments of reflection or prayer, or a heightened sense of spirituality related to the site's religious heritage and sacred atmosphere.

III. Emotional Responses

- a. **Definition:** This code categorizes a variety of emotional reactions reported by visitors, such as nostalgia, hope, renewal, or other intense emotions evoked by their experiences at Montserrat. These responses are often tied to both physical experiences (like hiking) and spiritual moments (such as attending religious services).
- b. **Context:** Statements where participants describe feelings of longing, emotional upliftment, or renewal triggered by their activities or the overall atmosphere of Montserrat.

IV. Nature as Healing

- a. **Definition:** This code is used for instances where participants express that the natural landscape of Montserrat provided a therapeutic or healing effect. It includes mentions of how the natural environment helped them to process emotions, gain clarity, or experience emotional relief.

- b. **Context:** Any discussion of the natural scenery contributing to a sense of emotional well-being, personal healing, or mental clarity, often linked to the scenic beauty and tranquil environment of Montserrat.

V. Emotional Distress and Challenges Pre-Travel Experiences

- a. **Definition:** This code focuses on the emotional states or difficulties that participants experienced prior to their decision to visit Montserrat. It aims to identify and understand the types of emotional distress that led individuals to seek out nature-based tourism as a coping mechanism or form of emotional support.
- b. **Context:** Descriptions of emotional challenges such as stress, grief, anxiety, or other forms of emotional struggle that motivated the decision to travel to Montserrat.

VI. Perception & Interpretation of Nature-Based Tourism Experiences

- a. **Definition:** This code explores how participants perceive and interpret their experiences in Montserrat, especially when they are undergoing emotional distress. It includes how they make sense of their interactions with the natural environment and how these experiences relate to their emotional states.
- b. **Context:** Narratives where participants discuss their understanding or interpretation of their time in Montserrat, including their engagement with nature and how it affected their emotions.

VII. Emotional Benefits

- a. **Definition:** This code examines the emotional benefits that participants perceive as a result of their nature-based experiences in Montserrat. It looks at the types of emotional relief, healing, or positive emotional changes that visitors report, particularly those with pre-existing emotional distress.

- b. **Context:** Statements about the therapeutic or restorative effects of the visit, including mentions of emotional recovery, feeling uplifted, or achieving a sense of peace or happiness due to their experiences at Montserrat.

5.1 Main Motivations & Pre-travel Emotional Distress or Challenges

In the initial stages of the study, interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants, including individuals from various age ranges, cultural backgrounds, and with different motivations. Consequently, it is important to recognize that not all visitors can be viewed with the same intensity or perspective, as certain aspects resonate more strongly with some groups than with others, and vice versa. This approach allowed me to delve deeper into various elements related to the overall destination and its perception, providing insights into the unique aspects of the location's identity. These distinctive features can serve as a foundation for further research and development, highlighting aspects of the place that may not have been immediately apparent but are essential to understanding its character and potential for future study.

Drawing upon the diversity of the sample, the motivations behind visitors' journeys to Montserrat are diverse, reflecting a rich tapestry of personal, spiritual, and cultural influences. This section delves into the primary motivations driving these visits, revealing how Montserrat serves as a pilgrimage site, a natural retreat, and a symbol of Catalan identity. Through a careful analysis of interviewee quotes, this exploration highlights the spiritual aspirations, aesthetic appreciation, physical challenges, and group dynamics that collectively draw people to this iconic destination. Each theme is supported by direct insights from visitors, providing a comprehensive understanding of why Montserrat holds such significance.

5.1.1 Main Motivations of Visitors to Montserrat

- **Spiritual Motivation**

The spiritual and religious significance of Montserrat has been identified as a predominant motivator for visitors who share similar religious backgrounds. A recurring

theme across the interviews was the perception of Montserrat as a pilgrimage site, where the act of visiting is closely tied to spiritual or religious fulfillment. This is particularly evident in the narratives of several participants who explicitly cited spiritual reasons as their primary motivation for visiting. For example, one interviewee emphasized that their visit was driven by a "religious or spiritual origin," noting that "the reason to always go up is spiritual. If it was for an excursion, it would be... There are many other mountains" (Interviewee 7). This statement highlights the distinct separation between spiritually motivated visits and those intended for recreation. Similarly, another participant underscored a personal commitment, explaining their journey as fulfilling a "promise to the Virgin of Montserrat in Colombia," which underscores the depth of religious commitment tied to the site (Interviewee 11). These narratives suggest that for many, Montserrat is not merely a destination but a sacred space that facilitates spiritual engagement and fulfillment.

- **The Destination's Nature and Aesthetic Appeal**

The natural beauty and unique aesthetic appeal of Montserrat resonated deeply with visitors, shaping their emotional and sensory experiences of the place. Many participants described Montserrat as a place where natural landscapes and architectural wonders coexist, creating a compelling destination that appeals to diverse interests. The multifunctional appeal of Montserrat was frequently highlighted, with participants expressing appreciation for both its scenic environment and cultural heritage. One interviewee described Montserrat as a place where "you can do everything," from hiking to exploring historical sites, thus reflecting its broad appeal (Interviewee 14).

Another participant noted the seamless integration of "architecture" and natural beauty, which they felt made Montserrat "a very nice place" to visit (Interviewee 20). These sentiments were echoed by others who emphasized the visual allure of the site,

with one participant stating that they were drawn to Montserrat by the beauty of the "mountain," "rocks," and "peaks" (Interviewee 4). Such descriptions underscore the dual attraction of Montserrat, combining the appeal of its natural landscapes with its cultural and historical significance.

- **Hiking and Sport Motivation**

For many visitors, Montserrat is experienced as a place of physical challenge and adventure, where the act of hiking becomes a meaningful way to connect with both the landscape and themselves. The physical landscape of Montserrat, characterized by its rugged terrain and challenging trails, provides an ideal setting for those seeking adventure and exertion. Several participants highlighted hiking as a central component of their visit, with one stating that the hike was "the strongest part of the whole trip," indicating the emotional and physical intensity associated with this activity (Interviewee 1). Another interviewee described a dual motivation, combining physical activity with spiritual reflection, as they stated, "I really like to walk, climb mountains... I like to pray, reflect" (Interviewee 5).

This dual motivation suggests that for some visitors, the physical challenge of hiking is intertwined with the pursuit of spiritual or emotional growth. Additionally, the site's reputation as a prime hiking location was reinforced by participants who recommended Montserrat for its trails, noting that it is "the best place to hike" (Interviewee 22). These accounts highlight the role of Montserrat as not only a spiritual and aesthetic destination but also a place for physical and emotional challenges.

- **Cultural and Identity Motivation**

Montserrat's cultural significance and its embodiment of Catalan identity were also central themes among visitors. Many participants articulated a strong connection

to the site as a symbol of regional pride and cultural heritage. This is particularly evident in the reflections of participants who view Montserrat as more than a spiritual or natural landmark; rather, they see it as a powerful emblem of Catalan culture and history. One interviewee expressed a deep personal connection to the site, referring to Montserrat as "the patron of Catalonia" and highlighting its cultural significance (Interviewee 5). Another participant described Montserrat as a "typical Catalan monument," positioning it as a cultural must-see and reinforcing its status as a cornerstone of regional identity (Interviewee 12). Furthermore, the site's role in preserving and promoting Catalan history was emphasized by another interviewee, who noted that Montserrat "has preserved a lot of the theme of Catalanism" (Interviewee 2). This narrative is supported by the historical and cultural weight attributed to Montserrat by participants, who mentioned its contributions to Catalan culture, such as its editorial works and the translation of the Bible (Interviewee 7).

These accounts illustrate how Montserrat functions as a cultural and patriotic symbol, reinforcing the social and historical consciousness of the Catalan people and also shows that the connection to this place and destination is very intertwined with identity, as Manzo and Devine-Wright mention (2014) "Place attachment is a multifaceted concept involving emotional bonds to a specific place, which can contribute significantly to personal and social identity."

- **Collective Experience and Group Influence**

The social aspect of visiting Montserrat emerged as a significant motivator for some visitors, highlighting the role of group dynamics in shaping the overall experience. Analysis of the interviews revealed that the collective experience of visiting Montserrat with others often enhanced the visit, transforming it from a solitary pilgrimage to a shared journey. For instance, one interviewee described Montserrat as

being on their "bucket list," but noted that the opportunity to visit with a group made it "perfect," suggesting that the presence of companions enriched the experience (Interviewee 8). This sentiment was echoed by others who valued "being with other people in a spiritual context," underscoring the blend of social and spiritual motivations that characterize many visits to Montserrat.

Another interviewee emphasized the importance of companionship and shared activities, stating, "we came for the company and for the hike," which highlights the dual motivations of social interaction and physical activity (Interviewee 16). Similarly, the experience of "walking with companions" was mentioned as a key aspect of the visit, pointing to the significance of group dynamics in the decision to visit Montserrat (Interviewee 18). These findings illustrate the diverse motivations driving visitors to Montserrat, ranging from spiritual and cultural connections to the desire for physical activity and the enjoyment of social experiences.

5.1.2 Emotional Distress or Challenges

The analysis of emotional distress or challenges among visitors revealed both long-term and short-term emotional struggles that influenced their decision to visit Montserrat. This theme captures various forms of emotional distress, including unresolved issues, life challenges, and other negative feelings or sad memories that participants experience or recall during their visit. Understanding these pre-travel emotions is essential for shedding light on why individuals might seek nature-based tourism as a coping mechanism, particularly in a setting like Montserrat.

The thematic coding process used in this analysis was both theoretical and inductive as aforementioned. Inductively, the analysis sought to uncover the specific emotional states and motivations underlying these challenges through a detailed examination of the interview data.

By conducting semantic analysis where necessary, the study aimed to identify the main challenges and sources of emotional distress, relying on the interviewees' own words to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences and emotions related to the subject matter. This approach aligns with the principles of semantic analysis, which involves interpreting the meaning and context of words in communication (Jurafsky & Martin, 2019).

- **Confronting Inner Demons**

A recurring theme in the interviews was the emergence of unresolved emotional issues and repressed memories when individuals visited Montserrat (on-site/during the travel). Several interviewees described how the environment of Montserrat triggered the confrontation of deeply buried traumas and fears. One participant noted, "All your ghosts come out and your real fears come out, your past wounds come out, the ones without healing or you get memories of repressed things that your mind has closed and you do not want to touch" (Interviewee 7). This quote illustrates how Montserrat functions as a space where visitors confront their inner demons, reflecting the emotional baggage they bring with them. The secluded and contemplative nature of Montserrat appears to play a pivotal role in this process, aligning with research on spiritual or nature-based tourism, where such environments often facilitate emotional catharsis and reflection. This finding directly relates to the research objective of examining the emotional challenges that prompt individuals to seek Montserrat as a travel destination.

- **Energy-related motivations**

The perception of Montserrat as a place with powerful spiritual energy also emerged as a motivator for some visitors. One interviewee mentioned coming "because of energy issues" (Interviewee 2), suggesting that Montserrat is viewed as a site that offers spiritual renewal or healing. This belief likely stems from the site's religious significance and its long history as a pilgrimage destination. The idea of seeking balance or healing in Montserrat aligns with the

research objective by highlighting how the perceived spiritual energy of the site attracts individuals who are dealing with emotional challenges related to their internal energy states.

- **Coping mechanism**

Another theme that emerged was the use of Montserrat as a coping mechanism for emotional challenges. Some visitors described how fulfilling promises or vows made during moments of distress led them to Montserrat. For example, one interviewee shared that their visit was driven by a promise made after losing luggage on a flight: "Because of a promise I made when I lost my luggage on a flight to San Francisco. If I found it, I would come here" (Interviewee 3). This narrative indicates that the act of visiting Montserrat provided a sense of closure or resolution to the anxiety experienced during that event. This example ties directly into the research objective by showing how specific emotional distress can prompt individuals to choose Montserrat as a place to resolve their distress through the fulfillment of promises.

- **Daily Stress**

For some visitors, Montserrat serves as a therapeutic escape from daily stress. One interviewee described their visit as a much-needed break from "the daily kind of stress," particularly after finishing exams: "Living here is like a break from the daily kind of stress. Also, maybe there's a context to it. I just finished some exams. So, it's like a shift" (Interviewee 22). This highlights how Montserrat's natural environment and isolation from urban pressures provide a refuge for mental recovery. The perception of Montserrat as a sanctuary for psychological relief aligns with the research objective by illustrating how the destination serves as a refuge for those experiencing the psychological aftermath of stressful events.

- **Repressed Emotions**

Montserrat also seems to act as a catalyst for the release of repressed emotions, as illustrated by an interviewee who felt an urge to cry and experienced fear due to long-suppressed

emotions: "I have felt that I wanted to cry, I have felt fear because I was repressing my emotions, but there is something in this place that has made me come out unintentionally" (Interviewee 15). The environment of Montserrat appears to facilitate emotional catharsis, demonstrating how certain spiritual or natural settings can trigger emotional releases. This aligns with the idea that environments like Montserrat can help individuals confront and process feelings they have long suppressed, further supporting the research objective of examining the emotional challenges that draw individuals to the site.

- **Coping With Grief**

The role of Montserrat in providing a space for processing grief emerged as a significant theme in the narratives of several interviewees. Initially, I aimed to limit my sample to individuals specifically experiencing grief. However, due to potential complexities and limitations associated with this approach, I decided against it. Despite this, I was pleasantly surprised by the findings related to grief that emerged from the broader sample. This theme captures the site's function as a sanctuary for those dealing with the loss of loved ones, offering a context for emotional reflection and spiritual solace. Pilgrimage sites like Montserrat often serve as places of comfort and healing, where visitors engage in rituals and practices that help them navigate their grief and find peace.

One key aspect highlighted by the participants is Montserrat's perceived ability to offer spiritual consolation for those mourning a loss. For example, one interviewee explicitly mentioned how the site allowed them to process their grief in a contemplative and spiritual manner: "I have started to think about the subject of mourning, how Montserrat can be a consolation for mourning" (Interviewee 2). This perspective aligns with the broader understanding of pilgrimage sites as environments that facilitate emotional healing through spiritual engagement. By

offering a place where individuals can connect with nature, Montserrat helps visitors find comfort amidst their loss, supporting the research objective of examining how spiritual sites can address emotional challenges such as grief.

Another dimension of coping with grief in Montserrat is the transformation in how individuals perceive and process their emotions. An interviewee shared their experience of coming to view grief as a natural part of life after visiting Montserrat: "I began to see my grief as a natural part of life's journey, rather than something to be suppressed or avoided. I learned to embrace my emotions and find solace in spirituality, allowing me to approach my grief with greater compassion and acceptance" (Interviewee 15). This narrative illustrates a significant shift in emotional and spiritual development, indicating that Montserrat not only attracts those experiencing grief but also plays a role in transforming their emotional response. This finding is crucial as it highlights the potential of nature-based spiritual sites to facilitate emotional growth and acceptance, thereby reinforcing the research objective of exploring how Montserrat aids visitors in rethinking and coping with their emotional challenges.

The importance of rituals in coping with grief was also evident in the interviews. For some, Montserrat serves as a space for performing personal rituals of remembrance, which help maintain a connection with deceased loved ones. One interviewee described the act of lighting candles in the Basilica as a way of thinking about their deceased brother, underscoring the site's role as a space for mourning and remembrance: "For me personally, the other thing, when we are in Basilica, the candles, well, I think, obviously, about my deceased brother, which is some personal emotional thing that I had" (Interviewee 20). This ritualistic behavior underscores how Montserrat acts as a bridge between the living and the deceased, providing a context for visitors to honor their memories and find spiritual comfort. Such practices highlight the importance of pilgrimage sites in the grieving process, offering individuals a means to connect with their loss in a supportive environment. This insight further supports the research objective

by demonstrating how Montserrat serves as a site where emotional and spiritual needs intersect, providing a space for intimate connections and emotional healing.

These thematic insights reveal that Montserrat functions as more than just a physical destination; it is a multifaceted space where visitors can confront personal traumas, engage in spiritual reflection, and seek solace. By facilitating these experiences, Montserrat becomes a significant site for nature-based tourism that addresses various forms of emotional distress. This analysis aligns with the research objective by highlighting how specific emotional challenges, such as grief, motivate individuals to seek out Montserrat. It illustrates the complex interplay between spirituality and emotion in nature-based tourism, emphasizing Montserrat's unique role in providing both physical space and spiritual context for emotional processing and healing.

5.2 Perception & Interpretation of Nature-Based Tourism Experiences

5.2.1 Spiritual Connection

The perception and interpretation of nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat reveal a complex interplay between spirituality and the environment, particularly for visitors with religious inclinations. This theme explores the deep spiritual connections that visitors often experience, which are significantly shaped by both the natural and religious aspects of Montserrat. For many visitors, Montserrat represents a sacred space where spirituality is deeply felt and experienced. As Interviewee 7 articulated, the site is synonymous with "the presence of God. Or spirituality. History. Spiritual history. There is a transmission for me of faith." This narrative emphasizes Montserrat's role as a spiritual hub, where visitors connect not only with their faith but also with the historical and spiritual essence of the site.

The spiritual experiences in Montserrat are not confined to physical space but extend into the inner lives of visitors. Interviewee 12 captured this sentiment by stating, "It's about your encounter with God, which could be anywhere. And which could lead to comfort. Definitely,

that's the purpose." This highlights how the spiritual atmosphere of Montserrat facilitates personal spiritual encounters, fostering a sense of connection and comfort that transcends the geographical boundaries of the site. Such reflections align with the findings of Wilson et al. (2013), who explore how natural landscapes contribute to spiritual experiences, emphasizing that the spiritual connection often goes beyond the physical environment and deeply affects the individual's inner world.

Furthermore, the religious sites within Montserrat, such as the basilica, provide spaces for prayer and reflection that enhance the spiritual experience for those aligned with Catholic spirituality. The collective rituals performed in Montserrat, like the lighting of candles as described by Interviewee 10, reinforce a shared spiritual experience, where personal prayers contribute to a communal act of faith. These rituals highlight Montserrat's role in fostering spiritual grounding and collective worship, echoing research that underscores the importance of ritual in creating and reinforcing spiritual connections at pilgrimage sites (Dubisch, 1995).

However, the spiritual significance of Montserrat does not resonate equally with all visitors. In fact, visitors who share catholic religious beliefs or have prior knowledge of Montserrat's spiritual history and have a cultural connection with it, as Catalans mainly are more likely to experience a profound sense of sacredness and spirituality. In contrast, those unfamiliar with the religion or the significance of the site may view it primarily as a cultural or historical destination, and in some cases, may not experience any spiritual connection at all. For instance, for some, the religious atmosphere can evoke discomfort rather than spiritual connection. Interviewee 8 expressed this sentiment, stating, "It made me feel uncomfortable because I did not want to be disrespectful but at the same time it's not part of my beliefs." This response illustrates the complexity of spiritual experiences in Montserrat, where the site's religious context can evoke a wide range of emotions, from reverence to discomfort, depending on individual backgrounds and beliefs. This finding aligns with the work of Olsen (2013), who discusses the

diverse reactions to religious tourism sites based on visitors' personal beliefs and cultural contexts.

The spiritual essence of Montserrat is also reflected in cultural elements, such as the hymn "Virolai," which Interviewee 7 described as "almost like the song of the blind." This hymn, deeply associated with Montserrat, evokes strong emotional and spiritual responses, underscoring the site's role as a beacon of spiritual resonance for many visitors. Overall, Montserrat emerges as a multifaceted spiritual landscape, offering a space for reflection, connection, and comfort while also provoking introspection and discomfort among those with differing beliefs.

5.2.2 Emotional Response

Visitors' emotional responses to Montserrat are as diverse as their spiritual experiences, ranging from positive emotions such as hope and joy to more challenging feelings like fear and sadness. The natural and spiritual environment of Montserrat plays a crucial role in eliciting these varied emotional reactions.

- **Positive Emotional Response**

"My nostalgia is towards the future" (Interviewee7)

Many visitors report positive emotional experiences in Montserrat, characterized by a sense of relief, hope, and joy. Interviewee 10 described a visit to Montserrat as "a weight and you took it off your chest," highlighting the cathartic effect of the environment, which allows for reflection and spiritual renewal. This aligns with the work of Fredrickson and Joiner (2002), who found that positive emotional experiences in natural settings can contribute to psychological resilience and well-being.

The presence of spirituality in Montserrat also instills hope in visitors, as articulated by Interviewee 12, who remarked, "God's presence always gives you hope wherever it is." This sense of hope, often untethered from specific expectations, reflects the uplifting effect of the environment, as echoed by Interviewee 19: "There's something about this place that fills you

with hope, even if you don't know exactly what you're hoping for." This emotional response is supported by research showing that natural environments, combined with spiritual significance, can foster feelings of hope and optimism (Heintzman, 2009).

Moreover, the beauty and serenity of Montserrat evoke feelings of joy and humanity. Interviewee 4 shared how the experience of seeing La Moreneta brought a deep sense of humanity and hope, illustrating how Montserrat's spiritual atmosphere enables visitors to connect with something greater than themselves. This aligns with studies by Fredrickson (2004) that highlight the role of awe and beauty in nature in enhancing emotional well-being and fostering a sense of connection to the broader human experience.

- **Negative Emotional Response**

Conversely, not all emotional responses to Montserrat are positive. The challenging landscape and solitude can evoke fear and emotional distress. Interviewee 20 described the experience as confronting "you with yourself and with fear," pointing to the potential for Montserrat to test visitors' emotional resilience. Such responses are consistent with findings by McDonald et al. (2015), who noted that natural environments could sometimes amplify feelings of fear and vulnerability, particularly in settings that evoke a sense of isolation or scale. The feeling of fear and vulnerability can actually be linked to the overwhelming sense of awe that such landscapes evoke. Awe is a complex emotional response that arises in the presence of vast, unfamiliar, or powerful stimuli, often found in nature (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Montserrat's dramatic peaks and spiritual significance may contribute to this feeling of awe, a response that can inspire both positive emotions, such as wonder and transcendence, as well as negative emotions, such as insignificance and fear (Bonner & Friedman, 2011). This duality of awe can lead visitors to experience both admiration for the grandeur of the landscape and an unsettling awareness of their own smallness in comparison (Keltner & Haidt, 2003).

For some visitors, Montserrat serves as a trigger for the recollection of memories, both positive and negative. Interviewee 11 shared that the site facilitated the release of repressed emotions, allowing them to connect with their past: "The first time I came here, it brought back memories, I remembered things, and it helped me connect with emotions that I was repressing." This capacity of Montserrat to act as a catalyst for emotional release and reconciliation is crucial for understanding its role in helping visitors process their emotional distress, a phenomenon supported by studies on emotional catharsis in natural settings (Clayton & Opatow, 2003).

Feelings of being lost and overwhelmed are also reported, particularly in the face of Montserrat's vastness. Interviewee 7 articulated this sense of disorientation, stating, "You can feel lost by the immensity, by the anonymity in the crowd." Such feelings highlight the emotional challenges that some visitors encounter when navigating Montserrat's physical and emotional landscape. Research by Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) supports this, noting that large, imposing natural environments can sometimes evoke feelings of insignificance and isolation. However, this expression of being lost in the immensity is also related to the feeling of awe aforementioned, as Keltner and Haidt (2003) emphasize, awe can challenge individuals' sense of self, creating a blend of wonder and emotional discomfort in the face of the sublime. This disorientation and discomfort expressed by the interviewee is caused by the overwhelming of the awe.

Furthermore, loneliness and discomfort are prevalent among those who visit Montserrat alone. Interviewee 5 described the site as "a very large place where you can feel very lonely," emphasizing the isolation that can be felt in such expansive environments. This sentiment is exacerbated when personal beliefs conflict with the expectations of the place, as noted by Interviewee 9, reinforcing the complex emotional landscape that Montserrat presents to its visitors.

In conclusion, Montserrat serves as a complex emotional landscape where visitors engage in deep psychological and spiritual work. The site elicits a wide range of emotional responses, from profound spiritual connection and hope to fear, loneliness, and the release of repressed memories. For tourists experiencing emotional distress, Montserrat offers a unique space for both confrontation and healing, where their emotional challenges are met with opportunities for reflection, spiritual growth, and ultimately, emotional renewal.

5.3 The Perceived Benefits of Nature-based tourism in Montserrat

To comprehensively address the research question, "How and why are nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat perceived as emotionally beneficial by tourists with emotional distress?" The data was organized into several interconnected themes. These themes reflect the multifaceted emotional benefits derived from nature-based experiences in Montserrat and underscore the complex interplay between natural environments and emotional well-being.

5.3.1. Nature-Induced Peace and Tranquility

One of the most frequently mentioned benefits of visiting Montserrat is the profound sense of peace and tranquility that visitors experience. This feeling is often closely linked to the natural environment and the spiritual atmosphere of the site. As Interviewee 3 describes, "Yes, but at six o'clock, when people leave, only you find yourself." This statement highlights how the solitude and peacefulness of Montserrat at night facilitates a deeper self-connection, reinforcing the idea that quiet natural settings can provide a conducive environment for introspection and emotional restoration. This is supported by existing literature that emphasizes the calming and restorative effects of natural environments on emotional well-being (Ulrich et al., 1991).

Furthermore, Interviewee 18 expands on this idea, noting that "Perhaps tranquility helps you search, helps you relax. The effort of walking surely also helps a lot. It makes you feel better by exercising." This quote suggests that the combination of physical activity and a serene

environment significantly contributes to emotional well-being. The therapeutic effects of nature and physical exercise are well-documented in research, which indicates that engaging with natural environments can reduce stress and promote emotional recovery (Pretty et al., 2007). Interviewee 15 also reflects on this theme, stating, "The breathtaking views and the tranquility of the surroundings offered moments of respite and allowed me to reconnect with nature." This observation underscores the role of nature in facilitating emotional solace and comfort, aligning with Kaplan's (1995) Attention Restoration Theory, which posits that natural environments restore cognitive function and emotional stability by providing a break from the demands of urban life.

Additionally, Interviewee 11 describes a sense of fulfillment and peace upon arriving at Montserrat: "Once you arrive here, you feel more at peace, having fulfilled that promise that you brought from your home country. So, it's like I leave in peace. Yes, so there was that moment of sadness and nostalgia, but in the end, there's also... Tranquility. Tranquility." This illustrates how the natural setting can help mitigate feelings of sadness and promote a state of tranquility. This aligns with research by Herzog et al. (1997), which suggests that natural environments can provide emotional comfort and serve as a space for emotional processing.

5.3.2. Nature's Role in Inspiring Hope

Montserrat's natural environment is also perceived as a source of hope and inspiration, particularly for visitors dealing with emotional distress. Interviewee 7 captures this sentiment by stating, "It is not nostalgia, I only have nostalgia towards the future." This quote reflects a focus on future aspirations rather than past regrets, suggesting that the natural surroundings of Montserrat encourage reflection and foster emotional healing by helping visitors envision a hopeful future despite their current challenges. This forward-looking perspective aligns with findings by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), who argue that natural environments can promote a sense of future orientation and psychological resilience.

Interviewee 12 reinforces this theme, describing Montserrat as a place of hope and healing: "Yes, I think it's a way of holding on to hope, a way to heal. Yes, I do recommend it. And that can create well-being." This statement highlights the strong emotional connection that visitors feel towards the natural landscape, indicating that it provides not only a space for solace but also a means to emotionally heal and find hope. This aligns with the findings of Heintzman (2009), who explored how natural settings can serve as spaces for spiritual renewal and emotional recovery.

5.3.3. Nature as a Catalyst for Self-Discovery

Montserrat also serves as a catalyst for self-discovery and introspection, encouraging visitors to engage in deep reflection and often leading to significant emotional clarity and personal insights. Interviewee 18 notes, "I think walking in general helps you find yourself. It's nature." This statement suggests that the act of walking in a natural environment facilitates self-exploration and emotional clarity. The restorative effects of walking in nature are well-supported by research, which highlights the role of physical activity in natural settings in promoting psychological well-being and enhancing self-awareness (Barton & Pretty, 2010).

This process of self-discovery is a common experience for many visitors, as reflected in Interviewee 21's observation: "This big, beautiful thing and I'm small and I'm here. It gives me a different perspective on myself." This quote illustrates the humbling and enlightening effects of being immersed in nature, where the vastness of the landscape helps individuals gain a broader perspective on their own lives. This is consistent with the findings of Korpela and Hartig (1996), who suggest that natural environments can provide a space for self-reflection and personal growth.

Additionally, Interviewee 5 emphasizes the importance of solitude in nature for introspection: "There are people who need this loneliness or feel this loneliness to be able to enter their interior and make an introspection to be able to find answers." This highlights the role of the

natural environment in providing a quiet, undisturbed space where visitors can reflect deeply and connect with their inner emotions. This supports the idea that solitude in natural settings can be a powerful catalyst for emotional healing and self-discovery (Laumann et al., 2001).

5.3.4. Nature as Healing

The overarching theme of nature as a healing force integrates various dimensions of how natural environments contribute to emotional well-being for visitors at Montserrat.

- **Nature as a Source of Solace**

Many visitors find spiritual solace in the natural landscape of Montserrat. Interviewee 8 comments, "But the spiritualism can come from the nature. It doesn't have to come from the church," suggesting that the natural environment can evoke a sense of spirituality independent of traditional religious settings. This is consistent with the work of Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), who found that natural settings often provide a spiritual experience that is distinct from formal religious practices.

Interviewee 12 also emphasizes this spiritual connection, recommending Montserrat for spiritual retreats: "If you are suffering from emotional distress and you want to go to Montserrat, don't go as a tourist, go for spiritual retreats." This recommendation underscores the perception that nature offers a space for spiritual and emotional healing. This aligns with research by Heintzman (2010), which explores how nature-based spiritual experiences can facilitate emotional healing and personal transformation.

- **Therapeutic and Restorative Qualities of Nature**

The therapeutic qualities of Montserrat's natural landscape are highlighted by Interviewee 5, who notes, "Walking always brings out the best of us and naturalizes a greater one." This suggests that engaging in physical activity within a natural setting can be deeply restorative, fostering emotional well-being and a sense of renewal. Research by Pretty et al. (2007) supports this, indicating that physical activities in nature can reduce stress and improve mood.

Interviewee 12 further supports the therapeutic benefits of nature, stating, "If they spend some time to reflect on their challenges, it might give them clarity and a good vision." This illustrates how nature helps visitors process their emotions and gain a clearer understanding of their personal challenges. This finding is in line with Kaplan's (1995) Attention Restoration Theory, which posits that natural environments provide a setting for recovery from mental fatigue and stress.

- **Nature as a Space for Disconnection and Reflection**

The natural environment of Montserrat provides an essential space for disconnection from daily stress and routines. Interviewee 12 observes, "Definitely, I believe that everybody should have a place to go to in order to disconnect," highlighting the need for natural spaces where individuals can relax and rejuvenate. This sentiment is echoed by Interviewee 22, who finds Montserrat to be a conducive environment for introspection: "It's like an opportunity to think of things that maybe you don't usually think of." This indicates that nature encourages reflection and emotional processing, contributing to overall emotional well-being. The role of nature in facilitating psychological detachment from stressors is well-documented in environmental psychology (Ulrich et al., 1991).

- **Nature's Impact on Well-being and Perspective**

Regular exposure to nature is perceived to have a positive impact on well-being and provides a new perspective on life. Interviewee 10 states, " (Visiting Montserrat) Doing it regularly, that will enhance your well-being," emphasizing the benefits of consistent engagement with nature. This aligns with research by Mayer et al. (2009), which demonstrates that frequent contact with natural environments can improve psychological health and well-being.

Additionally, Interviewee 9 describes the liberating effect of nature on emotional states: "And then there's the feeling of freedom, of relaxation. Related to nature as well." This sense of freedom and emotional relief is further reinforced by Interviewee 10, who highlights the

emotional connection formed through the beauty of nature: "It's the nature aspect. But not, like, the inside of the church." This supports the notion that natural beauty can evoke powerful emotional responses and contribute to a sense of liberation and peace (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

In conclusion, the nature-based tourism experiences at Montserrat are perceived as emotionally beneficial by tourists, particularly those dealing with emotional distress, due to the diverse ways in which the natural environment fosters peace, inspires hope, encourages self-discovery, and promotes healing. These experiences allow visitors to disconnect from their daily lives, reflect on their challenges, and connect with something greater than themselves, thereby providing a holistic approach to emotional well-being and restoration. The thematic analysis demonstrates that Montserrat serves as a dynamic landscape where nature, spirituality Montserrat's ability to evoke a wide range of emotional responses from visitors—ranging from spiritual connection to cultural pride—underscores the importance of understanding tourist destinations as complex, multifaceted environments that offer diverse experiences depending on the visitor's background and motivations.

As highlighted by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), the wilderness and natural settings provide a space for spiritual inspiration and emotional healing, which is also evident in the context of Montserrat. Moreover, Willson et al. (2013) argue that spiritual tourism is inherently a phenomenological experience, where individual perceptions and interpretations play a crucial role in shaping the overall experience.

The site's capacity to function as a catalyst for emotional reflection and spiritual connection also supports the findings of previous studies on the transformative power of natural and cultural landscapes. For example, Wang et al. (2020) discuss how pilgrimage and spiritual journeys often lead to a deeper understanding of oneself and a re-evaluation of personal beliefs, which is consistent with many visitors' experiences at Montserrat. Additionally, Schwarz

(2013) points out that tourists' interactions with natural sites are often guided by their sonic and sensory preferences, which further influences their emotional and spiritual responses.

In conclusion, the thematic analysis demonstrates that Montserrat is more than just a tourist destination; it is a dynamic landscape where personal, spiritual, and cultural elements intertwine to create a unique and multifaceted experience for each visitor. This complexity underscores the importance of a holistic approach to understanding the emotional and spiritual benefits of nature-based tourism, as it recognizes the diverse ways in which individuals connect with and derive meaning from such sites.

6. Discussion

The results show that Montserrat is considered a destination to escape the stress and challenges of daily life, seeking an environment that could provide peace and facilitate emotional processing. This aligns with the research question that investigates how nature-based tourism experiences in Montserrat are perceived as emotionally beneficial by tourists with emotional distress. Many visitors were drawn to Montserrat not just for its natural beauty, but also for its spiritual significance, which together created an ideal setting for those experiencing emotional turmoil to find solace and clarity. This finding is consistent with existing literature that suggests nature-based settings can offer significant therapeutic benefits, particularly for individuals dealing with stress or emotional distress (Buckley et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020). The peaceful environment of Montserrat, with its combination of natural and spiritual elements, aligns with findings by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), who noted that wilderness experiences often serve as a source of spiritual inspiration and emotional healing.

Participants perceived Montserrat's natural beauty and spiritual significance as deeply intertwined, creating a unique experience that facilitated emotional healing and introspection. This perception is critical to understanding why tourists view nature-based tourism in Montserrat as emotionally beneficial. The natural environment was seen not only as a backdrop for

spiritual connection but also as a direct facilitator of it. This resonates with the concept that natural landscapes can evoke profound emotional and spiritual responses, as suggested by Willson et al. (2013), who found that spiritual tourism often involves a phenomenological experience where personal perceptions and interpretations shape the overall experience. The dual appeal of Montserrat's nature and spirituality supports the idea that nature-based tourism can cater to both emotional and spiritual needs, providing a holistic experience that enhances visitors' well-being (Schwarz, 2013).

The study's findings highlight that the combination of nature and spirituality in Montserrat provides visitors with significant emotional benefits, including a sense of hope, peace, and clarity. These benefits help individuals cope with personal challenges and emotional distress, aligning with the research question's focus on the therapeutic and restorative effects of nature-based tourism experiences. Many interviewees described Montserrat as a place where they could reconnect with themselves, find spiritual comfort, and experience emotional renewal. This is in line with the literature on the restorative potential of natural environments, which suggests that such settings can foster psychological well-being and emotional resilience (Wang et al., 2020; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Additionally, the emotional renewal reported by visitors at Montserrat echoes the findings of studies on spiritual tourism, which emphasize the role of sacred and natural spaces in promoting introspection and emotional healing (Pocock, 2015; Willson et al., 2013).

The findings from this study align closely with existing literature on nature-based and spiritual tourism. Research by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) supports the idea that natural environments can be sources of spiritual inspiration and emotional healing, which is echoed in the experiences of visitors to Montserrat. The dual emphasis on nature and spirituality at Mont-

serrat reflects the findings of Willson et al. (2013), who noted that spiritual tourism often involves a deeply personal and phenomenological experience where visitors' spiritual and emotional needs are met through their engagement with the environment.

Moreover, the therapeutic benefits described by participants align with Buckley et al. (2022) and Wang et al. (2020), who discuss the restorative effects of natural environments, particularly for those experiencing emotional distress. The emphasis on Montserrat as a place for emotional renewal and spiritual comfort is also consistent with Pocock (2015), who highlights the emotional entanglements and healing potential of sacred tourism sites. By drawing parallels with these studies, the research not only validates the unique experiences reported by visitors to Montserrat but also contributes to a broader understanding of how nature-based tourism can serve as a powerful tool for emotional and spiritual well-being.

6.1 Implications for Theory

Drawing on the results of this research, a new conceptual framework is visualized taking into consideration main elements the research unveiled such as the diverse emotional responses of the tourists. The new conceptual model is crystallized as follows:

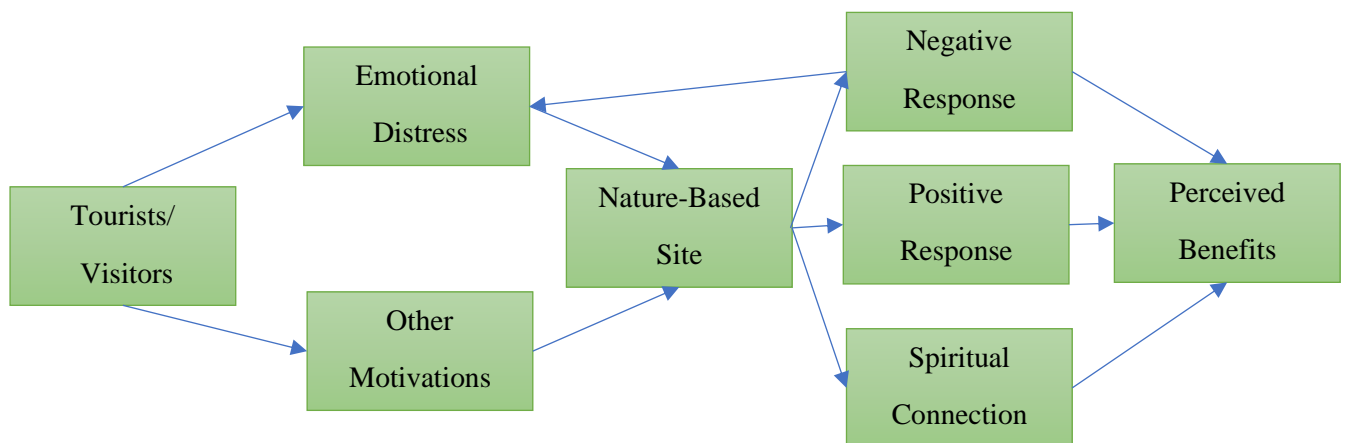


Figure 6: Revised conceptual model illustrating the relationships between the findings.

According to the revised conceptual model, Nature-based Tourism contributes to the perception of benefits by tourists, but the journey is not without emotional complexities. Many

visitors reported experiencing intense negative emotions, such as feelings of awe, fear, discomfort, and even reliving past traumas and confronting their "inner demons" upon encountering the powerful natural and spiritual elements in Montserrat. This aligns with research by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), who found that wilderness experiences often evoke both positive and negative emotions, creating a pathway for emotional growth and healing. Similarly, Buckley (2016) highlights that these strong emotional responses can lead to personal transformation.

While these initial negative responses may bring tourists back to their emotional distress, this confrontation is a critical step in the healing process. Willson et al. (2013) note that "the discomfort or emotional upheaval experienced in sacred or natural environments often serves as a necessary catalyst for emotional release and transformation." In Montserrat, the reconnection with past traumas was not perceived as a setback but rather as an opportunity for visitors to reconnect with themselves. This painful confrontation created a pathway toward emotional benefits, as visitors released pent-up negative emotions, finding peace and clarity afterward. This concept is supported by the theory of emotional catharsis, where individuals experience emotional relief by confronting difficult emotions and connecting with their own emotions.

According to Wang et al. (2020), nature-based tourism offers opportunities for emotional catharsis, where the process of acknowledging and confronting one's emotional pain—though discomforting—can lead to long-term psychological and emotional benefits. As visitors processed these emotions in Montserrat, many reported a sense of emotional release and renewal, reinforcing the therapeutic potential of nature-based tourism in emotional well-being.

The emotional journey experienced by the tourists aligns with Homer's conceptualization of travel, referenced at the beginning of this research, which views travel as a series of challenges followed by relief. The visitors' experiences in Montserrat illustrate how confronting

their negative emotions—though challenging—ultimately led to personal growth, introspection, and emotional healing. As Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) point out, engaging with both positive and negative emotions in natural settings can foster emotional resilience, allowing individuals to emerge from these experiences with a renewed sense of peace and perhaps “Immunity”. This also echoes Schwarz's (2013) observation that the combination of nature and spirituality in tourism offers a "holistic experience that addresses both the emotional and spiritual needs" of visitors, leading to overall well-being.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on nature-based and spiritual tourism by supporting more proof in a different and particular context that also provide emotional benefits. The research supports the idea that nature-based tourism experiences are not only about physical engagement with the environment but also about fostering emotional and psychological well-being that is nowadays a need as many does not even realize the distress they are going through. This aligns with the biophilia hypothesis, which suggests that humans have an innate affinity for nature and that exposure to natural environments can enhance emotional well-being (Wilson, 1984). By demonstrating how Montserrat's unique combination of natural beauty and spiritual significance meets the emotional and spiritual needs of its visitors, this study reinforces the need to integrate psychological theories of well-being into the framework of tourism studies (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

6.2 Implications for Practice

Drawing on what has been just mentioned, the study highlights the importance of understanding the emotional and spiritual motivations of tourists for practitioners. Destination managers and marketers should consider promoting Montserrat and similar sites not just for their natural beauty but also for their potential to offer spiritual solace and emotional healing. This could involve creating specific marketing strategies that emphasize these aspects or developing

programs and services that cater to visitors seeking emotional and spiritual renewal, such as guided meditation sessions, spiritual retreats, or nature therapy activities.

Moreover, the findings suggest that preserving the natural and spiritual integrity of such destinations is crucial. Tourism practitioners should ensure that development and commercialization do not detract from the qualities that make these sites emotionally and spiritually significant. This aligns with sustainable tourism practices that aim to balance the needs of visitors and the protection of natural and cultural resources (Buckley, 2009).

6.3 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the emotional and spiritual benefits of visiting Montserrat, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, one of the limitations of this study is the potential influence of temporal factors, particularly considering the post-COVID-19 context I started my paper with, on participants' experiences and responses. The data was collected at a specific point in time, shortly after global travel restrictions were eased, which may have significantly impacted tourists' motivations, behaviors, and emotional responses (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Research has shown that the pandemic has reshaped travel patterns and expectations, with tourists placing greater emphasis on safety, health protocols, and nature-based experiences (Zenker & Kock, 2020). These unique post-pandemic circumstances may not fully reflect long-term trends in spiritual or nature-based tourism. Additionally, seasonal factors, external events, and personal circumstances during the trip could further influence visitor experiences (Chen, 2003; Li et al., 2008).

Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data, which can be subject to various biases, such as social desirability bias or recall bias. Participants may have reported experiences that they believe are more socially acceptable or may have misremembered details of their visit. Future research could mitigate these issues by incorporating additional data collection methods,

such as observational studies or the use of psychophysiological measures to assess emotional responses more objectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Lastly, the study focuses on a single destination, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other nature-based or spiritual tourism sites. Montserrat's unique combination of natural and spiritual elements may not be found in other locations, making it difficult to generalize the results to different contexts.

6.4 Recommendations

To build on the findings of this study, future research could explore several avenues:

1. **Diverse Destinations:** Investigate similar nature-based and spiritual tourism sites in different cultural and geographic contexts to determine whether the emotional and spiritual benefits identified in Montserrat are applicable to other destinations. Comparative studies could help to understand the role of cultural differences in shaping visitors' experiences and perceptions (Weaver & Lawton, 2017).
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of nature-based and spiritual tourism experiences on emotional well-being. This could provide a deeper understanding of how these experiences influence psychological states over time and whether the benefits are sustained after visitors return to their everyday environments (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the emotional benefits of nature-based tourism experiences at Montserrat, particularly for tourists experiencing emotional distress. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, several key findings emerged:

1. **Emotional Distress Pre-Travel:** Many participants chose Montserrat as a destination to escape the stress and challenges of everyday life. They were drawn to its peaceful environment, which provided a sanctuary for processing emotions and finding solace.

The natural beauty and spiritual significance of Montserrat created a setting conducive to emotional healing, aligning with research that suggests natural environments can significantly reduce stress and improve emotional well-being (Ulrich et al., 1991; Hartig et al., 2003). This supports the notion that tourism can serve as a therapeutic escape for those seeking relief from emotional distress (Pearce, 2009).

2. **Perception of Nature-Based Tourism:** The study found that Montserrat's natural beauty and spiritual elements were perceived as interconnected, offering a unique experience that facilitated emotional healing and introspection. Visitors frequently mentioned how the natural landscape and spiritual atmosphere helped them connect with their inner selves and find peace even though some experienced negative emotional responses on-site. This finding resonates with previous studies on therapeutic landscapes, which emphasize the role of the natural environment in fostering psychological and spiritual well-being (Gesler, 1992; Williams, 2007). The concept of "nature as healer" is further supported by research highlighting the restorative effects of natural settings on mental health (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008).
3. **Emotional Benefits:** The combination of nature and spirituality in Montserrat provided visitors with a sense of hope, peace, and clarity, which helped them cope with personal challenges and emotional distress. Many participants described their experiences in Montserrat as transformative, allowing them to reconnect with themselves, find spiritual comfort, and experience emotional renewal. This finding aligns with literature suggesting that spiritual and nature-based tourism can lead to profound personal and emotional growth (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Wilson et al., 2013). The emotional benefits reported by visitors are consistent with the concept of "transformative tourism," where travel experiences foster significant changes in self-perception and emotional well-being (Reisinger, 2013).

Methodological Reflections:

The study's use of qualitative interviews and thematic analysis provided valuable insights into the emotional and spiritual experiences of tourists at Montserrat, but it also posed significant challenges for the researcher. One major issue was the difficulty in managing and interpreting highly subjective and emotionally charged narratives. While in-depth interviews offered rich data, it became challenging to maintain a neutral stance as a researcher when participants shared deeply personal and sometimes distressing experiences. The potential for researcher bias, where personal reactions or interpretations could subtly influence the analysis, was a constant concern (Creswell, 2013).

Moreover, conducting interviews in a natural, outdoor setting like Montserrat had its logistical difficulties. External factors such as environmental noise, interruptions, and the unpredictability of participants' emotional states sometimes disrupted the flow of interviews, making it hard to maintain focus or capture consistent data. There were also moments when participants were reluctant to fully express their emotions or felt overwhelmed by the setting, which impacted the depth of their responses.

The thematic analysis itself, while useful, presented another challenge in balancing the subjective experiences of participants with the need for objective, clear thematic categories. The complexity of interpreting emotional data without oversimplifying or misrepresenting it required ongoing adjustments to the coding process, making it time-consuming and difficult to maintain consistency across the data set. Finally, as a single researcher, managing the volume of qualitative data and ensuring rigorous analysis without a team to cross-check interpretations raised concerns about the reliability of the findings.

In future research, addressing these challenges through a larger research team, more structured interview settings, or incorporating additional data sources such as diaries or psychophysiological measures could help alleviate some of these issues and provide a more balanced and reliable understanding of tourists' emotional experiences.

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Appendices

- **Appendix A: Interview Consent Form**



English

Hello, do you have a minute?

My name is Gina, and I am conducting interviews with tourists who are visiting Montserrat for my Master Thesis Research in the UdG. The purpose of these interviews is to gain insights into the emotional experiences and perceptions of visitors like yourself.

I want you to know that your responses will be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality. I want to assure you that this interview aims to create a safe space for you to openly share your thoughts and feelings. You are under no obligation to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you may skip or modify any question as you see fit. Your insights may also contribute to future research and initiatives aimed at supporting visitors like you!

Let's proceed with the interview, and please feel free to express yourself openly and honestly. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, and your perspective is highly valued.



Español

Hola, ¿tienes un minuto?

Mi nombre es Gina, y estoy haciendo entrevistas con turistas que están visitando Montserrat para mi investigación de tesis de Master en la UdG. El propósito de estas entrevistas es obtener información sobre las experiencias emocionales y percepciones de visitantes como usted.

Quiero que sepas que tus respuestas serán tratadas con el máximo respeto y confidencialidad. Quiero asegurarte de que esta entrevista tiene como objetivo crear un espacio seguro para que compartas abiertamente tus pensamientos y sentimientos. No estás obligado/a a responder ninguna pregunta que te haga sentir incómodo/a, y puedes omitir o modificar cualquier pregunta según lo que veas. ¡Tus aportes también pueden contribuir a futuras investigaciones e iniciativas destinadas a apoyar a visitantes como tú!

Empezamos con la entrevista, y siéntete libre de expresarte de manera abierta. Recuerda, no hay respuestas correctas ni incorrectas, y tu perspectiva es muy valorada.

The interview should answer the research questions :

1- Motivation (experiences of emotional distress)

2- Perception 1 (how they see montserrat as a nature-based spiritual site)

3- Perception 2 (the benefits they see)

- **Appendix B: Interview Guide- English**

Introduction (5-7 minutes)

1. Would you please briefly introduce yourself? (gender, nationality, age, profession, religion, etc.)

Follow-up questions:

- Could you share more about your background and how your personal experiences or profession may influence your travels?
 - How do your personal beliefs or values align with your approach to travel or nature-based experiences?
2. Did you visit Montserrat alone, or did you have someone with you during your trip?

WHY?

Follow-up questions:

- How did the presence (or absence) of a companion impact your experience during the trip?
- If you traveled alone, did you find it more introspective or spiritual? If with someone, did that affect your reflection or emotions?

Before Montserrat (8-10 minutes)

3. What inspired you to choose Montserrat? Can you share what drew you specifically to Montserrat?

Follow-up questions:

- Had you visited other spiritual or nature-based destinations before Montserrat? If so, how does Montserrat compare to those experiences?
- Were there specific personal goals or emotional states that prompted you to choose Montserrat?
- Did you have any expectations for emotional or spiritual outcomes before arriving?

During Montserrat (10-12 minutes)

4. When you first arrived at Montserrat, what thoughts or feelings came to your mind?

WHY? What about now? What are you thinking when looking at the scenery here, WHY?

Follow-up questions:

Can you describe how the natural environment of Montserrat influenced your emotions upon arrival?

Did any of the specific sites, such as the Abbey or the mountains, evoke particular emotions or memories?

How do you think the physical environment, like the landscape or architecture, contributes to the spiritual atmosphere?

5. While exploring Montserrat, were there any moments or situations that stirred up strong emotions or brought to the surface any personal challenges you may have been facing? If you're comfortable sharing, could you describe how these experiences affected you emotionally?

Follow-up questions:

- Were there specific locations at Montserrat that triggered these emotions?
- How did your immediate environment (quiet, natural surroundings, spiritual sites) affect your ability to reflect on personal challenges?
- Did you feel that the experience was overwhelming or therapeutic? Why?

After Montserrat (15-18 minutes)

6. What kind of benefits can you perceive, values Montserrat offers? What do you feel you gained from visiting Montserrat?

Follow-up questions:

Did you feel any sense of healing or renewal after your visit?

Can you describe whether your experience changed your emotional state or provided insights into personal challenges?

Were there any spiritual or personal revelations that surprised you during or after your visit?

7. Do you think that visiting Montserrat helped you feel better about these challenges?
(YES/NO) WHY?

Follow-up questions:

- If yes, in what ways did your visit offer comfort, clarity, or emotional relief?
- If no, why do you think Montserrat did not fully address the challenges you were facing?

8. In what ways did exploring Montserrat help you find comfort? (HOW)

Follow-up questions:

- Was the comfort you found tied more to the spiritual elements, the natural surroundings, or your personal reflection?
- How would you describe the role of Montserrat in your emotional journey – was it a temporary escape, or did it provide lasting benefits?

9. Can you recall any particular moments or experiences at Montserrat that had a positive impact on your emotional well-being or provided a sense of solace?

Follow-up questions:

- Was there a specific activity or ritual, such as visiting a particular site or engaging in prayer/meditation, that was especially impactful?
- How did these moments resonate with you after you left Montserrat – do you still reflect on them?

10. Did your visit to Montserrat and engagement with its spiritual sites change your perception or understanding of your own emotional distress? If so, how did it influence

your perspective?

Follow-up questions:

- Did you feel more equipped to deal with personal struggles after visiting Montserrat?
- Has the experience altered how you manage emotional challenges in your everyday life?

11. Based on your experience, would you recommend Montserrat as a destination for individuals dealing with challenges or seeking solace? If so, what reasons would you give? If not, what factors would you consider?

Follow-up questions:

- Are there specific types of challenges (e.g., emotional, spiritual) that Montserrat is particularly helpful for?
- Would you recommend Montserrat more for individual reflection, or do you believe it has benefits for couples or groups dealing with similar issues?

12. Do you have anything else that you want to share about your experience?

Follow-up questions:

- Is there anything you wish you had known before visiting Montserrat?
- How has your experience in Montserrat influenced your future travel plans or personal goals?

- **Appendix C: Interview Guide- Spanish**

Introducción (5-7 minutos)

1. ¿Podrías presentarte brevemente? (género, nacionalidad, edad, profesión, religión, etc.)

Preguntas de seguimiento:

- ¿Podrías compartir más sobre tu trayectoria personal y cómo tus experiencias o profesión pueden influir en tus viajes?
 - ¿Cómo se alinean tus creencias o valores personales con tu forma de abordar los viajes o las experiencias en la naturaleza?
2. ¿Visitaste Montserrat solo o con alguien durante tu viaje? ¿Por qué?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

- ¿De qué manera la presencia (o ausencia) de un acompañante impactó tu experiencia durante el viaje?
 - Si viajaste solo, ¿lo encontraste más introspectivo o espiritual? Si fuiste con alguien, ¿eso afectó tu reflexión o emociones?
3. **Antes de Montserrat (8-10 minutos)**

3. ¿Qué te inspiró a elegir Montserrat? ¿Puedes compartir qué te atrajo específicamente de Montserrat?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

4. ¿Habías visitado otros destinos espirituales o basados en la naturaleza antes de Montserrat? Si es así, ¿cómo se compara Montserrat con esas experiencias?
5. ¿Hubo metas personales o estados emocionales específicos que te impulsaron a elegir Montserrat?
6. ¿Tenías expectativas de resultados emocionales o espirituales antes de llegar?

7. **Durante Montserrat (10-12 minutos)**

4. Cuando llegaste por primera vez a Montserrat, ¿qué pensamientos o sentimientos te

vinieron a la mente? ¿Por qué? ¿Y ahora? ¿Qué piensas al mirar el paisaje aquí, y por qué?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

8. ¿Podrías describir cómo el entorno natural de Montserrat influyó en tus emociones al llegar?
9. ¿Hubo sitios específicos, como la Abadía o las montañas, que evocaron emociones o recuerdos particulares?
10. ¿Cómo crees que el entorno físico, como el paisaje o la arquitectura, contribuye a la atmósfera espiritual?
11. Mientras explorabas Montserrat, ¿hubo momentos o situaciones que despertaron emociones fuertes o sacaron a la superficie desafíos personales que pudieras estar enfrentando?
Si te sientes cómodo compartiéndolo, ¿podrías describir cómo estas experiencias te afectaron emocionalmente?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

- ¿Hubo lugares específicos en Montserrat que desencadenaron estas emociones?
- ¿Cómo afectó tu entorno inmediato (entorno tranquilo, natural, sitios espirituales) tu capacidad de reflexionar sobre los desafíos personales?
- ¿Sentiste que la experiencia fue abrumadora o terapéutica? ¿Por qué?

12. Después de Montserrat (15-18 minutos)

6. ¿Qué tipo de beneficios percibes que ofrece Montserrat? ¿Qué sientes que obtuviste al visitar Montserrat?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

13. ¿Sentiste alguna sensación de sanación o renovación después de tu visita?
14. ¿Puedes describir si tu experiencia cambió tu estado emocional o te proporcionó ideas sobre desafíos personales?
15. ¿Hubo revelaciones espirituales o personales que te sorprendieron durante o después de tu visita?

16. ¿Crees que visitar Montserrat te ayudó a sentirte mejor con respecto a estos desafíos?

(SÍ/NO) ¿Por qué?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

- Si es así, ¿de qué manera tu visita ofreció consuelo, claridad o alivio emocional?
- Si no, ¿por qué crees que Montserrat no abordó completamente los desafíos que enfrentabas?

17. ¿De qué maneras explorar Montserrat te ayudó a encontrar consuelo? (¿CÓMO?)

Preguntas de seguimiento:

- ¿El consuelo que encontraste estaba más vinculado a los elementos espirituales, los alrededores naturales o tu reflexión personal?
- ¿Cómo describirías el papel de Montserrat en tu viaje emocional: fue una escapada temporal o proporcionó beneficios duraderos?

18. ¿Puedes recordar algún momento o experiencia particular en Montserrat que haya tenido un impacto positivo en tu bienestar emocional o que te haya brindado una sensación de consuelo?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

- ¿Hubo una actividad o ritual específico, como visitar un lugar en particular o participar en la oración/meditación, que haya sido especialmente impactante?
- ¿Cómo resonaron estos momentos contigo después de que dejaste Montserrat: sigues reflexionando sobre ellos?

19. ¿Tu visita a Montserrat y el contacto con sus sitios espirituales cambió tu percepción o comprensión de tu propio malestar emocional? Si es así, ¿cómo influyó en tu perspectiva?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

20. ¿Te sentiste más preparado para enfrentar los problemas personales después de visitar Montserrat?

21. ¿Ha cambiado la forma en que gestionas los desafíos emocionales en tu vida diaria?

22. Basado en tu experiencia, ¿recomendarías Montserrat como un destino para personas que enfrentan desafíos o buscan consuelo? Si es así, ¿qué razones darías? Si no, ¿qué factores tendrías en cuenta?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

23. ¿Hay tipos específicos de desafíos (por ejemplo, emocionales, espirituales) para los cuales Montserrat sea particularmente útil?

24. ¿Recomendarías Montserrat más para la reflexión individual, o crees que también tiene beneficios para parejas o grupos con desafíos similares?

25. ¿Hay algo más que te gustaría compartir sobre tu experiencia?

Preguntas de seguimiento:

26. ¿Hay algo que hubieras querido saber antes de visitar Montserrat?

27. ¿Cómo ha influido tu experiencia en Montserrat en tus futuros planes de viaje o metas personales?