

To what extent does scenic beauty or landscape aesthetics influence the willingness to pay (WTP) for accommodation and entry fees in nature-based tourism destinations?

Scenic beauty and landscape aesthetics significantly increase WTP for entry fees and accommodation taxes in nature-based tourism destinations.

Scenic beauty is a primary determinant of destination choice, and tourists consistently express higher willingness to pay when landscapes are perceived as natural and aesthetically valuable (Getzner, 2020). In the Austrian Alps, tourists were willing to pay an additional EUR 1.50–1.60 per person per night via a tourism tax to increase naturalness and scenic beauty, effectively doubling the existing local tax (Getzner, 2020). On Italian beaches, visitors paid approximately EUR 16 per season for conservation of high-scenic-quality (Class I and II) beaches, with WTP positively correlated to scenery class and negatively to urbanization degree (Rodella et al., 2020). In Finnish private forests, landscape quality was the attribute for which visitors showed the strongest WTP among four forest attributes tested (Ovaskainen & Juutinen, 2018).

Direct Evidence for Aesthetic Attributes

In Chinese nature-based parks, tourists demonstrated a stronger WTP for aesthetic attributes than for natural attributes in recreational ecosystem services (Ge et al., 2023). Payment is strongly related to aesthetic attributes, with tourists showing positive WTP for improved aesthetic features (Ge et al., 2023). In rural tourism destinations of the Yangtze River Delta, cultural service values—manifested in tourists' WTP—are closely associated with the configuration types of rural small-scale landscapes (Jin et al., 2025). Tourists who value aesthetics as a motivational factor show higher WTP for nature-based experiences, particularly for uncrowded, minimally adapted natural surroundings (Vespestad & Gressnes, 2020).

Destination Type	Payment Vehicle	Scenic/Aesthetic Effect	Amount
Austrian Alps	Tourism tax per night	WTP to increase naturalness and scenic beauty	EUR 1.50–1.60/night (Getzner, 2020)
Italian beaches	Conservation fee per season	Higher WTP for Class I–II (high naturalness) vs. Class IV–V	~EUR 16/season (Rodella et al., 2020)
Finnish forests	Payment per overnight stay	Landscape quality ranked highest among four forest attributes	Variable by segment (Ovaskainen & Juutinen, 2018)
Chinese parks	Choice experiment	Aesthetic attributes valued over natural attributes	Positive WTP (Ge et al., 2023)

Destination Type	Payment Vehicle	Scenic/Aesthetic Effect	Amount
Rural China	Entrance/usage fees	WTP tied to rural landscape element improvements	Ranked by element type (Cong et al., 2019)

FIGURE 1 Comparison of scenic and aesthetic influences on WTP across nature-based tourism destinations

Moderating Factors and Mediators

The relationship between scenic quality and WTP is not always direct. Perceived destination restorative qualities—a concept linked to scenic and environmental quality—did not significantly affect WTP for environmental protection on their own; instead, eudaimonic well-being and destination image fully mediated the relationship (Wang et al., 2025). This suggests that scenic beauty raises WTP partly through psychological mechanisms such as enhanced well-being and positive destination image rather than through aesthetics alone. In Ethiopia, 76% of visitors were willing to pay an entrance fee to enjoy the natural forest, landscape, and recreational facilities, with a mean WTP of Birr 45.64 per person (Endalamaw et al., 2026).

Socioeconomic and attitudinal variables moderate the scenic-aesthetic effect. WTP for scenic beaches was higher among females, nonresident users, and those with academic degrees who appreciated the coastal landscape (Rodella et al., 2020). Environmental values and sensitivity are key factors influencing WTP for eco-compensation in geoparks (Li et al., 2023). Pro-environmental attitudes and income positively correlate with WTP for national park entrance fees in the Himalayas, where visitors were willing to pay nearly double the existing fee (Thapa et al., 2024). Motivating factors such as commitment to environmental issues can be more important than hygiene factors like value for money in determining WTP in natural parks (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Context and Limitations

- **Heterogeneity:** Visitors segment into distinct groups with different attitudes, choice behavior, and WTP for landscape attributes, complicating uniform pricing (Ovaskainen & Juutinen, 2018).
- **Indirect valuation:** Hedonic house-price studies confirm that locations of extraordinary scenic beauty command price premiums, but isolating the amenity value of scenic beauty from remoteness and infrastructure effects remains challenging (Fuerst et al., 2026).
- **Cultural variation:** Landscape preferences and WTP parameters depend on national and cultural background, age, gender, education, and training (Rodella et al., 2020).
- **Economic vs. aesthetic drivers:** At some nature tourism sites, economic factors (income, travel cost, length of stay) and visit-related characteristics dominate WTP decisions over aesthetic considerations (Dzatini et al., 2026).

Scenic beauty and landscape aesthetics exert a substantial, consistently positive influence on WTP across diverse nature-based tourism contexts, but the magnitude varies with the degree of naturalness, the payment vehicle, and visitor characteristics, and the effect is frequently mediated by psychological and attitudinal factors rather than operating through aesthetics alone.

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