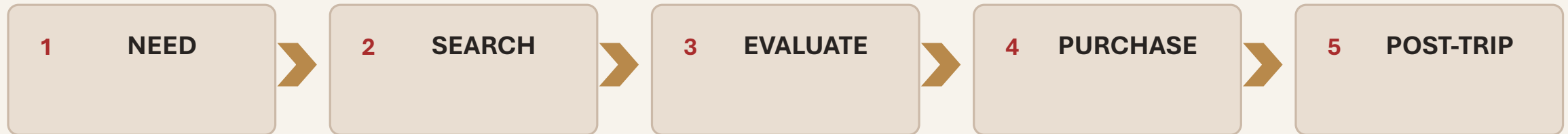


CONSUMER DECISION PROCESS

Explaining tourist behavior



Why tourist behavior is a decision process

Travel is a bundle of choices made before, during, and after the trip.

Before travel

- Need or desire
- Information search
- Comparison of destinations
- Bookings and payments

During travel

- Transport
- Accommodation
- Activities
- Service encounters
- Unexpected events

After travel

- Satisfaction
- Complaints or praise
- Reviews and word of mouth
- Repeat or new choices

Learning outcomes

- Explain the consumer decision process and its relevance to tourist behavior.
- Describe the stages from need recognition to post-trip evaluation.
- Distinguish internal, external, and situational influences on tourism choices.
- Analyze perceived risk, information sources, digital platforms, companions, price, and prior experience.
- Apply the framework to a realistic tourist situation.

Preparatory question

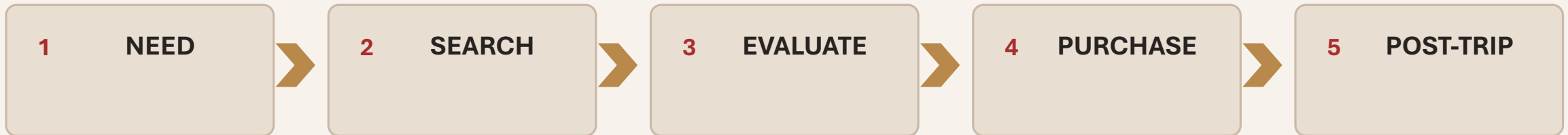
Think about the last leisure trip you took or seriously considered.

What made you want to travel?

- Where did you look for information?
- Which alternatives did you compare?
- What finally determined your choice?
- What did you tell other people afterward?

The five-stage model

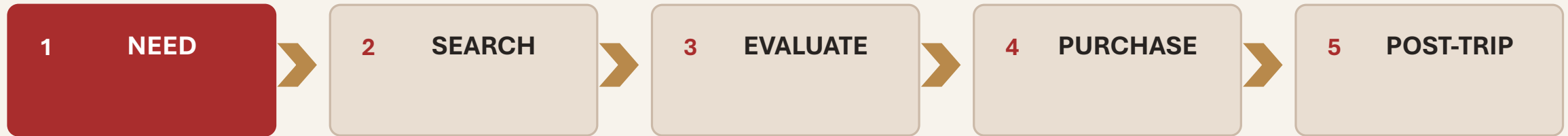
A practical framework, not a rigid sequence.



Tourist decisions may loop backward when prices, information, companions, safety concerns, or availability change.

Stage 1: Need recognition

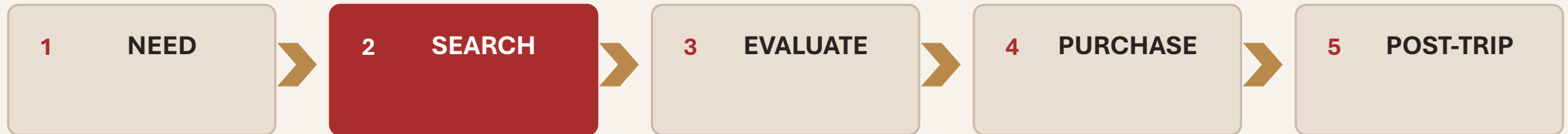
Why should I travel?



- Internal triggers: fatigue, curiosity, family time, novelty.
- External triggers: travel photos, promotions, festivals, school breaks, invitations.
- Motivators create desire; determinants affect whether the trip is possible.

Stage 2: Information search

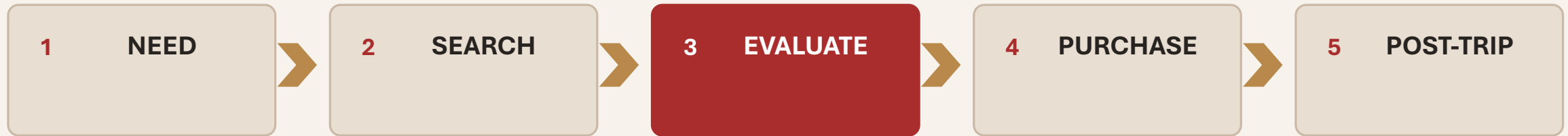
What choices are available?



- Internal search: memory, previous trips, familiar brands.
- External search: destination sites, OTAs, maps, social media, videos, reviews, agents, family and friends.
- More perceived risk usually means more search.

Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives

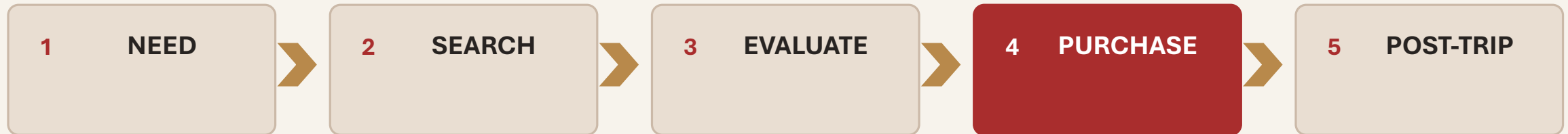
Which option fits me best?



- Criteria vary by traveler: price, time, safety, food, accessibility, nightlife, scenery, culture, sustainability.
- Tourists evaluate a bundle, not only a destination name.
- Perceived value weighs expected benefits against monetary and nonmonetary costs.

Stage 4: Purchase and booking

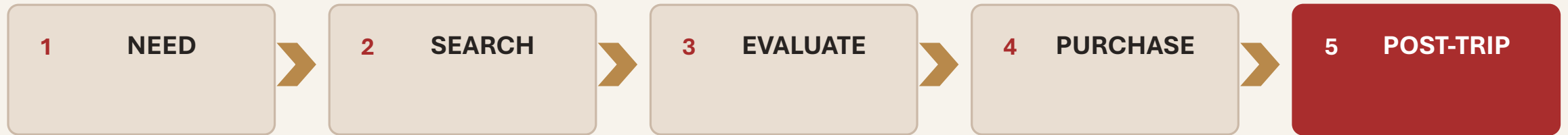
What will I actually choose?



- Preference becomes commitment through bookings and payment.
- A trip may require several transactions or one package.
- Availability, fare changes, cancellation terms, payment problems, news, companions, or promotions can change the final choice.

Stage 5: Post-trip evaluation

Was the choice worthwhile?



- Tourists compare actual experience with expectations.
- Outcomes include satisfaction, complaints, reviews, word of mouth, loyalty, and revisit intention.
- A satisfied tourist may still choose somewhere new next time.

Consumption: the tourist experience

Tourism requires attention to what happens between booking and evaluation.

People

- Employees
- Residents
- Travel companions
- Other tourists

Touchpoints

- Airport queues
- Hotel check-in
- Room cleanliness
- Restaurants and guides

Context

- Weather
- Technology
- Crowding
- Transport reliability
- Unexpected events

Factors that shape tourist decisions

Personal & psychological

Motivation, perception, attitudes, lifestyle, prior experience, involvement, uncertainty tolerance

Social

Family, companions, friends, reference groups, online communities, word of mouth

Cultural

Values, norms, food, language, religious practices, leisure and service expectations

Economic

Income, exchange rates, total price, promotions, opportunity cost, discretionary spending

Situational

Time, season, weather, political/health conditions, crowding, disruption, availability

Marketing & information

Destination image, branding, advertising, reviews, pricing, channels, information credibility

Perceived risk in tourism

Payment often occurs before the experience, away from the tourist's normal environment.

Financial

Will I lose money or get poor value?

Performance

Will the hotel, tour, or destination deliver?

Physical

Will I be safe and healthy?

Time

Will delays waste limited vacation time?

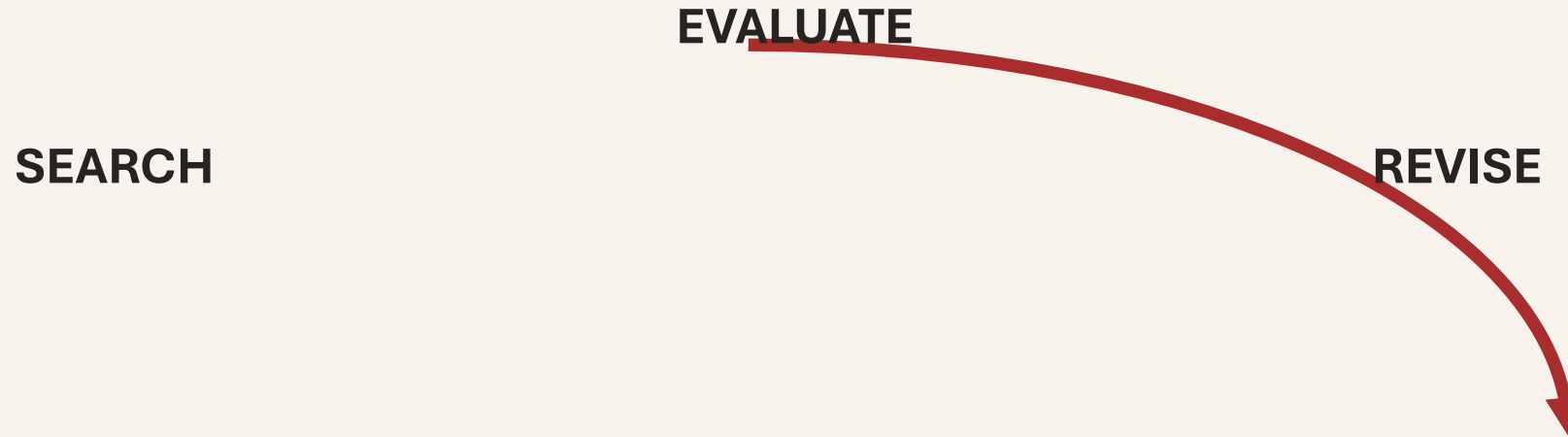
Social / psychological

Will this choice fit me and be accepted by important others?

Risk reduction: recent reviews • insurance • refundable rates • trusted intermediaries • direct transport • familiar places

The process is not always linear

Real decisions contain feedback loops.



Budget • companions • fare changes • new information • urgency • prior experience

Applied example: a three-day leisure trip

Need

Short break after demanding weeks at work

Search

Three destinations; transport, hotel, weather, attractions, reviews, friends

Evaluate

A: cheapest/long transfer • B: higher cost/direct flight • C: attractive activities/poor weather

Purchase

Destination B: convenience and shorter travel time justify higher price

Consume

Hotel meets expectations; reliable transport; one tour cancelled

Post-trip

Positive review and recommendation; different tour operator suggested

Class discussion: explain the choice

Two tourists consider the same destination. Why might they decide differently?

- Identify one motivator for each tourist.
- Choose three evaluation criteria that may differ.
- Identify one perceived risk for each.
- Explain one event that could send either tourist back to information search.
- Predict one possible post-trip behavior.

Key takeaways

- Tourist behavior begins before booking and continues after the trip.
- The five stages organize the process, while consumption connects purchase to later evaluation.
- Destination choice is a multi-attribute judgment involving time, price, convenience, services, and risk.
- Tourist decisions are shaped by personal, social, cultural, economic, situational, and information factors.
- Post-trip experiences feed future information search, but satisfaction does not automatically mean repeat visitation.
- The model is flexible: tourists can move backward, shorten stages, or make spontaneous choices.

References

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