

TOURIST SATISFACTION IN BEIHAI SHELL CARVING EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM*

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Abstract

Under the experience economy paradigm, experiential tourism has become a key strategy for enhancing tourist satisfaction, particularly in traditional craft-based destinations. This study aims to: (1) examine the four experiential dimensions education, entertainment, esthetics, and escape—in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism; (2) measure tourists' overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions; and (3) propose strategies to enhance experiential tourism development in traditional handicraft contexts.

A quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected through structured questionnaires from tourists who participated in Beihai Shell Carving activities, and descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS.

The findings reveal that tourists reported high evaluations across all four experiential dimensions, with educational and esthetic experiences receiving the highest ratings. Overall tourist satisfaction was high and positively associated with strong revisit and recommendation intentions. The results indicate that experiential value rather than purely functional service attributes plays a decisive role in shaping satisfaction in craft-based tourism.

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The study provides empirical evidence supporting the applicability of the experience economy framework in traditional cultural tourism settings and offers practical implications for optimizing experiential design to promote sustainable development in heritage-based tourism.

Keywords: Experiential tourism, Tourist satisfaction, Experience economy, Shell carving tourism, Cultural heritage tourism

Introduction

In the context of the experience economy, tourists are no longer satisfied with passive sightseeing or standardized service consumption. Instead, they increasingly seek tourism experiences that emphasize participation, emotional engagement, learning, and immersion. Pine and Gilmore (1998) argued that experiences constitute a distinct economic offering beyond goods and services, and that value creation depends on the extent to which consumers are actively involved and emotionally connected. This shift has significantly influenced the development of contemporary tourism, particularly in cultural and creative destinations that aim to enhance tourist satisfaction and competitiveness through experiential design.

Experiential tourism highlights tourists' direct participation in activities and their cognitive, emotional, and sensory involvement during the tourism process. Prior studies have demonstrated that tourism experiences can be understood through four experiential dimensions—education, entertainment, esthetics, and escape—which together shape tourists' perceptions and evaluations of their overall experience (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). These experiential dimensions have been widely applied in tourism research to explain how well-designed experiences contribute to positive emotions, memorable impressions, and higher levels of tourist satisfaction.

Tourist satisfaction is a central concept in tourism research because it directly affects revisit intention, recommendation behavior, and destination loyalty (Chen & Tsai, 2007). In experiential tourism contexts, satisfaction is determined less by functional service attributes and more by the quality of experiential engagement, including learning opportunities, enjoyment, aesthetic appreciation, and psychological immersion. Consequently, understanding how experiential dimensions influence tourist satisfaction is essential for destinations seeking sustainable development through experience-based tourism products.

Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism represents a distinctive form of traditional craft-based tourism rooted in local marine culture and artistic heritage. Although experiential tourism has been widely studied, empirical research focusing on tourist satisfaction in niche cultural craft experiences remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of systematic examination of how different experiential dimensions contribute to tourist satisfaction in traditional handicraft tourism settings. Therefore, this study investigates tourist satisfaction in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism from the perspective of the experience economy, aiming to provide empirical insights that can support experiential design optimization and sustainable cultural tourism development.

Objectives

This study objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the experiential tourism dimensions of Beihai shell carving tourism activities.
2. To measure the tourist satisfaction level with Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism.
3. To propose strategic recommendations for enhancing tourist satisfaction through the development of appropriate experiential tourism offerings.

Literature Review

1. Experiential Tourism and Tourist Experience

Experiential tourism emphasizes tourists' active participation, emotional involvement, and the co-creation of meaning during travel activities. Unlike traditional sightseeing tourism, experiential tourism allows tourists to engage directly with local culture, heritage, and creative practices, thereby generating memorable and meaningful experiences. Tung and Ritchie (2011) argued that memorable tourism experiences are characterized by emotional intensity, personal relevance, and active engagement, which distinguish experiential tourism from routine leisure consumption. These experiences tend to leave lasting impressions that shape tourists' overall evaluations of destinations.

From a conceptual perspective, experiential tourism integrates learning, enjoyment, immersion, and aesthetic appreciation into tourism activities. Smith and Johnson (2018) proposed that experiential tourism provides value through multisensory stimulation and interaction between tourists, hosts, and environments. In cultural and craft-based tourism, experiential activities such as hands-on workshops and heritage interpretation further strengthen tourists' understanding and appreciation of local traditions. These studies suggest that experiential tourism is particularly suitable for traditional craft destinations, where tourists can learn skills, appreciate artistry, and immerse themselves in cultural contexts.

2. Tourist Satisfaction in Tourism Studies

Tourist satisfaction has long been regarded as a key indicator of tourism performance and destination competitiveness. Satisfaction reflects tourists' overall evaluation of their travel experiences, based on the comparison between expectations and actual perceptions. Oliver (1980, 2014) introduced Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory, which explains satisfaction as a psychological outcome of whether perceived performance meets, exceeds, or falls short of prior

expectations. This theory has been widely applied in tourism research to explain how tourists form satisfaction judgments after participating in tourism activities.

Empirical tourism studies have further demonstrated that satisfaction is a multidimensional construct influenced by both cognitive and affective factors. Kozak and Rimmington (2000) found that satisfaction is shaped not only by service quality but also by emotional enjoyment and experiential fulfillment. Similarly, Yoon and Uysal (2005) highlighted that tourist satisfaction plays a mediating role between travel motivation and destination loyalty, reinforcing its importance in predicting revisit intention and recommendation behavior. These studies collectively underscore the central role of satisfaction in tourism research and management.

3. Experiential Dimensions and Satisfaction in Cultural Tourism

Recent research has increasingly focused on the relationship between experiential dimensions and tourist satisfaction, particularly in cultural tourism contexts. Wang and Xu (2020) demonstrated that experiential elements such as enjoyment, immersion, and aesthetic appreciation significantly enhance tourist satisfaction by increasing perceived experiential value. Their findings suggest that experiential design, rather than functional service attributes alone, is critical in shaping tourists' evaluations of cultural tourism products.

In the context of traditional craftsmanship, Li (2019) emphasized that experiential participation in craft-making activities enhances tourists' emotional connection and cultural understanding, leading to higher satisfaction levels. Craft-based experiential tourism allows tourists to shift from passive observers to active participants, which strengthens both cognitive learning and emotional engagement. However, empirical studies focusing specifically on how different experiential dimensions contribute to tourist satisfaction in traditional craft tourism remain limited. This gap highlights the need for further research on experiential satisfaction in niche cultural tourism settings, such as Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate tourist satisfaction with Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism. A questionnaire survey was selected as the primary data collection method because it allows for the systematic measurement of tourists' experiential perceptions and satisfaction levels. Quantitative approaches are widely applied in experiential tourism studies to capture post-experience evaluations and to summarize overall trends among tourists.

2. Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on the Experience Economy framework. The questionnaire comprised four main sections. The first section gathered respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education level, occupation, place of origin, and travel mode. The second section measured tourists' experiential perceptions across four experiential dimensions: education (learning traditional shell carving skills and cultural knowledge), entertainment (enjoyment and fun during participation), esthetics (appreciation of artistic quality and cultural atmosphere), and escape (immersion and temporary relief from daily routines). The third section assessed overall tourist satisfaction, while the final section examined behavioral intentions, including revisit intention and willingness to recommend the experience. All perceptual and satisfaction items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly dissatisfied) to 5 (strongly satisfied).

3. Sampling and Data Collection

The target population consisted of tourists who had participated in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism activities. The minimum sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula, resulting in a required sample of 385 respondents. Due to practical constraints, convenience sampling was adopted.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms over a four-week period. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study, as well as the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distributions, mean values, and standard deviations, were employed to summarize demographic characteristics, experiential perceptions, overall tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.

Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1. This study develops a conceptual framework to examine tourist satisfaction in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism based on the Experience Economy perspective. The framework proposes that tourists' experiential perceptions—comprising education, entertainment, esthetics, and escape—form the core experiential inputs of craft-based experiential tourism. These dimensions reflect tourists' cognitive learning, emotional enjoyment, aesthetic appreciation, and immersive engagement during participation. Tourist satisfaction is conceptualized as a holistic post-experience evaluation resulting from the combined influence of these experiential dimensions. In line with experiential tourism theory, higher-quality experiential design is expected to enhance overall satisfaction and subsequently strengthen positive behavioral intentions, such as revisit intention and willingness to recommend the experience.

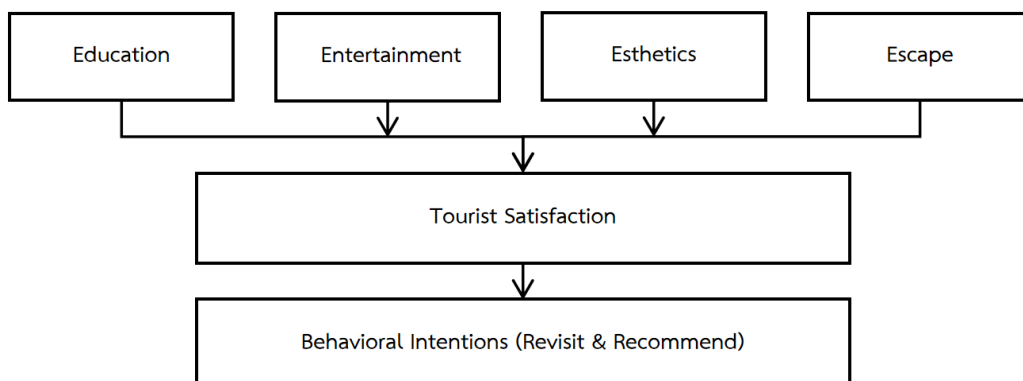


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework (Source: Constructed by the researcher)

Results

1. Experiential Tourism Dimensions of Beihai Shell Carving Tourism Activities

The first research objective was to examine the experiential tourism dimensions of Beihai Shell Carving tourism activities based on tourists' perceived experiences. Guided by the Experience Economy framework, four experiential dimensions—education, entertainment, esthetics, and escape—were used to assess tourists' evaluations of their participation in shell carving activities. Descriptive statistical analysis shows that tourists generally reported positive perceptions across all four experiential dimensions, indicating that Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism successfully integrates multiple experiential elements.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of tourists' perceptions of the four experiential dimensions. As shown in the table, all dimensions received relatively high mean scores, suggesting overall favorable evaluations of the experiential design.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Experiential Tourism Dimensions

Experiential Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Education	4.32	0.61	High
Entertainment	4.18	0.65	High
Esthetics	4.25	0.58	High
Escape	4.05	0.70	Moderate-High

Note. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly dissatisfied, 5 = strongly satisfied).

Among the four dimensions, the educational experience was particularly prominent. Tourists reported that hands-on participation in shell carving activities enabled them to learn basic carving techniques and gain knowledge about traditional craftsmanship and local marine culture. The learning process enhanced tourists’ sense of personal enrichment and contributed to their perception of the experience as meaningful and worthwhile.

The entertainment dimension was also positively evaluated. Tourists described the experience as enjoyable and engaging, emphasizing the pleasure derived from creative participation and interaction with instructors and other participants. Rather than passive amusement, entertainment was closely linked to the joy of hands-on creation and social interaction within a relaxed workshop environment.

With regard to the esthetic dimension, tourists expressed strong appreciation for the artistic quality of shell carving works and the visual and cultural atmosphere of the experiential setting. The natural textures of shell materials, the intricate craftsmanship, and the display of finished artworks contributed to a visually appealing environment, reinforcing tourists’ perception of shell carving as an art form rooted in local cultural heritage.

The escape dimension reflected tourists' sense of immersion and temporary detachment from daily routines. Many participants reported becoming absorbed in the carving process, experiencing relaxation and psychological relief. This immersive quality allowed tourists to perceive shell carving not only as a cultural activity but also as a form of leisure that provided mental restoration.

Overall, the findings suggest that Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism offers a balanced experiential structure that integrates educational, entertaining, aesthetic, and escapist elements, aligning well with the principles of experiential tourism.

2. Tourist Satisfaction with Beihai Shell Carving Experiential Tourism

The second research objective was to measure tourists' overall satisfaction with Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism. Tourist satisfaction was assessed as a comprehensive evaluation of experiential outcomes, encompassing both cognitive judgments and emotional responses following participation. The results indicate that tourists generally reported a high level of satisfaction with their shell carving experiences.

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics of overall tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. As shown in the table, tourists reported high mean scores for overall satisfaction, revisit intention, and recommendation intention, indicating positive post-experience evaluations.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Tourist Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Overall Tourist Satisfaction	4.28	0.60	High
Revisit Intention	4.10	0.72	High
Recommendation Intention	4.35	0.55	High

Note. Higher scores indicate stronger satisfaction or behavioral intention.

Most respondents indicated that their participation in shell carving activities met or exceeded their initial expectations. The experiential nature of the activity, which combined learning, creativity, and immersion, contributed to positive overall evaluations. Tourists perceived the experience as distinctive and valuable when compared with conventional sightseeing-based tourism, enhancing their satisfaction.

Satisfaction was closely associated with tourists' perceptions of the four experiential dimensions. Educational satisfaction stemmed from the acquisition of new skills and cultural knowledge, while entertainment satisfaction was linked to enjoyment and positive emotional responses during participation. Esthetic satisfaction was derived from appreciation of artistic quality and cultural ambiance, whereas escape-related satisfaction was associated with immersion and psychological relaxation. These experiential components interacted to form a holistic sense of satisfaction rather than isolated evaluations of individual attributes.

Behavioral intentions further reflected tourists' satisfaction levels. High willingness to recommend the experience suggests strong word-of-mouth potential, while revisit intention indicates experiential loyalty. These findings imply that positive experiential perceptions can translate into favorable post-experience attitudes.

3. Strategic Implications for Enhancing Tourist Satisfaction through Experiential Tourism Development

The third research objective was to propose strategic recommendations for enhancing tourist satisfaction through the development of appropriate experiential tourism offerings. These implications are derived directly from the empirical findings on experiential dimensions and satisfaction levels.

First, the results underscore the importance of strengthening educational experiences. Tourists demonstrated strong appreciation for learning opportunities and cultural knowledge acquisition. Enhancing instructional depth through

clearer explanations, cultural storytelling, and structured learning processes can further increase perceived value and satisfaction.

Second, sustaining entertainment and engagement is essential for maintaining positive emotional responses. Encouraging creative autonomy, facilitating interaction among participants, and preserving a relaxed workshop atmosphere can enhance enjoyment while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Third, aesthetic enhancement plays a critical role in shaping experiential evaluations. Improving visual presentation, exhibition design, and integration of local marine cultural elements can strengthen aesthetic appreciation and emotional attachment to the experience.

Finally, facilitating immersion and escape is crucial for tourists seeking psychological relaxation. Designing experiences that allow sufficient time for focused participation and minimize interruptions can deepen immersion and enhance satisfaction.

Taken together, these findings suggest that tourist satisfaction in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism can be enhanced through balanced experiential development. Aligning educational, entertainment, aesthetic, and escape elements with tourists' expectations can support sustainable satisfaction and the long-term development of traditional craft-based experiential tourism.

Discussion

The results of research objective 1 indicate that tourists perceived all four experiential dimensions—education, entertainment, esthetics, and escape—positively, with educational and esthetic experiences being particularly prominent. This is because craft-based experiential tourism enables active participation and meaningful interaction with cultural heritage, allowing cognitive learning and emotional appreciation to occur simultaneously. Such multidimensional engagement enhances experiential value beyond passive

consumption. This finding aligns with the Experience Economy framework proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998), which emphasizes that valuable tourism experiences emerge from the integration of participation, immersion, and emotional connection.

The results of research objective 2 show that overall tourist satisfaction was high and associated with strong revisit and recommendation intentions. This is because satisfaction in experiential tourism arises when perceived experiential performance meets or exceeds tourists' prior expectations, particularly in terms of learning, enjoyment, and immersion. The findings support Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), which conceptualizes satisfaction as the psychological outcome of performance–expectation comparison. When experiential value generates positive disconfirmation, it strengthens favorable post-experience evaluations and behavioral intentions.

The results of research objective 3 suggest that enhancing tourist satisfaction requires a balanced and integrated experiential design that simultaneously reinforces educational depth, emotional engagement, aesthetic quality, and immersive conditions. This is because experiential dimensions operate collectively rather than independently; coherence among them strengthens overall experiential meaning and memorability. This interpretation is consistent with Kim et al. (2012), who argue that memorable tourism experiences are formed through the interaction of multiple experiential components that jointly influence tourists' long-term evaluations.

Overall, the findings confirm that experiential value plays a central role in shaping satisfaction in traditional craft-based tourism and extend prior research by demonstrating how multidimensional experiential structures contribute to sustainable cultural tourism development.

Recommendations

1. General Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several general recommendations can be proposed to enhance tourist satisfaction in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism.

First, experiential tourism products should continue to prioritize educational value. Tourists demonstrated strong appreciation for learning traditional shell carving skills and cultural knowledge. Therefore, tourism operators and workshop designers should enrich instructional content by offering clearer explanations of carving techniques, cultural symbolism, and historical background. Structured learning activities, such as step-by-step guidance or themed workshops, can strengthen tourists' sense of achievement and deepen experiential value.

Second, maintaining interactive and enjoyable participation is essential. Entertainment in experiential tourism should be embedded in creative engagement rather than passive amusement. Encouraging tourists to express creativity, interact with artisans, and communicate with other participants can enhance emotional enjoyment and foster positive memories. A relaxed and supportive atmosphere can further improve tourists' overall experiential satisfaction.

Third, attention should be given to aesthetic and environmental design. The visual presentation of shell carving workshops, exhibition spaces, and finished artworks plays a significant role in shaping tourists' perceptions. Integrating local marine cultural elements, improving spatial layout, and enhancing artistic displays can strengthen aesthetic appreciation and reinforce the uniqueness of Beihai Shell Carving as a cultural tourism product.

Finally, experiential tourism design should support immersion and psychological escape. Providing sufficient time for participation, minimizing

external disturbances, and creating a calm and culturally rich environment can help tourists achieve deeper immersion. Such design strategies not only enhance satisfaction but also contribute to tourists' emotional well-being and restorative experiences.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into tourist satisfaction in Beihai Shell Carving experiential tourism, several limitations suggest directions for future research.

First, this study relied primarily on descriptive statistical analysis to examine experiential perceptions and satisfaction. Future studies could apply inferential statistical techniques, such as regression analysis or structural equation modeling, to explore the causal relationships between experiential dimensions and tourist satisfaction, as well as their influence on behavioral intentions.

Second, future research could incorporate qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, to gain deeper insights into tourists' emotional experiences and meaning-making processes. Qualitative data could complement quantitative findings and provide richer interpretations of experiential value in traditional craft tourism.

Third, comparative studies across different types of craft-based or cultural experiential tourism could be conducted to examine whether the relative importance of experiential dimensions varies across contexts. Comparing shell carving with other traditional crafts or cultural activities may help identify common patterns and context-specific characteristics.

Finally, longitudinal research designs could be adopted to examine how tourist satisfaction and experiential perceptions evolve over time. Such studies would contribute to a better understanding of experiential loyalty and the long-term sustainability of traditional craft-based experiential tourism.

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