

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM

BENJAMAPORN CHUMNANCHAR

Faculty of Management Sciences, Phuket Rajabhat University, Thailand

WARET RUTTANAVISANON*

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand

*Corresponding author's email: waret.rut@mahidol.ac.th

ABSTRACT

In the current era of tourism, destinations are increasingly chosen for the experiences they offer rather than just services. However, crafting high-quality, memorable experiences is challenging because the concept is abstract and multidimensional. This study aims to develop a confirmatory factor analysis framework for experiential tourism. A qualitative synthesis was employed, reviewing and synthesizing relevant literature to identify key experiential components. Five core dimensions of experiential tourism emerged from the analysis: Local Experience, Memorable Experience, Learning Experience, Participation Experience, and Feeling Experience. These dimensions form the basis of a proposed conceptual model for experiential tourism experiences. Distinct from previous exploratory studies that often treat these dimensions in isolation, this framework advances existing experiential and memorable tourism experience (MTE) models by integrating local and participation experiences as fundamental, measurable constructs within a unified, theoretically grounded structure. The findings provide a structured lens for understanding and measuring tourist experiences. Academically, the framework addresses the lack of validated models by offering clearly defined factors for confirmatory analysis. Practically, it offers destination managers and planners a guideline to design and evaluate tourism offerings that foster deep personal engagement, lasting memories, learning opportunities, active participation, and emotional fulfillment. Future research should test this model with empirical data to confirm its reliability and validity.

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INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry is undergoing a paradigm shift from a “service economy” to an “experience economy.” In an experience economy, experiences are viewed as the highest-value economic offerings, distinct from ordinary goods and services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Tourists today demand more than basic amenities; they seek emotional engagement, meaningful memories, and transformative experiences that enrich their lives. According to recent industry insights, nearly all travelers now prioritize unique and personalized experiences when choosing destinations. This trend underscores the need for destinations to deliver memorable tourism experiences as a key competitive advantage (RLA Global, 2024).

Designing and managing high-quality experiences is complex because tourist experiences are inherently abstract and multifaceted. Past research has proposed various constructions and scales to capture tourism experiences. For instance, Kim et al. (2012) introduced the Memorable Tourism Experience Scale (MTES) to measure how factors like hedonism, novelty, and involvement contribute to memorable trips. While MTES is a seminal tool for assessing the *outcome* of memory, it may not fully capture the active, contextual mechanisms—such as deep local interaction or active learning—that generate those memories in diverse cultural settings (Coelho et al., 2024). However, such efforts have often been context-specific, and what constitutes a meaningful experience can vary across cultural or regional settings. In Thai tourism contexts, for example, social interaction with hosts and cultural authenticity have been identified as critical drivers of visitor satisfaction and loyalty (Coelho et al., 2024; Suhartanto et al., 2020). These factors may be less emphasized elsewhere, highlighting that experiential tourism components can differ by destination environment. Furthermore, much of the existing literature relies on exploratory studies that identify potential dimensions in isolation, without unifying them into a parsimonious, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)—ready conceptual framework. This represents a critical gap: the

tourism field lacks a standardized, empirically validated model that integrates these fragmented findings into a cohesive structure applicable across different destination environments.

Despite growing recognition of the “experience” as a unit of value, there remains a lack of standardized, validated frameworks to measure experiential tourism in a generalizable way. Much of the existing literature consists of exploratory studies that identify possible experience dimensions, but few studies employ CFA to statistically confirm these dimensions with empirical data. A confirmatory approach is important to ensure that the observed indicators (e.g. specific activity types or emotions reported by tourists) truly correspond to underlying experiential constructions in a reliable manner (Chen et al., 2024; Hair et al., 2019). In other words, without CFA, we cannot be certain that a proposed set of experience factors is a valid measure across samples and contexts. This represents a critical gap: the tourism field lacks a universally accepted, empirically validated model of experiential tourism components that can be applied across different settings. To address this, this study aims to develop a verifiable component model for experiential tourism that advances beyond existing frameworks. By synthesizing prior research and theory, we propose a concise set of five core dimensions that best represent the holistic nature of the tourist journey: Local Experience, Memorable Experience, Learning Experience, Participation Experience, and Feeling Experience. Unlike prior models that often prioritize internal psychological states, this framework uniquely integrates external behavioral engagement (Participation, Local interaction) with internal emotional and cognitive processing (Feeling, Learning, Memory). This specific combination ensures a balanced and comprehensive measurement of the experience.

Accordingly, this study focuses on developing a verifiable component model for experiential tourism. By synthesizing prior research and theory, we aim to define a concise set of core dimensions that capture the essence of tourist experiences. These dimensions will form the basis for a CFA framework that can be tested in future empirical studies. Establishing such a framework is not only an academic exercise; it has practical significance. A validated model of experiential tourism can guide entrepreneurs and destination managers in designing attractions and activities that consistently deliver the desired experience outcomes. It can also help tourism organizations evaluate the quality of the experiences they offer and make data-driven improvements. Ultimately, clarifying the structure of experiential tourism will enhance the ability of destinations to create memorable, value-rich experiences, thereby improving tourist satisfaction and sustaining competitive advantage on the global stage.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study is to develop a confirmatory factor analysis framework of experiential tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Tourism: Definition and Characteristics

Tourism researchers define experiential tourism as travel that provides visitors with deep, personal engagement in the places, cultures, and people they encounter. Rather than passively sightseeing, experiential tourists actively learn, experience, and interact with their surroundings in a more profound way than traditional mass tourism allows (Shafiee et al., 2021). This concept aligns with the notion of transformative travel, where meaningful involvement can change a visitor’s perspectives or values.

Recent work has outlined several key characteristics that distinguish experiential tourism. Hosseini et al. (2023) identified four fundamental aspects of experiential travel:

- **Participation and Engagement:** Tourists take part in local activities firsthand—for example, cooking regional cuisine, learning traditional crafts, or joining in community festivals. Such active participation allows travelers to co-create their experiences with hosts rather than merely observing as outsiders.
- **Learning and Growth:** Experiential tourists seek to acquire new knowledge, skills, or insights during their journeys. They may learn about a destination’s history, culture, or environment, leading to personal growth both intellectually and spiritually. This focus on education and self-improvement connects to the idea of creative tourism, where travelers engage in learning-centered activities (Richards & Raymond, 2000).

- **Creating Unique Memories:** A core goal of experiential tourism is to create memorable moments that stand out from everyday life. Each trip is curated to be uniquely meaningful for the individual, resulting in memories that travelers cherish and often share with others long after the trip.
- **Deep Connection:** Experiential travel fosters an emotional and possibly spiritual bond between tourists and the destination. By interacting closely with local residents, culture, and nature, visitors develop respect and affection for the place. This deep connection can enrich their sense of belonging and encourage more responsible, appreciative behavior toward the host community.

These characteristics collectively highlight that experiential tourism is not just about where people go, but how they engage. The emphasis on participation, learning, memorable moments, and emotional connection differentiates an experiential journey from a conventional tour. It transforms tourism into a two-way exchange: tourists immerse themselves and contribute to the local milieu, while hosts and places impart lasting impacts on tourists.

Dimensions of Tourism Experiences and Memorable Encounters

Delivering memorable experiences has become a central objective in tourism development. Pine and Gilmore (1999) described a memorable tourism experience as one that is so positive and extraordinary that it remains etched in the visitor's memory. Memorable experiences add value from the tourist's perspective—they are essentially the “takeaways” that travelers perceive they have gained from a trip. Research shows that when tourists feel they have obtained special value or personal significance from their travels, they are more likely to share positive stories and recommendations with others. In this way, creating memorable experiences not only satisfies visitors but also benefits destinations through repeat visits and word-of-mouth promotion.

Over the past two decades, numerous studies have attempted to pinpoint what components of an experience make it memorable or impactful. However, early findings were quite varied, reflecting the complexity of tourist experiences. For example, in the context of cultural tourism, Chen and Rahman (2018) found four key factors that enhance visitors' experiences: (1) participation in activities, (2) a strong memorable tourism experience (the overall enjoyment and memory-making aspect), (3) cultural contact (building a relationship with the local culture or community), and (4) resulting destination loyalty. This suggests that engaging with culture and communities can lead to memories that in turn foster loyalty to the destination.

Other researchers proposed different sets of experiential components. Gentile et al. (2007) identified six dimensions of an impactful experience from a management perspective: a sensorial component (engaging the senses), an emotional component, a cognitive component (thought-provoking aspects), a pragmatic component (practical value or utility), a lifestyle component (relevance to one's personal values or lifestyle), and a relational component (social connections). Similarly, Chandralal et al. (2015) analyzed travel blog narratives and distilled seven common themes that made experiences memorable for travelers: interactions with local people, immersion in local life and culture, personally significant or life-changing moments, shared experiences with companions, a sense of novelty, fortunate serendipitous happenings, and positive emotions (often facilitated by professional guides, quality services, or unexpected joys).

Some quantitative studies have linked these experience dimensions to outcomes like memory retention and satisfaction. For instance, Kim et al. (2010) examined how specific experience realms influence tourists' memories. Their results indicated that a tourist's memories were significantly shaped by dimensions such as education (learning something new), aesthetics (appreciating beauty and atmosphere), entertainment, escapism (feeling removed from daily life), involvement, hedonism (fun and pleasure), and local culture. In other words, experiences that are educational, beautiful, entertaining, immersive, enjoyable, and culturally authentic tend to be remembered more vividly by tourists.

Given the multitude of factors identified across studies, Kim et al. (2012) conducted a comprehensive literature review to consolidate understanding of experiential components. They catalogued 19 distinct elements that had been discussed in prior research, ranging from broad feelings like happiness and meaningfulness to specific sensations like refreshment and novelty. Recognizing that not all these elements are equally important for memorability, Kim et al. (2012) then empirically derived a refined structure of seven dimensions underpinning memorable tourism experiences. These seven dimensions

are: hedonism (seeking pleasure), novelty, local culture (authentic cultural exposure), refreshment (a sense of renewal or escape), meaningfulness (having personal significance), involvement (active engagement), and knowledge (learning). This MTES framework by Kim et al. (2012) has been highly influential and provides a baseline for understanding what generally contributes to memorable experiences.

Subsequent research has largely supported these dimensions, and the MTES has been tested in various contexts. For example, Kim and Ritchie (2014) performed a cross-cultural validation of the MTES, confirming that the seven-factor structure held true among different tourist groups (e.g., American vs. Taiwanese travelers). Culture can, of course, affect the emphasis on certain dimensions—one study found some differences in memorable experiences between Western and Asian tourists—but overall, the core dimensions appear consistently relevant. A recent comprehensive review by Hosany et al. (2022) further reinforces that dimensions like hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, involvement, etc. recur across many studies and are integral to the tourist experience framework. Based on a literature review, several research studies have examined experiential tourism components, as shown in Table 1. The table shows the differences in the components of experiential tourism.

Table 1: Experiential tourism components consistent with the study of related study

Author	Research	Component						
		H	M	LC	R	N	I	K
Bigné et al. (2020)	Memorable tourist experiences versus ordinary tourist experiences analysed through user-generated content	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Castellani et al. (2020)	Dimensions and triggers of memorable tourism experiences: Evidence from Italian social enterprises	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chen et al. (2023)	How does rural tourism experience affect green consumption in terms of memorable rural-based tourism experiences, connectedness to nature and environmental awareness?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fan et al. (2022)	Immersive technology: A meta-analysis of augmented/virtual reality applications and their impact on tourism experience	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Kim (2013)	A cross-cultural comparison of memorable tourism experiences of American and Taiwanese college students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kim and Ritchie (2014)	Cross-cultural validation of a memorable tourism experience scale (MTES)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kim and So (2022)	Two decades of customer experience research in hospitality and tourism: A bibliometric analysis and thematic content analysis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021)	Understanding memorable tourism experiences and behavioral intentions of heritage tourists	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wang et al. (2019)	The right brew? An analysis of the tourism experiences in rural Taiwan's coffee estates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wei et al. (2019)	Psychological factors affecting memorable tourism experiences	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗

Notes: H = hedonism; M = meaningfulness; LC = local culture; R = refreshment; N = novelty; I = involvement; K = knowledge

Sources: Adapted from Hosany et al. (2022) and Kim et al. (2012)

The table serves as a key component to synthesize related studies, likely adapted from methodologies and variables from research to determine which psychological or environmental factors contribute most to a memorable tourism experience. Despite the progress in identifying these dimensions, most of the work to date has been exploratory or descriptive. There remains a need to confirm that a given set of experiential dimensions truly represents the construction of experiential tourism in a robust way. This is especially important when adapting concepts to specific destinations or new tourism trends. The literature points to five broad themes—enjoyment, uniqueness, learning, participation, and emotional connection—that seem to capture the essence of experiential tourism. Therefore, the present study builds on literature to propose five corresponding dimensions (described in the Results section) and outlines a CFA-based framework. This approach moves toward a more standardized model that future researchers can test with data for different destinations or tourist segments. By doing so, we address the gap in measurement validation and bring clarity to the structure of experiential tourism.

While previous research has identified numerous attributes associated with tourism experiences, these findings often remain fragmented across disparate theoretical lenses. To construct a parsimonious and verifiable model, this study employed a qualitative synthesis of the existing literature, identifying recurring themes that converge into five distinct dimensions. A critical review of foundational models, including the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and the

MTES (Kim et al., 2012), reveals that tourist experiences are consistently multidimensional, spanning behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains. However, existing models often overemphasize one domain at the expense of others. Local Experience (Contextual Integration): Recent studies (e.g., Coelho et al., 2024; Suhartanto et al., 2020) highlight that in cultural destinations like Thailand, the “authenticity” and “social interaction” with hosts are not merely background settings but active drivers of the experience. Consequently, we integrated these findings into a distinct “Local Experience” dimension, characterizing the destination-specific context that generic models often overlook. Participation Experience (Behavioral Engagement): Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that active involvement is central to the experience economy. While some models conflate participation with general involvement, we isolate “Participation Experience” to explicitly measure the active behavioral aspect—doing, making, and interacting—as distinct from passive observation. Learning and Feeling Experiences (Cognitive & Emotional Processing): Cognitive acquisition (learning new skills or culture) and emotional arousal (joy, excitement) are frequently cited as separate but related internal states. To avoid conflation, we retained “Learning Experience” and “Feeling Experience” as separate dimensions. This distinction allows the model to differentiate between a tourist who is intellectually stimulated versus one who is emotionally moved, providing a more granular analysis than a single “hedonic” factor could offer. Memorable Experience (The Retention Outcome): Finally, recognizing that an experience is only valuable if it is retained, we include “Memorable Experience” not just as a future intention, but as a dimension of the experience itself—the immediate perception that this moment is worth remembering, aligning with Kim et al. (2012) emphasis on memorability.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can experiential tourism be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct suitable for confirmatory factor analysis?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative systematic review design to develop a conceptual framework of experiential tourism. Rather than collecting primary survey or interview data, we systematically reviewed existing theories, studies, and empirical findings related to tourist experiences. The approach can be characterized as an integrative literature analysis—combining insights from prior qualitative studies, quantitative findings, and theoretical models to synthesize a new framework. The emphasis was on identifying common experiential dimensions that appear across multiple sources. This qualitative synthesis was chosen because the concept of “experiential tourism” involves rich, multifaceted phenomena (emotions, activities, meanings) that have been explored in diverse ways by different scholars. A broad review and integration allowed us to capture these nuances and ensure that the proposed framework has a strong grounding in established research. The ultimate aim of the research design was to yield a set of hypothesized dimensions suitable for later quantitative validation (through CFA) in the context of tourism in Phuket, Thailand.

Participants

No human research participants were involved in this study. The units of analysis were scholarly and industry sources (journal articles, conference papers, theses, books, and reputable reports) that discuss aspects of tourist experiences and experiential tourism. In selecting literature for review, emphasis was placed on studies that either introduced or evaluated components of tourism experiences (especially those aiming to measure experiences or outcomes like satisfaction and loyalty). Given the intent to apply the framework to Phuket’s tourism context, some sources specific to Thai or Asia-Pacific tourism were included alongside global studies, to ensure cultural relevance. However, the majority of the literature was international, reflecting widely applicable concepts. By treating the literature itself as data, the researchers used a literature review criterion from 2018 to 2025 in its selection process. We aimed to eliminate biases that might come from focusing on a single tourist sample. This method ensures the framework is informed by a broad spectrum of tourist experience observations rather than one particular group.

Research Instruments

No survey instruments, questionnaires, or experimental apparatus were used, since this study did not involve primary data collection. Instead, the “instrument” was a document analysis protocol. This involved systematically reading and coding relevant publications to extract information on proposed experience dimensions, definitions, and empirical evidence for those dimensions. To ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the data extraction and coding process, a rigorous multi-step protocol was implemented. First, a standardized codebook was developed prior to the full analysis. This codebook explicitly defined the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each experiential dimension. Second, to address stability and consistency (intra-rater reliability), the coding process followed an iterative approach. A random sample of 20% of the selected articles was re-coded two weeks after the initial analysis to verify that the categorization of themes remained consistent over time. Finally, to mitigate subjective bias, the initial coding results and the proposed dimensional framework underwent peer debriefing and expert review. We developed a coding sheet to note each distinct experience factor mentioned in the sources, along with any definitions or examples provided. For example, if a source identified “escapism” as an experience dimension, it was recorded with context. This process served as an analytical tool to organize the qualitative data (literature content). Additionally, inclusion criteria were implicitly used as a filtering instrument: only peer-reviewed or expert-validated sources were included to ensure reliability of information. The credibility of sources (e.g., high citation counts, published in reputable journals) acted as a quality check instrument during literature selection.

Data Collection Procedure

Step 1: Literature Search and Collection

We conducted an extensive literature search to gather relevant documents on experiential tourism and related constructions (memorable experiences, tourist satisfaction drivers, experience economy, etc.). Sources were collected from academic databases (such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) and curated repositories. Keywords used in searches included “experiential tourism,” “tourist experience dimensions,” “memorable tourism experience,” “experience economy tourism,” and “tourist satisfaction experience.” We also obtained industry reports and policy papers that touch on experience design in tourism. Preference was given to literature published in the last 15 years to capture contemporary trends, with classical works (e.g., Pine & Gilmore, 1999) included for foundational theory. By the end of this step, a library of about 50 key sources (articles, book chapters, etc.) was compiled for analysis. Each source was deemed reliable, having either undergone peer review or been authored by recognized experts. To ensure the selection of high-quality and relevant studies, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they (1) explicitly investigated dimensions, constructs, or measurement scales of tourist experiences; (2) were published primarily within the last 10 years to capture contemporary trends, with the exception of seminal theoretical works; and (3) were peer-reviewed academic articles, dissertations, or authoritative industry reports. Studies were excluded if they (1) focused solely on macroeconomic aspects of tourism without addressing experiential constructs; (2) treated “experience” only tangentially or in a non-conceptual manner; or (3) were non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces, editorials, or duplicate records.

Step 2: Content Analysis of Sources

The collected literature was then analyzed qualitatively. We performed content analysis by reading each source and identifying passages that discuss what makes an experience meaningful or memorable for tourists. These passages were coded according to the specific experience component mentioned (for example, “novelty,” “social interaction,” “learning,” “aesthetics,” “adventure,” and so forth). We kept a tally of how frequently certain themes appeared across different studies. During this process, patterns began to emerge—many concepts clustered into broader categories. For instance, terms like “education,” “knowledge,” and “skill development” were grouped under a broader learning category. We continually refined these groupings as we progressed through the analysis. When new concepts appeared, they were either added as a separate category or merged into an existing category if conceptually similar. An example of this cross-case analysis structure is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: An example of this cross-case analysis structure in data collection procedure

Source	Context/Study Focus	Identified Codes/Keywords	Synthesized Dimension
Adham et al.(2025); Chomphopanya et al. (2023)	Cultural Heritage Tourism	Authentic interaction, Daily life observation, Villager engagement	Local Experience
Cohen and Kirchmeyer (1995)	Community-Based Tourism	Co-creation, Active joining, Volunteering	Participation Experience
Junead et al. (2022)	Adventure Tourism	Thrill, Unforgettable moments, Novelty	Memorable Experience
Samanketgon (2023)	Creative Tourism	Skill acquisition, Workshops, Gaining knowledge education	Learning Experience
Wongkerd et al. (2022)	Wellness Tourism	Serenity, Awe, Emotional rejuvenation	Feeling Experience

Step 3: Synthesis and Framework Development

After analyzing all sources, we reviewed the coded themes to distill them into a coherent set of dimensions. Following the example above, numerous studies emphasized aspects of tourist learning, so Learning Experience was designated as one core dimension. We applied similar reasoning to form other dimensions: e.g., factors related to enjoyment, fun, and positive emotions were synthesized into a Memorable Experience dimension (focusing on pleasure and lasting memories). The criteria for selecting a dimension were (1) frequency of mention across multiple independent studies and (2) theoretical support that the dimension significantly shapes tourist experiences. Using these criteria, five primary dimensions were finalized, each representing a cluster of related sub-concepts identified in the literature. We then organized these dimensions into a conceptual framework, envisioning experiential tourism as a higher-order construction that encompasses the five factors. This framework is intended to be tested via CFA in future research to verify that each proposed dimension is a valid component of experiential tourism.

Data Analysis

The analysis in this study was qualitative and interpretive, focusing on merging insights from prior research rather than statistical testing. Nevertheless, it followed a structured approach to ensure rigor. During content analysis, we used thematic coding as described, which is analogous to open and axial coding in qualitative research. We first opened the data by identifying distinct experience-related concepts (open coding). Then, we axially coded by relating and grouping these concepts into overarching dimensions. For example, numerous codes like “local culture,” “authenticity,” and “community interaction” were linked under a potential local experience dimension. We paid attention to definitions provided by authors to correctly categorize each item.

After grouping, we reviewed each proposed dimension against the literature to verify it was well-supported. We examined whether each dimension appeared in at least several reputable sources and whether its inclusion made sense given the context of tourism in Phuket (the intended application). Minor adjustments were made at this stage—for instance, ensuring that Feeling Experience captured not just any emotions but specifically the emotional fulfillment aspect (joy, awe, inspiration) of travel. The final step of analysis was creating a diagrammatic conceptual model illustrating experiential tourism as a construction composed of the five dimensions identified. This model serves as a hypothesis for subsequent quantitative analysis.

Several validation methods were employed to ensure the methodological rigor and reliability of the findings. First, iterative validation was applied; the process of categorizing themes was recursive, allowing the researcher to cross-reference suggested dimensions against existing literature after the initial grouping to guarantee reliability and consistency. Second, intercoder reliability was established to mitigate personal bias. Finally, peer debriefing of the conceptual model was conducted, involving both external academic colleagues and members of the internal research team.

It is important to note that throughout the analysis, researcher bias was mitigated by cross-verification within the team: both authors independently reviewed the coding scheme and agreed on the emerging dimensions. Any discrepancies in

interpretation of a source were discussed and resolved. The outcome of the analysis—the five-dimension framework—thus reflects a consensus interpretation of the collective body of knowledge on experiential tourism.

RESULTS

The qualitative synthesis of literature revealed five key dimensions that constitute the core of experiential tourism. These five dimensions represent the recurring themes and factors that make tourism experiences meaningful and memorable for visitors. To ensure the proposed framework is theoretically grounded, we mapped these emerging dimensions against established models in tourism and experience economy literature, such as the Memorable Tourism Experience Scale (MTES) (Kim et al., 2012) and the experience economy domains (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Table 3 illustrates how fragmented concepts from prior studies were consolidated into the five proposed dimensions.

Table 3: Synthesis of experiential dimensions

Proposed Dimension	Corresponding Constructs in Prior Literature	Key Sources
Local Experience	Local Culture; Authenticity; Communitas	Adham et al. (2005); Chomphoopanya et al., 2023; Kim et al. (2012); Wang et al. (2019)
Memorable Experience	Hedonism; Refreshment; Entertainment; Novelty	Kim et al. (2012); Pine and Gilmore (1999)
Learning Experience	Knowledge; Education; Self-growth	Kim et al. (2012); Pine and Gilmore (1999); Samanketgon (2023)
Participation Experience	Involvement; Active Participation; Co-creation	Cohen and Kirchmeyer (1995); Pine and Gilmore (1999)
Feeling Experience	Aesthetics; Sensory; Affective/Emotional Arousal	Gentile et al. (2007); Wongkerd et al. (2022)

The qualitative systematic review of literature revealed five key dimensions that constitute the core of experiential tourism. These five dimensions represent the recurring themes and factors that make tourism experiences meaningful and memorable for visitors. They are proposed as the principal components in a confirmatory factor analysis framework for experiential tourism. The dimensions are:

- **Local Experience:** Encounters that are unique to the destination’s context, allowing tourists to immerse in the local way of life. Local experiences might include hands-on engagement with the community, traditions, or natural environment of the place (Chomphoopanya et al., 2023). For example, a tourist might participate in a village’s daily fishing routine or explore indigenous markets, gaining authentic insights that cannot be found elsewhere. Such local context immersion differentiates the experience from generic tourism and fosters a sense of connection to the place (Adham et al., 2025).
- **Memorable Experience:** Aspects of the trip that are extraordinary, joyful, or emotionally powerful enough to leave a lasting positive memory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A memorable experience often involves novelty or “wow” moments—it could be an exhilarating adventure, a deeply moving cultural ceremony, or simply exceptional hospitality that exceeds expectations (Junead et al., 2022). These experiences are characterized by high personal enjoyment (hedonic value) and a lingering impression; tourists continue to recall and cherish them after returning home.
- **Learning Experience:** Opportunities during travel that enable tourists to acquire new knowledge, skills, or personal insights. A learning experience might occur when a traveler learns a traditional craft from artisans, gains historical knowledge on a guided heritage tour, or discovers new perspectives about nature on an eco-tour. This educational component makes the trip intellectually stimulating and adds value by contributing to the tourist’s personal growth or understanding of the world (Samanketgon, 2023).
- **Participation Experience:** The degree of active involvement and interaction a tourist has in activities and with others at the destination. A participation experience entails the tourist taking on an interactive role; for instance, joining locals in festivities, collaborating in a workshop, or contributing to a volunteer project. Rather than observing passively, the tourist becomes a participant, which often leads to a greater sense of engagement and fulfillment. This dimension also captures co-creation of experiences, where tourists and hosts create the experience together (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 1995).

- **Feeling Experience:** The emotional responses and feelings of fulfillment that a tourist gains through the trip. A feeling experience refers to the affective component of tourism—the excitement, awe, happiness, peace, or even profound reflection a trip can evoke. It may be sparked by aesthetic pleasures (such as witnessing a breathtaking landscape or art), interpersonal warmth (making a genuine connection with a host family), or achieving personal rejuvenation. Strong positive emotions contribute significantly to an experience being memorable and meaningful for the traveler (Wongkerd et al., 2022).

These five dimensions form a comprehensive framework for understanding experiential tourism. Each dimension encapsulates a cluster of related ideas found repeatedly in prior studies (as detailed in the Literature Review). Together, they describe what experiential tourism involves from the visitor’s perspective. The Local, Memorable, Learning, Participation, and Feeling experiences are interrelated—for example, active participation often leads to deeper learning and stronger feelings, and engaging with the local culture can make an experience more memorable. In the context of a confirmatory factor model, we envision Experiential Tourism as a second-order construct that manifests through these five first-order factors. In practical terms, this means that if a destination successfully delivers on all five dimensions, it can be said to offer a rich experiential tourism product.

Notably, the number of dimensions (five) was deliberately chosen to keep the framework parsimonious while covering the breadth of concepts found in the literature. This set aligns well with both theoretical expectations and the pragmatic considerations of tourism development. It is broad enough to apply to different types of destinations (urban, rural, cultural, natural) yet specific enough to guide measurement (each dimension can be measured with concrete indicators, such as “degree of local interaction” for Local Experience or “level of enjoyment” for Memorable Experience). In developing this framework, we also ensured the dimensions resonate with the Phuket context for future application. Phuket, as a mature tourist destination, offers a mix of cultural attractions, community-based tourism, nature experiences, and entertainment—all of which can be mapped to the five dimensions above.

To summarize the results, experiential tourism is characterized by tourist engagements that are locally unique, deeply memorable, educational, interactive, and emotionally stirring. These characteristics can now be systematically examined. The next sections discuss the implications of focusing on these dimensions and how they relate to existing knowledge, as well as considerations for implementation and further research.

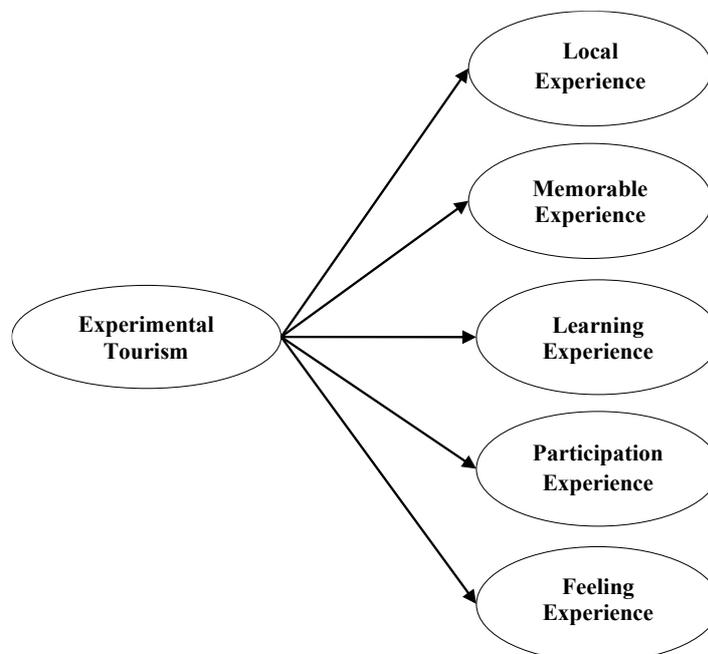


Figure 1: Synthesis model for experiential tourism indicators in research

In Figure 1, the researcher developed variables used in the synthesis model for experiential tourism indicators consisting of 5 components: local experience, memorable experience, learning experience, participation experience, and feeling experience. The number of variables is consistent with the concept of developing a conceptual framework analysis of experiential tourism. From the literature review, the researcher arranged the components appropriately, thus defining 5 components according to the research framework as shown in the diagram.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study identified five dimensions—Local, Memorable, Learning, Participation, and Feeling experiences—as the building blocks of an experiential tourism framework. In this section, we first discuss each dimension in light of existing literature, demonstrating how the findings both align with and advance prior research. We then examine the broader implications of the framework for theory and practice and acknowledge the study’s limitations with suggestions for future research.

The confirmation that experiential tourism consists of multiple distinct dimensions is consistent with the consensus in tourism research that the tourist experience is a multidimensional construct. Our framework echoes many elements of the Memorable Tourism Experience Scale (MTES) by Kim et al. (2012) while tailoring them to an experiential tourism context. For instance, the Memorable Experience dimension in our results encompasses hedonic enjoyment and novelty, which (Kim et al. 2012). also found crucial for memorability. Likewise, the Learning Experience and Participation Experience dimensions correspond to the educational and involvement aspects highlighted in both the MTES and other studies (Chandralal et al., 2015; Hosseini et al., 2023). By confirming these as core dimensions, our framework reinforces the idea that a truly rich tourism experience engages tourists cognitively (learning), behaviorally (participation), and affectively (feelings), in addition to providing novelty and authenticity (local and memorable aspects).

One notable contribution of our findings is the explicit inclusion of the Local Experience dimension as a standalone factor. Previous scales often implicitly covered local cultural immersion under “local culture” or “authenticity” sub-items (Kim et al., 2012; Chandralal et al., 2015), but our synthesis elevates it to a primary dimension. This move reflects accumulating evidence that authentic local interaction is a cornerstone of experiential tourism. Engaging with local people and traditions not only differentiates an experience from the tourist’s everyday life, but also greatly enhances its meaningfulness and personal value (Suhartanto et al., 2020). In destinations like Phuket, encouraging local experiences (such as homestays, community-led tours, or cultural workshops) can thus be seen as essential for providing what today’s experience-seeking traveler’s desire.

The Participation Experience dimension underscores the importance of the tourist’s active role in co-creating experiences. This finding ties into the broader shift in tourism from passive consumption to active participation, as advocated in experience economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and community-based tourism principles. Participation can range from simple interactions (e.g., joining a dance during a festival) to more structured involvement (e.g., volunteering in a conservation project). By participating, tourists often feel a greater investment in the outcome of experience, which can heighten satisfaction and attachment to the destination. Our framework’s inclusion of this dimension aligns with Cohen and Uphoff’s (1980) classic view of participation having multiple facets—decision-making, implementation, sharing benefits, and evaluation in community activities. In tourism terms, this means destinations should create avenues for tourists to be involved at various stages (planning their activities, engaging on-site, giving feedback, etc.), thereby empowering visitors and enhancing their experience quality.

The Feeling Experience dimension in our results highlights the emotional resonance of tourism. While all tourism experiences involve emotions, experiential tourism explicitly seeks to create positive, memorable feelings—whether it is the thrill from adventure, the awe from beautiful scenery, or the sense of peace from a wellness retreat. Studies like Gentile et al. (2007) and Hosany et al. (2022) have emphasized emotional and sensory components as critical to experiences. Our identification of a Feeling dimension affirms that emotional outcomes (joy, inspiration, nostalgia, tranquility) are not just by-products but core deliverables of experiential travel. Destinations can facilitate strong positive emotions by designing experiences that appeal to the senses and the heart—for example, a sunset cruise with local music appeals to aesthetic senses and can evoke feelings of romance or serenity, contributing significantly to the trip’s memorability.

Theoretical Implications

The proposed five-dimensional framework contributes to tourism theory by providing a confirmatory model that future studies can test and refine. It synthesizes prior fragmented findings into a cohesive structure that can be empirically validated. If supported by data, this framework would confirm that experiential tourism is a higher-order construct composed of identifiable sub-dimensions, much like service quality is composed of dimensions (tangibles, reliability, etc.) in classical models. This has implications for measurement theory: researchers can develop or adapt survey instruments to measure each of the five dimensions, confident that they collectively represent the experiential tourism concept. The framework thus advances theoretical precision in an area that has often been described in qualitative terms. Furthermore, by grounding the framework in existing literature and then abstracting it, we bridge the gap between descriptive research and analytical research that requires constructs and variables.

A notable advancement is the explicit elevation of “Local Experience” to a standalone primary dimension. Whereas previous scales often subsumed local interaction under generic “authenticity” sub-items, this framework recognizes that engagement with local people and traditions is a cornerstone of value creation in experiential tourism. Additionally, the “Participation Experience” dimension aligns with the experience economy’s shift from passive consumption to active co-creation, empowering tourists to invest personally in the experience outcome.

In addition, our findings invite theoretical exploration of the relationships between these dimensions. For example, does a higher level of participation experience lead to stronger feelings of fulfillment, which then enhance the memorable aspect? Are learning experiences more effective at creating memorable experiences when coupled with local experiences (learning in context)? Such questions emerge naturally from our framework and can be theorized and tested. The framework could thus serve as a foundation for building more complex theoretical models including mediators and moderators—about how experiences influence outcomes like satisfaction, loyalty, or personal change. It also lays a conceptual groundwork for comparing destinations or tourist segments; researchers can assess which dimension is most prominent in different contexts (e.g., adventure tourism may score higher on feeling and participation, whereas cultural tourism may emphasize learning and local experiences). In sum, the framework enriches experiential tourism theory by offering both structure and new avenues for inquiry.

Practical Implications

For destination managers, tour operators, and experience designers, this framework provides a clear checklist of elements to consider when crafting tourism offerings. To truly deliver experiential tourism, a destination should strive to incorporate all five dimensions into its product portfolio or even into individual packages. Practically, this means developing activities that allow tourist participation and learning (e.g., interactive workshops, guided hands-on tours), facilitating genuine local interactions (community-based tourism initiatives, meet-the-local events), ensuring the experiences have standout memorable moments (creative itineraries with “surprise and delight” elements), and paying attention to the emotional journey of the visitor (creating pleasant atmospheres, storytelling to evoke emotions, etc.).

One direct application could be in destination marketing and branding. Marketing messages can be aligned with these dimensions: for instance, campaigns can highlight how a visit to Phuket offers authentic local village experiences, opportunities to learn Thai cooking (learning), adventures like island hopping that you will never forget (memorable), chances to join local festivals (participation), and stunning scenery that will take your breath away (feeling). By touching on each dimension, destinations can appeal to the full spectrum of motivations that experiential travelers have.

Another practical implication is for experience quality assessment. Tourism providers can use the five dimensions as criteria to evaluate existing tours or attractions. For example, a resort offering a cultural package might assess: Are we providing enough Local content (maybe adding a visit to a local community)? Is the itinerary facilitating Participation (perhaps include a guest activity rather than just demonstration)? Are we incorporating Learning (guide explains history or significance)? How can we ensure the experience is truly Memorable (maybe end with a personalized keepsake or unique event)? And what emotions are guests likely to Feel (excitement, serenity, etc., and can we enhance that through music,

ambiance, or service)? In this way, the framework can function as a guideline for experience design and training staff to deliver experiences.

From a policy perspective, especially in sustainable and community-focused tourism development, the framework underscores the value of community involvement and cultural preservation. By emphasizing local and participation experiences, it implicitly encourages destinations to invest in their cultural and social assets as part of tourism. For Phuket, this could mean supporting local artisans, maintaining cultural festivals, training communities to host tourists, and protecting natural sites that form the backdrop for emotional and learning experiences. Doing so not only enriches the tourist experience but also ensures that tourism growth contributes to preserving local heritage and empowering residents (a win-win scenario).

Methodological Implications

By grounding abstract concepts in defined literature and structuring them into distinct factors, this study bridges the gap between descriptive qualitative descriptions and analytical research that requires measurable variables.

The identification of these five dimensions provides a confirmatory model that is ready for empirical validation. Researchers can now develop or adapt survey instruments to measure each dimension with the confidence that they collectively represent the higher-order construct of experiential tourism. This paves the way for structural equation modeling to test complex relationships, such as whether “Participation” acts as a mediator for Memorable outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the framework is comprehensive, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. First, the model was derived from literature and has not yet been empirically tested with primary data; thus, its validity and relative weighting of dimensions remain to be confirmed. There is a risk of literature selection bias—we might have emphasized certain dimensions because they appear frequently in published studies, which themselves focus on popular concepts. It is possible that some subtle experiential factors were underrepresented in our sources and hence omitted from the framework. For example, “safety and comfort” is not explicitly listed as a dimension in our model (since most experiential studies focus on positive engagement factors), but a baseline of safety may be an important precondition for tourists to fully engage in experiences. Future research could examine if a dimension related to basic service or comfort should parallel the experiential dimensions for a holistic model.

Another limitation is the potential overlap between dimensions. In practice, the five aspects of experience often co-occur and intertwine. Tourists might not perceive clear-cut boundaries—a single activity can be simultaneously local, participatory, educational, emotional, and memorable. This interdependence can complicate measurement, as indicators might load onto multiple factors. While CFA can help sort this out, our framework assumes each dimension is distinguishable. If empirical testing finds high correlations (multicollinearity) between certain dimensions (e.g., Memorable and Feeling might be very closely linked), the model may need refinement (such as collapsing highly overlapping dimensions).

Additionally, the framework was assembled with Phuket and similar destinations in mind. Phuket’s tourism is diverse (cultural sights, nature, nightlife, community tourism), making the model broadly applicable, but extremely specialized niches of tourism might have additional dimensions. For instance, adventure tourism might consider “thrill” or “risk” as a dimension of experience, which in our framework would partly fall under Memorable (excitement) and feeling (fear or joy) but might need more emphasis. Thus, the generalizability to all types of tourism experiences needs verification; the five dimensions should be seen as a base model that could be extended or adapted in niche contexts.

Building on this study, the immediate next step is to operationalize the five dimensions with measurable indicators and conduct empirical confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Future researchers can develop a survey instrument asking tourists to rate various statements corresponding to each dimension after their trip. For example, Local Experience can be measured with items like “I interacted closely with local people” or “I experienced authentic local culture,” Learning Experience

with “I gained new knowledge or skills during the trip,” and so on. By collecting data from tourists (possibly those visiting Phuket or similar destinations), one can test whether the data fits the five-factor model well—indicated by model fit indices and significant factor loadings in CFA. If successful, this would statistically validate the framework.

Beyond validation, future studies could explore the predictive power of these experience dimensions. Do higher scores on these dimensions lead to greater tourist satisfaction, higher revisit intention, or stronger destination loyalty? Structural equation modeling could be used to examine these relationships. For instance, one could hypothesize that memorable and feeling experiences have the strongest direct effect on satisfaction, whereas Learning and Participation experiences indirectly boost loyalty through enhancing memorable quality. Testing such hypotheses would provide deeper insight into how experiential components drive outcomes, which is valuable for destination strategy.

Comparative studies are also suggested. Researchers might compare different demographic groups (e.g., backpackers vs. luxury tourists, or younger vs. older travelers) to see if the importance of each dimension varies. It could be that younger “Gen Z” travelers place more emphasis on participation and local experiences, whereas older travelers value learning and comfort. Understanding these differences can help in market segmentation and product tailoring.

Finally, qualitative research can complement quantitative validation by exploring tourists’ narratives in depth. In-depth interviews or analysis of travel blogs (as done by Chandralal et al., 2015) for tourists visiting Phuket could reveal if they spontaneously mention these five aspects when recounting their experiences. Any new themes arising from such narratives might indicate additional dimensions or nuances (for example, spiritual impacts or interpersonal dynamics among travel companions) that could be integrated into an expanded framework.

In conclusion, this framework sets the stage for a more structured understanding of experiential tourism. By addressing its limitations through empirical testing and extension, researchers and practitioners can collaboratively build a robust model that captures the full richness of tourist experiences and guides the creation of truly memorable and meaningful journeys.

CONCLUSION

This research developed a structured framework for conceptualizing experiential tourism, filling a critical gap in tourism literature and practice. Through an extensive synthesis of prior studies, we identified five core dimensions—Local Experience, Memorable Experience, Learning Experience, Participation Experience, and Feeling Experience—that collectively define the experiential aspect of travel. These dimensions encapsulate how tourists engage with destinations (actively and authentically), what they gain (knowledge, memories, emotional fulfillment), and why those experiences stand out (novelty and personal significance). By proposing this five-factor model and situating it within a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) framework, the study provides a clear basis for measuring and validating the construction of experiential tourism.

The findings offer a significant contribution to the field of tourism management. The framework brings clarity and cohesion to a topic that has often been described in broad or varying terms. It synthesizes scattered insights into a unified model that researchers can now test empirically. In doing so, the study advances theoretical understanding by suggesting that experiential tourism is a multi-dimensional yet integrative construct. The confirmation (through future CFA) that these five dimensions indeed coalesce into one higher-order factor (experiential tourism) would be a novel validation of long-held assumptions about tourist experiences. Moreover, acknowledging each dimension’s role provides nuance—it shows that a destination must be more than just fun or just educational; it ideally needs to be a balanced blend of several experiential qualities to truly excel in today’s market.

From a practical standpoint, the framework serves as a strategic blueprint for destinations aiming to enhance or market their experiential offerings. Practitioners now have an evidence-based checklist: to deliver experiential tourism, ensure that visitors have authentic local interactions, opportunities to learn, active participation, emotionally rich moments, and ultimately create memories. The study’s insights encourage a holistic approach—focusing on one dimension (e.g., providing entertainment) without the others may not yield a lasting impression. Instead, destinations like Phuket can audit their tourism products against all five dimensions and invest in areas where they are lacking. For example, a highly

entertainment-driven destination might develop more cultural learning tours to add depth, while a destination rich in culture might innovate more interactive or adventurous options to add excitement. The framework also implicitly supports sustainable tourism development by valuing local culture and community involvement, aligning well with the goals of preserving heritage and benefiting host communities.

We acknowledge that this study was conceptual in nature, grounded in literature rather than field surveys. As such, an honest appraisal of its limitations is necessary. The framework awaits empirical validation; until tested with real tourist data, its components remain proposed constructs. Additionally, the content we drew from literature might carry publication biases (e.g., more emphasis on positive and novel aspects of experiences). Nevertheless, by being transparent about these limitations, we set a clear agenda for future research to strengthen and refine the model.

In summary, this study makes a meaningful step toward understanding what constitutes an enriching tourism experience. It provides a theoretically grounded, practical framework at a time when the tourism industry is pivoting strongly towards experiential value creation. The significant contribution of this work lies in transforming a popular but diffuse concept—experiential tourism—into a tangible set of dimensions that can be measured, managed, and enriched. Destinations that harness these insights can design travel offerings that not only satisfy tourists' current desires for unique and meaningful experiences, but also foster lasting positive memories and loyalty.

This conceptual framework is a preliminary model that awaits empirical validation; future studies should test and refine the five-dimension structure as discussed, to strengthen its generalizability and practical utility.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

We have declared the use of Gemini for grammatical review, sentence refinement, and assistance with table preparation. No content was generated by AI.

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THE AUTHORS

Benjamaporn Chumnanchar, PhD, is a lecturer in the Business Tourism Management and Hospitality Program at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Phuket Rajabhat University in Thailand. She holds a PhD in Integrated Tourism and Hospitality Management, and her research interests focus on Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE), Experience Design, and Event Management.

Email: benjamaporn.c@pkru.ac.th

Waret Ruttanavisanon, PhD, is a lecturer in the Health, Nature, and Cultural Tourism Management Program at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University in Thailand. He holds a PhD in Integrated Tourism and Hospitality Management, and his research interests encompass Health and Wellness Tourism, Religious Tourism, Hospitality and Tourism Management, Service Quality, and Tourism Marketing.

Email: waret.rut@mahidol.ac.th

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