Service Quality and Tourist Satisfaction in Cultural Tourism Destinations

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ABSTRACT

Purpose	This study aims to examine the effect of service quality dimensions on tourist satisfaction in cultural tourism destinations in West Sumatra. Specifically, it investigates how tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy contribute to tourists' overall satisfaction within culturally rich destinations where service encounters play a critical role in shaping visitor experiences.
Methodology	The research adopts a quantitative explanatory design using a survey approach. Data were collected from tourists visiting major cultural tourism destinations in West Sumatra through structured questionnaires. A total of 250 valid responses were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling to assess the relationships between service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction. The measurement and structural models were evaluated to ensure reliability, validity, and predictive accuracy.
Findings	The results indicate that all service quality dimensions have a positive and significant influence on tourist satisfaction. Assurance and reliability emerge as the strongest predictors, suggesting that tourists place high importance on service professionalism, trustworthiness, and consistency. Tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy also significantly enhance satisfaction, reflecting the importance of both physical attributes and interpersonal service interactions in cultural tourism contexts
Contribution	This study contributes to tourism and service quality literature by empirically validating the SERVQUAL framework in a cultural tourism setting within a developing region. It also provides practical insights for destination managers to prioritize service improvement strategies that enhance visitor satisfaction and destination competitiveness.
Keywords:	Service quality; Tourist satisfaction; Cultural tourism; SERVQUAL; West Sumatra

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic sectors in the global economy, contributing significantly to employment creation, regional development, and cultural exchange (UNWTO, 2022). In recent years, the focus of tourism development has shifted from mass tourism toward more experience-oriented forms, including cultural tourism, which emphasizes authenticity, heritage, and local identity (Richards, 2018). As tourists increasingly seek meaningful and memorable experiences, service quality has emerged as a critical determinant of tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness. High-quality services not only enhance tourists' experiences but also influence their overall evaluation of destinations, intention to revisit, and positive word-of-mouth (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 2018).

At the national level, Indonesia has positioned cultural tourism as a strategic pillar of its tourism development agenda. The country's rich cultural diversity, traditional customs, and historical heritage offer strong potential to attract both domestic and international tourists. Previous studies on sustainable and community-based tourism in Indonesia highlight that cultural resources alone are insufficient to ensure destination success without adequate service quality and community support (Arjuna et al. 2025; Pohan et al. 2025). In this context, tourist satisfaction becomes a key indicator of destination performance and sustainability (Chen & Chen, 2010).

From a sectoral perspective, cultural tourism represents a unique segment within the tourism industry that integrates tangible cultural resources with intangible service encounters. Unlike natural tourism, where environmental attributes may dominate tourist evaluations, cultural tourism experiences are strongly shaped by human interactions, interpretation quality, and service delivery processes (Richards, 2018). Tourists engaging in cultural tourism expect not only access to cultural attractions but also respectful treatment, accurate information, convenient facilities, and emotionally engaging experiences. Consequently, service quality plays a central role in shaping tourists' perceptions and satisfaction in cultural tourism destinations (Akama & Kieti, 2003).

Empirically, Sumatera Barat offers a compelling context for examining the relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction. The province is widely recognized for its strong Minangkabau cultural identity, traditional architecture, culinary heritage, and cultural festivals. Similar to other culturally rich destinations in Indonesia, cultural tourism development in Sumatera Barat faces challenges related to service consistency, infrastructure readiness, and coordination among tourism stakeholders (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023). Tourist feedback frequently indicates variations in service quality, particularly in accessibility, hospitality, and information availability.

These empirical conditions suggest a gap between the cultural richness of destinations and the quality of services experienced by tourists. Studies on cultural and sustainable tourism in Indonesia indicate that while cultural attractions often meet tourists' expectations, service-related shortcomings may reduce satisfaction and weaken destination image (Pohan et al. 2025). This issue is particularly critical in cultural tourism, where negative service encounters may be perceived as disrespectful to cultural values and undermine tourists' emotional connection with destinations (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

The core problem addressed in this study lies in the inconsistent levels of tourist satisfaction observed across cultural tourism destinations, despite similar cultural

offerings. This inconsistency suggests that factors beyond cultural assets influence tourists' evaluations. Although service quality has been widely acknowledged as a key determinant of satisfaction, its specific role within cultural tourism contexts remains underexplored, particularly at the regional level and outside major tourism hubs (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

A review of existing literature reveals several important research gaps. First, many studies on service quality and tourist satisfaction focus on mass tourism destinations, hotels, or transportation services, with limited attention to cultural tourism settings. Second, empirical findings on the influence of service quality dimensions on tourist satisfaction remain inconsistent, with some studies emphasizing tangible aspects while others highlight empathy and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Brady & Cronin, 2001).

To address these gaps, this study draws upon established service quality and satisfaction theories. The SERVQUAL framework provides a foundational model for understanding service quality through dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This framework is complemented by Expectation Confirmation Theory, which conceptualizes tourist satisfaction as the outcome of a comparison between pre-visit expectations and perceived performance (Oliver, 1980).

Positioned within this theoretical framework, the present study seeks to contribute to the tourism literature by providing empirical evidence from a culturally distinctive region. By focusing on Sumatera Barat, this research responds to calls for more context-specific tourism studies that reflect the diversity of cultural experiences across destinations (Richards, 2018).

The contributions of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it deepens understanding of how service quality dimensions operate in cultural tourism and clarifies their role in shaping tourist satisfaction. Practically, it provides insights for destination managers and policymakers in designing service improvement strategies that align with tourists' expectations while preserving cultural authenticity. Based on the arguments above, the objective of this study is to analyze the effect of service quality on tourist satisfaction in cultural tourism destinations in Sumatera Barat, with particular attention to how different service quality dimensions influence tourists' overall satisfaction and support sustainable cultural tourism development.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design
This study employs a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach to examine the effect of service quality on tourist satisfaction in cultural tourism destinations. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the objective of the study is to test theoretically grounded relationships between latent constructs and to measure the magnitude of their effects. The explanatory design enables the identification of causal relationships between service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction based on empirical data.

A cross sectional survey method was adopted, in which data were collected from tourists at a single point in time. This design is suitable for capturing tourists' evaluations of service quality and satisfaction immediately following their visitation experiences in cultural tourism destinations.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of domestic and international tourists who have visited cultural tourism destinations in Sumatera Barat. These destinations include cultural villages, historical sites, traditional houses, museums, and cultural event locations that represent Minangkabau heritage. Tourists are selected as the unit of analysis because they are the direct recipients of tourism services and are therefore able to evaluate service quality and satisfaction accurately.

The sample comprises tourists who are at least 18 years old and have completed their visit to one or more cultural tourism destinations in Sumatera Barat. This criterion ensures that respondents have sufficient experience with destination services to provide meaningful assessments.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size Determination

A purposive sampling technique was applied to select respondents who met the predefined criteria. This technique was chosen due to the absence of a complete sampling frame of tourists and the practical constraints of accessing visitors at tourism sites. Purposive sampling is commonly used in tourism research to ensure that respondents possess relevant experiential knowledge.

The minimum sample size was determined based on the requirements of Structural Equation Modeling. Following the guidelines proposed by Hair et al., the recommended sample size should be at least five to ten times the number of indicators included in the measurement model. Considering the number of service quality and satisfaction indicators used in this study, a minimum sample size of 200 respondents was deemed adequate. To enhance statistical power and reliability, a total of 230 questionnaires were distributed, resulting in 212 valid responses used for analysis.

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered directly to tourists at selected cultural tourism destinations. The questionnaire was designed to measure tourists' perceptions of service quality and their overall satisfaction. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pre tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and content validity.

Data collection was conducted both through face to face distribution at tourism sites and online distribution using digital survey tools. Respondents were informed about the voluntary nature of participation and assured of anonymity to minimize response bias and encourage honest responses.

Operational Definition of Variables and Measurement Indicators

Service quality is defined as tourists' perceptions of the overall excellence of services provided at cultural tourism destinations. It is measured using five dimensions adapted from the SERVQUAL model, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibility refers to the physical facilities and appearance of service personnel. Reliability reflects the ability to perform promised services dependably. Responsiveness denotes the willingness to help tourists and provide prompt service. Assurance relates to employees' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to inspire trust. Empathy refers to individualized attention and understanding of tourists' needs.

Tourist satisfaction is defined as tourists' overall evaluation of their experience at cultural tourism destinations, based on the comparison between expectations and

perceived service performance. Indicators include overall satisfaction, fulfillment of expectations, and satisfaction with the visit experience.

Measurement Scale

All constructs were measured using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Likert scale was selected due to its suitability for capturing perceptual and attitudinal responses in tourism research. The use of a standardized scale also facilitates comparison with previous empirical studies and supports measurement reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent Description

The respondents of this study consist of 212 tourists who visited cultural tourism destinations in Sumatera Barat. The demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents were domestic tourists, reflecting the dominant role of local and national tourism in the region. Most respondents were within the productive age group, suggesting that cultural tourism in Sumatera Barat attracts visitors who are economically active and capable of making discretionary travel decisions.

In terms of educational background, a substantial proportion of respondents held at least a bachelor's degree, indicating a relatively high level of awareness and evaluative capability when assessing service quality. The length of visit varied from one day to more than three days, implying diverse exposure levels to tourism services. Overall, the respondent characteristics provide a reliable basis for evaluating perceptions of service quality and tourist satisfaction.

Validity and Reliability Test

Prior to testing the structural relationships, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure construct validity and reliability. Convergent validity was assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted, while internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. These assessments are essential to confirm that the indicators accurately measure their respective constructs.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Assessment

Construct	Indicator Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Tangibility	0.72–0.85	0.83	0.88	0.59
Reliability	0.74–0.87	0.86	0.90	0.63
Responsiveness	0.70–0.84	0.81	0.87	0.57
Assurance	0.76–0.89	0.88	0.92	0.69
Empathy	0.73–0.86	0.84	0.89	0.61
Tourist Satisfaction	0.78–0.90	0.89	0.93	0.73

The results indicate that all indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming adequate convergent validity. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are above 0.70 for all constructs, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Furthermore, AVE values surpass the minimum criterion of 0.50, suggesting that the constructs explain more than half of the variance of their indicators. These findings confirm that the measurement model is valid and reliable for further structural analysis.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted by examining path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained through bootstrapping procedures. This approach enables the assessment of both the magnitude and significance of each hypothesized relationship.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Tangibility → Tourist Satisfaction	0.18	2.45	0.015	Supported
H2	Reliability → Tourist Satisfaction	0.26	3.71	0.000	Supported
H3	Responsiveness → Tourist Satisfaction	0.14	2.12	0.034	Supported
H4	Assurance → Tourist Satisfaction	0.29	4.08	0.000	Supported
H5	Empathy → Tourist Satisfaction	0.21	3.02	0.003	Supported

The results demonstrate that all dimensions of service quality have a positive and statistically significant effect on tourist satisfaction. Among these, assurance and reliability exhibit the strongest effects, indicating that tourists place high importance on trust, professionalism, and consistent service delivery. These findings provide empirical support for the proposed hypotheses and confirm the multidimensional nature of service quality in cultural tourism contexts.

Discussion

The Effect of Tangibility on Tourist Satisfaction

The findings indicate that tangibility has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction. This suggests that physical facilities, cleanliness, cultural artifacts, and visual presentation contribute meaningfully to tourists' overall experience. From a theoretical perspective, this result aligns with service quality theory, which posits that tangible cues shape initial perceptions and influence satisfaction judgments.

Consistent with previous tourism studies, tangible elements serve as experiential signals that reduce uncertainty and enhance perceived value. In the context of cultural tourism in Sumatera Barat, traditional architecture, cultural symbols, and well-maintained facilities reinforce authenticity and aesthetic appreciation. Practically, this

finding implies that destination managers should prioritize the maintenance and cultural integrity of physical infrastructures to enhance satisfaction.

The Effect of Reliability on Tourist Satisfaction

Reliability emerges as a significant determinant of tourist satisfaction, indicating that consistent and dependable service delivery strengthens tourists' positive evaluations. This result supports expectancy-disconfirmation theory, which emphasizes the importance of meeting promised service standards.

Prior empirical studies have consistently found reliability to be a core driver of satisfaction in tourism services. In the local context, reliability reflects the ability of service providers to deliver accurate information, adhere to schedules, and fulfill service promises. The implication is that destination management organizations must focus on operational consistency and service standardization to build tourists' confidence and satisfaction.

The Effect of Responsiveness on Tourist Satisfaction

The significant influence of responsiveness highlights the role of prompt assistance and willingness to help tourists. This finding aligns with relationship marketing theory, which emphasizes interactive and responsive service encounters as a basis for positive customer experiences.

Empirical comparisons indicate similar patterns in cultural tourism destinations, where timely responses enhance perceived care and reduce service-related stress. In Sumatera Barat, where tourists often seek cultural explanations and guidance, responsive staff play a crucial role in shaping meaningful experiences. This finding implies the need for continuous training focused on service agility and communication skills.

The Effect of Assurance on Tourist Satisfaction

Assurance has the strongest impact on tourist satisfaction among the service quality dimensions. This underscores the importance of trust, competence, and professionalism in tourism services. Theoretically, assurance contributes to perceived service credibility and reduces perceived risk, which is particularly relevant in unfamiliar cultural settings.

Previous research supports the dominant role of assurance in shaping satisfaction, especially in experiential and cultural tourism. In Sumatera Barat, knowledgeable and courteous staff enhance tourists' sense of security and cultural understanding. Managerially, this finding suggests that investing in employee training and cultural competence development is critical for improving tourist satisfaction.

The Effect of Empathy on Tourist Satisfaction

The positive effect of empathy indicates that personalized attention and understanding of tourists' needs significantly enhance satisfaction. This result aligns with human-centered service theories, which emphasize emotional engagement and individualized service.

Comparisons with prior studies reveal consistent evidence that empathy strengthens emotional bonds between tourists and destinations. In the cultural tourism context of Sumatera Barat, empathetic interactions reflect local hospitality values and cultural warmth. This implies that service providers should foster a service culture that

values attentiveness and personalized engagement to create memorable tourist experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical evidence on the role of service quality dimensions in shaping tourist satisfaction in cultural tourism destinations in Sumatera Barat. The findings demonstrate that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy collectively and individually exert significant positive effects on tourist satisfaction. Among these dimensions, assurance and reliability emerge as the most influential factors, highlighting the importance of trust, professionalism, and consistent service delivery in cultural tourism settings.

The research objectives are fully addressed through the confirmation that service quality functions as a key determinant of tourist satisfaction. The results indicate that tourists' evaluations are not only driven by physical attributes and facilities but also by interpersonal interactions and the perceived competence of service providers. This underscores the multidimensional nature of service quality in cultural tourism destinations.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the service quality and tourism literature by validating the SERVQUAL framework within a cultural tourism context in a developing destination. The findings extend existing theories by demonstrating that assurance and empathy play a critical role in enhancing satisfaction where cultural interpretation and personal interaction are central to the tourism experience.

Practically, the results offer important managerial implications for destination managers and policymakers. Improving employee competence, cultural knowledge, and communication skills should be prioritized to strengthen assurance and empathy. In addition, maintaining service consistency and upgrading tangible facilities that reflect local cultural identity can enhance tourists' overall satisfaction and destination competitiveness.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The research focuses on a single regional context, which may limit generalizability to other cultural tourism destinations. The cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to capture changes in tourist perceptions over time. Future research is encouraged to incorporate comparative or longitudinal designs, include additional behavioral outcomes such as loyalty and revisit intention, and examine moderating variables such as tourist motivation or cultural involvement to enrich understanding of satisfaction formation in cultural tourism.

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