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The Relationship Between Visitors' Emotional Experience, Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions: The Case of Çankırı Salt Express*

Mikail KARA[a], Çağrı SÜRÜCÜ[b], Yusuf Ziya AKBAŞ[c]**

[a] *Çankırı Karatekin University, Faculty of Tourism, Tourism Guiding Department, ÇANKIRI, E-mail: mkara@karatekin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-1027-3611*
[b] *Çankırı Karatekin University, Faculty of Tourism, Tourism Management Department, ÇANKIRI, E-mail: cagrisurucu@karatekin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-0454-9020*
[c] *Çankırı Karatekin University, Faculty of Tourism, Tourism Guiding Department, ÇANKIRI, E-mail: yusufziyaakbas@karatekin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-4478-3580*

Abstract

Emotional experience refers to the feelings that a destination's attractions evoke in visitors. It is known that experiences within this scope are effective in visitors' destination satisfaction and revisit intentions. The aim of this research is to reveal the emotional experience levels of those who visit the city via Çankırı Salt Express and to examine the effects of these experiences on destination satisfaction and behavioural intention. For this purpose, the research data were collected through surveys from 221 visitors who travelled to Çankırı via the Touristic Salt Express in November 2024 and agreed to participate in the study. Quantitative research method was adopted as the research method. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to investigate the relationships between variables. According to the findings, it was determined that aesthetic and entertainment experiences have a significant effect on destination satisfaction and satisfaction shapes the future behavioural intentions of visitors. In the light of the findings, suggestions for destination managers and researchers were presented.

Keywords: Emotional experience, Satisfaction, Behavioural intention, Çankırı touristic salt express.

Ziyaretçilerin Duygusal Deneyim, Memnuniyet ve Davranışsal Niyetleri Arasındaki İlişki: Çankırı Tuz Ekspresi Örneği

Öz

Duygusal deneyim, bir destinasyonun çekiciliklerinin ziyaretçilerde uyandırdığı duyguları ifade eder. Bu kapsamdaki deneyimlerin ziyaretçilerin destinasyon memnuniyetlerinde ve tekrar ziyaret niyetlerinde etkili olduğu bilinmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, Çankırı Tuz Ekspresi ile şehri ziyaret edenlerin duygusal deneyim düzeylerini ortaya koymak ve bu deneyimlerin destinasyon memnuniyeti ve davranışsal niyet üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda araştırmanın verileri 2024 yılı Kasım ayında Turistik Tuz Ekspresi ile Çankırı'yı ziyaretçilerden araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden 221 kişiden anket yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Araştırma yöntemi olarak nicel araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Değişkenler arası ilişkileri araştırmak için yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (YEM) kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre estetik ve eğlence deneyimlerinin destinasyon memnuniyeti üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisi olduğu, memnuniyetin ise ziyaretçilerin gelecekteki davranışsal niyetlerini şekillendirdiği tespit edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular ışığında destinasyon yöneticilerine ve araştırmacılara yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygusal deneyim, Memnuniyet, Davranışsal niyet, Çankırı turistik tuz ekspresi.

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** Corresponding author e-mail: cagrisurucu@karatekin.edu.tr

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry laid the foundations of mass tourism with the first organized tour initiated in England in 1851 under the leadership of Thomas Cook. In 1862, Cook started to organize package tours to Asia and America using railway and maritime transport and reached an annual number of 20 thousand tourists by 1897. These developments enabled an increase in touristic mobility on a global scale. Therefore, it can be said that train services play an important role in the development of tourism (Çelebi Sonay, 2019). Factors such as speed, comfort and accessibility offered by rail transport increased access to touristic destinations and enabled more people to experience tourism. During the era when steam locomotives dominated the railways, trains were not only a means of transportation but were also operated specifically for tourists who wanted to enjoy the journey itself. Train journeys powered by steam locomotives were far from being a new concept in tourism; in some countries, the journey itself held far more significance than the destination (Thomson, 1985). Although steam-powered locomotion has largely disappeared today, steam trains are still being promoted in many countries to offer tourists a nostalgic experience.

These historical processes have made trains more than just a means of transportation but also seen as a touristic experience. Touristic trains still offer tourists unique experiences even though trains have lost their former importance for mass tourism with the diversification of transportation systems today. These trains provide touristic experiences by offering panoramic views, comfortable interiors and mentoring services to travellers who usually visit locations with historical, natural and cultural importance (Gencal, 2024). These special train services make not only reaching the destinations important, but also the experiences lived during the journey. Transportation is one of the basic elements of the tourism sector and the improvement of transportation infrastructure plays a decisive role in the development of tourism; because beyond tourists reaching a destination, transportation itself can also become a tourist attraction (Bayat & Özdemir, 2020; Kovalenko-Marchenkova, Martseniuk & Andryeyeva 2023). In this context, transportation is regarded not merely as spatial mobility, but as a multidimensional phenomenon that gains meaning through the experiences an individual acquire during the journey.

The travel experience includes not only arriving at the destination but also emotional experiences during the travel process. The travel process both provides passengers with physical transportation and offers an emotionally significant experience (Su & Wall, 2009). So, the transformation of transportation into a tourist attraction is directly related to a process in which the emotional experiences of tourists are shaped; because tourists' satisfaction is greatly affected not only by the destination but also by the experiences during the travel process. Such emotional experiences are considered as one of the main factors affecting the formation of tourists' general satisfaction levels.

Satisfaction is shaped by the cognitive and emotional evaluations that consumers make by comparing the performance of a product or service with their expectations. Emotional experience stands out as an important factor affecting customer satisfaction in this process, with positive or negative emotions (Calvo-Porral & Otero-Prada, 2021). Customer satisfaction is usually an evaluation judgment made after consumption of a product or service and is linked to the customer's perceptions of the value received and individual emotions such as pleasure or disappointment (Ardani et al., 2019). The evaluation of tourist satisfaction should be addressed with a multidimensional approach. Tourists may have different motivations for visiting certain destinations and may also differ in terms of their satisfaction perceptions and evaluation criteria (Yoon & Uysal, 2005: 47-48).

One of the behavioural outcomes of tourist satisfaction is loyalty towards the destination. Revisit intention is the desire to revisit a destination and is a strong indicator of destination loyalty. Many studies in the literature have examined the factors affecting revisit intention and support that destination satisfaction is one of the strongest influences on this intention (Acharya, Mekker & De Vos, 2023). In addition to increasing tourists' satisfaction, unforgettable experiences that tourists have during their travels strengthen their revisit intention. This not only encourages tourists to revisit the destination but also encourages them to refer others to it, thus contributing to the sustainability of destinations (Torabi et al., 2022). In this context, Lee (2016) examined the relationship between emotional experiences, cognitive processes and behavioural intentions of battlefield tourism and stated that these processes shape each other. Lu et al. (2017) on the other hand stated that the experience of awe varies according to the way they perceive the environment and that this experience affects tourists' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. In her study, Prentice (2020) stated that emotional intelligence plays an important role in the interactions of tourism service representatives with tourists, positively affecting the satisfaction and behavioural intentions of tourists. Zheng et al. (2020) emphasize that emotional experiences in places

where death and tragedy have been witnessed can affect visitors' satisfaction and future intentions. Leri and Theodoridis (2021) found, in the case of wine tourism, that environmental factors and the behaviour of other visitors strengthen future visit intentions by increasing emotional arousal. Otoo, Kim and Stylidis (2021) showed that positive emotions, especially joy and love, positively affect future travel intentions by increasing personal involvement and satisfaction. Jiang et al. (2022) on the other hand stated that tourists seek not only relaxation but also authentic experiences and especially young tourists prefer to integrate more deeply into the local culture.

Nostalgia, associated with tourists' longing for past experiences, strengthens their attachment to destinations and shapes their behavioural intentions (Wang, 2023). Studies in sectors such as spa tourism show that emotional experiences have strong effects on destination image and satisfaction. These emotions, especially "joy", "love" and "positive surprise" increase visitors' satisfaction levels and strengthen their intentions to revisit (Suban, 2024). Nguyen and Duong (2024) revealed that nostalgic emotional experiences strengthen the destination image and encourage word-of-mouth communication and sustainable behaviours. Su et al. (2024) on the other hand emphasized that relaxing and challenging activities encourage environmentally friendly behaviours and that tourists' perception of power plays an important role in this process. Baniya et al. (2024) stated that emotions have significant effects on destination loyalty and satisfaction and stated that especially love and joy strengthen place identity and loyalty. Aslan (2025) examined the relationship between emotional solidarity, behavioural intention and local people's support for tourism development and emphasized the mediating role of behavioural intention in this process. Tang et al. (2025) revealed that environmentally friendly perception encourages environmental responsibility and environmental behaviours by creating positive emotional experiences.

In the context of a direct relationship with nature, train journeys stand out as a symbolical example of unforgettable emotional experiences. The railways sometimes serve as a transport corridor connecting rural areas or urban settlements and green belts (Abdullah & Syed Jaafar, 2021). Train journeys that last one or two days offer tourists the opportunity to explore mystical regions intertwined with nature, offering unique experiences that combine culture and tourism. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in alternative tourism routes in Türkiye and express services along the railway extending from the west to the east have become popular (Başarangil, 2022). In this context, tourist trains go beyond being just a means of transportation and offer a unique travel experience that appeals to all the senses and have become an important alternative in many parts of the world. Tourist travels by train offer visitors the opportunity to have a different experience and are of great value in terms of cultural heritage (Bayat, 2021).

One of the prominent concrete examples in this context is the Touristic Salt Express initiative. The Touristic Salt Express made its first trip in May 2024 and was operated for tourism purposes every Saturday for a month. Train services continued as planned during the months of September, October and November. By this train, passengers travelled to Çankırı, a city that hosts the ancient culture of Anatolia, experiencing underground salt city, boutique museums, local delicacies and other tourist attractions throughout the day (TCDD, 2025). The scientific examination of the travel experience offered by this unique initiative contributes to a deeper understanding of the emotional and behavioural impacts of transportation on individuals.

The scientific evaluation of the experiences offered by this particular initiative constitutes the main objective of this study. The aim of this research is to reveal the emotional experience levels of those who visited the city by Çankırı Salt Express and to examine the effects of these experiences on destination satisfaction and behavioural intention. In addition, determining the relationships between emotional experiences and other variables is among the objectives of the research. In this regard, the study not only contributes to the existing literature but also serves as a guiding resource for tourism policies. The fact that research on touristic train travels is limited and that it addresses the emotional experience, customer experiences and behavioural intentions of tourists in the destination from a holistic perspective increases the importance of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Emotional Experience

Tourism experience can be defined as the subjective and cognitive state perceived by visitors during a service encounter. The tourism experience has unique, emotionally charged and high personal value. Emotions play an important role in tourism, given that holidays are rich in experiential qualities (Hosany & Gilbert, 2009: 6). The concept of experience plays an important role in tourism research as well as in destination positioning. For example, it is a central element in MacCannell's (1989) tourist experience approach and

it is the tourist's search for an authentic experience. In this direction, tourism destinations are considered as places where authenticity that tourists cannot encounter in their daily lives is staged (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007: 119). Akkuş (2019) states that emotions which play an important role in product and service evaluations, are emotional reactions that are specifically obtained during the use of the product or service or that emerge as a result of the consumption experience. Cavlak & Cop (2019) mention three types of emotional experiences of tourists: "entertainment", "escapism" and "aesthetic". The need for entertainment is an emotional experience that is known as the primary motivator of tourism and is also reflected in the definitions of tourism. The escapism experience is also very important for tourists. People who travel usually act with the motivation of having an escape experience. People who want to see different cultures and environments want to get away from their ordinary living environments. Aesthetic experience on the other hand is an element that can be associated with the visual richness, artistic and natural beauties of the places visited (Kara & Tokmak, 2023: 243). Tourism experience occurs within the individual tourist as an internal, cognitive process stimulated through interactions and encounters at the destination. This process results in a state of psychological reflection or emotional experience. The emotional state refers to the individual's initial anticipation of the trip and the on-site encounter (Larsen, 2007). In other words, the complexity of experience formation stems from its psychological structure and this entire process affects the tourist's emotional state that is; his/her emotional experiences (Mohd et al., 2019: 131).

Destination Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a psychological concept that includes the feeling of well-being and pleasure that occurs when an individual meets his or her expectations and hopes from an attractive product or service (Chi & Qu, 2008). Likewise, tourist satisfaction is directly affected by tourists' expectations, too (Wang et al., 2009). On the other hand, destination satisfaction refers to the total emotion an individual experiences after and/or during visiting a destination (Cole & Scott, 2004). Destination satisfaction is measured as qualitative satisfaction or overall satisfaction. While qualitative satisfaction evaluates the visitor's level of satisfaction with various features of the destination, overall satisfaction measures the visitors' level of satisfaction holistically. Common destination qualities generally taken into consideration are nature, culture, service, infrastructure, accommodation and food (Acharya et al., 2023: 2). Chon (1989) demonstrated that destination satisfaction depends on the level of fit between the tourist's expectations about the destination and his/her experiences there. In other words, the difference between the tourist's pre-visit image of the destination and the elements he/she personally experiences in the destination determines the level of satisfaction. Increasing tourist satisfaction not only has positive effects on tourism service providers and the image of the destination, but also strengthens tourist loyalty, reduces price flexibility, lowers transaction costs and increases efficiency. Therefore, countries attach great importance to measuring tourist satisfaction (Chen, Zhang & Qiu, 2013: 75).

Behavioural Intention

Behavioural intention is considered a basic construct in predicting individuals' future behaviour. Revisit intention refers to individuals' desire to visit a particular destination again in the future. Baker and Crompton (2000) defined revisit behaviour as "the possibility that a tourist will participate in an activity again". In the literature it is suggested that cognition affects emotion, emotion affects attitude and attitude affects behavioural intention (Cheng & Lu, 2013: 770). Behavioural intention can be classified as positive or negative. Positive behavioural intention reflects customer loyalty, which includes behaviours such as word of mouth (recommendation), higher spending and loyalty (Chen & Chen, 2010). Burton, Sheather & Roberts (2003) stated that customer experience is related to intentions. The more positive the customer's experience the more likely they are to use the service again (Ardani et al., 2019: 86). Tourist behaviours include choosing a destination to visit, subsequent evaluations and future behavioural intentions. Subsequent evaluations include the travel experience, perceived trip quality, perceived value and overall satisfaction during the stay, while future behavioural intentions include revisit intention and willingness to recommend. Tourist behaviour consists of a series of events including the decision-making process before the visit, on-site experiences, evaluation of these experiences and post-visit behavioural intentions and behaviours (Chen & Tsai, 2007: 1115). Revisit behaviour is one of the important determinants of future travel behaviour. Behavioural intention indicates how much effort a person is willing to put in to perform a certain action. It reflects consumers' loyalty to purchase repeatedly (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Emotional Experience and Destination Satisfaction

Destinations, which mean much more than geographical location, are considered as a combination of products and services that provide positive or negative emotions to tourists. Therefore, tourists' emotions should be taken into consideration when

examining tourist satisfaction (Biswas et al., 2021: 494). Emotions are defined as intense feelings that trigger specific reaction behaviours. Playing an important function in defining experiences and influencing consumer responses, emotions accumulate emotional memory traces that consumers process and integrate to form post-consumption satisfaction evaluations. Satisfaction is a positive reaction resulting from the evaluation of a consumption experience (Prayag, Hosany & Odeh, 2013: 120). In the literature, the importance of the emotions that consumers feel and experience during the service experience is emphasized. Therefore, the emotions experienced in the service sector affect consumer behaviours such as satisfaction and complaint (Calvo-Porral & Otero-Prada, 2021: 471).

There are various studies in the literature examining the relationship between emotional experience and satisfaction. Çetinkaya (2021) found that there was no significant relationship between the aesthetic, escapism, entertainment sub-dimensions of emotional experience and satisfaction as a result of the survey she conducted on foreign cruise tourists who visited Topkapı Palace within the scope of daily city tours. As a result of the research conducted by Akkuş & Korkmaz (2022) in a thermal hotel in the Reşadiye district of Tokat province, it was determined that emotional experiences did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. As a result of the study conducted on customers of E-bebek stores in Antalya and Isparta, Elibol (2022) determined that the escapism dimension of the emotional experience did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction, while a positive significant relationship was found between the aesthetic and entertainment dimensions and customer satisfaction. On the other hand, in studies conducted by Güven & Ay (2020) on shopping mall customers in İzmir, Birdir & Bezek (2023) on restaurant customers in Türkiye, Saruhanoğlu & Kerim (2020) on Gloria Jean's Coffees customers in Türkiye, Şıttak (2021) on tourists in the Assos region of Çanakkale, Hagen & Bron (2014) on intercity train passengers, Quynh, Hoai & Loi (2021) on local tourists in the city of Hoi An (Vietnam), Prayag et al. (2017) on domestic tourists visiting the Sardinia Island of Italy, Tlili & Amara (2016) on foreign tourists staying in four-star hotels in Tunisia, González-Rodríguez, Domínguez-Quintero & Paddison (2020) on tourists in the cities of Seville (Spain) and York (England), Breiby & Slatten (2018) on tourists in Norway, Pestana, Parreira & Moutinho (2020) on third-age tourists visiting Lisbon (Portugal) and Koenig-Lewis & Palmer (2014) on university students in England found a positive significant relationship between emotional experience and satisfaction as a result of their research.

As a result of the literature review the following hypotheses were developed:

H_1: Emotional experience has a positive and significant effect on destination satisfaction.

H_{1a}: The aesthetic sub-dimension of emotional experience has a positive and significant effect on destination satisfaction.

H_{1b}: The entertainment sub-dimension of emotional experience has a positive and significant effect on destination satisfaction.

H_{1c}: The escapism sub-dimension of emotional experience has a positive and significant effect on destination satisfaction.

Destination Satisfaction and Behavioural Intention

Tourism is considered one of the basic dynamics of regional development. A successful tourism sector contributes to the regional economy by increasing the tourism revenues of the destination, encourages employment and increases public revenues. In this context, the tendency of tourists to revisit the destination and their behaviour of recommending the destination to others are considered as a critical element for the sustainable development of tourism destinations (Chen & Tsai, 2007: 1115). The quality and performance of tourism destinations are also often evaluated by a combination of two characteristics; destination satisfaction and behavioural intention (revisit intention) (Cole & Scott, 2004). Satisfaction is a summary of a cognitive and emotional response to a previous consumption experience, while behavioural intention refers to the probability of an individual to perform a certain action, for example, to purchase a product (Dolnicar, Coltman & Sharma, 2015: 152; Özdemir & Değirmencioğlu, 2021: 952).

Satisfaction is an important element for maintaining long-term relationships with customers. Dmitrovic et al., (2009) stated that increasing tourist satisfaction could contribute to increased revenue and profit for service suppliers. Forozia, Zadeh & Gilani, (2013) found in their research that customer satisfaction is the main factor that encourages tourism businesses to achieve success and advantage in competition. The role of customer satisfaction is an important factor affecting customer behavioural intentions. Understanding the cognitive and behavioural outcomes of satisfaction has important implications for management purposes (Ardani et al., 2019). Understanding the direct effects of destination satisfaction on destination popularity, revisit intention, word-of-mouth marketing, product and service consumption and loyalty (Kozak et al.,

2005) is important in improving visitors' overall destination experiences and creating an effective marketing strategy (Acharya et al., 2023: 2).

There are various studies in the literature examining the relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention (revisit intention). Özdemir & Mısırlı (2020), as a result of their research on students studying at Çankırı Karatekin University and using intercity bus companies; Dağdeviren, Kara & Özdemir (2018), as a result of their survey on visitors staying at Çankırı Çavundur thermal accommodation facilities; Özdemir & Yelken (2021) on university students coming to Ilgaz Yıldıztepe Ski Centre for ski training, found a positive significant relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention.

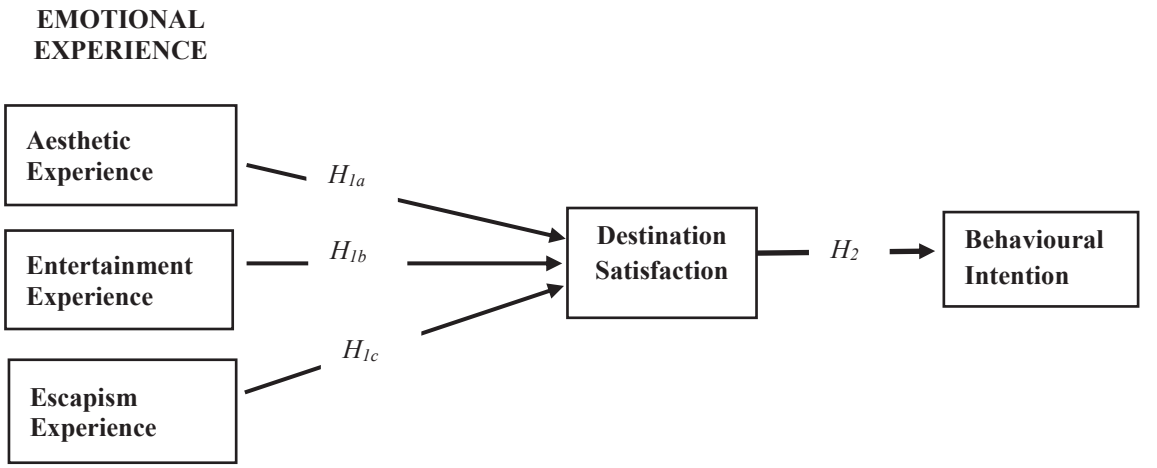

Figure 1: Research Model

In their studies conducted by Kim (2016), on passengers using the urban railway line in Daejeon (South Korea), Wang et al. (2020), in Tianjin (China), Ibrahim et al. (2023), in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Febrianti, Asmala & Johan (2023), on railway customers in Bandung (Indonesia); Seçilmiş, Uysal & Aydın (2019), on passengers traveling by high-speed train between Istanbul, Ankara, Eskişehir and Konya provinces, found that satisfaction positively affects repeat purchasing behaviour.

Rajput & Gahfoor (2020), as a result of their research conducted in fast food restaurants in Pakistan; Prayag & Ryan (2012), as a result of their research on international visitors staying in hotels on the island of Mauritius (Africa); Cinnioğlu & Gündoğdu (2023) as a result of their research on local tourists in Hatay (Türkiye); Rittichainuwat, Qu & Mongknonvanit (2002), as a result of their research on international tourists visiting Thailand at Bangkok Airport; Jang & Feng (2007), as a result of their research on tourists visiting Canada; Simpson et al., (2020), as a result of their research on visitors to ecological accommodation facilities in Sri Lanka; Chelliah et al., (2019), as a result of their research on international students in Malaysia; Torabi et al., (2022), as a result of their survey on local visitors visiting Tehran (Iran); An, Suh & Eck (2019) as a result of their research on those staying through Airbnb in the USA found a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and revisit intention.

As a result of the literature review the following hypothesis was developed:

H_2: Destination satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on behavioural intention.

The research model prepared in the light of these hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

The survey form used in this study consists of four sections. The first section includes questions regarding the demographic information of the participants. The second section includes the "Emotional Experience Scale" consisting of three dimensions and 10 items, developed by Oh et al., (2007) and used by Cavlak and Cop (2019) in their studies. The third section includes the "Destination Satisfaction Scale", which consists of a single dimension and four items and was used in Song et al.'s (2015) study. The "Behavioural Intention Scale" used by İlban, Bezirgan and Çolakoğlu (2016) in their study is in the last section and consists of a single dimension and five items. The statements were measured using a five-point Likert-type rating (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The scale items used in the study are presented in Appendix 1.

Sample and Data Collection

The universe of the research consists of domestic tourists who come to Çankırı province with the

touristic salt express train tour. Visitors who set off from Ankara with the Touristic Salt Express, which was launched in 2024 as a continuation of the Tenezzüh (Excursion) Train services organized from Ankara to Çankırı 90 years ago, reach Çankırı after a three-hour train journey and have the opportunity to visit the historical and touristic places of the city, especially the Underground Salt City (Anadolu Agency, 2025). The sample of the research consists of local tourists who visited Çankırı with the touristic salt express train tour in November 2024. The data of the study were collected by the researchers through face-to-face surveys. Convenience sampling method was used in data collection. A pilot study was conducted with 50 local tourists to determine the structural validity and reliability of the survey form. According to the assumption that the number of variables is at least 10 times larger for calculating the sample size, at least 190 surveys are needed since there are 19 propositions in the study (Roscoe, 1975; Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). As a result of the pilot study, the survey was used without any changes. A total of 230 surveys were collected within the scope of the research. 9 incompletely filled surveys were removed from the data set and analyses were carried out on 221 surveys.

Data Analysis

All data analyses in the study were performed using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 software programs. First, descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of the participants were performed. Second, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to test the suitability of the measurement model. Finally, structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed to investigate the relationships between the variables *(This study was approved by the Çankırı Karatekin University Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences Ethics Committee with decision number 25.10.2024 / 46).*

FINDINGS

It is noteworthy that the majority of the participants are female (76%), married (52%), have a bachelor's degree (55%), are aged 55 and over (52%) and have a middle income (79%) (Table 1).

At the same time, the mean values and standard deviations of the scale expressions used in the research are reflected in Table 2. For example, it is noticeable that the item "In general, I was satisfied with my visit to Çankırı" (DM4) has the highest mean ($\bar{x}$= 4.39); on the contrary, the proposition "I felt like a different character in this region" has the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$= 2.84).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	169	76,5
	Male	52	23,5
Marital Status	Married	115	52,0
	Single	106	48,0
Education Level	High School Graduate	68	30,7
	Bachelor's Degree	123	55,7
	Postgraduate Graduate	30	13,6
Age	18-24 years old	26	11,8
	25-34 years old	15	6,8
	35-44 years old	20	9,0
	45-54 years old	44	19,9
	55 and over	116	52,5
Occupation	Public Sector Employee	58	26,2
	Private Sector Employee	26	11,8
	Business Owner	5	2,3
	Retired	91	41,2
	Not Employed	41	18,5
Monthly Income (TL)	Low	25	11,3
	Medium	175	79,2
	High	21	9,5

Measurement Model

In order to verify the measurement model used in the study, confirmatory factor analysis is applied to the scales used in the study. Since the data obtained within the scope of the study showed normal distribution, the maximum likelihood technique was used (Bacon, 1997; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). Before conducting hypothesis tests, the measurement model was tested (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The results obtained are reflected in Table 2. First, factor loadings were examined. The factor loadings of all scale items in the measurement model were calculated between 0.596 and 0.943. All t-values of the scale items were found to be statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$). In addition, the goodness of fit values were found to be acceptable (x^2=286.315; df=142; x^2/df=2.016; CFI=0.951; NFI=0.908; IFI=0.951; TLI=0.941; RMSEA=0.068; SRMR=0.047) and all the data obtained showed that the structural model was good (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016).

Table 2. Measurement Model Result

Factors	Scale Items	Standardized Factor Loading	t Value	p Value	Skewness	Kurtosis	Average	Std. Deviation
Aesthetic Experience AVE:0,632 CR:0,873 Cronbach's Alpha:0,872	EsE1	0,752	*fixed	***	-,713	,053	3,85	1,038
	EsE2	0,796	11,898	***	-1,156	1,199	4,12	0,957
	EsE3	0,836	12,535	***	-,581	-,374	3,82	1,030
	EsE4	0,794	11,867	***	-,924	,456	3,90	1,069
Entertainment Experience AVE:0,825 CR: 0,934 Cronbach's Alpha: 0,931	EE1	0,857	* fixed	***	-1,459	2,407	4,27	0,903
	EE2	0,943	20,051	***	-1,367	1,735	4,20	0,985
	EE3	0,923	19,318	***	-1,341	1,902	4,27	0,894
Escapism Experience AVE:0,720 CR: 0,885 Cronbach's Alpha:0,884	EscE1	0,864	* fixed	***	,082	-1,185	2,84	1,357
	EscE2	0,895	14,000	***	-,242	-1,150	3,20	1,369
	EscE3	0,782	13,652	***	,097	-1,160	2,92	1,364
Destination Satisfaction AVE:0,703 CR: 0,904 Cronbach's Alpha:0,899	DS1	0,774	* fixed	***	-1,816	3,794	4,37	0,893
	DS2	0,833	13,270	***	-1,426	1,781	4,27	0,976
	DS3	0,871	13,991	***	-,991	,564	4,29	0,819
	DS4	0,872	14,002	***	-1,868	4,069	4,39	0,854
Behavioural Intention AVE:0,551 CR:0,857 Cronbach's Alpha:0,848	BI 1	0,596	* fixed	***	-,723	,121	3,85	1,060
	BI 2	0,739	8,484	***	-,809	,209	4,13	0,894
	BI 3	0,880	9,359	***	-,853	-,093	4,25	0,868
	BI 4	0,822	9,062	***	-,808	-,069	4,14	0,934
	BI 5	0,636	7,641	***	-1,154	1,183	4,22	0,939

Note: (*) The indicator is fixed at 1. (***) $p < 0,001$

AVE: Average Variance Explained; **CR**: Composite Reliability

$\chi 2$: 286,315; df: 142; $p < 0,001$; $\chi 2$ / df: 2,016 CFI: 0,951; NFI: 0,908; IFI: 0,951; TLI: 0,941; RMSEA: 0,068; SRMR: 0,047

Convergent validity was examined with AVE values. AVE value should be 0.50 and above (Hair et al., 2017). AVE value of each factor was found to be minimum 0.551. Cronbach's alpha values of the scales were found to vary between 0.848 and 0.931; CR coefficient was found to vary between 0.857 and 0.934 and were above the minimum level (≥ 0.70) (Hair et al., 2013). Therefore, these values indicate the reliability of the measurement model.

The discriminant validity of the measurement model was examined as in Table 3. Both Fornell & Larcker and heterotrait monotrait (HTMT) criteria were used to assess discriminant validity in the measurement model. According to the Fornell Larcker criterion, the √AVE value calculated for each factor should be higher than the correlation of the factors they are related to with other factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the Fornell & Larcker criterion was met. In addition, the HTMT values were below 0.90. According to these results, it is seen that discriminant validity was achieved according to both criteria.

the standardized path coefficients for each construct in the model varied between 0.32 and 0.48 and the t values were found to be statistically significant. In addition, low (< 0.10), medium (between 0.11 and 0.49) and high (> 0.50) level classification was adopted for the effect size of standardized path coefficients (Kline, 2016).

In the light of the findings, it was determined that aesthetic experience (β= 0.48, t= 4.30, p< 0.001) and entertainment experience (β= 0.39, t= 4.28, p< 0.001) affected destination satisfaction positively, moderately and statistically significantly. In other words, it can be stated that individuals who had positive aesthetic and entertainment experiences were more satisfied with the destination. In this context, hypotheses H_{1a} and H_{1b} were supported. Hypothesis H_{1c} was not supported. In the context of the second hypothesis in the research model, it is observed that destination satisfaction affected behavioural intention (β= 0.32, t= 4.05, p< 0.001) positively, moderately and statistically significantly. Therefore, hypothesis H_2 was supported.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Criterion

Fornell-Larcker	**ESE**	**EE**	**EscE**	**DS**	**BI**
Aesthetic Experience	***0,795***				
Entertainment Experience	0,772	***0,908***			
Escapism Experience	0,618	0,477	***0,849***		
Destination Satisfaction	0,754	0,742	0,439	***0,838***	
Behavioural Intention	0,333	0,250	0,308	0,312	***0,742***
HTMT	**ESE**	**EE**	**EscE**	**DS**	**BI**
Aesthetic Experience					
Entertainment Experience	0,783				
Escapism Experience	0,609	0,780			
Destination Satisfaction	0,773	0,779	0,435		
Behavioural Intention	0,349	0,264	0,302	0,323	

Note: The values in italics with bold show the square root of the explained mean–variance (√AVE), while the other values in the same column show the correlations between the relevant constructs.

ESE: Aesthetic Experience; **EE:** Entertainment Experience; **EscE:** Escapism Experience;

DS: Destination Satisfaction; **BI:** Behavioural Intention

Structural Model

After determining the construct validity and reliability of the measurement model, the hypotheses were tested. It was determined that the chi-square (χ2) value of the model was 294.031, the degree of freedom (df) was 145, the $\chi 2$/df value was 2.028 and at a significant level (p< 0.001). In addition, the goodness of fit values of the measurement model were found to be at an acceptable level (CFI=0.949; NFI= 0.906; IFI= 0.950; TLI=0.940; RMSEA=0.068). It is noteworthy that

CONCLUSION

The research reveals that the majority of the participants are female, married, have a bachelor's degree, are aged 55 and over and are middle-income individuals. It was observed that visitors were generally satisfied with Çankırı and they gave high scores to the statement "I was satisfied with my visit to Çankırı in general", but scored low to the statement "I felt like I was a different character in this region". This fact shows that the visitors' aesthetic and social interaction experiences

Table 4. Results Regarding the Structural Model

Hypotheses				β	t value	p	R^2	Result
H_{1a}	Aesthetic Experience	→	Destination Satisfaction	0,480	4,304	***	0,637	Supported
H_{1b}	Entertainment Experience	→	Destination Satisfaction	0,390	4,280	***	0,637	Supported
H_{1c}	Escapism Experience	→	Destination Satisfaction	-0,039	-0,557	0,578	0,637	Not Supported
H_2	Destination Satisfaction	→	Behavioural Intention	0,323	4,056	***	0,104	Supported

Note: β: Standardized path coefficients **(***):** p<0,001

t value: ≥ 2.58 (p < 0.001); ≥ 1.96 (p < 0.05) (Byrne, 2010: 68; Hair et al., 2011)

χ2: 294,031; **df:** 145; p < 0.001; **χ2/df:** 2,028 **CFI:** 0.949; **NFI:** 0.906; **IFI:** 0.950; **TLI:** 0.940; **RMSEA:** 0.068; **SRMR:** 0.058

in the region did not meet their expectations. Visitors emphasized the lack of cultural interaction and the inadequacy of aesthetic experiences in the region. This result is consistent with studies such as MacCannell (1989) and Oh et al., (2007), that is, failure to meet the search for authentic experience suggests that visitors' experiences are unsatisfactory. It is emphasized in the literature that tourists' satisfaction affects their future behaviour and especially strengthens their revisit intention (Özdemir & Mısırlı, 2020; Seçilmiş et al., 2019). In this context, improvements in aesthetic and social experiences in Çankırı can increase visitors' future visit intentions.

The study also examined the impact of visitors' emotional experiences on destination satisfaction and behavioural intentions. It was found that aesthetic and entertainment experiences had a significant impact on destination satisfaction and satisfaction shaped visitors' future behavioural intentions. These findings align with previous literature. For example, Hagen & Bron (2014) found a positive significant relationship between emotional experience and satisfaction in their study on intercity train passengers in the Netherlands. Additionally, Prayag & Ryan (2012) stated that emotional experience was strongly associated with satisfaction in their study on tourists staying in hotels on the island of Mauritius. However, the lack of a significant effect of the escape experience on destination satisfaction reveals that such experiences may not always be successful. Studies such as Çetinkaya (2021) and Akkuş & Korkmaz (2022) also pointed out that the escape experience did not create the expected effect in certain tourism destinations and that these experiences did not have an impact on tourist satisfaction. In this context, it can be said that tourism destinations should focus on more interactive, aesthetic and entertaining elements in their marketing strategies instead of experiences based solely on rest and escape. These findings, which show that aesthetic and entertaining elements can create a stronger effect than escape-oriented experiences, indicate that tourism destinations should reshape their marketing strategies.

The findings highlight that destination satisfaction has a significant impact on behavioural intentions and that it is a critical factor for sustainable success in the tourism sector. There are similar findings in the literature; for example, Wang & Hsu (2010), Saut & Song (2022) and Acharya et al., (2023) stated that satisfaction plays an important role in determining visitors' future behaviour, especially their revisit intentions. Baniya, Chaulagai and Okumus (2024) found that tourists' emotional experiences significantly affect destination identity and destination loyalty. Nguyen and Duong (2025) concluded that destination image positively affects sustainable behavioural intention as a result of their research. Suban (2024) suggested that a higher degree of satisfaction would encourage visitors to revisit the destination as a result of their research. On the other hand, Patwardhan et al., (2020) found that visitors' emotional experiences mediate destination attachment dimensions on loyalty. These findings are also consistent with the research conducted by Seçilmiş et al., (2019). In their research, they found that satisfaction with the destination positively affects visitors' behavioural intentions and tourists with high levels of satisfaction are more likely to revisit the destination and recommend it to others. This result is consistent with the findings of the current study and reveals that tourism businesses should make customer satisfaction their top priority. Ensuring visitors' satisfaction not only keeps them loyal, but also helps bring in new customers through word of mouth marketing.

DISCUSSION

Peira, Bonadonna and Beltramo (2024) state that railway tourism in Italy has a significant potential that can be developed by operational organizations thanks to the characteristics of the railway lines originating from their cultural, historical and natural heritage. They also stated that this form of tourism can be considered as a useful tool for local economies and organizers. In their research conducted in Portugal, Pinheiro, Gonçalves and Mendonça (2022) revealed that the example of the Douro Historical Train provided a high level of visitor satisfaction. In line with the findings obtained, the authors suggest that this constitutes a good example in terms of increasing the diversity of tourist products, supporting differentiation strategies in the positioning of destinations and contributing to sustainable tourism development. Bhati, Pryce and Chaiechi (2014), in their study examining industrial railway heritage-focused tourist attraction centres in Australia and Malaysia, emphasized that factors such as tourism potential, stakeholder participation, economic sustainability, authenticity and social perception should be taken into consideration in the evaluation of heritage railways as destinations.

Theoretical Contributions

This research enriches the existing literature by investigating the interplay between visitor satisfaction, emotional experiences, and behavioural intentions within emerging tourism destinations like Çankırı. It specifically highlights the significance of aesthetic and social interaction elements in shaping visitor experiences. Furthermore, the study offers a nuanced perspective on the efficacy of "escape" experiences, suggesting they may not always be as impactful as commonly assumed. On the other hand by linking satisfaction to long-term destination success, the study reinforces theoretical frameworks in experiential tourism and consumer behaviour. Additionally, the study contribute to the growing body of research on sustainable tourism development by highlighting how visitor satisfaction strategies can support long-term destination competitiveness, thus provides a foundation for future theoretical work on experience-based tourism in developing regions.

Practical Contributions

The findings of this study offer several practical contributions for tourism stakeholders in Çankırı and similar destinations striving for sustainable success:

- Strengthening aesthetic and social interaction elements
- Offering interactive and entertaining experiences instead of experiences based on relaxation and escape
- Diversifying tourist products
- Highlighting authentic cultural experiences, particularly "Çankırı Yaran"
- Developing more interactive experiences instead of escape-focused experiences
- Supporting word-of-mouth marketing strategies
- Regularly collecting visitor feedback
- Organizing events that emphasize cultural diversity, such as the International Çankırı Salt Festival
- Developing marketing strategies that focus on visitors' emotional experiences
- Providing service quality training for tradespeople and local businesses

Recommendations for Future Studies

In future studies, it is recommended to compare these relationships in different destinations and to develop tourism marketing strategies and to examine the effects of demographic factors and the role of interactive experiences instead of escape oriented experiences in more detail. Moreover, examining the longitudinal impacts of satisfaction-driven strategies on destination loyalty would be beneficial. Finally, future studies should explore the economic dimensions of these experiences, quantifying how these affect local business revenues and employment in local communities. Such research would provide valuable insights for policymakers balancing cultural preservation with economic development objectives.

Limitations

The fact that this study was conducted solely in a single destination, Çankırı may limit the generalizability of the findings. The specificity of the recommendations developed to Türkiye's sociocultural dynamics may necessitate additional validation studies to test the universal applicability of these findings. The limited availability of visitor satisfaction data for specific periods may limit its ability to reflect long-term trends. The study relies heavily on quantitative data and is not supported by qualitative analysis, which may limit the in-depth interpretation of the findings.

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Appendix 1. Scale Items

Emotional Experience Scale
Aesthetics
I felt a real sense of harmony
Just being here was very pleasant
The setting was very attractive
The setting provided pleasure to my senses
Entertainment
Activities of others were amusing to watch
Activities of others were fun to watch
Watching activities of others was very entertaining
Escapism
I felt I played a different character here
I felt like I was living in a different time or place
I completely escaped from reality

Destination Satisfaction Scale
Satisfaction
I am happy with participating in the stay program
Stay is better than I expected
I have a good feeling about stay

Behavioural Intention Scale
Behavioural Intentions
I would like to visit this area again in the future.
I would say positive things about this area.
I would recommend this area to my friends.
I would be proud to tell other people about this area.
I have no negative thoughts about this area.