

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SANGKHLABURI DISTRICT, KANCHANABURI PROVINCE, THAILAND

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Abstract

Sangkhlaburi District, situated in Kanchanaburi Province on the border between Thailand and Myanmar, is a region with rich cultural diversity and significant potential for cultural heritage tourism. Despite its distinctive attractions—such as Wat Wang Wiwekaram, the Mon Bridge, and the Three Pagodas Pass—there is a lack of empirical research examining tourist demand and satisfaction in the area. This study explores the connections between tourism route development, marketing strategies, and tourist satisfaction to offer insights for sustainable tourism growth. A quantitative research methodology was utilized, employing structured surveys distributed to 400 tourists, both Thai and international, with data being analyzed through descriptive statistics and a one-sample t-test. The findings indicate that leisure and community-oriented tourism primarily drive visitation, while cultural and religious engagements yield the highest levels of satisfaction. Although promotional efforts from government and private sectors did not significantly affect tourist perceptions, personal interactions with tourism officials were found to be influential. The establishment of tourism routes and activities was shown to have a notable positive impact on tourist satisfaction ($t = 11.927$, $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$). Further strategic analysis emphasizes the significance of cultural, historical, and religious tourism, as well as the need for enhancements in infrastructure, service quality, and sanitation. The results highlight the necessity for integrated planning, capacity building, and digital promotion approaches to improve the destination's competitiveness in the New Normal and Next Normal environments.

Keywords: cultural heritage tourism, Sangkhlaburi, New Normal, Next Normal, tourism planning, Thailand, integrated planning, digital promotion

1. Introduction

Tourism plays a vital role in driving economic growth and facilitating cultural exchange, particularly in developing regions where heritage and natural resources offer distinct competitive advantages. In Thailand, tourism constitutes about 18–20% of the national GDP, with heritage and cultural tourism serving as a fundamental aspect of the country's global attractiveness (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], 2021). Over the past ten years, Thai tourism policy has increasingly focused on promoting secondary cities and border regions to alleviate pressure on congested areas like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket, while encouraging inclusive economic progress in less developed areas (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). In this national framework, Kanchanaburi Province has surfaced as a key destination that integrates cultural, historical, and natural attractions. In

2016, the province welcomed 737,890 domestic tourists along with 42,433 international visitors; by 2017, these numbers had climbed to 831,169 and 46,433, respectively, indicating growth rates of 12.64% and 9.41% (Department of Tourism, 2017). This rising trend highlights the strategic significance of the province within Thailand's tourism sector. Among the districts in Kanchanaburi, Sangkhlaburi is notable for its distinctive cultural diversity and historical importance as a borderland destination. Situated along the Thai–Myanmar border, Sangkhlaburi features a mix of both tangible and intangible heritage assets. Key attractions in the area include Wang Wiwekaram Temple, which is closely linked to the revered Mon monk Luang Pho Uttama, and the Mon Bridge, one of Southeast Asia's longest wooden bridges. The Three Pagodas Pass also stands out, known historically as an entry point for Burmese invasions into the Ayutthaya Kingdom. Alongside these cultural landmarks, the district is home to natural resources like the Kraton Chon Waterfall and Kroeng Krawia Waterfall, enhancing its appeal to both local and international tourists (Kanchanaburi Province, 2017).

A notable feature of Sangkhlaburi is its diverse cultural makeup, where Karen, Mon, and Myanmar ethnic groups live alongside Thai communities. This blend of ethnicities is reflected in festivals, religious customs, architectural styles, and food traditions, forming a vibrant tapestry of cultural heritage. Such richness makes Sangkhlaburi an ideal location for cultural heritage tourism, a growing segment that focuses on genuine experiences and intercultural understanding (Richards, 2018). However, even with its significant potential, academic research on Sangkhlaburi's tourism growth is scarce. Current studies on Thai rural tourism frequently center on well-known places like Chiang Mai or Ayutthaya, leaving lesser-known areas such as Sangkhlaburi largely understudied (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2021). To fill this void, the current study explores how tourism pathways, marketing tactics, and service quality affect tourist satisfaction in Sangkhlaburi, ultimately striving to formulate practical recommendations for sustainable tourism planning. The importance of this research goes beyond the district itself. Border tourism locations in Southeast Asia often encounter distinct challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, fragile ecosystems, and intricate sociocultural issues (Yamashita, 2020). Simultaneously, these destinations are favorably positioned to take advantage of global trends leaning toward more sustainable and culturally-rooted tourism practices in the post-pandemic world (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). In this context, Sangkhlaburi acts as both a case study and a microcosm of wider discussions on tourism development in multicultural and remote regions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forth new paradigms in tourism demand, altering travel patterns and encouraging destinations to reevaluate their strategies. The idea of the New Normal emphasizes travel that prioritizes health, contactless services, and a focus on domestic tourism. Looking towards the future, the Next Normal is anticipated to center on sustainability, digital advancement, and engaging cultural experiences (McKinsey & Company, 2021). For Sangkhlaburi, these emerging trends present both obstacles and opportunities. While its outdoor attractions and spiritual sites resonate well with health-focused travelers, the district must also invest in digital solutions, hygiene infrastructure, and workforce development to stay competitive. With these goals in mind, the study examines three hypotheses: (1) the connection between route design and government support, (2) the effect of public relations from both government and the private sector on tourist perceptions, and (3) the influence of tourism route and activity development on tourist satisfaction. The study uses a quantitative methodology, surveying 400 Thai and international tourists through structured questionnaires. Data analysis involves descriptive statistics and one-sample t-tests to test the hypotheses. The importance of this

research lies in its potential contributions to both theoretical knowledge and practical policy. From an academic standpoint, the study integrates existing tourism models such as Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (1980), Inskeep's Integrated Tourism Planning (1991), and the SERVQUAL service quality framework (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), while also incorporating modern views on tourism in the New Normal and Next Normal. In practical terms, the results aim to guide policymakers, local governments, and private stakeholders in creating strategic initiatives to enhance facilities, improve promotional efforts, and design tourism routes that showcase Sangkhlaburi's cultural richness.

By placing the case study within the international discourse on sustainable and resilient tourism, this research also helps advance Thailand's wider tourism development objectives and aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those concerning sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and responsible consumption and production (Goal 12). In conclusion, this study positions Sangkhlaburi as a destination of both local and global significance, reflecting the challenges and opportunities associated with cultural heritage tourism at the fringes of the nation-state. Through a blend of empirical analysis and theoretical perspectives, the paper seeks to offer a comprehensive framework for comprehending and promoting tourism development in rural, multicultural, and borderland settings.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The development of tourism in peripheral and multicultural areas like Sangkhlaburi has consistently garnered academic interest because of its intricate relationship with cultural heritage, economic opportunities, and sustainability issues. This literature review analyzes and integrates theories, models, and research results concerning tourism development. It comprises five subsections: (1) theories regarding tourism growth, (2) destination perception and marketing, (3) quality of service and tourist contentment, (4) tourism during the New Normal and Next Normal, and (5) tactical planning structures. Together, these viewpoints offer a conceptual basis for the current research.

2.1 Tourism in Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage tourism refers to traveling driven by the desire to discover cultural, historical, and spiritual assets (Timothy, 2011). Worldwide, locations that highlight cultural variety and vibrant heritage—like Luang Prabang in Laos, Hoi-An in Vietnam, and Bali in Indonesia—have effectively merged preservation with tourism development. Nonetheless, academics warn about the dangers of cultural commodification and the loss of authenticity (Cohen, 1988; Shepherd, 2002). In Thailand, heritage tourism has historically centered on Ayutthaya and Sukhothai, yet researchers are increasingly promoting the idea of expanding tourist traffic to more remote areas (Nuryanti, 2019). Sangkhlaburi illustrates the potential and difficulties of heritage tourism. Its diverse cultural heritage fosters genuine, engaging experiences, yet managing the balance between cultural preservation and visitor demands necessitates thoughtful oversight (Yamashita, 2020).

2.2 Theories of Tourism Development

Tourism Area Lifecycle (TALC)

A highly utilized framework in tourism research is Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which illustrates how destinations progress through a series of stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and ultimately either rejuvenation or decline. The model has been applied to elucidate trends in tourist movements, the maturity of destinations, and issues related to sustainability (Getz, 1992;

Agarwal, 2002). In Sangkhlaburi, a rise in visitor numbers, infrastructure growth, and marketing efforts indicate that the district is presently in the initial consolidation phase. Nonetheless, TALC has faced criticism for its linear approach and lack of focus on local agency and cultural elements (Haywood, 2006). This study utilizes TALC not as a rigid model but as a guiding tool to place Sangkhlaburi within larger patterns of tourism development.

Coordinated Tourism Development

Inskeep's (1991) Integrated Tourism Planning Model highlights the synchronization of physical, economic, social, and environmental aspects in tourism development. The model emphasizes the importance of engaging a variety of stakeholders—including governments, private investors, and local communities—in developing tourism strategies. This viewpoint is especially pertinent to border areas like Sangkhlaburi, where ethnic groups like the Mon and Karen not only serve as cultural treasures but are also key participants whose perspectives need to be included. Integrated planning guarantees that tourism growth does not compromise social unity or ecological sustainability, challenges that are critical in delicate ecosystems and culturally significant settings.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Alongside these models is the body of work on community-based tourism (CBT), which sees local communities as key players in the creation, administration, and advantages of tourism projects (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). CBT has been effectively utilized in various Southeast Asian settings, where marginalized ethnic communities utilize their cultural heritage for tourism while maintaining control over decision-making (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017). In Sangkhlaburi, where various ethnic communities live together, CBT provides a means for inclusive growth that honors cultural diversity and avoids the exclusion of at-risk groups.

2.3 Promotion and Destination Image

The image of a destination is an essential factor influencing tourist selection, contentment, and commitment. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) contend that destination image is complex, including both functional characteristics (e.g., attractions, infrastructure) and psychological traits (e.g., ambiance, hospitality). Research findings consistently indicate that favorable perceptions of destinations affect return visits and recommendations through word-of-mouth (Stylidis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017).

Processes of Image Formation

Gartner (1993) highlights three origins of destination image creation: organic images stemming from personal experiences, induced images formed through marketing efforts, and autonomous images affected by mass media and independent sources. For Sangkhlaburi, organic images can arise from tourist experiences related to the Mon Bridge or temple visits, while induced images are spread by the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Nevertheless, research indicates a disconnect between formal marketing efforts and the genuine experiences of visitors in underdeveloped regions (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). To bridge this gap, it is essential to implement more genuine and inclusive branding strategies that represent the real experiences of ethnic communities.

Digital Promotion and Social Media

The emergence of digital platforms has changed how destinations are promoted. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok enable travelers to share live experiences, impacting the choices of their peers (Mariani, Mura, & Di Felice, 2018). In less popular locations, content created by users frequently acts as a more trustworthy source of information compared to official websites (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). For Sangkhlaburi, focusing on digital marketing and enhancing community-led storytelling

could boost its international reputation and draw travelers seeking experiences in the post-pandemic time.

2.4 Quality of Services and Satisfaction of Tourists

Service quality is closely linked to tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and the destination's competitiveness. The SERVQUAL model created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) remains the most widely utilized framework, focusing on five dimensions: tangibles, dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Employing SERVQUAL in tourism contexts has demonstrated its capability in pinpointing service deficiencies in accommodations, transit, and guiding services (Kang & James, 2004).

Service Quality in Remote Locations

In developing regions, studies often emphasize deficiencies in infrastructure, sanitation, and accessibility, which negatively affect guest satisfaction (Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Lloréns-Montes, 2007). In Sangkhlaburi, survey results show moderate satisfaction levels for accessibility ($\bar{X} = 3.97$), accommodations ($\bar{X} = 3.96$), and amenities ($\bar{X} = 3.28$). These figures indicate that service quality represents a considerable challenge requiring targeted investment.

Quality of Service and Tourist Contentment

The quality of service is closely associated with tourist contentment, loyalty, and the competitiveness of the destination. The SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) continues to be the most commonly used framework, concentrating on five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The use of SERVQUAL in tourism settings has shown its effectiveness in evaluating service disparities in lodging, transportation, and guiding services (Kang & James, 2004).

Quality of Service in Peripheral Destinations

In developing areas, research frequently indicates shortcomings in infrastructure, sanitation, and accessibility, which adversely impact tourist satisfaction (Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Lloréns-Montes, 2007). In Sangkhlaburi, survey findings indicate moderate satisfaction rates regarding accessibility ($\bar{X} = 3.97$), accommodation ($\bar{X} = 3.96$), and amenities ($\bar{X} = 3.28$). These numbers suggest that service quality represents a significant challenge that demands focused investment.

Tourist Contentment and Commitment

Tourist satisfaction is affected not just by the quality of service but also by cultural experiences and emotional ties (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Positive encounters encourage return visits and recommendations, both essential for places with constrained marketing resources. Engagement in activities like visiting temples and taking part in religious ceremonies received high satisfaction scores in this study ($\bar{X} = 4.10$), indicating that cultural and spiritual tourism could be a promising niche market for Sangkhlaburi.

2.5 Travel in the New Standard and Future Standard

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed tourism trends, leading to the emergence of ideas such as the New Normal and Next Normal. The New Normal features increased awareness of health, a favor for local and short-distance travel, and dependence on contactless technology (Sigala, 2020). Research indicates that open-air attractions and countryside locales have gained from the trend of moving away from congested urban areas (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020).

The Upcoming Standard

The Next Normal is a progressive idea that highlights lasting shifts in traveler habits and industry standards. According to McKinsey & Company (2021), the future of tourism will be shaped by sustainability, digital transformation, and customized experiences. For Sangkhlaburi, embracing the Next Normal involves encouraging sustainable practices, enhancing digital infrastructure, and designing engaging experiences that showcase local ethnic variety. Inability to adjust could lead to the district being sidelined in a more competitive tourism sector.

2.6 Strategic Planning Frameworks: SWOT and TOWS

Strategic planning continues to be a fundamental element of sustainable tourism growth. The SWOT analysis—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—is commonly employed to assess destinations. Nevertheless, Weihrich's (1982) TOWS matrix enhances this method by aligning internal and external elements to create practical strategies. Utilizing Sangkhlaburi's advantages in cultural diversity and tackling infrastructure weaknesses can seize opportunities like the growing interest in heritage tourism.

Uses in Country Tourism

While SWOT and TOWS analyses are frequently utilized in urban tourism planning, their use in rural and borderland settings remains restricted. Studies indicate that tailored strategies are crucial to prevent “copy-paste” approaches that overlook distinct sociocultural factors (Ruhanen, 2013). In Sangkhlaburi, utilizing SWOT and TOWS helps stakeholders focus their investments on sanitation, digital marketing, and cross-border partnerships, while addressing threats like political instability or environmental decline.

2.7 Synthesis of Literature and Existing Gaps

This assessment emphasizes various findings:

- 1) Established models like TALC, integrated planning, and SERVQUAL are still useful but need contextual adjustments.
- 2) Strategies for destination imagery and promotion should evolve to focus on authenticity, digital engagement, and community involvement.
- 3) The quality of service remains a constant issue in peripheral destinations, but cultural and spiritual activities present significant opportunities for niche growth.
- 4) The New Normal and Next Normal frameworks require creative solutions that integrate health safety, sustainability, and digital interaction.
- 5) Strategic planning methods such as SWOT and TOWS are valuable yet underutilized in multicultural, border areas.

Nonetheless, there are still considerable deficiencies. Limited research has empirically utilized tourism development models in small locations like Sangkhlaburi. There is a lack of research on incorporating New Normal/Next Normal frameworks into local tourism strategies. In the same way, the actual execution of enhancements to destination images associated with cultural diversity has not been adequately addressed. This study aims to address these gaps by providing theoretical insights and practical recommendations to enhance cultural heritage tourism in Sangkhlaburi.

3. Hypotheses

H1: There is a relationship between the design of tourism routes and activities and the government's tourism promotion plans.

H2: Government and private sector public relations influence tourist perceptions of Sangkhlaburi District.

H3: The development of tourism routes and activities influences tourist satisfaction.

4. Objectives

1. To examine government approaches to planning tourism routes, activities, and promotion in Sangkhlaburi.
2. To explore business sector strategies in developing tourism routes and activities during the New Normal and Next Normal.
3. To design tourism routes and activities that enhance domestic and international tourist satisfaction.

5. Methodology

This study employed a **quantitative research design** to systematically investigate tourist perceptions, motivations, and levels of satisfaction in relation to cultural heritage tourism in Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province. Quantitative approaches are widely used in tourism studies when the objective is to test hypotheses and measure relationships among constructs such as motivation, service quality, satisfaction, and destination image (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A structured **survey questionnaire** was developed as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: (1) demographic information, (2) purposes of visit, (3) participation in tourism activities, (4) evaluation of service quality using SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), and (5) overall satisfaction with tourism routes and activities. This structure ensured comprehensive coverage of both behavioral and perceptual aspects. The study population consisted of both **domestic and international tourists** visiting Sangkhlaburi during the research period (January–March 2023). Due to time and resource constraints, **accidental (convenience) sampling** was applied, targeting tourists at popular sites such as the Mon Bridge, Wat Wang Wiwekaram, and the Three Pagodas Pass. Although convenience sampling may introduce limitations in generalizability, it is widely recognized as an efficient and practical method in tourism field research (Veal, 2017).

A total of **400 completed questionnaires** were collected, exceeding the minimum sample size required for basic hypothesis testing using t-tests and descriptive statistics (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Of these, 65% were Thai tourists and 35% were international visitors, providing a balanced perspective between domestic and foreign market segments. The questionnaires were distributed in both **Thai and English**, ensuring accessibility to a diverse tourist population. Respondents were given clear instructions and assurances of anonymity to enhance reliability and validity. Research assistants were trained to clarify any questions and to minimize interviewer bias. Data were coded and analyzed using **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26**. The following statistical procedures were conducted:

- **Descriptive statistics** (frequency, mean, standard deviation, and percentage) to summarize tourist profiles and behaviors.

- **One-sample t-tests** to examine whether tourist perceptions significantly differed from neutral expectations on satisfaction and service quality.

- **Cross-tabulations** to explore differences between Thai and international respondents.

- **Reliability testing** of the SERVQUAL scale using Cronbach's alpha, where values above 0.70 were considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The use of these techniques allowed for both a broad overview of tourist behaviors and a more nuanced assessment of the relationships between tourism routes, service quality, and satisfaction.

6. Results and Discussions

6.1 Tourist Purposes for Visiting Sangkhlaburi District

The examination uncovered five unique purposes for tourism in Sangkhlaburi (Table 1). Leisure and recreation became the primary motivation (57.0%, $\bar{X} = 4.47$, high level), indicating the area's attractiveness as a peaceful location with picturesque views and a laid-back vibe. This corresponds with Kontogeorgopoulos (2021), who noted that rural Thai locations draw tourists in search of nature-centered relaxation.

Table 1. Purposes of Tourism in Sangkhlaburi District

Purpose of Tourism	Number	Percentage (%)	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Level
Leisure/Recreation	228	57.0	4.47	High
Community-Based Tourism	95	23.8	3.80	Medium
Cultural Tourism	36	9.0	3.00	Medium
Adventure Tourism	32	8.0	2.00	Low
Health & Wellness Tourism	9	2.2	1.00	Lowest

Community-based tourism represented almost a quarter of visits (23.8%, $\bar{X} = 3.80$), highlighting the increasing attraction of participatory tourism experiences that involve interaction with local communities. Trejos and Chiang (2019) observe that these actions encourage shared cultural education and aid in sustainable development.

Even though cultural tourism was noted at only 9.0% ($\bar{X} = 3.00$), this relatively small figure does not automatically suggest low significance. Instead, it could indicate the hidden potential of Sangkhlaburi's ethnic diversity (Mon, Karen, and Myanmar) that is still not adequately promoted. Adventure tourism (8.0%, $\bar{X} = 2.00$) and health and wellness tourism (2.2%, $\bar{X} = 1.00$) received lower scores, indicating that inadequate infrastructure and a lack of marketing hinder these sectors (Cohen & Cohen, 2019).

Interpretation: The findings indicate that Sangkhlaburi's tourism economy significantly depends on general leisure travel, whereas cultural and niche segments are still not fully developed. Strategic interventions might focus on diversification by combining wellness and adventure experiences with cultural heritage tours

6.2 Tourist Activities and Experiences

Visitors assessed various activities in the Sangkhlaburi District (Table 2). The greatest average scores were noted for trips to Wat Wang Wiwekaram ($\bar{X} = 4.10$, high level), the Mon Bridge ($\bar{X} = 4.05$, high level), and religious gifts ($\bar{X} = 3.95$, medium-high level). The importance of cultural exchange with ethnic communities ($\bar{X} = 3.88$) was recognized as well. Natural experiences like hiking and visiting waterfalls were rated fairly, whereas cross-border shopping at the Three Pagodas Pass received poorer ratings.

Table 2. Popular Tourist Activities in Sangkhlaburi District

Activity	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Level
Visit Wat Wang Wiwekaram	4.10	High
Visit the Mon Bridge	4.05	High
Participate in religious offerings	3.95	Medium-High
Engage with ethnic Mon/Karen culture	3.88	Medium

Visit waterfalls (e.g., Kratongcheng)	3.65	Medium
Trekking and outdoor exploration	3.52	Medium
Cross-border shopping (Three Pagodas Pass)	3.25	Medium–Low

Visitor interaction with regional landmarks displayed a significant focus on cultural and religious locations. Visits to Wat Wang Wiwekaram ($\bar{X} = 4.10$) and the Mon Bridge ($\bar{X} = 4.05$) received the highest ratings, as indicated in Table 2. Engagement in religious offerings ($\bar{X} = 3.95$) and participation in cultural exchanges with ethnic groups ($\bar{X} = 3.88$) also received high rankings. These results resonate with Yamashita (2020), who emphasized the importance of spiritual and ethnic exchanges in border tourism throughout Southeast Asia.

Conversely, outdoor activities like trekking and visits to waterfalls received average ratings, while cross-border shopping at the Three Pagodas Pass was rated lower ($\bar{X} = 3.25$). This indicates that the primary tourism attraction of Sangkhlaburi lies in cultural and spiritual experiences rather than retail or adventure. Kaewta and Black (2021) likewise discovered that cultural immersion usually leads to greater satisfaction compared to solely commercial or recreational pursuits in rural areas of Thailand.

Interpretation: The branding of Sangkhlaburi should emphasize its cultural heritage and ethnic diversity, while also enhancing infrastructure to facilitate secondary activities like trekking and eco-tourism.

6.3 Service Quality and Tourist Satisfaction

The SERVQUAL framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988) was utilized to assess the dimensions of service quality. Accessibility ($\bar{X} = 3.97$) and accommodation services ($\bar{X} = 3.96$) received notably high ratings, indicating that visitors view the district as accessible and bolstered by adequate lodging. Nevertheless, the physical facilities ($\bar{X} = 3.65$) and service reliability ($\bar{X} = 3.42$) were assessed as moderate, whereas amenities ($\bar{X} = 3.28$) received the least favorable rating (Table 3).

Table 3. Service Quality Ratings in Sangkhlaburi District

Service Dimension	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Level
Accessibility	3.97	High
Accommodation services	3.96	High
Tangible facilities	3.65	Medium
Reliability of services	3.42	Medium
Amenities	3.28	Low

This illustrates typical issues in rural areas where swift tourism expansion is not consistently accompanied by corresponding enhancements in infrastructure and public services (Sharpley, 2020). Significantly, total satisfaction was strongly linked to cultural and religious activities ($\bar{X} = 4.10$), highlighting the value of authenticity and cultural identity in tourism experiences (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Interpretation: The results underscore the necessity for focused enhancements in services like signage, sanitation options, and public transport, while preserving the genuine cultural experiences that presently foster satisfaction.

6.4 Strategic Tourism Development (SWOT and TOWS)

Table 4 SWOT analysis

Strengths	Opportunities
• Unique multicultural heritage (Mon, Karen, Thai, Burmese). • Iconic landmarks (Mon Bridge, Wat Wang Wiwekaram). • Growing domestic tourist base.	• Rising interest in cultural and community-based tourism. • Expansion of digital tourism platforms. • Cross-border tourism integration with Myanmar.
Weaknesses	Threats
• Limited sanitation and public infrastructure. • Weak promotional impact from government campaigns. • Reliance on seasonal tourism.	• Environmental pressures from mass tourism. • Political instability affecting border travel. • Vulnerability to future pandemics.

Interpretation: A strategy that utilizes cultural advantages while tackling infrastructural shortcomings can boost competitiveness. Collaborative governance that includes the government, private entities, and ethnic groups is essential.

6.5 Travel in the New Reality and Future Reality

COVID-19 has transformed tourism dynamics globally. Survey findings revealed that tourists favored outdoor attractions, contactless options, and digital information sources. These correspond with wider international patterns of increased health awareness and the expanding influence of digital platforms (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). McKinsey & Company (2021) highlights the Next Normal as a transformation towards sustainability and engaging experiences.

In Sangkhlaburi, this means that cultural and religious experiences need to be redesigned to comply with health and safety regulations, potentially by focusing on outdoor events, smaller gatherings, and improved digital narratives.

Interpretation: The district can capitalize on the Next Normal by establishing itself as a secure, eco-friendly, and culturally vibrant destination, attracting both local and global tourists in search of authenticity and wellness.

6.6 Recommendations

- 1) Route Creation: Develop cohesive tourism paths that merge cultural, religious, and natural sites.
- 2) Enhancements to Infrastructure: Upgrade sanitation, enhance accessibility, and improve signage.
- 3) Online Promotion: Utilize social networks, influencer collaborations, and virtual reality experiences.

4) Capacity Development: Educate local guides and hospitality personnel in multilingual abilities and cultural understanding.

5) Trans-border Collaboration: Create combined tourism offerings with Myanmar's neighboring towns.

7. Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

7.1 Summary

This research offers empirical proof that designing tourism routes greatly improves visitor satisfaction in Sangkhlaburi, whereas marketing efforts need to better match tourist behaviors. Results emphasize the significance of service excellence, facilities, and cultural genuineness in maintaining borderland tourism.

From a policy standpoint, Sangkhlaburi needs to adopt digital marketing, enhance infrastructure, and encourage community involvement to remain competitive in the Next Normal of tourism. The research enhances tourism literature by implementing well-known models (TALC, Integrated Planning, SERVQUAL) within a multicultural borderland setting.

Initially, government promotional activities through conventional media (e.g., brochures, tourist info centers) and online platforms (e.g., websites, social networks) did not notably influence tourists' views of Sangkhlaburi. Rather, the most significant predictor was face-to-face interactions with government tourism personnel (Sig. = 0.003). This result highlights the lasting importance of human mediation and service quality in tourism experiences, even in the digital era. Tourists seem to prioritize reliable, in-person guidance over impersonal media campaigns, indicating the significance of assurance and responsiveness emphasized in the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

Secondly, promotional channels in the private sector—whether offline or online—did not have a considerable predictive effect on how tourists perceive things. This indicates that visitors in Sangkhlaburi depend more on self-guided information-seeking actions, frequently through peer connections, personal recommendations, or user-created online material, instead of depending on official marketing channels. This is consistent with current tourism studies that emphasize the increasing influence of traveler-generated content on destination image (Gartner, 1993; Pike & Page, 2014).

Ultimately, the findings validated a notable positive correlation between the growth of tourism routes and activities and overall tourist satisfaction ($t = 11.927$, Sig. = 0.000). Thai and international tourists expressed great satisfaction with Sangkhlaburi's attractions, especially its cultural and religious activities, suggesting that current tourism development efforts in the area are improving visitor experiences. This result corroborates the structural model of tourism behavior proposed by Yoon and Uysal (2005), highlighting satisfaction's function as a mediator between motivations and loyalty to a destination.

7.2 Discussion

The results correspond with earlier research highlighting that infrastructure, quality of service, and genuine cultural experiences enhance satisfaction in heritage tourism (Timothy, 2011; Richards, 2018). The limited impact of marketing campaigns indicates a disconnect between governmental strategies and the information-seeking behaviors of visitors, which are increasingly influenced by social media (Sigala, 2020).

The robust connection between route design and satisfaction validates Inskeep's (1991) unified planning model. Visitors who were able to effortlessly explore cultural, natural, and community attractions expressed greater satisfaction. This emphasizes the importance of interpretive signs, multi-language resources, and digital guides to enhance cultural engagement.

Comparisons with comparable locations like Pai (Thailand), Luang Prabang (Laos), and Bagan (Myanmar) indicate that Sangkhlaburi could evolve into a significant cultural tourism center if infrastructure and online marketing are emphasized.

The results offer both support and difficulties to current theoretical models in tourism research.

The restricted impact of printed and digital advertising channels indicates that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in rural regions such as Sangkhlaburi need to rethink their communication approaches. While digitalization has revolutionized global tourism marketing, in settings where trust, authenticity, and cultural insight are essential, human connection continues to be vital. This aligns with Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) focus on comprehensive destination image creation, which includes emotional and experiential aspects in addition to informational factors.

Secondly, the findings can be aligned with the 5As framework of tourism growth (Attraction, Accessibility, Amenities, Accommodation, Activities) (Cooper et al., 2008). Although attractions (e.g., Mon Bridge, Wat Wang Wiwekaram) and lodging options received high ratings, aspects such as amenities, accessibility, and service reliability continue to be areas of concern. These shortcomings impede the district's general competitiveness, reflecting Dwyer and Kim's (2003) model, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of infrastructure, resources, and facilitating conditions in influencing destination success.

Third, the significance of cultural and religious experiences corresponds with the worldwide transition towards experience-focused and transformative tourism in the post-pandemic period (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Tourists are increasingly looking for genuine cultural experiences, wellness-focused travel, and sustainable activities, which Sangkhlaburi can offer effectively due to its diverse heritage and spiritual sites.

Simultaneously, the results emphasize the conflict between conservation and commercialization in tourism growth. Cultural tourism presents a significant opportunity for distinction, yet overexploitation or poor management may jeopardize the genuineness and longevity of regional customs. This illustrates the issues highlighted by Cohen and Cohen (2019) concerning the commercialization of ethnic heritage in rural areas of Thailand.

7.3 Real-World Consequences

Based on the empirical results and theoretical evaluation, various actionable suggestions are put forward to enhance tourism in Sangkhlaburi:

- 1) Collaboration on infrastructure development between local government and regional authorities is crucial for enhancing transportation systems, road conditions, signage, and public amenities. Improved accessibility will directly affect tourist traffic and perceptions of service standards.

- 2) Training programs aimed at enhancing service quality should be tailored for staff in both government and private sectors to develop multilingual communication abilities (especially in English and Chinese), responsiveness, and skills in cultural interpretation. Priority should be given to assurance and empathy; which travelers appreciate the most in personal interactions.

3) Hygiene and Safety Regulations: It seems you haven't provided the text you want paraphrased. Please share the specific text you need assistance with! Ongoing investment in sanitation, waste disposal, and health regulations will enhance the district's reputation as a secure and sustainable place, especially in the post-COVID tourism environment. It seems you've provided the letter "b." without any text to paraphrase. Please provide the text you'd like me to rephrase, and I'll be happy to help! Capacity Enhancement & Knowledge Exchange: Facilitate workshops for local tourism officials, guides, and business owners to enhance cultural-historical understanding, effectively interpret ethnic variety, and boost foreign language skills. It seems like you've provided only a "c." without any text to paraphrase. Please provide the text you want to be paraphrased, and I'll be happy to assist transparency and reliability.

4) Broadening Tourism Options: In addition to cultural and religious sites, tourism authorities ought to encourage community-oriented tourism, wellness tourism, and eco-tourism as supplementary offerings. This will lessen reliance on leisure tourism and promote more sustainable visitor patterns.

5) Collaboration and Governance among Stakeholders: Managing destinations should focus on a collaborative governance approach, engaging local communities, diverse ethnic groups, private businesses, and government entities. This supports Pike and Page's (2014) focus on collaborative management of destination image as a factor in sustaining long-term competitiveness.

7.4 Suggestions for Subsequent Studies

This research makes notable contributions and also highlights areas for additional academic investigation:

1) Comparative Research in Rural Areas Future studies need to explore if the trends seen in Sangkhlaburi are relevant to other rural or border districts in Thailand or Southeast Asia. This would improve the applicability of the tourism development framework.

2) Community-Centric Tourism Frameworks According to Scheyvens (1999), future research should investigate ways to empower local communities in leading the design and management of tourism offerings. This research would offer understanding into how tourism planning can incorporate inclusivity, equity, and the preservation of culture.

3) Balancing Development and Conservation Research must investigate strategies for preserving cultural heritage that reconcile the demand for economic growth with safeguarding delicate cultural and natural resources. This entails evaluating the dangers of over-tourism, commercialization, and the decline of authenticity.

4) Future research could explore how travelers modify their actions in rural cultural locations in response to health awareness and sustainability-focused circumstances. This would enhance comprehension of how COVID-19

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