MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY HOMES: SENSORY EXPERIENCES AND DESIRED TOURIST BEHAVIOURS

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Abstract

Purpose – The objective of this research is to identify the sensory stimuli associated with mountain holiday homes and analyse effects of sensory experience on desired tourist behaviours, i.e., revisit intention, positive word-of-mouth, and intended length of stay.
Methodology/Design/Approach – Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to identify sensory experiences in and around mountain holiday homes and to adapt the existing sensescape scale to this context. Quantitative data were then collected in an online questionnaire distributed via holiday home owners in Gorski Kotar, resulting in 270 domestic tourist responses.
Findings – Sensory experiences influence all desirable tourist behavioural outcomes, but they translate differently across behavioural outcomes. When it comes to mediation effects, entertainment experience, rather than escapism experience emerged as the mediating mechanism.
Originality of the research – This study provides a context-specific adaptation of the sensescape scale to mountain holiday homes. It further advances tourist experience research by integrating sensory experiences and experience economy realms (4E) within a single model and introducing intended length of stay as a distinct behavioural outcome.
Keywords tourist experience, sensory experience, mountain tourism, holiday homes, length of stay

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INTRODUCTION

In mountainous regions, tourists generally prefer holiday homes over hotel accommodation (Flognfeldt & Tjørve, 2013). This preference reflects not only the modern amenities and greater flexibility this houses offer, but also rising disposable incomes and more flexible work arrangements which enable extended stays in these comfortable settings. Mountain holiday homes are typically located in small towns or villages, surrounded by nature and an environment shaped by local culture, and becoming increasingly comfortable and well-equipped (Garvey, 2008). Their distinctive character, natural surroundings, handcrafted interiors, and relation to local culture, means they are inherently rich in multisensory stimuli. While sensory rich environments are widely appreciated by the tourists, it remains unclear whether and how specific sensory experiences in mountain holiday homes translate into desired tourist behaviours.

Although sensory marketing has been often applied to the tourist experience study (Agapito et al., 2013), most research focuses on destinations (e.g., Butun, 2026; Nukhu & Singh, 2023) and attractions (Agapito et al., 2012; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Zheng et al., 2026) rather than accommodation. When accommodation has been studied, the focus has been on hotels (Sun et al., 2025; Ali & Ahmed, 2019), with individual contributions in particular forms of accommodation such as rural bed and breakfasts (Peng et al., 2024) or unique shared accommodation (Souza et al., 2020). No research, to our knowledge, has addressed sensory experience in mountain holiday homes. This is a notable gap. Mountain holiday homes are a form of accommodation; however, given their modern facilities and strong embeddedness in natural and cultural surroundings (Garvey, 2008), they increasingly function as destinations in themselves, enabling visitors to immerse in the tourist experience without leaving the property or its immediate surroundings. Precisely because of this specific character, we consider it important to investigate the specific sensory stimuli they generate. A second research gap concerns the behavioural outcomes studied. Existing work has linked sensory experience to word-of-mouth (Nukhu and Singh, 2023; Chen et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2026), revisit intention and loyalty (Chen et al., 2021; Satti et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2026), travel intention (Cui et al., 2024), but intended length of stay remains largely unexplored, despite its financial and environmental importance.

The purpose of this research is therefore to bridge these gaps by identifying the sensory stimuli present in and around mountain holiday homes and proposing a model which explains how they relate to desired behavioural outcomes including length of stay. To build a model, we rely on Experience Economy theoretical framework (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), Embodied Cognition theory (Wilson 2002) and the Stimuli - Organism - Response theory (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Desired tourist behavioural outcomes

Desired tourist behavioural outcomes ultimately manifest in prolonged stays, revisits, and positive word-of-mouth. In this paper, we focus on tourists' intentions to demonstrate these three behaviours in the future, based on their prior experience.

Prolonged stays, as Gössling et al. (2018) note represents a key parameter in destination management as it allows fewer arrivals for the same overnight stays, reducing destination's costs, congestion, and the environmental impacts of transportation. In accommodation units, prolonged stays reduce cleaning and overall operational costs. However, Almeida et al. (2021) argue that increasingly accessible transportation, rising incomes, and strong marketing strategies, result in multiple shorter trips across different destinations. This contributes to a global decline in tourist length of stay (Gössling et al., 2018).

Revisit intentions, the second desired behaviour is likelihood of a tourist's return to a destination, and represents a form of tourist loyalty (Paisri et al., 2022). Revisits are essential as repeat visitors stay longer, spend more, report higher levels of satisfaction, and share positive word-of-mouth more frequently (Hossain et al., 2023). However, even when all needs and expectations have been met, revisit intention is often lower than repurchase intention for other products. This is because tourists may have concerns about disappointment when visiting the same destination again (Hu & Xu, 2021) or may seek out novel experiences.

Finally, positive word-of-mouth, the third desired behavioural outcome is defined as the willingness of a consumer to deliver good information about the brand to others (Chen et al., 2021). It is the oldest medium for sharing opinions about products or services and the one most likely to influence behaviour, due to the high credibility transmitted by family and friends (Hwang et al., 2023; Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

1.2 Tourist experience

Desired tourist behavioural outcomes are strongly rooted in the quality of lived experiences (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Nukhu & Singh, 2023; Chen et al., 2021). Consumer experience is a concept widely discussed in marketing and tourism literature, yet due to its multidimensionality lacking a universally agreed definition. Its understanding is commonly tracked back to Holbrook & Hirschman (1982), who emphasize the experiential view of consumption which focuses on symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic components aimed at the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun. Founders of experience economy, Pine and Gilmore (1998), conceptualize experiences as staged events categorized into four realms (4Es): entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist, based on the level of consumer participation and immersion. They further propose five key principles for effective experience design: theming the experience, harmonizing impressions with positive cues, eliminating negative cues, mixing in memorabilia, and engaging all five senses. In the same time, Schmitt (1999) proposes five experiential modules: sense, feel, think, act, and relate, which represent distinct dimensions through which experiences can be designed and managed. As sensory experience is of particular importance for this research it is noteworthy to point out its role in the two mentioned frameworks. While it constitutes the first of the experiential modules in Schmitt's (1999) framework, Pine and Gilmore (1998) treat sensory engagement as a driver of experiences.

Although consumer experience was not initially conceptualized as touristic, experience has, unsurprisingly, become a central construct in tourism research. Larsen (2007) argues that the tourist experience is a highly complex psychological process and defines it as a past personal travel-related event, strong enough to be stored in long-term memory. Past research has conceptualised it through various dimensions, but mostly adopting either the Pine & Gilmore's (1998) 4E dimensions (cf. Hosany & Witham, 2010; Paisri et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2023; Radder & Han, 2015) or focusing on the five sensory dimensions (cf. Chen et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2024; Agapito et al., 2012). Furthermore, Souza et al. (2020) offer one of the most comprehensive approaches by integrating the experiential dimensions from Pine & Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999) and identify: relate/social interaction, senses/esthetic, feel, sacred, escape, act, entertainment, educational dimensions of tourist experience.

1.3 Sensory experience

We primarily focus on the conceptualisation of tourist experience through the five senses. This is because the carefully crafted sensory environment i.e., sensescape, is often what enables differentiation from competitors among similar tourist offerings (Molina-Collado et al., 2024) and helps establish unique selling propositions (Lv et al., 2024). Compared with the traditional servicescape concept, which primarily focuses on manmade physical surrounding within service environments (Bitner, 1992), sensescape offers a broader perspective more relevant for mountain holiday homes as it emerges not only from designed interiors and service elements, but also from natural surroundings and local culture (Buzova et al., 2021).

Numerous tourism studies explore which sensory stimuli consumers recall most vividly, and visual stimuli consistently emerge as dominant (e.g., Souza et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2025; Agapito et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2024; Buzova et al., 2021). Still, across studies, other senses emerge. While auditory stimuli have importance in destinations and attractions, taste unsurprisingly

plays a more prominent role in hospitality settings (Satti et al., 2021). Butun (2026) argues that destination experience is inherently multisensory, and although non-visual sensory cues are less present in tourist destination narratives, their influence on experience quality can be considerable. Beyond the hierarchy of individual senses, research also highlights the importance of interplay among them. For example, Sun et al. (2025) find that moving beyond purely visual hotel promotion and integrating visual elements with auditory, tactile, and olfactory cues increases sales. Conversely, misaligned or excessive combinations of sensory stimuli can cause discomfort or confuse consumers, diminishing the overall quality of the experience. The sensory landscape design therefore requires conceptual coherence and careful calibration (Spence et al., 2014).

2. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

To build a conceptual model we rely on Embodied Cognition theory (Wilson, 2002), Stimuli-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974) and Experience Economy framework (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), all previously used in the context of tourist experience.

According to Embodied Cognition theory, the mind must be understood in relation to the physical body that interacts with the environment; i.e., cognition is deeply rooted in sensorimotor processing (Wilson 2002). Accordingly, tourism experiences are commonly approached from an embodied perspective, as tourists engage with the external world through their senses, making sensory experience a foundational component of the tourism experience (Agapito et al., 2013, Wang et al., 2026) and a starting point of our model. Since this research seeks to understand how sensory experiences translate into desired behavioural responses, we draw on the S-O-R theory (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974). This theory posits that external stimuli (S) affect an individual's internal states (O), subsequently triggering behavioural responses (R). In line with these theoretical perspectives, prior research has shown that both individual sensory experiences and multisensory experiences (stimuli) positively influence desired tourist behavioural outcomes (response) like word-of-mouth (Nukhu & Singh, 2023; Chen et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2026) and revisit intention (Satti et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2026). Although no prior study has directly examined the relationship between sensory experience and prolonged stay, we argue that this relationship is theoretically justified, as previous research demonstrates positive links between sensory experience and satisfaction (Zheng et al., 2026), and between satisfaction and longer stays (Almeida et al., 2021). Hence, we propose:

H1: Perceived sensory experiences positively relate to revisit intention.
H2: Perceived sensory experiences positively relate to intended word-of-mouth.
H3: Perceived sensory experiences positively relate to intended length of stay.

While sensory experiences may directly influence tourist behaviour, S-O-R theory suggests that sensory stimuli trigger internal psychological states (organism), which subsequently lead to behavioural responses. Although the organism component of the S-O-R model was originally conceptualised primarily as emotional states, its application in consumer behaviour and tourism research, particularly following Bitner's (1992) servicescape framework, broadened the organism component to include cognitive evaluations (Peng et al., 2024), memorable tourism experiences (Wang et al., 2026), and other internal psychological states that mediate the relationship between stimuli and responses. In our model, sensory experiences are conceptualised as foundational experiences (stimuli) that facilitate the emergence of richer and more memorable experiences (organism). This assumption is rooted in Pine and Gilmore's (1998) Experience Economy framework, which emphasises the engagement of all five senses as a key principle in designing memorable experiences, as well as in Oh et al.'s (2007) subsequent operationalisation of memorable experiences, which highlights their cognitive and emotional nature (i.e., organism).

Although Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that the richest experiences encompass all four experiential realms, they also acknowledge that only some realms may emerge depending on the context. Subsequent research (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Sotiriadis, 2017) relatedly found that tourism experiences do not necessarily depend on the simultaneous presence of all four realms, and that different experiential realms may be more influential across different tourism settings (e.g., music festivals, museums, or nature-based tourism). Mountain holiday homes have a unique dual appeal; they provide immersion in nature far from urban hustle and everyday routines, while offering highly equipped accommodations that enable entertaining activities. Thus, we argue that the escapism and entertainment dimensions of the memorable tourist experience are not only salient in this context, but represent the primary motives for visiting mountain holiday homes. As such, they are expected to have strongest influence on desired tourist behavioural outcomes. Therefore, we incorporate escapism and entertainment as mediators into our conceptual model.

Research supports argument of escapism being a primary motivation for naturebased tourism (Sotiriadis, 2017) showing that tourists seek experiences that allow them to escape everyday life and enhance their wellbeing through rest and activities (Vespestad et al., 2025). Research also shows that escapism leads to desirable behaviours like positive word-of-mouth and revisit intention (Ali & Gaber, 2022). Therefore, we posit:

H4: Perceived sensory experiences positively relate to escapism experience.
H5: Escapism experience positively relates to revisit intention.
H6: Escapism experience positively relates to intended word-of-mouth.
H7: Escapism experience positively relates to intended length of stay.

The importance of entertainment as a motive to visit mountain holiday homes is identified by Larsen and Laursen (2012) who argue that tourists in holiday homes spend a significant time within the accommodation and its nearby natural surroundings seeking fun and entertainment. In a similar vein, Tafesse and Tariq (2025) show that, in Airbnb accommodations, entertainment amenities contribute more strongly to guests' fivepoint star ratings than any other amenities including outdoor, office, or kitchen amenities. Although entertainment was conceptualized by Pine & Gilmore (1998) as passive absorption, subsequent research has emphasized its more active and immersive forms. For example, Luo & Fan (2023), found that tourists and industry employees consider entertainment activities to include gambling, shopping, sightseeing. Moreover, research building on Pine & Gilmore's (1998) framework has often operationalized entertainment not only by passive observation but also active participation in entertaining activities (cf. Hosany & Witham, 2010; Radder & Han, 2015). Finally, research shows that entertainment experience leads to desirable behaviours like positive word-of-mouth and revisit intention (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Ali & Gaber, 2022). Thus:

H8: Perceived sensory experiences positively relate to entertainment experience.
H9: Entertainment experience positively relates to revisit intention.
H10: Entertainment experience positively relates to intended word-of-mouth.
H11: Entertainment experience positively relates to intended length of stay.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research object

This study was conducted in Gorski Kotar, a mountainous region in Croatia, where the growing demand for holiday homes has recently encouraged the local community to invest in improving accommodation quality (Opačić & Koderman, 2024). Mountain holiday homes in Gorski Kotar are typically situated in isolated areas, yet in close proximity to larger towns, easily accessible via roads, and equipped with many amenities, including barbecue areas, swimming pools, hot tubs, saunas, fireplaces, and game rooms (Gorski Kotar, n.d.). Comfortable and quiet, they serve as natural retreats where visitors can escape the stress and fast pace of urban life, while their seclusion also enables social gatherings and entertainment.

However, Gorski Kotar is still mainly perceived as a weekend destination, particularly among domestic guests who account for 63% of total overnight stays (Gorski Kotar, 2025). According to eVisitor (2026), the average length of stay in holiday homes is only 3.1 days and given the increasing supply of holiday homes, which has doubled over the past five years, from 730 to 1,424 beds, these properties experience low occupancy rates of 12.1%. These results push the owners to actively improve their offerings, yet results vary across properties. The varied success makes Gorski Kotar mountain holiday homes an excellent context for this research.

3.2 Research procedure and measurement instruments

In the first phase of the study, qualitative research was carried out using the in-depth interviews to identify sensory experiences present in and around mountain holiday homes, with the aim to operationalize the sensescape for this specific context. The structured interviews comprised five questions, each examining what respondents perceived through a different sense. The interviews were conducted in September 2024 with five holiday home owners (three residents of Gorski Kotar and two residents of Rijeka who own holiday homes in Gorski Kotar) and five domestic tourists who had stayed in mountain holiday homes in Gorski Kotar. The purposive selection of three holiday home owners was based on personal acquaintance, after which the sample was expanded through snowball sampling. The same procedure was applied to the selection of tourists. Familiarity with respondents or referrals to them was important for obtaining deeper insights.

The analysis shows that mountain holiday homes and their surrounding outdoor areas are characterised by experiences related to all five senses (Table 1). Although the specific stimuli differ between home owners and tourists (with identical items highlighted), they are structurally very similar. Across senses, both groups refer to sensory experiences originating inside the house and in the outdoor area, as well as to sensory experiences shaped and controlled by the property owners and those shaped by the surrounding environment beyond owners' control.

Table 1: **Identified Sensory Stimuli in Holiday Homes of Gorski Kotar**

Sense	Holiday home owners	Tourists
Smell	**the natural scent of wood used as a building material**, the scent of fireplace smoke, scented candles and essential oils, freshly cut grass, floral and fruity scents, the scent of fir and spruce.	**the natural scent of wood used as a building material**, fresh air, the scent of soil.
Sound	**birdsong**, sounds of wild animals, **the sound of a flowing river**, **crackling fire**, buzzing of bees, creaking floor, traditional local music	**birdsong**, **the sound of a flowing river**, **crackling fire**, silence, rustling of fallen leaves, raindrops, wind in the treetops, crunching snow underfoot, church bells, children's laughter, barking of dogs, hunters' gunshots, local farming machinery
Sight	indigenous architecture and house design, seasonal and thematic decorations, handcrafted furniture, vintage items, sunset, green landscape, starry sky, stones, traditional costume, footprints in the snow, lace and checkered patterns on tablecloths, curtains, and bedding	luxury amenities, cleanliness and tidiness, the real-life appearance of the object compared to photos on website, wooden furniture, interior colours, facilities for children, view of meadows and mountains, wine cellar, billiards, bees, fireflies, snow.
Taste	fruit, linden tea, homemade juice, mulled wine, game sausages, bacon, honey	liqueurs, homemade brandy, fresh milk, cakes, homemade pasta, fritters, homemade aronia jam, blueberry jam, apple strudel, homemade cheese, baked trout.
Touch	wood and stone textures, grass underfoot, pine needles, shade, warmth of the sauna and pool.	cold air and river water, warmth of the fireplace, pleasant summer freshness, wind, vibrations while driving on a forest road, the warmth of water from a wood-heated tank, swaying in a hammock for relaxation, softness of blankets and robes, comfort of beds and pillows.

To develop the questionnaire for the quantitative phase of the study, we contextually adapted the Sensescape scale (Buzova et al., 2021), based on qualitative findings. This is in line with Buzova et al. (2021) who suggested that scale is transferable across tourism contexts, but specific items require contextual adaptation, as sensory stimuli vary across settings. Subsequent studies have adapted the scale to other contexts, including nightlife (Fang et al., 2024) and nature-based destinations (Kou et al., 2024). When contextually adapting the scale, we preserved its original structure as much as possible. For example, since the original visualscape scale includes items related to architecture, natural landscape, seafront (scenery) and a wide variety of things to see, we also incorporated these items while adapting the examples to the context of mountain holiday homes. For instance, in the item referring to architecture, we replaced examples such as buildings, monuments, and ornaments, with stone and wood materials and design elements, as these were the architecture-related examples identified in the interviews. To preserve the original scale's structure, we also reassigned certain sensory stimuli across dimensions. For instance, while the olfactory items in the original scale primarily referred to the smells of food and drinks, our qualitative study did not elicit such smells. Consequently, we relocated some food and drink examples from gustative to the olfactory dimension.

Upon contextual adaptation, items were translated into Croatian and back-translated to English to ensure their linguistic validity. In addition, ten colleagues completed the questionnaire and comment on any unclear items, which led to minor fine-tuning of some items to make them sound more natural in Croatian. Table 2 presents the constructs and corresponding items used in the study showing that we used validated scales adapting them minimally to refer to holiday homes respondents stayed in. Only for the length of stay concept we could not find validated scale, so we used an open-ended question.

Table 2: **Constructs and questionnaire items**

Construct	Item	Reference
Visual experience	The natural landscape of the holiday home (e.g., forests, meadows, wild animals, open spaces, river) is beautiful.	Adapted from Buzova et al. 2021
	The yard of the holiday home (e.g., footprints in the snow, facilities for children, orchard, barbecue) is attractive.	
	The architecture and design of the holiday home (e.g., stone and wood materials, design elements) are attractive.	
	The scenery of the natural landscape from the holiday home (e.g., greenery, mountains, sunset, starry sky, snow) is beautiful.	
	Various details are visible in the holiday home (e.g., decorations, handcrafted furniture, interior colours, patterns on tablecloths, curtains, and bedding, luxurious amenities).	
Auditory experience	The sounds near the holiday home (e.g., church bells ringing, children's laughter, residents' conversation, the crunch of snow underfoot, silence) contribute to the sense of local atmosphere.	
	It is pleasant to listen to the sounds of the natural landscape (e.g., birdsong, wildlife calls, the murmur of a stream, rustling leaves, and wind in the treetops).	
	It is pleasant to listen to the sounds (e.g., the crackling of a fire, the creaking of the floor, silence) heard within the holiday home.	
Olfactory experience	The smell of plants, flowers, trees and nature (e.g., cut grass, fir and spruce trees, fresh air) in the holiday home surroundings is pleasant.	
	The host offered or recommended the preparation of local food (e.g., bacon, fritters, homemade aronia jam, blueberry jam) that emit a pleasant smell.	
	The host offered or recommended local beverages (e.g., mint tea, currant juice, mulled wine, blueberry liqueur, walnut liqueur) that emit a pleasant aroma.	
Gustative experience	The host offered or recommended the preparation of local food (e.g., wild game sausages, homemade cheese, roasted trout, sweet pastries, apple strudel) that tastes good.	
	The host offered or recommended local beverages (e.g., linden tea, elderflower juice, homemade liqueurs, brandy, homemade milk) that taste good.	
	The host offered or recommended local food and beverages that have a unique taste.	
Tactile experience	Cool and fresh air around the holiday home is good for the skin.	
	Touching the earth, pine needles and grass around the holiday home is pleasant.	
	One can feel the warmth of the fireplace which is pleasant to the skin.	
	The materials of the holiday home (e.g., wooden wall coverings, stone, bedding) are appealing to touch.	
Entertainment	The activities in the holiday home were fun to watch and do.	Adapted from Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh et al. 2007
	The activities in the holiday home were amazing to watch and do.	
	The activities in the holiday home were entertaining to watch and perform.	
Escapist	During my stay in the holiday home, I felt like someone else.	
	During my stay in the holiday home, I completely forgot about my daily routine.	
	During my stay in the holiday home, I completely escaped from reality.	
Word-of-mouth	I will tell my family and friends about this holiday home.	Nukhu & Singh, 2023; Kim et al., 2009
	I will recommend this holiday home to my close friends.	
	I will tell other people positive things about this holiday home.	
Revisit intention	If I could, I would come to this holiday home again.	Adapted from Chen et al., 2020
	I have a strong intention to visit this holiday home again.	
	I will always consider this place to be my first choice for a holiday home in Gorski Kotar.	
Length of stay	If you were to revisit this holiday home, how many days would you like to stay?	Open-ended question

Quantitative data were collected between January and April 2025 among domestic tourists who had stayed in holiday homes in Gorski Kotar. An online structured questionnaire was administered via the Google Forms platform and distributed to 255 email addresses of holiday home owners in Gorski Kotar. All owners were informed about the purpose of the study and asked to forward the questionnaire to their guests. After they were reminded via email or telephone, in total of 270 tourists completed the survey.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Measures refinement and sample description

Prior to conducting the measurement model analysis, data screening procedures were performed. Out of the initial sample of 270 respondents, 24 were excluded due to ambiguous answers regarding the length of stay. Length of stay was measured as an open-ended question. Given the textual nature of responses for the purposes of analysis, the variable had to be recoded into seven categories based on conceptually meaningful groupings: very short stays (1-2 days), weekend stays (3 days), short week stays (4-5 days), one-week stays (6-7 days), extended stays (8-10 days), two-week stays (11-14 days), and long-term stays (15 or more days). Respondents that provided answers like "I would move to Gorski Kotar", or non-aligned with the categorization scheme like "3-5 days" had to be excluded. Consequently, the final sample consisted of 246 respondents. Their demographics is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: **Sample description**

Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male	39.8
	Female	60.2
Age	18-29	17.1
	30-44	43.9
	45-59	30.5
	60+	8.5
Education	Secondary school	34.1
	Undergraduate	14.2
	Graduate	35.4
	Other (postgraduate / no response)	16.3
Employment status	Employed	83.3
	Retired	7.7
	Student	6.5
	Unemployed	2.4
Monthly household income (€)	Up to 2,654	23.6
	2,655-5,300	29.7
	5,301-7,999	7.7
	8,000+	2.4
	Do not know / no answer	36.6

4.2 Measurement model

Analysis was conducted in JASP (JASP Team, 2026). Given the complexity of the model, high internal consistency of constructs was important, therefore Cronbach's alphas were first tested. Although they showed acceptable internal consistency for all concepts, three items were removed: *The smell of plants, flowers, trees and nature (e.g., cut grass, fir and spruce trees, fresh air) in the holiday home surroundings is pleasant*; *One can feel the warmth of the fireplace which is pleasant to the skin*; and *If I could, I would come to this holiday home again* to further improve internal consistency across their constructs. Another item's removal was considered, but its removal would slightly improve internal consistency from 0.734 to 0.747, therefore it was retained.

Further, the measurement model was assessed. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted and discriminant validity assessment via the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) revealed overlap between visual and auditory (0.901), and olfactory and gustative (1.029) dimensions. Both exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.85, or even the more lenient 0.90 cut-ff (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating that they could not be considered empirically distinct. This finding, although not initially anticipated, is consistent with neuroscience research showing that individuals' responses to stimuli in one sensory modality are often shaped by stimuli perceived through another modality. For example, a fragrance that seems pleasant in a quiet,

white-lit room might smell less pleasant in a loud, red room (Spence et al., 2014). Such cross-modal sensory interactions can occur between any pair of senses; however, within a tourist sensescape, visual-auditory and olfactory-gustative pairings appear particularly relevant. Tourists often perceive sights and sounds simultaneously, such as the visual impression of a footprints in snow together with the sound of crunching snow underfoot, or the sight of a forest accompanied by wind in the treetops. Relatedly, Qiu et al. (2018) found a strong correspondence between tourists' soundscapes and visualscapes. In the same vein, olfactory and gustative experiences in tourism are closely connected through local food and drinks, consumption of which causes simultaneous activation of both sensory receptors (Spence et al., 2014). Accordingly, these two pairs of sensory experiences were merged in the subsequent analysis.

New CFA with merged pairs of sensory experiences was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement scales (Table 4). All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and majority exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, (two being slightly below) indicating adequate indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). All constructs exhibit high internal consistency, as evidenced by Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.734 to 0.960, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.834 to 0.987, surpassing the recommended level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity was supported as the average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.619 to 0.963, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4: **CFA and scale reliability of latent constructs**

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Mean	SD
Visual-auditory	va_1	0.698	0.866	0.928	0.619	6.39	0.80
	va_2	0.865					
	va_3	0.848					
	va_4	0.735					
	va_5	0.832					
	va_6	0.677					
	va_7	0.822					
	va_8	0.795					
Olfactory-gustative	og_1	0.927	0.946	0.974	0.882	5.25	1.85
	og_2	0.956					
	og_3	0.958					
	og_4	0.967					
	og_5	0.887					
Tactile	ta_1	0.700	0.806	0.879	0.711	5.81	1.30
	ta_2	0.830					
	ta_3	0.978					
Entertainment	ent_1	0.956	0.946	0.976	0.930	6.36	0.99
	ent_2	0.994					
	ent_3	0.943					
Escapism	esc_1	0.730	0.734	0.834	0.627	5.46	1.34
	esc_2	0.790					
	esc_3	0.851					
Word-of-mouth	wom_1	0.976	0.960	0.987	0.963	6.71	0.74
	wom_2	0.985					
	wom_3	0.982					
Revisit intention	ri_1	0.918	0.851	0.896	0.812	5.67	1.40
	ri_2	0.883					

All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Table 5), indicating adequate discriminant validity between constructs.

Table 5: **Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**

	Visual-auditory	Olfactory-gustative	Tactile	Entertainment	Escapism	Word-of-mouth
Olfactory-gustative	0.390					
Tactile	0.591	0.430				
Entertainment	0.573	0.316	0.172			
Escapism	0.378	0.376	0.482	0.269		
Word-of-mouth	0.694	0.324	0.256	0.577	0.416	
Revisit intention	0.283	0.448	0.666	0.217	0.512	0.321

The overall measurement model demonstrated a good fit to the data. The CFI = 0.996 exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating excellent model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Similarly, NNFI = 0.996 suggested a very good fit. RMSEA = 0.068 indicated an acceptable fit, as values below 0.08 are considered adequate (Hu & Bentler, 1999). SRMR = 0.075 was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, further confirming a good model fit (Byrne, 2013).

4.3 Structural model

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs of the conceptual model. The model was estimated with bootstrapping based on 5,000 samples, and 95% confidence intervals were reported for all path coefficients. The DWLS estimator was used because all observed variables were measured on ordinal scales. The structural model showed good overall fit, with CFI = 0.996, NNFI = 0.995, while RMSEA = 0.069 and SRMR = 0.075 indicated acceptable fit.

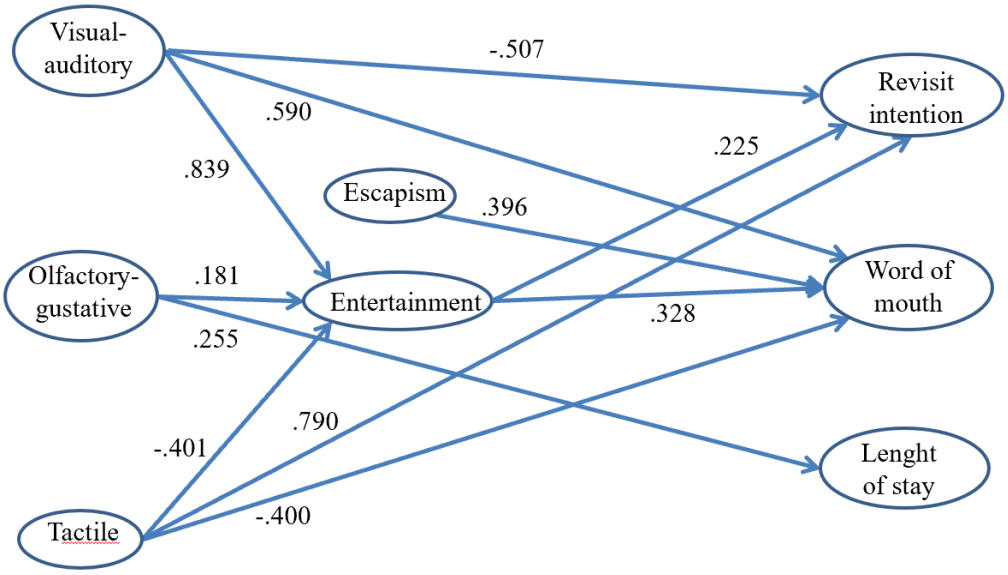
Results presented in Table 6 and Figure 1 show that none of the sensory experience dimensions significantly predicted escapism, as all 95% confidence intervals included zero. In contrast, all three sensory experiences significantly influenced entertainment. Specifically, visual-auditory experience (β = 0.839, CI [0.426, 1.111]) and olfactory-gustative experience (β = 0.181, CI [0.061, 0.421]) had significant positive effects, whereas tactile experience had a significant negative effect on entertainment (β = -0.401, CI [-0.771, -0.104]).

Regarding outcome variables, for word-of-mouth, escapism (β = 0.396, CI [0.228, 0.655]), entertainment (β = 0.328, CI [0.099, 0.539]) and visual-auditory experience (β = 0.590, CI [0.235, 0.913]) had significant positive effects, while tactile experience had a significant negative effect (β = -0.400, CI [-0.871, -0.036]). For revisit intention, entertainment (β = 0.225, CI [0.015, 0.750]) and tactile experience (β = 0.790, CI [0.407, 1.551]) had significant positive effects, however, visual-auditory experience showed a significant negative effect (β = -0.507, CI [-1.258, -0.002]). For length of stay, only olfactory-gustative experience had a significant positive effect (β = 0.255, CI [0.059, 0.455]).

Table 6: **Regression coefficients**

Outcome	Predictor	Std. estimate	Std. Error	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
	Visual-auditory	0.225	0.178	-0.076	0.493
Escapism	Olfactory-gustative	0.163	0.093	-0.021	0.311
	Tactile	0.255	0.193	-0.088	0.631
	Visual-auditory	**0.839**	**0.156**	**0.426**	**1.111**
Entertainment	**Olfactory-gustative**	**0.181**	**0.087**	**0.061**	**0.421**
	Tactile	**-0.401**	**0.171**	**-0.771**	**-0.104**
	Escapism	0.273	0.106	-0.003	0.464
	Entertainment	**0.225**	**0.191**	**0.015**	**0.750**
Revisit intention	**Visual-auditory**	**-0.507**	**0.374**	**-1.258**	**-0.002**
	Olfactory-gustative	0.170	0.117	-0.236	0.359
	Tactile	**0.790**	**0.286**	**0.407**	**1.551**
	Escapism	**0.396**	**0.111**	**0.228**	**0.655**
	Entertainment	**0.328**	**0.111**	**0.099**	**0.539**
Word-of-mouth	**Visual-auditory**	**0.590**	**0.200**	**0.235**	**0.913**
	Olfactory-gustative	0.054	0.085	-0.120	0.230
	Tactile	**-0.400**	**0.188**	**-0.871**	**-0.036**
	Escapism	0.168	0.107	-0.053	0.368
	Entertainment	-0.225	0.154	-0.559	0.010
Length of stay	Visual-auditory	0.404	0.260	-0.240	0.890
	Olfactory-gustative	**0.255**	**0.087**	**0.059**	**0.455**
	Tactile	-0.278	0.182	-0.592	0.118

Figure 1: **Path diagram – significant paths**



Indirect effects analysis (Table 7) revealed that visual-auditory experience had a significant positive indirect effect on word-of-mouth via entertainment (β = 0.275, CI [0.092, 0.519]), as did olfactory-gustative experience (β = 0.059, CI [0.019, 0.156]). In contrast, tactile experience showed a significant negative indirect effect via entertainment (β = -0.131, CI [-0.316, -0.040]). The indirect effect of visual-auditory experience (β = 0.189, CI [0.011, 0.875]) and olfactory-gustative experience (β = 0.041, CI [0.002, 0.295]) on revisit intention through entertainment was positive and significant, while the indirect effect of tactile experience (β = -0.090, CI [-0.641, -0.004]) on revisit intention through entertainment was negative and significant. Olfactory-gustative experience had significant indirect effect through escapism on word-of-mouth (β = 0.065, CI [0.011, 0.193]) and length of stay (β = 0.027, CI [0.001, 0.114]).

Table 7: **Indirect effects**

	Std. Estimate	Std. Error	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Visual-auditory → entertainment → word-of-mouth	**0.275**	**0.108**	**0.092**	**0.519**
Visual-auditory → entertainment → revisit intention	**0.189**	**0.235**	**0.011**	**0.875**
Visual-auditory → entertainment → length of stay	-0.189	0.167	-0.609	0.011
Olfactory-gustative → entertainment → word-of-mouth	**0.059**	**0.035**	**0.019**	**0.156**
Olfactory-gustative → entertainment → revisit intention	**0.041**	**0.050**	**0.002**	**0.295**
Olfactory-gustative → entertainment → length of stay	-0.041	0.037	-0.169	7.485×10^{-5}
Tactile → entertainment → word-of-mouth	**-0.131**	**0.070**	**-0.316**	**-0.040**
Tactile → entertainment → revisit intention	**-0.090**	**0.162**	**-0.641**	**-0.004**
Tactile → entertainment → length of stay	0.090	0.099	-9.720×10^{-4}	0.411
Visual-auditory → escapism → word-of-mouth	0.089	0.057	-0.032	0.197
Visual-auditory → escapism → revisit intention	0.061	0.083	-0.018	0.230
Visual-auditory → escapism → length of stay	0.038	0.048	-0.018	0.223
Olfactory-gustative → escapism → word-of-mouth	**0.065**	**0.041**	**0.011**	**0.193**
Olfactory-gustative → escapism → revisit intention	0.044	0.036	-0.003	0.132
Olfactory-gustative → escapism → length of stay	**0.027**	**0.026**	$\mathbf{5.910\times10^{-4}}$	**0.114**
Tactile → escapism → word-of-mouth	0.101	0.083	-0.010	0.386
Tactile → escapism → revisit intention	0.069	0.063	-0.056	0.169
Tactile → escapism → length of stay	0.043	0.048	-0.009	0.275

5. DISCUSSION

Our results show that each of the three sensory experiences is positively directly related to a different desired outcome: visual-auditory experience predicts word-of-mouth, olfactory-gustative experience predicts length of stay, and tactile experience predicts revisit intention. The results also reveal unexpected negative paths, specifically, tactile experience on word-of-mouth and visual-auditory experience on revisit intention. Notably, these negative effects follow a mirrored pattern: where one predictor relates positively to an outcome, the other relates negatively, and vice versa. Further analysis reveals that the two predictors showing negative effects (i.e., visual-auditory and tactile) are positively correlated to each other and to all outcome variables when examined independently. This pattern indicates a suppression effect, common in SEM when two predictors are highly correlated (Maassen & Bakker, 2001). As in SEM each coefficient represents the unique effect of a predictor after partialling out the variance shared with the other predictors, when two predictors overlap substantially in what they explain (as visual-auditory and tactile seem to), the residual unique effect of one can turn negative. This is not because that sensory experience is detrimental to the outcome, but because the shared variance has already been attributed to the other predictor. Given that each predictor positively relates to only one outcome, the first set of hypotheses (H1-H3), which posit that sensory experiences positively relate to desired tourist behaviour is partly supported. Previous research (Chen et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2026) found the direct effect of sensory experience on word-of-mouth and revisit intention, however, the non-uniform effects in our results, wherein each sensory dimension uniquely predicts a distinct outcome, reveal intriguing dynamics that have received limited attention in the literature thus far and merit emphasis.

Turning to the second set of hypotheses, we point that escapism plays a very limited role when other paths are controlled for. It is unrelated to any sensory experience (rejecting H4), and among the outcomes relates only to word-of-mouth (confirming H6, and rejecting H5 and H7). Also, only two indirect paths through escapism reached statistical significance, but their magnitude was negligible. This diverges from Pine and Gilmore's (1998) proposition that engaging all five senses is central to creating memorable experiences including escapism experience. One explanation is that escapism functions as a travel motivation, a need to detach from everyday routines, stressful environments, and one's usual social roles (Vespestad et al., 2025), rather than a response to on-site sensory stimuli. Further, its link to word-of-mouth but not revisit intention nor length of stay (if revisiting) may reflect escapism's novelty-seeking nature, i.e., tourists seeking escape from everyday routines might prefer new destinations over familiar ones. This contradicts studies linking escapism to revisit intention (e.g., Ali & Gaber, 2022), suggesting the relationship is context-dependent.

In contrast to escapism, entertainment is far more embedded in the model's nomological network. Visual-auditory and olfactory-gustative experiences both positively predict entertainment, while tactile experience shows a negative path, again pointing to the suppression pattern and suggesting only partially supporting H8. On the outcome side, entertainment positively relates to revisit intention and word-of-mouth (supporting H9 and H10), consistent with Hosany and Witham (2010), but not to length of stay (rejecting H11). The indirect effects resemble the direct pattern: all three sensory dimensions influence revisit intention and word-of-mouth through entertainment, with visual-auditory and olfactory-gustative exerting positive indirect effects and tactile a negative one, again reflecting the suppression dynamic observed throughout the model.

CONCLUSION

The study contributes to the tourist experience literature in several ways. First, it offers a novel perspective on mountain holiday homes as not only a form of accommodation, but also nature-based destinations in themselves, highlighting their distinct sensory profile and drawing the attention of marketing researchers to them. Relatedly, it identifies sensory stimuli present in and around them and contextually adapts the Buzova et al.'s (2021) sensescape scale to measure their context-specific sensory experiences. Second, the proposed conceptual model incorporates intended length of stay, a desired behavioural outcome (Gössling et al., 2018) previously neglected in tourist experience research, alongside the commonly examined revisit intention and word-of-mouth. The results show that different types of experiences translate differently across three outcomes, with some influencing length of stay and others revisit intention and word-of-mouth, highlighting the need to study intended length of stay as a distinct behavioural outcome. Third, this study bridges two largely disconnected streams of tourist experience research, sensory experience (Agapito et al., 2012) and Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four memorable experience realms (4Es), within a single integrative model. Despite the conceptual recognition that memorable experiences require the engagement of all five senses (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), prior empirical research has largely examined these constructs in isolation. This study tests a theoretically grounded model linking sensory stimuli to distinct memorable experience realms (entertainment and escapism) and, in turn, to tourist behaviour. In other words, we tested Pine and Gilmore's assumption that to achieve effective memorable experiences all senses should be engaged. The findings do not support the importance of senses for experiencing escapism, while they play a more prominent role for experiencing entertainment. Finally, this study contributes to the sensescape literature by revealing theoretically supported partial clustering of sensory experiences, contrary to previous research that either studied each sense individually or aggregated all into a single higher-order construct.

Practically, the findings offer mountain holiday home owners guidance to carefully design sensory cues within the accommodation. Given that different sensory experiences translate into different behavioural outcomes, owners should prioritise those elements that align with their desired outcomes. Specifically, olfactory-gustative experiences may be more effective for extending length of stay, whereas visual-auditory and tactile experiences may be more relevant for enhancing revisit intention and word-of-mouth.

This study has several limitations. First, the relatively small sample drawn exclusively from domestic guests has limited statistical power and generalizability. Second, respondents were contacted through holiday home owners which ensured relevant reach and increased response rate, but may have biased the sample toward those closer to holiday home owners and with more favourable attitudes. Third, the self-reported measures may be subject to common method bias. Fourth, measuring length of stay using an open-ended question and recoding data into a 1-7 scale based on conceptual categories enabled initial instrumentalization of this important but neglected variable. However, transforming textual data into quantitative categories introduced a degree of researcher interpretation which may have influenced the results.

Future research should address these limitations by replicating the study with a larger sample and across different cultural and contextual settings and developing a scale for length of stay. Furthermore, experimental designs could better capture causal relationships among sensory experiences, memorable experiential realms, and behavioural outcomes. Finally, this study focuses on entertainment and escapism of the four memorable experiential realms, as these were argued to be the primary motives for visiting mountain holiday homes; however, future research could examine the mediating roles of esthetic and education to develop a fully integrated model encompassing the sensory experience and experience economy (4E) research streams.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING

In preparing this paper, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Perplexity for linguistic support, including translation, phrasing suggestions, and clarity improvements, and Elicit for literature review. Following the use of this tools/services, the authors have reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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