



AN INTEGRATED APPROACH OF CAMBODIA'S DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES
FOR ENHANCING DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS



A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Naresuan University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management
2025

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Thesis entitled “An Integrated Approach of Cambodia’s Destination Attributes for
enhancing destination competitiveness”

By SIMSOPHAL SAM

has been approved by the Graduate School as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management of
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As I am writing this acknowledgement, I am in tears. I wish I could sum up my journey in one page, but words cannot express what these past two and a half years have meant to me. I wrote this thesis to express my resilience, personal growth, and the love and support I received from so many people. It represents long nights of hard work, self-doubt, overwhelming joy, deep reflection, and countless memories I will always cherish.

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Simsophal Sam



Title AN INTEGRATED OF CAMBODIA'S DESTINATION
ATTRIBUTES FOR ENHANCING DESTINATION
COMPETITIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

Cambodia's economic and cultural development depends on tourism, but the country faces challenges that limit its global competitiveness. Few studies have examined tourist perceptions of destination attributes and competitiveness. Most have focused on policy and supply side perspectives. This demand-side study of Cambodia's tourism destination competitiveness (TDC) for first-time and repeat international visitors, based on Dwyer and Kim's model, addresses this gap. Mixed methods were used. In-depth interviews with 20 international tourists in Phnom Penh identified important destination attributes, which informed a 400-person quantitative survey. Tourists rated destination attributes' importance, performance, and satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale. Compare visitor segment perceptions using Importance and Performance Analysis (IPA), Gap Analysis, Utility Scores, and t-tests.

The Findings show Cambodia has competitive strengths in cultural heritage, cuisine, and visitor safety, which should be preserved. Fair tour/excursion pricing and reasonable transport costs were found with high importance but low performance, making them the most important areas for improvement. The gap analysis also showed that first-time visitors had moderate

expectations for access and convenience, while repeat visitors used prior experiences and regional comparisons to evaluate them more strictly. The study concludes with policy recommendations to improve infrastructure, safety, and accessibility while preserving cultural heritage and hospitality. This research extends destination competitiveness theory by focusing on demand side insights and offers recommendations to improve Cambodia's global tourism appeal.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the study's background to set the research context. The problem statement explains the study rationale and sets research questions and goals. The chapter then discusses the study's findings. After explaining operational definitions (OD), the study's scope is defined.

Background of the Study

Due to increased information and changing tourist preferences, global tourist destinations compete to be the top choice (Chen et al., 2025; Rodríguez et al., 2012). Destination competitiveness is crucial for attracting new visitors and encouraging repeat visits, driving economic growth and global reputation (Chen et al., 2025; González-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023; Xu, & Au, 2023). The European Travel Commission (ETC) has increased member country competition to attract new explorers and returning tourists seeking deeper cultural immersion (ETC, n.d).

ASEAN has a variety of strategic plans to attract first-time visitors and encourage repeat tourism. The Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025 promotes Southeast Asia as a top destination to attract new visitors (ASEAN, n.d). ASEAN residents and international tourists are encouraged to visit the region by social media campaigns like “A Destination for Every Dream”. ASEAN’s integrated approach boosts its long-term competitiveness in a crowded global market. International tourism in Cambodia, an ASEAN member, increased from 2.5 million in 2010 to 6.7 million in 2024 (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). Cambodia has adopted tourism policies and plans to enhance tourism. In 2023, “BUILD Plus 3Ds,” a tourism strategy, aims to make the country a top global destination (May Kunmakara, 2023; Nhean Chamrong, 2023; Ou Sokmean, 2023). Despite this goal, Cambodia is less popular than its neighbors (Hoang Phong, 2024; OECD, 2023). Cambodia is less competitive than Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia (Fernández et al., 2020; Hafiz Hanafiah et al., 2016).

Cambodia's tourism competitiveness is poorly researched, especially first-time versus repeat visitors' needs. Chens et al. (2008) compared Cambodia to major ASEAN competitors and proposed a resource allocation framework for policymakers. Only tourism practitioners and officials were surveyed for their supply side study. Carter et al. (2015); Choo (2017) examined Cambodia's tourism sector challenges using academic literature. As for Leang (2025) discussed policies and strategies with stakeholders. These studies identified industry challenges but failed to distinguish between critical factors for attracting first-time and repeat visitors. Tourists' priorities reveal how different consumer segments view Cambodia's competitive attributes.

This makes it unclear how first-time and repeat tourists value destination attributes. Existing studies miss changing preferences by ignoring demand-side perspectives. The decision-making factors for first-time visitors differ greatly from those for repeat visitors (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022). Furthermore, Leung and Baloglu (2013) analyzed data from publications and tourism practitioner surveys and suggested that future research should directly examine tourists' perspectives or experiences and satisfaction to better understand destination competitiveness.

Thus, this study examines Cambodia's tourism competitiveness from international visitors, focusing on first-time and repeat travelers' priorities, to fill research gaps. This study examines destination attributes from a tourist's perspective using qualitative and quantitative methods. Previous studies have focused on supply-side perspectives.

Problem Statement

Most studies on Cambodia's tourism have examined the supply side, focusing on tourism practitioners and officials rather than tourists (Carter et al., 2015; Chens et al., 2008; Choo, 2017; Leang, 2025). This approach ignores international visitors' priorities, which are crucial to identifying a destination's appeal from their perspective (Leung, & Baloglu, 2013). Cambodia may struggle to compete in the ASEAN tourism market and globally due to a lack of understanding of international tourists' preferences and destination attributes.

This gap prevents policymakers and businesses from meeting tourist expectations and improving Cambodia's reputation. Dabphet (2017) and Zhou (2005) found that destination attributes vary in their contribution to perceived value, with some tourists prioritizing certain attributes. In a competitive international tourism market, understanding what attracts tourists and what they value is crucial. Tourist preferences and destination satisfaction can help Cambodia meet international standards and address issues that negatively impact tourist experiences. Understanding what visitors like best helps policymakers and stakeholders allocate resources, prioritize investments, and target to specific market attributes. Understanding tourist priorities helps policymakers design policies that preserve and promote the country's image, positioning it as an attractive destination while minimizing environmental impact cost-effectively (Eggers et al., 2021).

Tourism businesses can use these insights to improve their services and create customized offerings for age, gender, and first and repeat visitors. Businesses can boost visitor satisfaction, reviews, and repeat visits by designing experiences for specific groups. Increased tourist satisfaction can contribute to local economic growth, job creation, and partnerships with local suppliers and communities (Chen et al., 2025; González-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023; Xu, & Au, 2023). Cambodia can attract more tourists, boost economic growth, create jobs, and promote long-term tourism growth by aligning national and business-level tourism strategies with visitor expectations. Cambodia's success and competitiveness as a destination depend on gathering and applying this information.

Rationale of the Study

Millions of tourists visit Cambodia each year (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). Cambodia relies on tourism for employment and economic growth (International Trade Administration, 2024; Vanne Khut, 2024). Cambodia struggles to attract international tourists when competing with neighboring countries. Cambodia must understand how international tourists value its destination attributes to maintain and grow its global market share. Strategic development, resource optimization, and Cambodia's competitiveness depend on tourist perceptions and preferences.

The mixed methods study is ideal for understanding how tourists prioritize destination attributes, including importance, performance, and satisfaction (Chi, & Qu, 2009; Eggers et al., 2021; Huertas-Garcia et al., 2014). Cambodia has studied destination competitiveness, but mostly from the supply side, from tourism practitioners and officials. This quantitative and qualitative study captures demand, focusing on international tourists' perceptions. This research offers new insights into tourist preferences in Cambodia because no previous studies have used this method to quantify first-time and repeated tourists' perceptions.

This study adds to destination competitiveness theories by focusing on tourist-centric competitiveness Dwyer, & Kim (2003) and Chens et al. (2008). This study focuses on tourists' perceptions of destination attributes, building on the author's competitiveness focus. This research improves frameworks and emphasizes the importance of demand insights for competitiveness strategies by identifying tourist preferences. This research bridges supply-side evaluations and demand-driven priorities, providing a refined approach that may be applicable to competitive tourism contexts.

This study focuses on international tourists because of their importance to Cambodia's tourism sector. Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese tourists make up a large portion of visitor arrivals (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). International tourist arrivals increased 317.5% from 2020 to 2023, demonstrating their economic impact on the tourism industry. This study targets international tourists to understand their unique perceptions, which is essential for aligning Cambodia's tourism offerings with global expectations.

Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, was chosen for this research because of its tourism, culture, and economic importance. The city mix of Cambodia's history, modernization, and urbanization makes it ideal for destination evaluation. Phnom Penh, one of Cambodia most visited cities (Ministry of Tourism, 2024), offers a diverse range of attractions and experiences (CHAT, 2016).

Research Question

This study assesses Cambodia's destination attributes, compares first-time and repeat visitor satisfaction, and suggests ways to boost tourism competitiveness. These goals prompt the following research questions: What is Cambodia's most important destination attributes for tourists, and how do they perform? International tourists' perceptions of Cambodia's destination attributes will be examined in this study. The study will also examine travelers' satisfaction with these attributes. Do first-time and repeat international visitors have different satisfaction levels? Based on first-time and repeat visitor satisfaction, what strategic guidelines can be developed to boost Cambodia's destination competitiveness?

The study objectives are defined based on these questions as follows:

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the importance and performance of Cambodia's destination attributes through the Importance and Performance Analysis (IPA).
2. To examine the differences in satisfaction levels between first-time and repeat international visitors with regard to Cambodia's destination attributes.
3. To propose guidelines for enhancing the competitiveness of Cambodia as a tourism destination.

Contribution of the Study

This demand-side study of Cambodia's tourism competitiveness, focusing on how first-time and repeat international visitors evaluate destination attributes, fills a gap in the literature. Tourist voices are prioritized over policy frameworks and supply-side factors in this study. It clarifies Cambodia's tourism in global reputation.

The study assesses destination competitiveness using IPA, Gap Analysis, Utility Scores, and independent sample t-tests. These methods identify major strengths, weaknesses, and statistically significant tourist segment differences. The findings can help Cambodian tourism stakeholders and policymakers track competitiveness and allocate resources.

The findings show which factors most affect tourist satisfaction and repeat visits for tourism businesses and service providers. Understanding cultural heritage, safety, accessibility, and transport costs helps businesses tailor services and investments. By meeting first-time and repeat visitor needs, tourism operators can improve visitor experiences, build loyalty, and promote Cambodia.

The study adds demand-focused frameworks to Dwyer and Kim (2003) and Chens et al. (2008). Visitors' perceptions change with prior experience, demonstrating competitiveness's dynamic nature. Mixed methods combine qualitative insights with quantitative approach, enhancing academic contributions and preparing future researchers. This research links supply evaluations and demand priorities, improving scholarship and practice.

Scope of the Study

The study evaluates Cambodia's destination attributes, differentiates tourists' preferences and satisfaction, and proposes ways to improve them to boost destination competitiveness. Due to Cambodia's size, budget, and time constraints, the destination with the most tourists and competition is prioritized. Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital, is the most visited city with a diverse international tourist base (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). Therefore, this study focuses on international tourists in Phnom Penh to learn about their destination perceptions.

However, the study uses Dwyer and Kim (2003) framework which includes destination attributes, visitor conditions, and competitiveness. This study used destination attributes as independent variables to evaluate Cambodia's destination competitiveness.

This thesis covers one year, from August 2024 to September 2025. The qualitative approach will collect data from January to February 2025 (three weeks) and the quantitative approach from March 2024 to May 2025 (two months). Data collection and analysis will be followed by report writing. The research process is systematic and comprehensive with this carefully planned schedule, allowing for thorough data collection, rigorous analysis, and effective report synthesis within the timeframe.

Operational Definition (OD)

The operational definition provides detailed descriptions of how specific variables will be measured within the specific context of this study. Accordingly, several key variables have been identified, as outlined below:

1. Destination Attribute (DA)

Destination attributes refer to specific characteristics or features of a destination, encompassing both tangible elements such as accommodation, transportation, safety, and attractions and intangible aspects, including service quality and cultural experiences.

2. Destination Competitiveness

A destination is competitive if it can attract and satisfy tourists while standing out from competitors. Tourist perception of Cambodia's destination attributes is used to assess destination competitiveness and how well they make Cambodia a preferred travel destination.

3. Tourist Perception

Tourist perception includes their opinions, attitudes, and impressions of a destination based on their experiences, expectations, and exposure to its attributes. This study measures tourist perception by assessing destination qualities, their importance, performance, and satisfaction, revealing how these views affect their Cambodian experience.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Cambodia's tourism industry has great potential but faces ongoing challenges that limit its competitiveness (Carter et al., 2015; Chens et al., 2008; Choo, 2017; Keo, & Banhidi, 2023; Leung, & Baloglu, 2013; Seab, 2022). These issues range from infrastructure and service quality to marketing, hygiene, and visitor experience management. Since a destination's success depends on how well it delivers on visitors' most valued attributes, it is important to understand what matters to tourists (Chi, & Qu, 2008; Dwyer, & Kim, 2003; Ritchie, & Crouch, 2003; Yoon, & Uysal, 2005). Furthermore, first-time and repeat tourists may value these attributes differently (Crompton, 2025). Therefore, improving Cambodia's destination competitiveness requires more than general improvement. It requires identifying the tourist's most valued attributes and assessing how well they are delivered.

This chapter reviews the literature on tourism policy, destination attributes, and the use of analytical tools like Importance and Performance Analysis (IPA), gap analysis, and utility scoring in tourism research. The review situates Cambodia's tourism sector within the broader discourse on destination competitiveness and highlights the key knowledge gaps that this research aims to fill by establishing its theoretical and empirical foundations.

Tourism Development in Cambodia

Not long after gaining independence from French colonial rule (BBC, 2018), Cambodia emerged as a prominent attraction in Southeast Asia (Lam, 1998). However, Cambodia suffered decades of civil war and social and political changes until the 1990s, when peace and socio-economic reconstruction led to rapid tourism industry growth (Chheang, 2011; Ear, 2009; Heuveline, 1998). The 1996-2000 Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) and 2001-2005 SEDP-II supported Cambodia's rebuilding (Chheang, 2011; Royal Government of Cambodia, 2006; TERAMOTO).

Tourism was crucial to these plans because the government knew it could boost economic recovery, employment, and global recognition (Chheang, 2011). International tourist arrivals have skyrocketed from 0.26 million in 1996 to 6.7 million in 2024 (see **Figure 1**) (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). Tourism is Cambodia's second largest growth driver, boosting GDP. In 2019, it contributed 12% of GDP, generated \$5.3 billion in revenue, and employed 630,000 people (International Trade Administration, 2024; Vanne Khut, 2024).

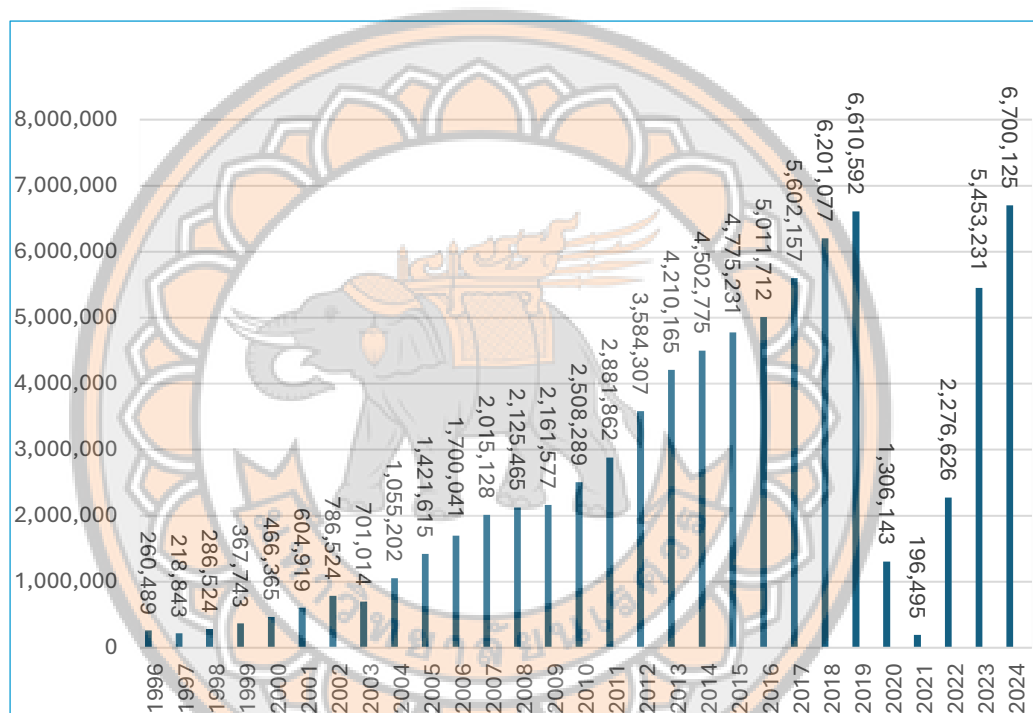


Figure 1 Number of tourist arrivals in Cambodia (1996-2024)

Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2024

Many tourism strategies and policies were implemented to boost tourism (UDOM et al., 2020). The strategies address both tangible and intangible tourism infrastructure needs (May Kunmakara, 2023; Royal Government of Cambodia, 2012; UDOM et al., 2020). For instance, from 2001 to 2005, SEDP-II focused on developing new infrastructure and amenities and marketing to attract international and local tourists (Asian Development Bank, 2009). Cambodia's tourism development strategic

plan 2012-2020 promoted tourism business freedom, government-private sector cooperation, local products, and relevant laws (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2012). Furthermore, Chheang (2009) also examined Cambodia's tourism development and planning priorities, including security and safety, infrastructure, tourism facilities, stakeholder collaboration, cultural heritage, environmental protection, human resources, and tourism product marketing and promotion.

Later in 2023, "BUILD Plus 3Ds" was introduced to position Cambodia as a top global tourism destination (May Kunmakara, 2023; Nhean Chamrong, 2023; Ou Sokmean, 2023). The 5-pillar "BUILD" brand management strategy emphasizes reputation, positive perception, and target market engagement. Unique selling points marketing promotes the country's appeal to major markets. Inbound design improves tourist experiences through infrastructure and international standards. Leveraging tourism endowment and diversification requires innovative and creative product development. Competitive tourism sites diversify offerings to boost destination competitiveness. Three supporting pillars are the "3Ds". These include improving destination management, embracing the digital revolution, and developing HR. UDOM et al. (2020, p. 206) summarized Cambodia's tourism strategies and policies from 1996 to 2020, and the BUILD plus 3Ds are shown in **Figure 2**.

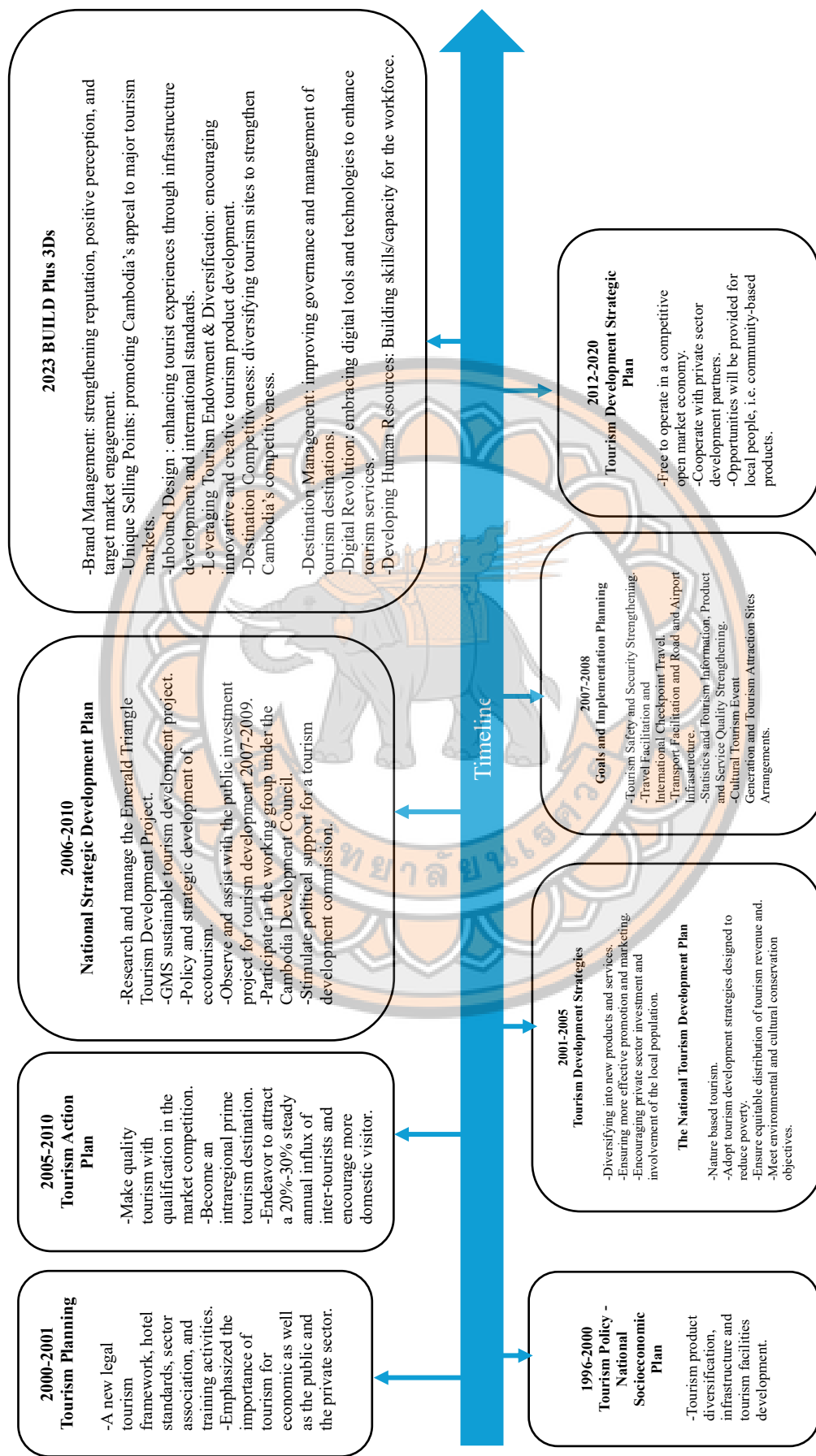


Figure 2 Tourism Strategy and Policy Overview of Cambodia (1996 - 2023)

Despite extensive tourism policies from 1996 to 2020, BUILD Plus 3Ds fails to address several issues. For example, infrastructure development has been a priority in the National Socio-economic Plan (1996-2000) and Implementation Planning (2007-2008) but maintaining and upgrading roads and facilities to meet international standards within the BUILD Plus 3Ds framework is difficult. In the Tourism Development Strategies (2001-2005) and Tourism Development Strategic Plan (2012-2020), community involvement was also stressed. By creating Khmer-themed tourism products, BUILD Plus 3Ds continues this focus. From 1996 to 2020, marketing campaigns and tourism services have focused on market competitiveness and country image. The BUILD Plus 3Ds builds on these efforts by focusing on international tourism branding and marketing.

Comparing Cambodia's tourism policies from 1996-2020 to the 2023 BUILD Plus 3Ds strategy shows that infrastructure development, community involvement, environmental conservation, and market competitiveness are government priorities. Besides tourism policies and strategies, **Table 1** lists other challenges in Cambodia's tourism industry identified by previous researchers. These obstacles could prevent Cambodia from becoming a top global destination as envisioned in the Build Plus 3Ds tourism action plan.

Table 1 Issues in Tourism Industry in Cambodia

Element(s)	Source(s)
1. Infrastructure	Tourism Policy, Chens et al. (2008), Leung, & Baloglu (2013)
2. Community Involvement	Tourism Policy, Carter et al. (2015), Seab (2022)
3. Environmental Conservation	Tourism Policy, Leung, & Baloglu (2013)
4. Market Competitiveness	Tourism Policy, Choo (2017)
5. Recreational and Entertainment facilities	Chens et al. (2008)
6. Technology	Carter et al. (2015), Seab (2022), Dena (2023)

Element(s)	Source(s)
7. Safety and Security	Keo, & Banhidi (2023)
8. Brand Management	Choo (2017), Prum et al. (2024); Sann, & Lai (2019)
9. Attraction	Choo (2017)
10. Transportation	Choo (2017), Chens et al. (2008)
11. Human Resources	Tourism Policy, Carter et al. (2015), Seab (2022), Dena (2023)

Many researchers have identified tourism industry challenges and suggested attribute development. Cambodia should improve air transportation, tourism infrastructure, ICT infrastructure, cultural resources, and natural resources (Leung, & Baloglu, 2013). Additionally, Keo, & Banhidi (2023) found high crime rates in big cities, poor street food hygiene, and outdoor safety issues. Prum et al. (2024); Sann and Lai (2019) found that Cambodian hospitality customers often overlook Cambodian identity. In addition, Dena (2023) found issues with unskilled workers, law regulation, and technology infrastructure.

A study by González-Rodríguez et al. (2023) showed that Cambodia may have favorable conditions for tourism. However, it still lacks competitive success compared to other destinations. Governments also shape and implement competitiveness strategies (Connelly, 2007). The country must convince tourists its destinations are worth the trip visit (Nadalipour et al., 2019). To the author's knowledge, Cambodian research on these issues is scarce. Thus, Cambodia should develop tourism policies and strategies to boost its global competitiveness to align with the 2023 tourism strategy.

Despite Cambodia's ambitious goal of becoming a top global destination, it trails behind its neighbors (Hoang Phong, 2024; OECD, 2023). In fact, Malaysia was Southeast Asia's most popular destination in 2023, with 29 million foreign visitors, according to VN Express International. Thailand was second, followed by Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Cambodia (Hoang Phong, 2024). Moreover, Fernández et al. (2020) ranked 80 countries by tourism competitiveness and placed

Cambodia 76th. Cambodia is less competitive than Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia.

In conclusion, Cambodia's tourism sector faces structural and operational challenges that prevent it from fully capitalizing on its cultural and natural assets. Cambodia trails regional competitors in visitor numbers and global rankings due to infrastructure, service quality, safety, workforce skills, and policy execution issues. These weaknesses hurt visitors and hurt Cambodia's position in a competitive tourism market where neighboring destinations are investing heavily to improve their appeal. Thus, improving competitiveness is no longer a dream but a necessity. This requires examining Cambodia's tourism performance through the lens of destination competitiveness to identify the factors and attributes that shape tourist perceptions and destination choices. Cambodia must address these competitiveness drivers to become a Southeast Asian tourism hidden gem.

Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC) is a well-discussed topic in tourism literature, and recent studies have used destination attributes to examine tourists' competitiveness perceptions. Further research shows that improving destination attributes improves tourist satisfaction and competitiveness (Hossain, & Islam, 2019; Xu, & Au, 2023). According to previous studies, Cambodia must address **Table 1**'s issues to boost its tourism competitiveness and attract more visitors. Thus, tourism destination competitiveness will be discussed next.

Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC)

A destination's competitiveness is key to success in the global tourism industry (Leung, & Baloglu, 2013). Competitiveness has two levels, Dwyer, & Kim (2003). Micro, at the industry level, focuses on tourism-related sector performance and efficiency. Macro, at the national level, wants to boost tourism-related economic returns. Competitiveness at the macro level encompasses economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors that determine a destination's appeal, not just infrastructure or marketing. These attributes determine how well a country can attract, satisfy, and retain tourists in the face of intense international competition, making destination competitiveness research essential for sustainable tourism development.

Destination competitiveness is a destination's ability to provide high-quality products and memorable experiences that attract visitors and increase spending (Crouch, & Ritchie, 2000). This understanding goes beyond attraction to include offering tourists important products and services, meeting or exceeding their satisfaction, and outperforming competitors destinations (Altinay, & Kozak, 2021; Dwyer, & Kim, 2003). A destination must continuously improve its capabilities and performance in the tourism market to stay competitive (González-Rodríguez et al., 2023). Destinations depend on their ability to compete at this level to survive, grow, and succeed (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016). Thus, Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC) has become a major focus for researchers and practitioners in the tourism industry and academic literature (Cronjé, & du Plessis, 2020; Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023; Xu, & Au, 2023).

Given this perspective, tourism destination competitiveness must be grounded in theoretical models for analysis and practice. Several frameworks have become industry standards due to their comprehensiveness and adaptability. The models of Crouch, & Ritchie (2000) and Dwyer, & Kim (2003) integrate many tangible and intangible factors that affect a destination's competitiveness. These frameworks view competitiveness as a complex system of interrelated attributes, from core resources and visitor experiences to enabling conditions and destination management.

There is no TDC concept is more well-known than Crouch, & Ritchie (2000) and Dwyer, & Kim (2003). Xu, & Au (2023) found that recent studies use Crouch, & Ritchie (2000) and Dwyer, & Kim (2003) competitiveness models as a foundation. Both models use destination attributes or tourism products like infrastructure, accessibility, safety and security, human resources, and others as key indicators. Goffi (2013) added that these models include many destination attributes needed to measure competitiveness in a structured way.

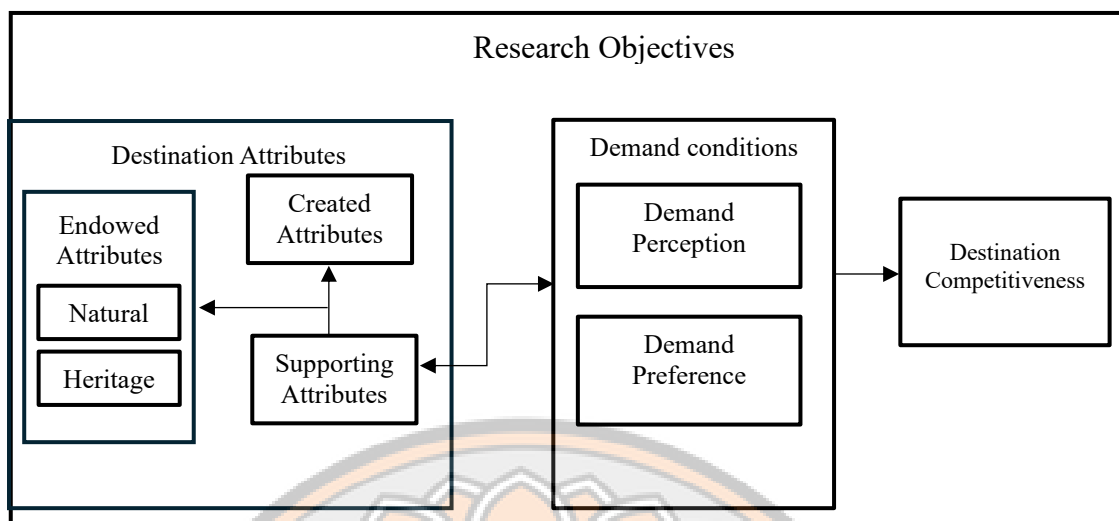


Figure 3 Adapt from Dwyer and Kim (2003, p. 378)

Dwyer, & Kim (2003)'s tourism destination competitiveness model considers supply and demand side factors. It has four parts including core resources and attractors, supporting factors and resources, destination management, and demand conditions. Heritage sites, landscapes, and unique events are key resources and attractors. Infrastructure, hospitality, accessibility, and other tourist amenities are supporting factors and resources. Finally, demand conditions capture tourists' characteristics, segments, and perceptions, in recognition that a destination's competitiveness is measured by how well its offerings match market segments' needs. The model shows how resources, management practices, and market realities affect a destination's competitiveness by linking these four components.

Demand conditions are crucial for Cambodia. Angkor Wat, natural landscapes, and cultural heritage are competitive advantages, but they only matter if they meet tourists' changing needs. Dwyer, & Kim (2003) stated that "a destination's product must develop in a way that matches the evolving consumer preferences, if the destination is to enhance or even maintain competitiveness" (p. 379). This is especially relevant in Cambodia, where first time visitors seeking iconic attractions and repeat visitors seeking deeper, more authentic experiences may prioritize attributes differently. This study recognizes that strategic improvements in destination attributes must be based on a clear understanding of what tourists value most, how satisfied they

are with these aspects, and where significant gaps exist between expectation and experience by focusing on demand conditions. To ensure that Cambodia's tourism development recommendations are evidence based, targeted, and responsive to visitor preferences, the study uses Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA), gap analysis, and utility scoring.

According to the Dwyer, & Kim (2003) model, destination attributes are the tangible and intangible features that express and perceive competitiveness. These attributes often fall under core resources and attractors or supporting factors in the model, but demand conditions mediate their influence as tourists compare them to their expectations and travel motivations. Understanding destination attributes is crucial to assessing and improving competitiveness because they directly affect visitor experience. Infrastructure quality, cultural heritage, accessibility, safety, and hospitality standards are experiential touchpoints that influence tourists' decisions to visit, recommend, or return (Munir et al., 2025). Examining destination attributes is a practical way to translate destination competitiveness into measurable factors that can guide strategic action, especially in Cambodia, where first-time and repeat visitors may reveal different priorities for improvement.

Destination attributes are widely considered a key factor in tourism success, affecting what attracts and keeps visitors (Zhou, 2005). Tourism research has examined these attributes in various contexts, such as enhancing destination competitiveness and development (Caber et al., 2012; Dabphet, 2017; Hossain, & Islam, 2019; Xu, & Au, 2023) or shaping tourist travel experiences (Baruca, & Čivre, 2022; Biswas et al., 2021; Dabphet, 2021; Gannon et al., 2017; Moon, & Han, 2018; Schlesinger et al., 2020; Singh, & Tiwari, 2016). Tourists evaluate a destination based on these tangible and intangible attributes.

Furthermore, tourists choose destinations based on their satisfaction and expectations (Raazim, & Munasinghe, 2021). Therefore, how tourists rate these attributes can determine a destination's competitiveness (Ragavan et al., 2014). As no universal list or standard exists, making it difficult to choose which attributes to evaluate. Tourism products vary, so what's important in one destination may not matter in another (Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023). For example, tropical beach destinations emphasize climate, beach quality, and water activities, while mountain

destinations emphasize scenery, hiking trails, and wildlife. Similar attribute sets in both contexts may lead to ineffective strategies that don't meet tourist needs.

Most studies on Cambodia's position in ASEAN competitive tourism landscape have taken a supply side or policy-driven approach. Chens et al. (2008) used expert insights to compare Cambodia's tourism competitiveness to regional competitors, while Carter et al. (2015) and Leang (2025) used literature synthesis to examine structural and operational challenges. These works provide strategic insights, but they do not capture tourists' perspectives or prioritize which attributes need improvement. This is a major issue because tourism competitiveness depends on aligning destination development with visitor values rather than internal or institutional views.

This gap is typical of tourism destination competitiveness (TDC) research, which ignores micro-level experiences that affect tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Cronjé, & du Plessis, 2020; Xu, & Au, 2023). Policymakers and industry stakeholders may lack detailed, attribute-specific insights to make targeted improvements in Cambodia due to the lack of recent, data-driven studies from international tourists. Before implementing competitiveness strategies, destination attributes must be assessed for importance and performance. They form the basis of perceived value and competitive advantage.

Applying broad competitiveness strategies into actionable improvements requires assessing and prioritizing destination attributes. Destination competitiveness is strategic, but destination attributes are operational and experiential, serving as tourist touchpoints and judgments. Tourists rate destinations based on how well these attributes meet or exceed their expectations (Hossain, & Islam, 2019; Jin, & Park, 2019). Even with well structured tourism policies and marketing, poor safety, cleanliness, and hospitality standards can reduce a country's competitiveness. Thus, knowing which attributes target markets value most and how they perform directly improves competitiveness. This study analyzes the relationship between strategic competitiveness goals and tourist-valued destination attributes.

Destination Attribute

Destinations are “an amalgam of tourism products and services,” and their interconnected attributes shape the tourist experience (Buhalis, 2000). Destination attributes have been extensively studied in tourism literature for decades (Crouch, 2011; Dann, 1977; Lew, 1987; Sien Leong et al., 2023; Um, 1987; Van Raaij, 1986). According to scholars, destination attributes are tourism products tangible and intangible elements that attract visitors and help them evaluate their trips (Crouch, 2011; Herman et al., 2023; Vareiro et al., 2017). Tourism services like lodging, transportation, entertainment, recreation, and retail are included. Vareiro et al. (2017) define them as natural or cultural resources that meet customer needs. Similarly, Herman et al. (2023) stated natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and hospitality quality attract tourists. From this perspective, destination attributes are the products, services, and resources that satisfy tourist preferences and influence their destination choice.

Other than a factor that attracts and matches customer reference, Dann (1977) referred the destination attribute a pull factor. Pull factors are a destination's external features that attract tourists. In this context, destination attributes attract tourists by appealing to their interests, needs, or desires. Meaning, if a destination has beautiful beaches, it will attract beach vacationers. Zhou (2005) identified 10 attributes such as price, culture, entertainment, scenery, weather and climate, accessibility, safety, friendliness, and service. While, Singh, & Tiwari (2016) found culture, nature, recreational activities, accessibility, infrastructure, reception, tourist spot services, hotel or restaurant services, and value of money. Visitors from each study valued these attributes.

Van Raaij (1986) defined destination attributes as “man-made features” that can be tailored to customer preferences and determine tourist segments. This concept showed 25 domestic tourist travel attributes by Dabphet (2017). Jumanazarov et al. (2020) identified 16 attributes, including endowed, created, supporting, and situational conditions, that attract international tourists. Additionally, 16 elements were used to study international tourists' return and word-of-mouth intention (Jumanazarov et al., 2020). Cró, & Martins (2018) found HR, security, and ICT readiness important. Furthermore, Gidebo (2021) investigated destination attributes that attract international tourists and found that accessibility, attractions, infrastructure and amenities,

accommodation, service quality, and price are key factors. According to relevant literature, destination attributes are a destination's features and characteristics that attract tourists. Despite different conceptualizations in previous research, destination attributes attract customers and satisfy preferences. These attributes include tourism products and services, natural and cultural resources, and man-made features.

Categorizing destination attributes by appeal is common. For example, amusement parks, historical landmarks, museums, and shopping areas provide entertainment and leisure, making a destination more appealing. Service attributes like accommodation quality, accessibility, hospitality, and accessible services make a destination more convenient and enjoyable, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and recommendations (Jumanazarov et al., 2020). These varied factors attract tourists and create memorable experiences, fostering long term loyalty and boosting the destination's reputation in a competitive tourism market.

As shown in **Table 1**, Cambodia still faces 11 destination attributes challenges. These attributes are crucial to tourism satisfaction and require targeted improvements. Due to destination context differences, choosing attributes for investigation and evaluation is difficult. Cambodia's challenges will be used in this study.

However, according to Crouch (2011), Dann (1977), and Van Raaij (1986) community involvement, environmental conservation, market competitiveness, and brand management are not directly consumable or experiential tourism products. These scholars define tourism products as attractions, accommodations, and activities that meet tourists' needs. Community involvement and environmental conservation are supportive practices that enhance the experience, while market competitiveness and brand management are strategic activities that shape destination attractiveness and perceptions. Tourism relies on these elements, but they are not core products.

Therefore, 4 of the 11 attributes will be excluded from this study. However, Jin, & Park (2019) suggested that using more attributes in evaluation helps researchers understand tourist satisfaction factors better. When accommodations, safety, cultural attractions, environmental quality, and accessibility are considered, researchers can identify the factors that most affect tourists' experiences. This critical approach highlights the diverse factors that affect satisfaction, revealing which areas need

improvement and which are already performing well, resulting in practical and targeted recommendations to improve tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness (Hossain, & Islam, 2019). Author will break down 7 main attributes into sub-attributes. The study can use tourism-relevant sub-attributes from previous research to improve reliability and comparability. This sub-attribute breakdown provides more actionable and diagnostic insights, guiding more precise tourist satisfaction recommendations.

Table 2 Destination Attributes

Dimension(s)	Meaning(s)	Item(s)	Author(s)
Infrastructure	The elements that support tourism development.	1. Accommodation 2. Food and Beverage 3. Telecommunication 4. Commercial infrastructure	Blazeska et al. (2018), Beerli, & Martin (2004)
Recreational and Entertainment Facilities	Services and spaces designed to enhance everyday life by providing opportunities for relaxation, leisure, and physical activity.	5. Entertainment 6. Sports activities 7. festival/Exhibition	Mandić et al. (2018), Dabphet (2017)
Technology	Various advanced tools and systems that enhance and transform the tourism experience.	8. Information access 9. Smart Tourism	Kong et al. (2024), Pai et al. (2020)
Safety and Security	Protection from violence, crime, and terrorism, as well as the presence of effective and reliable security services.	10. Visitor safety 11. Terrorist attack 12. Crime Rate	Cró, & Martins (2018), Dabphet (2017), Beerli, & Martin (2004)

Dimension(s)	Meaning(s)	Item(s)	Author(s)
Attraction	Places designed to encourage interaction of sites.	13. Natural attraction 14. Cultural attraction 15. Manmade attraction	Leask (2018), Dabphet (2017)
Transportation	Transport infrastructures.	16. Quality of roads, airports and ports 17. Private and public transport facilities.	Dinu (2018), Beerli, & Martin (2004)
Human Resources	Facilitation and the professionalism of the staff.	18. Service quality. 19. Language barrier.	Cró, & Martins (2018), Beerli, & Martin (2004)

As mentioned, destination attributes influence tourists' choices by aligning with their satisfaction levels; a destination's effectiveness and performance can be evaluated and measured by tourists' perceptions of its attributes (Ragavan et al., 2014). Tourists perceive destination attributes differently (Dabphet, 2017), and some are more important than others (Zhou, 2005). For instance, in Dabphet (2021) only 5 of 29 attributes significantly affect tourist satisfaction. Only 9 of 45 destination attributes Singh, & Tiwari (2016) found important. Ragavan et al. (2014) found 8 factors, but only 2 significantly improved tourist satisfaction. This means destination performance is evaluated based on tourists' perceptions of various attributes, but only a few significantly affect tourist satisfaction.

Furthermore, research consistently shows that first-time and repeat visitors evaluate a destination differently, which affects their preference for certain attributes. First-timers value iconic attractions and cultural heritage and seek new experiences (Crompton, 2025). In Cambodia, this may mean prioritizing Angkor Wat, historical monuments, or traditional cultural performances that fit Cohen (1979)'s "romantic" tourist profile of exploration and unfamiliarity. Due to their lack of experience, these visitors are more sensitive to pre-arrival information quality, perceived safety, and

logistical convenience (Lehto et al., 2004). First-time tourists' satisfaction often depends on how well the destination meets or exceeds marketing, guidebook, and word-of-mouth expectations.

Repeat visitors, however, focus more on the destination experience. After visiting attractions, they are more likely to seek authenticity in daily life, meaningful social interactions, and activities that connect them to the local culture (Mckercher, & Lau, 2008; Pine, & Gilmore, 1998). In Cambodia, this could be community-based tourism, artisan workshops, or exploring local cuisine beyond familiar dishes. This group values service reliability, hospitality quality, and value-for-money because repeat visits are often driven by emotional attachment and relationship-building with the destination (Oppermann, 2000). Repeat visitors may also be more tolerant of minor transportation issues but less of quality declines or authenticity issues. For sustainable destination competitiveness, tourism planners must recognize and address these different priorities to tailor strategies that appeal to both segments without diluting the destination's core identity.

When creating a tourist perception tool, the attributes chosen reflect the destination's attractions and experiences (Dabphet, 2021). The right attributes will always depend on the place's character and the type of visitors it attracts. Destination managers must identify what exists and what matters to their target markets. One traveler may be excited by authentic street food, but another may be more interested in museum quality or public transport. Previous studies in Cambodia have used destination attributes to assess tourist satisfaction (Keo, & Banhidi, 2023; Keo et al., 2023; Kunthea, 2016; Saut, & Ly, 2023), and Carter et al. (2015) examined the country's sustainability issues. Despite this, few studies have examined how these attributes affect satisfaction.

Tourism research globally reveals a strong correlation between attribute performance and perceived (Atsız, & Akova, 2021; Jin, & Park, 2019; Liew et al., 2021). Understanding the importance of each attribute in creating satisfaction provides planners with a targeted improvement roadmap. Destinations risk misallocating resources without that understanding. This study uses Importance and Performance Analysis (IPA), a simple but powerful tool for mapping a destination's strengths, weaknesses, and urgent needs. Cambodian destination attributes can be placed in this

framework to determine which factors most influence tourist decisions and satisfaction. This strategy focuses on what matters most to increase competitiveness and visitor loyalty (Hossain, & Islam, 2019).

Importance Performance Analysis (IPA)

Martilla, & James (1977) introduced Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), “an easily-applied technique for measuring attribute importance and performance”. An automobile service dealer trying to increase customers and repeat sales was their example. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire assessed the importance and performance of key service attributes. The results were categorized into quadrants, and the average ratings (mean values) were used to create a two-dimensional grid with four sections (**Figure 4**), providing a visual summary of the results and potential strategic actions. It became standard for the IPA method.

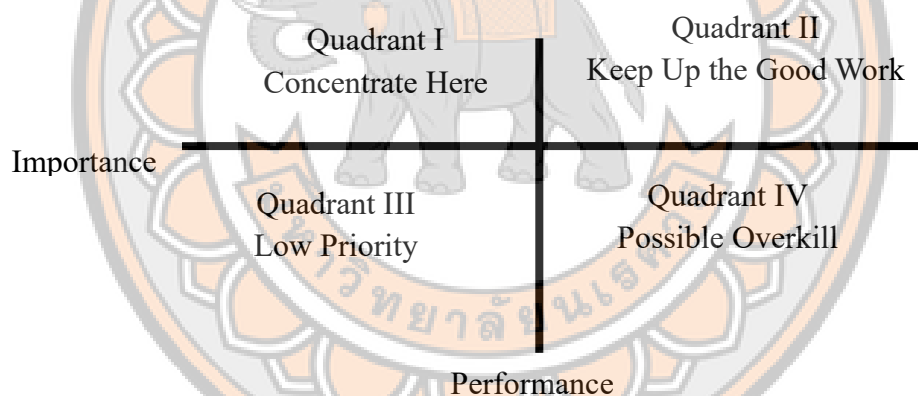


Figure 4 Importance-Performance Analysis Grid

The IPA has four quadrants with performance on the x-axis and importance on the y-axis (**Figure 4**). Quadrant I, labeled “Concentrate Here,” has destination attributes with high importance but low performance, indicating that they should be improved. Quadrant II, “Keep up the Good Work,” contains the destination’s strengths and key assets in high-importance, high-performance attributes. Quadrant III, “Low Priority,” contains attributes with low importance and performance that do not threaten the destination's success. Quadrant IV, “Possible Overkill,” contains low-importance, high-performance items. Although tourists like these features, they are less important.

To apply IPA, researchers must identify a set attributed, then use that set to measure importance and performance based on visitors' self-stated simultaneously (Dabphet, 2021; Hossain, & Islam, 2019). For example, Hossain and Islam (2019) identified key tourism attributes and used a 5-point Likert scale to measure importance (1=Not at all important, 5=Extremely important) and performance (1=poor, 5=Excellent).

The IPA can help stakeholders allocate funds more efficiently to critical attributes, budgets, and time constraints (Bruyere et al., 2002; Martilla, & James, 1977). Many researchers used it to evaluate destination attributes' importance to destination competitiveness and tourist satisfaction (Caber et al., 2012; Dabphet, 2021; Hossain, & Islam, 2019; Jin, & Park, 2019; Mustafa et al., 2020). IPA also provides a graphical representation of tourists' perceptions of a destination and suggestions for improvement (Bruyere et al., 2002). Thus, its simplicity and efficacy have made IPA popular for decades, especially in competitiveness and satisfaction research (Hossain & Islam, 2019). IPA has been widely used for decades and is valued for its clarity, but its methodological weaknesses are well discussed. Understanding these limitations is essential before using IPA results for strategic decisions.

One major issue is that importance and performance scores are not independent. According to Oh (2001) and Matzler et al. (2004), a tourist's satisfaction with a service can affect how important they think it is and how they evaluate performance. The two dimensions may reinforce each other due to "response interdependence," distorting results. Meaning, if tourists like something, they may value it more, or vice versa. Managers may prioritize map attributes that are inflated by emotional or experiential spillover due to this bias.

Second, IPA reports sample-wide mean scores. Averages are easy to present but hide subgroup differences. An attribute may appear in the "Keep up the Good Work" quadrant for all respondents but in "Concentrate Here" for first-time visitors and "Low Priority" for repeat visitors when segmented. Aggregated maps may miss key visitor segments' unique needs when allocating resources. Sever (2015) warns that such aggregation can oversimplify diverse perspectives, especially in Cambodia, where visitor groups have different expectations and travel motivations.

Third, IPA only shows relative placement, not how far performance lags importance. One attribute in Quadrants I may have a small importance-performance gap while another has a large one. Both would have the same quadrant visual urgency despite highly different strategic implications (Azzopardi, & Nash, 2013). Lack of details can misallocate scarce improvement resources.

Due to these issues, IPA should be used for preliminary screening rather than final decision-making. Gap Analysis and Utility Scoring help it quantify performance gaps, capture attribute values relative to expectations, and segment results by visitor type. This multi-method approach bases strategic priorities on importance performance positioning and actual expectation experience gaps, making tourism development planning richer and more reliable.

Gap Analysis

IPA provides a visual overview of importance and performance, but it does not explain how well a destination meets tourist expectations. Gap Analysis matters here. Gap Analysis compares tourist expectations (importance) to satisfaction. It measures performance rather than just quadrant placement.

In this study, the gap is calculated using a simple formula:

$$\text{Gap} = \text{Satisfaction} - \text{Importance}$$

This difference is averaged for each attribute to determine how well it meets visitor expectations. Tourists rank destination features by importance. Satisfaction scores reflect their experience. Thus, the gap score shows whether the destination meets, exceeds, or falls short of expectations. A negative gap score means satisfaction is underperforming importance. That is, the destination fails to provide the quality or service tourists expect. For instance, if “cleanliness” is rated 4.8 in importance but only 3.5 in satisfaction, the -1.3 gap is significant. A positive gap score indicates that satisfaction exceeds importance, indicating that the attribute is performing well. If safety has a 3.0 importance score and a 4.2 satisfaction score, the gap is +1.2. This may improve visitor experience but may also indicate that resources are being allocated to tourist-unwanted attributes. Zero gaps indicate a perfect match between expectations and experiences. This state is ideal because tourists get what they expect without

disappointment or overinvestment. If the attribute is unimportant, even a zero gap may not affect destination competitiveness, highlighting the need for contextual interpretation.

Gap Analysis avoids the IPA averaging problem, a major benefit. Comparing satisfaction and importance for first-time and repeat visitors can reveal differences that IPA's aggregated results may hide. Both groups may rate attraction quality highly, but first-time visitors may report a small negative gap, indicating they were slightly disappointed, while repeat visitors may report a positive gap, indicating they were pleasantly surprised. This distinction lets managers tailor improvements to each group rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach. The urgency of Gap Analysis is another benefit. IPA may consider two attributes in the "Concentrate Here" quadrant equally critical, but Gap Analysis can reveal the largest shortfall. The method is also more resistant to IPA's inflated ratings problem because tourists score importance and satisfaction for direct comparison.

However, Gap Analysis also has limitation. Some researchers believe that satisfaction and importance differences may not always indicate a service issue (Bacon, 2003). For instance, unrealistically high expectations could cause a negative gap in an attribute, not poor service. Gap Analysis works best when combined with Utility Scoring to contextualize results and link them to market priorities.

Gap Analysis is used in this study to determine which tourist attributes most mismatch expectations and whether first-time and repeat visitors differ. This method reveals performance weaknesses that threaten competitiveness and overperforming strengths that could be used strategically in marketing. The research uses Gap Analysis and IPA to create a visual map of attribute positioning and a precise numerical measure of expectation experience gaps, giving Cambodia's tourism stakeholders a stronger, evidence-based foundation for decision-making.

Utility Scores

Gap Analysis shows where expectations and experiences differ, but it does not quantify each attribute's strategic value to the destination's competitiveness. This is where Utility Scores originated in marketing and decision-making. In consumer research, "utility" is a product or service's perceived value or benefit (Green, & Rao, 1971; Louviere, 1988). Established weighted composite practices in service and

tourism analytics are used to calculate an attribute-level Utility Score as Importance Weight $\times$ Satisfaction Score. Weighted customer satisfaction measures have been calculated by multiplying importance and performance (Nam, & Lee, 2019; Oh, & Parks, 1998). Like this study, dual approach combine analytically derived importance weights with satisfaction to produce single composite indicators (De Nisco et al., 2009) to transcript expectations (importance) and experience (satisfaction) into actionable strategies.

Tourist value of destination attributes can be quantified using the Utility Score. This metric combines tourists' expectations, satisfaction, and experiences into one actionable metric.

In this study, the Utility Score is calculated as:

$$\text{Utility Score} = \text{Importance} \times \text{Satisfaction}$$

This formulation makes subjective data comparable, scaled, and rankable across all attributes. A high utility score indicates a core competitive strength for an attribute with high importance and satisfaction. An attribute with high importance but low satisfaction will have a low utility score, indicating a strategic weakness that needs immediate investment.

The modified self-explicated approach used here avoids the cognitive load of respondents making many attribute trade-offs (Netzer, & Srinivasan, 2011). Instead, tourists directly rate each attribute's importance and satisfaction. This maintains respondent engagement and reduces fatigue while providing a clear, quantitative indicator, which is important when measuring many attributes.

A similar conceptual has been applied by De Nisco et al. (2009), calculated average SERVQUAL gap scores by multiplying service quality dimensions by satisfaction scores. The present study combined importance (value) and satisfaction into a single measure. Both studies use this multiplicative method to measure the combined effect of importance and satisfaction on perceived value, overcoming the limitations of looking at them separately.

Additionally, Nam, & Lee (2019) also developed and tested a weighted customer satisfaction metric that multiplies attribute importance by performance. The composite scores correlated strongly with airline business performance benchmarks, proving that combining importance and satisfaction into one actionable indicator is valid. Similar to the Utility Score used in this study, tourist expectations (importance weights) and actual experiences (satisfaction scores) are combined into one metric to guide strategic destination management.

Utility scores help Cambodian policymakers and tourism operators prioritize. Marketing campaigns can use high-utility attributes to strengthen destination branding, while low-utility but high-importance attributes should be prioritized. Tourism stakeholders can identify shifting priorities by comparing utility scores between first-time and repeat visitors. For example, first-time visitors may value “cultural sites” more than repeat visitors, who may value “local hospitality” or “value for money.”

Conceptual Framework Development

The researcher integrated destination competitiveness and tourist perceptions into this study’s conceptual framework (**Figure 5**). It starts with qualitative inquiry to identify key destination attributes based on international visitors’ real experiences and expectations of Cambodia. These attributes are quantified to assess their perceived importance and performance. The framework captures what tourists value most and how well these expectations are met with this dual approach. The study examines how destination attributes affect Cambodia’s competitiveness and tourist satisfaction by aligning the framework with competitiveness theory and visitor priorities.

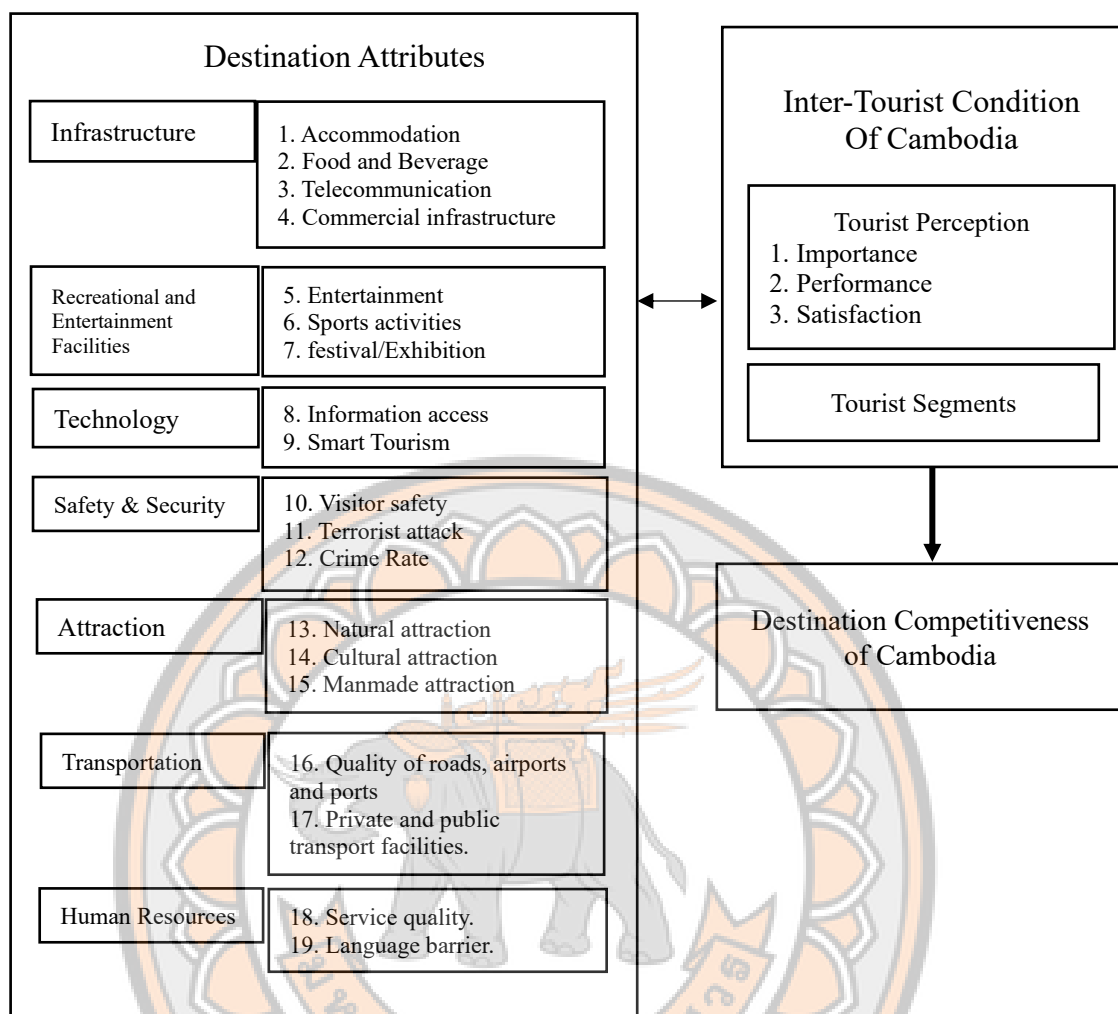


Figure 5 Conceptual Framework of This Study

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to evaluate the importance and performance of Cambodia's destination attributes, assess international tourists' satisfaction levels, and propose guidelines for improving these attributes to enhance destination competitiveness. Accordingly, the research questions are defined as follows:

1. What are the most important destination attributes for tourists visiting Cambodia, and what is the performance of these attributes?
2. What is the satisfaction levels regarding destination attributes differ between first-time and repeat international visitors?

The research questions guided the literature review, leading to the development of the conceptual framework. This chapter provides a detailed overview of the study's methodology and procedures, including the research design and process, sampling techniques, and the survey location. It also outlines the data collection methods and analysis techniques.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in **Figure 5** illustrates the expected relationships between seven key attributes and their 19 sub-attributes, which serve as independent variables. This framework defines the research objectives and maps out how these variables interact to impact international tourist perception. By assessing the importance, performance, and satisfaction levels of these attributes, the framework aims to demonstrate their influence on destination competitiveness in Cambodia. This structured approach guides the research process in addressing the study's central questions.

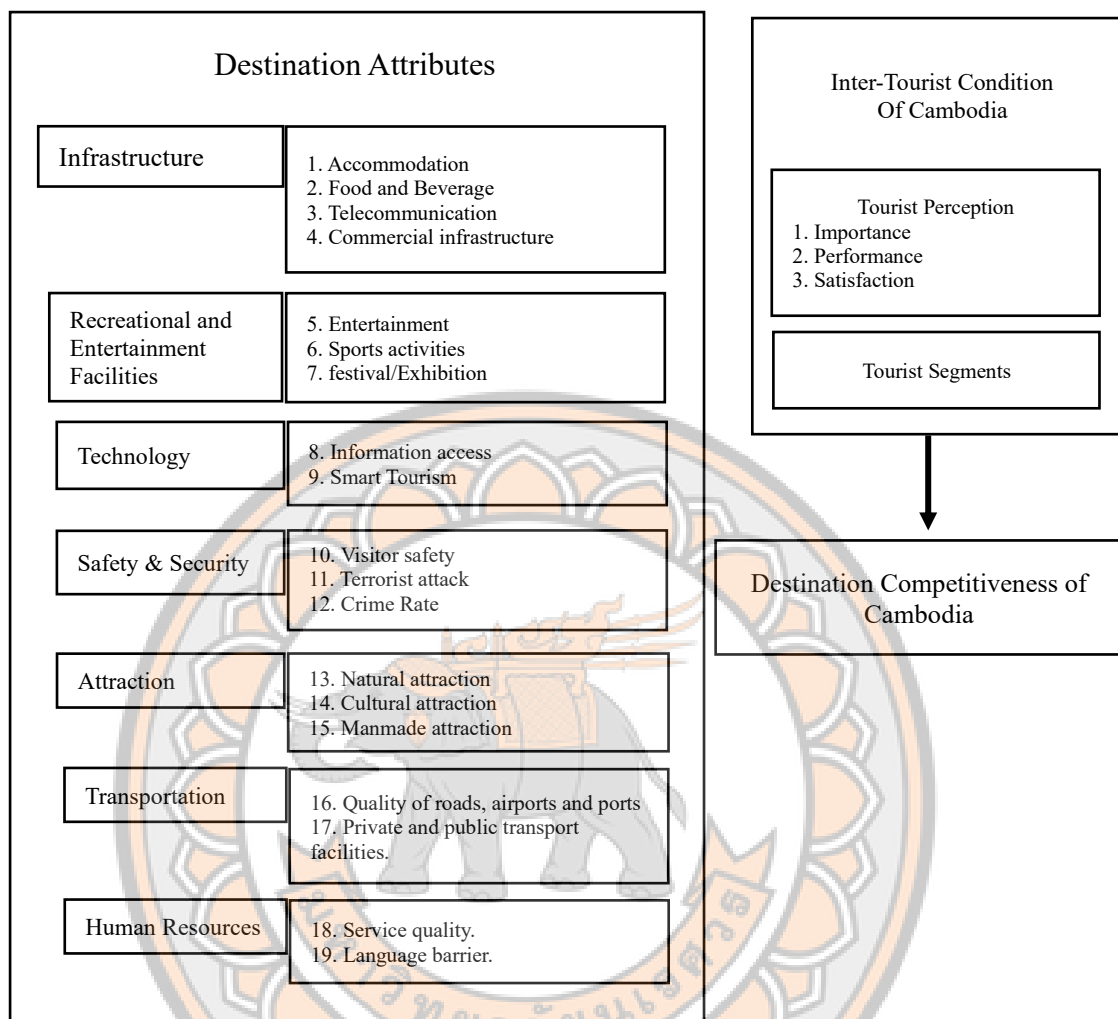


Figure 6 Conceptual Framework of This Study

Research Methodology

Methodology refers to the structured process of inquiry involving specific procedures that researchers follow to gather and analyze data (Creswell, 2009). There are three types of methods, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, which are justified according to the research subject. Any information that can be measured, counted or quantified, and given a numerical value is referred to as quantitative data. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is descriptive and communicated through words, language, and qualities; it cannot be tallied or measured. Mixed method is the combination of both.

According to Truong et al. (2020) mixed methods research has several key advantages. First, through the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative approaches, researcher can have a thorough understanding of the research problem. Additionally, it allows for development, with one method informing and building upon the other. It also promotes initiation by uncovering new issues that may go unnoticed when using a single method. It is also recommended for exploring research questions when there is limited information which is essential in this study (Agyeiwaah, 2022).

Therefore, in order to acquire the most pertinent data for this research, author chose to conduct mixed methodology. As no universal set of indicators exists for assessing tourism destination competitiveness (Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023). Meaning, a phenomenon that can be explore deeper in the field of destination attributes in Cambodia. The objective of this study is abductive in nature, as it aims to explore the data and identify relevant destination attributes, and further evaluate them through the perception of visitors with the use of both methods. Azer et al. (2022) suggested if data is considered insufficient or research involves multiple phases, a mixed-methods approach is the most appropriate.

Given this as an unexplored phenomenon and the limitation of single method, it is necessary to adopt a mixed-method approach and combining qualitative and quantitative methods known as exploratory sequential design. According to (Creswell, 2009), it begins with qualitative data collection and analysis, and then moves to the quantitative phase, where the results of the initial qualitative analysis inform and guide the subsequent quantitative data collection and analysis.

This study employs an mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009) that unfolds in two interconnected phases to comprehensively examine tourist perspectives on Cambodia's destination competitiveness. The qualitative phase utilizes in-depth interviews with international tourists to uncover nuanced perceptions of destination attributes in general. These qualitative findings then directly inform the development of a structured quantitative questionnaire, which is administered to a larger sample to statistically validate and measure the relative importance of identified attributes and further differentiate visitor segments. The confirmatory nature of this approach ensures that the quantitative phase systematically tests and extends insights gained from the

exploratory qualitative phase, with the questionnaire serving as the critical bridge between rich contextual understanding and generalizable empirical evidence.

Research Design

Research design is a strategy that outlines how a study will approach answering the research questions (Saunders, 2009). This study employs a step-by-step process of mixed-methods (See **Figure 7**) adapted from studies by Suryana et al. (2024); Tripathi and Siddiqui (2010); チヨウ (2022). Due to the complexity of the study, the research process is mainly divided into two parts. First, a qualitative method is employed to identify the most influence destination attributes in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This aims to gather primary data directly from international tourists, allowing for more insights into their needs and perceptions of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. After identifying the destination attributes, the second part of this study is to use them to evaluate the importance and performance of Cambodia's destination attributes and further differentiate tourists' preferences and satisfaction levels.

In line with the research design, a survey-based quantitative method will be used. The survey will be conducted on-site to efficiently collect data aiming to validate the findings from the interviews and quantify the importance and performance of the identified attributes.

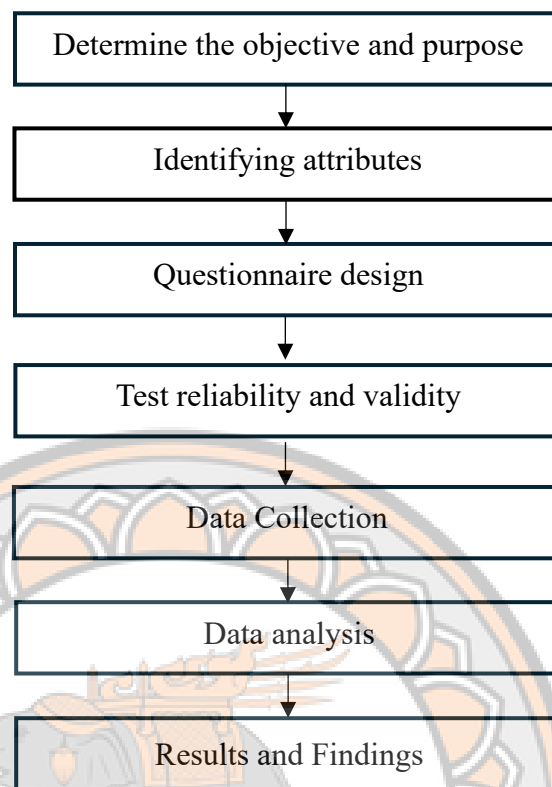


Figure 7 Research Design for the Study

1. Determine the objective and purpose

The first step is to specify the objectives of the analysis. The objective of the present study is to evaluate the importance and performance of Cambodia's destination attributes using importance and performance analysis, differentiate the preferences and satisfaction levels, and propose a guideline for improving destination attributes to enhance destination competitiveness.

2. Identifying Attributes

Although the challenges related to destination attributes were identified in Chapter II, the researcher believes that these attributes may not be sufficient to address the research questions. First, the attributes were evaluated based on theoretical sources, such as Cambodia's tourism policy, news articles, and related literature, which the researcher believes may not accurately reflect current real-world conditions and could introduce bias. Second, the data were gathered some time ago, and, given the evolving nature of global tourism, tourist preferences may have changed (Akbaba, 2024). Third,

the researcher aims to explore tourists' current preferences to address the limitations of earlier studies (Carter et al., 2015; Chens et al., 2008; Choo, 2017; Leang, 2025). Following this, the researcher will employ a quantitative survey method to gather up-to-date data from tourists. This approach will help accurately capture current tourist preferences and satisfaction levels. A quantitative survey is advantageous for several reasons: it enables the collection of a large volume of standardized data, facilitates statistical analysis, and reduces subjective interpretation bias that may arise from relying solely on theoretical sources (J. Creswell, 2009; Truong et al., 2020; Weber, 2017).

The part will begin with a qualitative approach to determine the key attributes in the perceived value of selecting a destination. The goal of this step will be to identify the most important attributes from the perspective of travelers. In-depth, semi-structured interviews will be conducted, utilizing open-ended questions to explore general information regarding the current state of destination attributes in Cambodia.

Semi-structured interviews were used in a qualitative manner due to the exploratory character of the section. This approach offers flexibility and time for in-depth examination of different topics. Open-ended questions allowed interviewees to freely react after discussing major themes associated with the study questions, directing the discussion toward topics they showed significant. This method facilitated the new insights (Bauer, & Gaskell, 2000).

The interview questions were carefully designed to identify the most critical destination attributes (see **Table 5**), providing valuable insights into tourists' travel perceptions. Following an extensive literature review and initial development by the author, the questions underwent rigorous evaluation by three tourism management experts from Naresuan University to ensure both objectivity and clarity. To further strengthen the research methodology, these semi-structured interview protocols were reviewed and approved by Naresuan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), confirming their appropriateness for data collection while safeguarding participant rights and research integrity. This multi-stage validation process combining expert consultation and institutional oversight ensures that the interview instrument effectively captures the perspectives visitors to Cambodia.

Table 3 Key interview Lists

Theme	Key interview questions	Purpose
Travel Experience	Why did you choose to visit Cambodia, and what was the main purpose of your trip?	Understand the visitor's motivation and purpose for visiting Cambodia
Important Factors	What things mattered most to you when deciding to visit Cambodia? (e.g., attractions, accommodation, safety, etc.)	Identifies the attributes that influenced the traveler's decision to visit, revealing the valued attributes
Visitor Experience	How did you feel about the quality of things like accommodation, attractions, safety, and infrastructure during your trip?	Assesses the performance of destination attributes that contribute to tourist satisfaction
Satisfaction	Were you happy with your experience in Cambodia? What could be improved to make it better?	Evaluates the traveler's level of satisfaction with their experience and encourages suggestions for improvement
Final Thoughts	Is there anything else about your trip that stood out or influenced your overall impression of Cambodia?	Additional feedback, capturing unexpected insights that may influence their overall impression

3. Questionnaire design

The goal of this section is to answer the research questions. The author will use the identified attributes and form them into a survey questionnaire, applying self-explicated analysis. In this study, self-explicated analysis refers to the action of the participants rating the attributes individually by themselves. A questionnaire survey will be designed to collect data from international tourists who visited Phnom Penh.

This study primarily employs quantitative methodology for addressing the research questions. This approach assumes that the sample fairly represents the population, allowing for reliable and valid measurements of the research subject (Etikan et al., 2016; Memon et al., 2020).

A dichotomous, closed-ended questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale will be used, with attributes selected from the qualitative results and literatures. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from “not important” to “very important,” was used as it reduces respondent frustration while improving response rates and response quality (Sachdev, & Verma, 2004). The questions will measure tourists’ perceptions importance, performance, and satisfaction.

The questionnaire consists of three phases. In the first phase, respondents will evaluate their preferences, including demographic information, travel purpose, and whether they are first-time or repeat visitors. No personal identity will be collected to ensure the privacy of the respondents. The second phase will ask tourists to rate the importance, performance, and satisfaction levels of various destination attributes using a 5-point Likert scale. In the final phase, open-ended questions will be employed to capture respondents’ perspectives on the positive and negative travel attributes that influence the destination’s competitiveness.

4. Test reliability and validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire developed for this study, rigorous review and testing procedures were implemented. Initially, the questionnaire underwent an extensive evaluation by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Naresuan University. This IRB review process ensured that the questionnaire met ethical standards, addressed methodological rigor, and appropriately protected the rights and well-being of the research participants.

Following IRB approval, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of randomly selected international tourists who had visited Phnom Penh. According to Hertzog (2008), a common recommendation is that the sample size for a pilot study should be approximately 10% of the projected main sample, which supports the decision to use 40 participants for the pilot test in this research. The primary purpose of this pilot test was to assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and internal consistency of the survey questions. As noted by Srinivasan and Lohith (2017), a pilot survey serves

as a preliminary trial of the main study, primarily aimed at identifying potential flaws in the measurement instrument. Reliability analysis, such as Cronbach's alpha, was applied to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, confirming their reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{C}}{\bar{V} + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{C}}$$

Where:

α = Cronbach's Alpha

N = Number of items (32 attributes)

$\bar{C}$ = Average inter-item covariance

$\bar{V}$ = Average variance of each item

Onsite paper pilot survey targeted international tourists is in February 2025. Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis showed that destination attribute values ranged from 0.80 to 0.87, indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency according to benchmarks (Nunnally Jr, 1970). These results show that the questionnaire items met study goals. The pilot evaluated reliability, instrument design, language clarity, and ease of use to ensure that respondents could understand and use the questionnaire.

The pilot participants' feedback helped identify and fix questionnaire ambiguities. Therefore, pilot test results were used to refine the survey instrument, improving its reliability and validity before full-scale data collection.

5. Data Collection

5.1 Population

This study uses the same population type for both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure consistency across research phases. The qualitative method identifies the importance of destination attributes valued by international visitors, while the quantitative method statistically confirms these identified attributes. Engaging the same population in both phases allows the study to align qualitative findings with the quantitative tool, making the insights more relevant and reliable. This

consistency also enables the quantitative analysis to build upon qualitative insights, verifying and expanding findings across a broader sample within the same population group (Weber, 2017). As evidenced in previous studies, the same population group has been used (Huertas-Garcia et al., 2014; Suryana et al., 2024).

The population refers to individuals, groups, or objects that are the main focus of a study and typically share common characteristics (Handayani, 2016, p. 110). In this context, the population includes international travelers visiting Cambodia for various purposes such as holidays, business, study, or work (Cró, & Martins, 2018; Gidebo, 2021; Jumanazarov et al., 2020). Although the term “traveler” can be broad, in this study it encompasses tourists, as well as business travelers who may also engage in tourism activities. In cases where tourists visit the region in groups with friends or family, only one member of each group will be asked to participate in the interview/survey to ensure a diversity of perspectives and avoid repetition or imitation among participants. Respondents younger than 18 years old will be automatically excluded from the study.

Data collection for the qualitative approach will be conducted from the end of January to the February 2025 (three-week period), while data collection for the quantitative approach will take place from the end of March 2025 to the end of May 2025 (two month period). The author will personally approach the participants to explain the research objectives and purpose, providing clear details regarding the information sheet and informed consent forms. Participants will be fully informed, and their consent to participate will be obtained. The confidentiality of the participants’ personal information will be ensured and permission to audio-record the interviews will be sought. The survey will only be conducted if participants agree to take part and provide informed consent.

5.2 Sampling Technique and Size

5.2.1 Qualitative Method

Purposive sampling will be applied in the qualitative phase of this study, with a focus on achieving data saturation to ensure that insights collected are both in-depth and relevant (Etikan et al., 2016). This approach is ideal for studies that select participants based on specific criteria closely aligned with the study’s objectives, aiming to capture a diversity of insights from international tourists engaging

with various attractions. Among the seven purposive sampling methods noted by Etikan et al. (2016), Maximum Variation Sampling (MVS), or Heterogeneous Sampling, is suited for this study as it captures a broad range of perspectives from tourists visiting Phnom Penh's key attractions. To ensure location-based perspectives, respondents will be approached at key tourist attractions across Phnom Penh. By focusing on these iconic destinations, purposive sampling ensures that the data collected reflects a broad range of visitor interactions, supporting an in-depth exploration of the tourist perceptions of destination attributes. The chosen locations will be discussed in the survey location section.

This qualitative study will determine the key attributes considered significant in the perceived value of selecting a destination. The goal of this step is to identify the most important features from the perspective of travelers. In terms of the size of the respondents, Mocănașu (2020) suggests that there is no universally agreed-upon standard for determining the exact size of a proper sample in academic research. However, for master's degree-level research, a sample size of around 30 participants is recommended. However, the gathering of data should end when saturation is reached, which can happen with as few as twelve individuals and usually does not go beyond twenty (Kumar, 2018; Lincoln, 1985). Therefore, for this study, it is expected that the data saturation will be reached with 20 participants.

5.2.2 Quantitative Method

Convenience sampling, also known as accidental sampling, is well-suited for the quantitative phases of this study, as it provides access to participants who are readily available and meet the criteria related to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). This method enables the study to capture a broad range of responses that reveal varying perspectives and experiences within the target group. By using convenience sampling, valuable insights can be gathered efficiently, making the process both time and cost-effective. A major drawback of this technique is that it requires a complete, up-to-date list of the population, which can be difficult to obtain for large populations (Sharma, 2017). To address this limitation, the researcher will use the latest data from official government documents (Ministry of Tourism, 2024).

A structured, self-explicated analysis questionnaire will be employed to assess respondents' perceptions of the importance, performance, and satisfaction level of destination attributes. Respondents will be asked to rate these sections on a 5-point Likert scale: (1=not important to 5=very important) (1=poor to 5=excellent) (1=not satisfied to 5=very satisfied).

According to the Ministry of Tourism (2024), Phnom Penh recorded 163,271 foreign visitor arrivals in January 2024. The representative sample size was estimated using the modified sample size of the Taro Yamane equation (Yamane T, 1967), based on the sample size formula of Cochran (1963). In this equation, n represents the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the margin of error. For this study, the total number of international tourists is $N = 163,271$, and the margin of error is set at 5 %.

Formular of Yamane T (1967)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where: n = the sample size
 N = the finite population
 e = level of significance (or limit of tolerable error %)
 1 = Unite (a constant value)

$$n = \frac{163,271}{1 + 163,271(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = 399$$

Based on Taro Yamane's formula, the sample size for the quantitative section is 399. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2007) recommended that for populations exceeding 10,000, a sample size of 400 is appropriate. Therefore, to simplify the data analysis and ensure an even number of participants, the author decided to round up the sample size to 400.

5.2.3 Survey Location

Respondents will be approached at tourist attraction spots throughout Phnom Penh, a city rich in attractions and memorable places to visit. According to CHAT (2016), five significant destinations were identified for data collection. Hence, this study will focus on these destinations: the Royal Palace, National Museum, Wat Phnom, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and Choeung Ek Killing Field.

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Qualitative Method

For the data analysis phase, thematic analysis will be used. The thematic analysis will be used to describe the importance of destination attributes in Phnom Penh City, Cambodia. After the interview transcripts are completed, thematic analysis will be performed. This study apply the method of Guest et al. (2011) six-step approach for thematic analysis. It provides a structured yet flexible framework for identifying patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The six steps are as follows:

1. Familiarization with the Data. Begins by thoroughly reading the data to develop an understanding of its content and meaning. During this process, initial observations and notes may be recorded to highlight potential areas for theme development.
2. Generating Initial Codes. Key analytic ideas are identified through coding from the transcript interview.
3. Identifying Themes. Codes that share commonalities are grouped together to form broader themes, which represent meaningful patterns across the dataset.
4. Reviewing Themes. The identified themes are examined in relation to the coded extracts and the overall dataset.
5. Defining and Naming Themes. Each theme is clearly defined and given a descriptive name that support its essence. At this stage, the researcher constructs an analytical narrative that explains the significance of the themes, their connection to the aim.

6. Producing the Final Report. The analysis is presented in a structured report, integrating themes, supporting evidence from the data, and a discussion of their relevance to the study.

6.2 Quantitative Method

For the field survey data, statistical analysis will be conducted using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. To address objective 1, mean value of importance and performance of each destination attributes, followed by the creation of an Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) matrix in Microsoft Excel. This visualization will help identify key areas requiring improvement or investment.

For objective 2, gap analysis will be applied to measure the discrepancy between tourists' perceived importance and actual satisfaction levels. This approach ensures a nuanced understanding of performance in numbers, as high satisfaction scores alone may be misleading if tourists do not highly value the attribute. Each destination attribute will be evaluated individually to determine whether Cambodia meets, exceeds, or falls short of expectations. To further enhance the analysis, independent samples t-tests on SPSS version 32.0 will be conducted to compare responses between first-time and repeat visitors, providing empirical evidence on segment-specific perceptions. By integrating gap analysis with t-tests, this study moves beyond descriptive statistics, offering actionable, segment specific insights for policymakers and destination managers.

Table 4 Overview of Research Process for the Study

Identifying Cambodia's Destination Attributes		
Process 1	Method	1. Semi-structured Interviews
		2. Thematic analysis
	Participant	International tourists in Cambodia, 20 Respondents
	Objective	Know the important attributes perceived by tourist
Determine the Questionnaire		
Process 2	Method	Self-explicated analysis
	Participant	Researcher
	Objective	Determine the form of the questionnaire
Determining Tourist preferences and perception		
Process 3	Method	Survey questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale
	Participant	International tourists in Cambodia, 400 Respondents
		1. Know the attributes' importance (not important to very important)
	Objective	2. Know the attributes' performance (poor to excellent)
		3. Know the attributes' satisfaction (not satisfied to very satisfied)
Data analysis		
Process 4	Method	IPA, Gap Analysis/T-test with the SPSS 32.0, Utility Score
		1. Knowing the importance and performance of destination attributes
	Objective	2. Differentiate the first time and repeat visitor's tourist satisfaction
		4. Proposed strategy to enhance TDC for Cambodia as a tourist destination.

CHAPTER IV

QUALITATIVE RESULT

To explore the current crucial destination attributes in Cambodia, this study employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with international tourists. Data collection was conducted over a three-week period, allowing participants to share their experiences and perceptions in detail. The interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis methods (Guest et al., 2011), which facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and insights that reflect the factors influencing tourist perceptions on the importance destination attributes.

The Profile of Research Informants

A total of 20 informants represent a diverse traveler from various countries (See **Table 5**). While most visited Cambodia for tourism often citing cultural exploration, historical curiosity, or a desire to see iconic sites like Angkor Wat. Others came for reasons such as extended personal travel, or simply adding Cambodia to their Southeast Asia itinerary after visiting neighboring countries. They ranged from solo travelers and couples to groups of friends and families.

All interviews were conducted individually using an in-depth, semi-structured format. Interviews typically lasted under forty minutes and each informants received a souvenir at the end of the interview, as a gesture of appreciation for their time. All informants were approached and interviewed voluntarily to ensure a relaxed and comfortable environment. At the start of each interview, the researcher provided a brief explanation of the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and each participant signed a consent form at the beginning. To maximize accessibility, interviews took place at the attraction that the informant is located. The semi-structured questionnaire can be found in **Table 3**. Every interview was recorded on a personal smartphone and then transferred to a personal laptop.

Table 5 Informant's Information

Informants I	Country of Origin	Travel companion	FT/RPV	Location
I1	French	Family	First Time	Royal Palace
I2	Pakistan	Friends	First Time	Royal Palace
I3	Norway	Alone	Fourth Time	Royal Palace
I4	Russia	Alone	Second Time	Museum
I5	India	Friends	First Time	Museum
I6	Cameroon	Alone	First Time	Museum
I7	Germany	Couple	First Time	Killing Field
I8	Brazil	Alone	First Time	Killing Field
I9	The U.S.	Alone	First Time	Killing Field
I10	New Zealand	Friends	First Time	Killing Field
I11	The U.S.	Alone	First Time	Killing Field
I12	Canada	Friends	First Time	S21 Prison
I13	Singapore	Friends	Second Time	S21 Prison
I14	England	Alone	First Time	S21 Prison
I15	Romania	Alone	First Time	S21 Prison
I16	China	Friends	First Time	Wat Phnom
I17	Myanmar	Friends	First Time	Wat Phnom
I18	China	Friends	Fourth Time	Wat Phnom
I19	Thailand	Friends	Second Time	Royal Palace
I20	Vietnam	Couple	Third Time	Museum

Result

1. Perceived Safety as a destination attribute

Perceived safety refers Tourists' emotional and physical sense of security while traveling in Cambodia. Based on the coded data, this includes expressions of emotional ease, comfort in public spaces, and awareness of potential risks such as petty theft or unfamiliar environments. It was one of the most frequently mentioned themes across interviews, particularly among female travelers, highlighting its significance.

Physical Safety

Mentally Safety

...It feels like a safe place with very nice people. Tourists don't like unsafe places or unfriendly people

(Interviewee 1, January 20, 2025)

...So far it feels very safe... you don't feel like you have to worry too much about your safety and getting robbed

(Interviewee 11, February 12, 2025)

...Safety is the most important thing by far. I need to know that I can go, and I can be safe when I'm here... We stayed in really great hotels... clean, safe places to stay

(Interviewee 13, February 16, 2025)

2. Cultural Engagement as a destination attribute

Cultural Engagement refers to tourists' interest in learning, experiencing, and emotionally connecting with Cambodian culture and history. This captures motivations to visit cultural and historical sites, engage authentically with local communities, and seek meaningful, non-commercialized experiences.

Historical Sites

Local Lifestyle Experience

Local Interaction

...Cambodia is a wonderful place from a historical and cultural point of view. This is the main reason why we are here. Cambodia is seen in Europe as a wonderful place with a lot of history. I am referring to Khmer history, especially Siem Reap, the temples, and the ruins. This is very famous throughout Europe

(Interviewee 1, January 20, 2025)

...The most important thing for me was to learn about the history, the Khmer Rouge, and the Cambodian culture. I came here to understand more about what happened, how people live after that, and how the culture has developed. Visiting places like the Killing Fields and the museums helped me to really feel the history, not just read about it

(Interviewee 2, January 20, 2025)

Beyond visiting iconic monuments, tourists expressed a strong desire to experience authentic local life.

...We don't want just to see the tourist attractions. We went to small villages where you can see how Cambodian people really live day-to-day, with traditional markets, old wooden houses, and temples where the local people worship. It felt very real, and you could feel the spirit of the place, not just take photos

(Interviewee 5, February 5, 2025)

...The temples are very impressive, but what touched me the most is the spirit of the people and their traditions. When you see how people pray, how they respect their ancestors, and how proud they are of their heritage despite everything that happened that really moves you

(Interviewee 7, February 8, 2025)

...I enjoyed visiting villages more than the big cities because you can see the real Cambodia. In cities, everything feels a bit modernized already, but in the countryside, you can still find the traditional way of living, farming, small communities, monks walking on the street in the morning

(Interviewee 8, February 8, 2025)

3. Cambodian People as a destination attribute

Cambodian People refers to the perceptions of friendliness, sincerity, and resilience of local people during the visit. This theme highlights that positive interactions with locals often became one of the most meaningful and memorable aspects of tourists' journeys.

Hospitality

...Personally, I know Cambodia is a very good place because the people are very nice. There is a lot of hospitality here, and the people are kind. This is something very important. The important thing is that tourists feel welcomed, and Cambodian people are very nice and welcoming.

(Interviewee 1, January 20, 2025)

...Everyone smiles at you even if they don't know you. Even if they don't speak your language, they try to help. It's very touching. In many places, you feel like just a tourist, but here, you feel like people actually care about you being here.

(Interviewee 4, February 5, 2025)

Tourists were also deeply moved by the sincerity and authenticity of Cambodian hospitality.

...In some countries, people are nice to you because they want to sell you something. Here, it felt different. People said hello, smiled, helped, even when there was no reason to. It felt real, and it made the whole trip more meaningful

(Interviewee 12, February 16, 2025)

4. Infrastructure as a destination attribute

Infrastructure refers to tourists' perceptions of the quality, availability, and convenience of infrastructure and transportation services that support travel within Cambodia, such as roads, public transport, domestic flights, and access to key tourist

destinations with simplicity and ease. This theme highlights that infrastructure and accessibility were important supporting factors for tourists' mobility and ease of travel.

Accessibility

Infrastructure

...In Phnom Penh, there is absolutely no problem. Siem Reap is also very developed. You have a lot of options taxis, tuk-tuks, good hotels, good restaurants

(Interviewee 1, January 20, 2025)

...It's easy to get tuk-tuks everywhere. You just walk a few meters and someone will offer you a ride. No need to plan anything. It's cheap, it's flexible, and it feels like a part of the experience here

(Interviewee 5, February 5, 2025)

5. Accommodation Value as a destination attribute

Accommodation Value refers to tourists' perceptions of the balance between the quality, comfort, cleanliness, affordability of lodging options relative to the price paid, their expectations and personal needs. Many tourists visiting Cambodia did not seek luxury accommodations; instead, they highly valued clean, comfortable, affordable, and culturally authentic places to stay. personal needs refer to individual preferences that influence tourists' accommodation choices beyond basic quality and cleanliness.

Affordable Accommodation

Clean & Comfortable Lodging

...In Phnom Penh, there is absolutely no problem. Siem Reap is also very developed. Clean accommodations are sufficient; five-star hotels are not necessary. Cambodian people can easily provide clean accommodations, which is what tourists want

(Interviewee 1, January 20, 2024)

Beyond basic comfort, many tourists sought authentic local experiences through their accommodation choices, preferring small guesthouses and locally run hotels over standardized international chains.

...Our hotel was not fancy, but it was very clean, well-located, and had a very relaxed feeling. It had a nice local style not a corporate chain feeling. Actually, it added to the feeling of being in Cambodia, not separated from it.

(Interviewee 7, February 8, 2025)

Affordability relative to quality was another point of satisfaction.

...You can find really good places for reasonable prices here. Compared to other countries we visited in Southeast Asia, Cambodia had better value for money when it comes to hotels.

(Interviewee 5, February 5, 2025)

6. Value Perception as a destination attribute

Value Perception refers to how tourists' judgment of fairness, affordability, and transparency of prices in everyday services. In the context of Cambodia, tourists frequently emphasized affordability, price fairness, and transparency. A common observation was that Cambodia provided good quality at low cost.

Fair Pricing & Transparency

Dual Currency Use

Affordability

...Cambodia is one of those places where you don't feel like you're constantly spending or being taken advantage of. You can do a lot, eat well, move around, and it doesn't feel like a strain. In some places, you feel like every small thing costs extra. But here, you feel like things are priced fairly and you can just enjoy yourself without budgeting every little thing.

(Interviewee 5, February 5, 2025)

When it came to transportation costs, tourists were pleased with the informality, fairness, and availability of tuk-tuks. The ability to bargain made tourists feel that they were receiving a fair deal, which added positively to the destination's overall perceived value.

...You don't have to worry about taxis ripping you off like in some other countries. Tuk-tuks are cheap, drivers are friendly, and if you bargain a little, you get a fair price without feeling bad about it. That makes a big difference because you don't feel anxious every time you get in a vehicle. You trust that it's part of the experience, and it feels honest.

(Interviewee 8, February 8, 2025)

Food affordability was another contributor to perceived value.

...I could get a full meal starter, main, drink for like three or four dollars, and it was fresh and tasty. Some of the food stalls were even cheaper and really good. You feel like you're not just getting food but experiencing something local, and you're not breaking your budget. That's rare in a lot of other places.

(Interviewee 12, February 12, 2025)

...What surprised me is that things were not only affordable, but there was no hidden cost. You pay, and that's it. In other countries, there are always add-ons or tips or extra fees, but here it felt honest. It builds trust in the country and makes you want to recommend it to others.

(Interviewee 3, January 20, 2025)

7. Gastronomy as a destination attribute

Gastronomy refers to food as a cultural valued for authenticity, variety, and emotional impact. Tourists perceive and engage with food as part of their overall travel experience. In the context of Cambodia, food was viewed not merely as a source of

nourishment, but as a medium for cultural immersion, personal discovery, and emotional connection.

Food Experience

...It was not just eating, it was discovering. I tried amok for the first time, and the way it was served with banana leaves and everything made it special. You could tell food was part of the tradition. It wasn't just about taste, but presentation and meaning too. We asked the staff to explain the ingredients, and they were happy to share. That moment made me feel like I was learning something real about the country.

(Interviewee 3, January 20, 2025)

...We tried a lot of local food, and it was always cheap and very tasty. We enjoyed the fact that you could just walk around and find something authentic. The night markets had amazing smells grilled meats, spices, fresh herbs. Sitting on a plastic chair at a street stall, eating next to locals, felt more meaningful than dining in a fancy restaurant. It was real, and that's what we came for.

(Interviewee 12, February 16, 2025)

8. Environmental Hygiene as a destination attribute

Environmental Hygiene refers to tourists' perceptions of cleanliness and sanitation in public spaces such as streets, tourist sites, markets, and areas surrounding food vendors. While not always the central focus of travel decisions, environmental hygiene significantly impacts tourists' sense of comfort and destination image.

Public Cleanliness

Food Safety & Hygiene

...I really liked the places we visited, but I noticed a lot of trash on the streets. Sometimes there were piles of garbage in public areas, and it takes away from the beauty of the place. I remember we were walking near a temple, and right outside there were plastic bags and bottles everywhere.

It just didn't feel like it was taken care of properly, even though the site itself was beautiful.

(Interviewee 6, February 5, 2025)

...When we walked along the riverside in Phnom Penh, we saw some lovely spots for photos to relax. But then you'd turn a corner and see a pile of garbage or overflowing bins. It doesn't ruin the trip, but it makes you think the city could be so much more attractive if they managed that better.

(Interviewee 13, February 16, 2025)

...It's a developing country, so I didn't expect it to be perfect. But yeah, some areas were dirtier than I thought. Still, it didn't bother me too much because the people were friendly, and the food was great. But I can imagine for some travelers it might be a bigger issue, especially if they have children or health concerns.

(Interviewee 9, February 8, 2025)

9. Authenticity Seeking as a destination attribute

Authenticity Seeking refers to tourists' desire for genuine and non-commercialized experiences in tradition and local daily life. Many tourists expressed a strong preference for stepping away from modernized or heavily touristed zones in favor of villages, religious rituals, local communities, and quiet cultural spaces where they felt they could connect with "the real Cambodia."

Unique Experience

Authentic Feeling

Escape from Modernization

Cultural Preservation

...We don't want just to see the tourist attractions. We went to small villages where you can see how Cambodian people really live day-to-day with traditional markets, old wooden houses, and temples where the local people worship. It felt very real, and you could feel the spirit of the place, not just

take photos. That's what makes it special you feel something when you're there.

(Interviewee 5, February 5, 2025)

...I enjoyed visiting villages more than the big cities because you can see the real Cambodia. In cities, everything feels a bit modernized already, but in the countryside, you can still find the traditional way of living farming, small communities, monks walking on the street in the morning. There's peace and simplicity in those places that make you feel like you're experiencing something real and not something made for visitors.

(Interviewee 8, February 8, 2025)

The desire for cultural preservation also underpinned many travelers' views on authenticity.

...In many places around the world, things are changing due to modernization, but this is not always positive. You get infrastructure but lose culture, traditions, and authenticity. If every place becomes the same, with McDonald's, ATMs, and mobile phones everywhere, there will be no difference between visiting Cambodia, the USA, or anywhere else. Losing your roots means losing everything.

(Interviewee 1, January 20, 2025)

...I hope that the tourism development here is done carefully. It would be sad to see traditional villages and local crafts disappear just because of modern hotels and malls. Those things you can find anywhere but not Cambodia's culture. That's what makes this place worth visiting.

(Interviewee 3, January 20, 2025)

...The temples are very impressive, but what touched me the most is the spirit of the people and their traditions. When you see how people pray, how they respect their ancestors, and how proud they are of their heritage it

really moves you. You're not just watching; you feel connected, like you're part of something meaningful.

(Interviewee 7, February 8, 2025)

Table 6 summarizes the final themes generated from the interview data, along with detailed descriptions of each theme. These themes reflect key aspects of the tourist experience in Cambodia. Each theme was developed through systematic coding and reflects patterns consistently mentioned across interviews. The descriptions clarify the core meanings and provide a foundation for the analysis that follows.

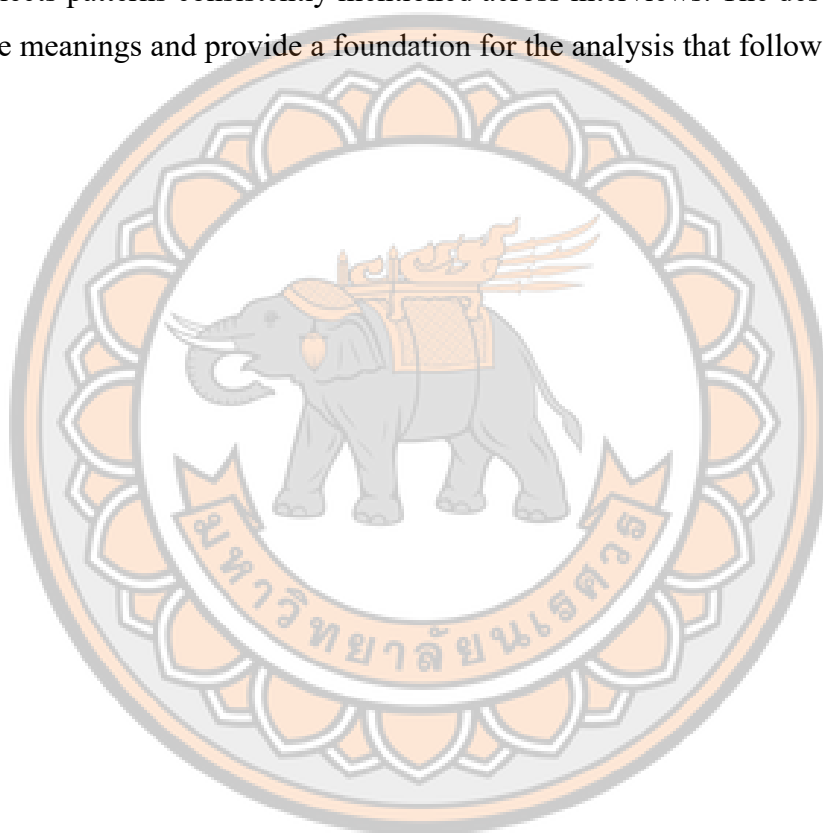


Table 6 Qualitative Result: Important Destination Attributes

Theme(s)	Attribute(s)	Definition(s)	Code(s)
Perceived Safety	- Physical Safety - Mentally Safety	Tourists' emotional and physical sense of security while traveling in Cambodia.	Not getting Robbed or scam by local people. Not getting threatened by someone. Being protected by local authorities. Do not see accident, someone getting rob or scam. Clear Pedestrian Walk. Do not feel like getting robbed or being scam. Do not feel like taking advantage of. Do not feel any risk when crossing roads.
Cultural Engagement (Activities...)	- Historical Sites - Local Lifestyle Experience - Local Interaction	Tourists' interest in learning, experiencing, and emotionally connecting with Cambodian culture and history.	A wonderful place with lot of history. See original tribe, traditional dress, culture, and lifestyle. Feels Connected to temple. Cambodia has a rich and old history. Iconic historical site. Killing field, prison, and genocide museum. History and architecture of temples

Theme(s)	Attribute(s)	Definition(s)	Code(s)
Cambodian People	• Hospitality	Perceptions of friendliness, sincerity, and resilience of local people during the visit.	Greet strangers like family. Share meals without expecting payment. Smiles from the heart, not expecting money.
	• Accessibility • Infrastructure	Tourists' views on the quality and ease of transportation and infrastructure.	Tuk-tuks everywhere but traffic made trips unpredictable. Grab saved us in Phnom Penh, fixed prices, no haggling.
Accommodation Value	• Affordable	Assessment of cleanliness, comfort, affordability, and alignment with personal lodging preferences.	Hotel played traditional music at breakfast. \$15 AC room felt luxurious compared to neighboring countries
	• Clean & Comfortable lodging		Owner gifted us handmade kramas on checkout. Can chose between smoking room or non.
Value Perception	• Fair Pricing & Transparency	Judgment of fairness, affordability, and transparency of prices in everyday services.	Cheap food, 1\$ get me a meal. Could travel 2 weeks on my daily home food budget.
	• Dual Currency Use • Affordability		Market vendors gave same price to locals and tourists.
Gastronomy Experience	• Food Experience	Food as a cultural valued for authenticity, variety, and emotional impact.	See local people cook and eat in their house. Many ingredients in one dish. Got invite to join a party with the people.

Theme(s)	Attribute(s)	Definition(s)	Code(s)
Environmental	Public Cleanliness	Cleanliness and sanitation in public and	Afraid to try street vendors food.
Hygiene	Food Safety & Hygiene	food-related areas, shaping comfort.	They touch a food and my money. A lot of flies and no food cover. Why not use gloves. trash in is near the food.
Authenticity Seeking	- Unique Experience - Authentic Feeling - Escape from Modernization - Cultural Preservation	Desire for genuine, culturally experiences rooted in tradition and local daily life.	Want to see how the local and their daily life. Can see how simple and happy the people are. The children always smile and greet me. Small home but many people live in together.

By comparing the qualitative results with the literature review, it is revealed that while the literature emphasizes crime rates and general visitor safety, the qualitative findings expand this to a mental safety, reflecting tourists' need for a sense of security and comfort. Accommodation in the qualitative study shows affordability and cleanliness, demonstrating tourists' increasing focus on value for money. Similarly for food, the prioritizes are on hygiene, safety, and the experiential aspect of gastronomy. In terms of infrastructure, the literature emphasizes facilities such as transport, telecommunications, and roads, whereas qualitative findings are on accessibility or movement over structural provision.

In the literature review, culture is a tourism product, focusing on natural, cultural, and manmade attractions, as well as entertainment, sports, and festivals. In contrast, the qualitative findings reveal tourists' preference for immersive and authentic experiences, including engagement with local lifestyles, cultural preservation, authentic atmospheres, and opportunities for cultural learning. This shift indicates that modern tourists value emotional resonance, authenticity, and community-based experiences over passive consumption of attractions.

Additionally, qualitative results highlight factors such as transparency in payment and dual currency usage, which are rarely mentioned in the literature but significantly influence tourists' perceptions of fairness and satisfaction. Overall, while the literature emphasizes structural and tangible attributes, the qualitative findings demonstrate that cultural, emotional, and experiential dimensions are equally crucial to tourist satisfaction.

Furthermore, to transform these qualitative findings into a structured questionnaire and gain a clearer understanding of important destination attributes and, the researcher will combine insights from previous research and qualitative interviews with international tourists (see **Figure 8**). This integrated approach ensures a more comprehensive view by integrating both existing knowledge and real-world experiences.

The process starts by identifying main themes from the interview results. These themes represent the key attributes that tourists consider important. Next, findings from the literature review are added to these themes, enriching them with insights from previous studies. For example, within the theme Attraction &

Recreational Facilities, two sub-themes quality of attractions (natural, cultural, historic) and availability of festivals and exhibitions are derived from earlier research. Meanwhile, the significance of cultural heritage emerges directly from the qualitative interviews. This step-by-step process continues until all information from both sources is combined. If a theme is not mentioned in the interviews, the author will still include themes identified in the literature review. For instance, the theme Technology and Marketing come entirely from previous studies. This method of combining data ensures a well-rounded understanding of which destination attributes are most important. The table below summarizes the results of this integration.



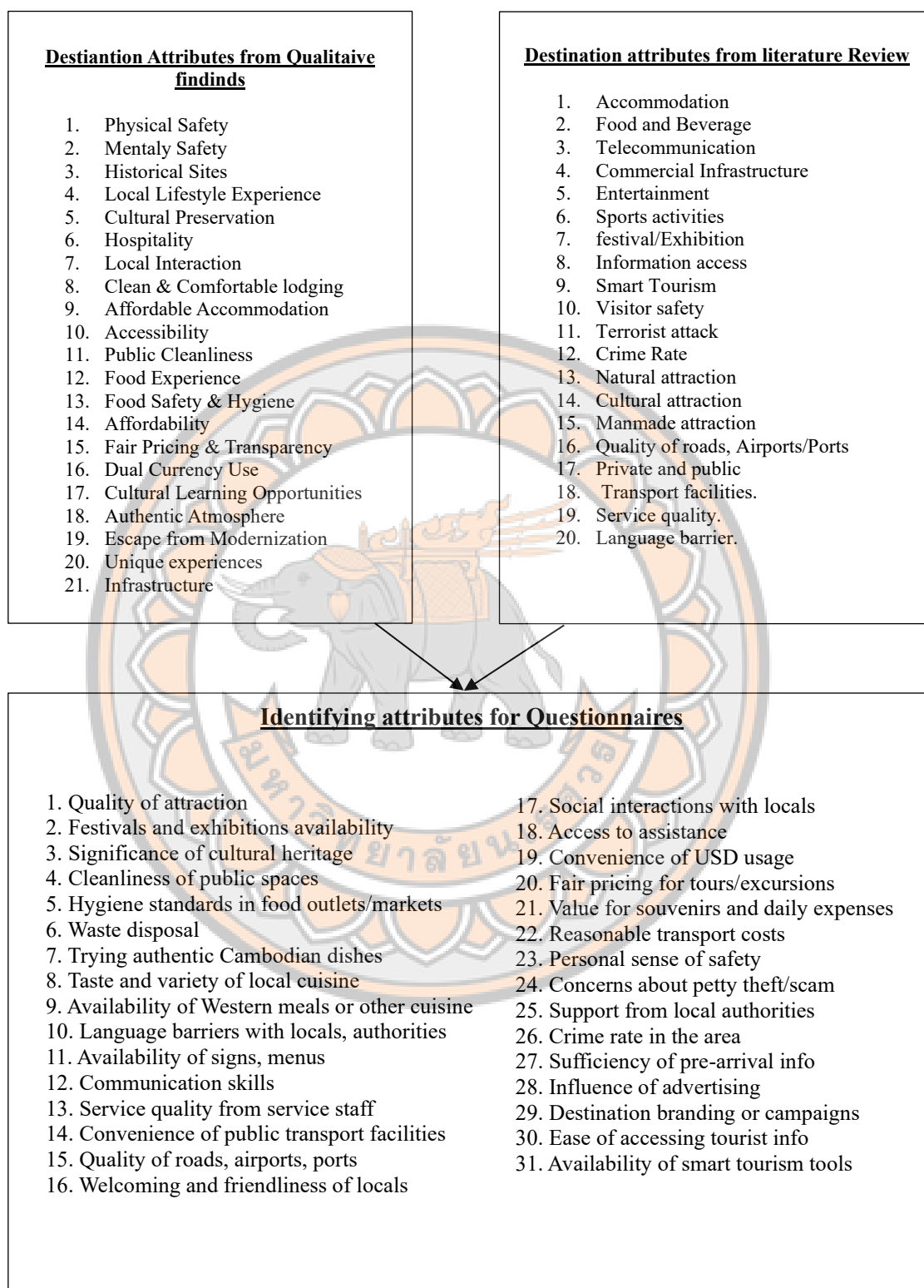


Figure 8 Destination Attributes of process 1

Limitations

One limitation of this qualitative study is the gap to interview tourists who are traveling as part of an organized tour group. Based on researcher's observations during data collection, many visitors to historically significant sites such as the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek Killing Fields tend to be travelers who are part of guided tour groups. When researcher approached for the interviews, all of them respectfully decline as they had limited time. Researcher assumed that these visitors often have structured itineraries, making it difficult for them to allocate time for interviews. Additionally, when researcher approached the tour leader, he or she used the same reason of time limitation, plus they had to look after their group. As a result, the study primarily includes independent travelers those visiting Cambodia on their own, with family, or in small groups. This limitation may affect the generalizability of the findings, as guided tour participants' perspectives on Cambodia's destination attributes, may differ from those of independent travelers, who have greater flexibility in planning their trips. By not including group tourists, this study may not fully capture the experiences and preferences of this segment of visitors.

Another limitation of this part is the absence of senior travelers among the interview participants. Based on my observations of the participants' physical appearance. As a result, this study lacks insights from senior tourists, whose travel preferences, expectations, and experiences may differ significantly from those of younger travelers. The exclusion of senior travelers may affect the comprehensiveness of the study's findings, as older tourists often have different priorities when visiting a destination.

CHAPTER V

RESULT AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results of the data analyses are employed to investigate research objectives of this study. A total of 400 questionnaire surveys was collected from international tourists in six different attractions in Phnom Penh city, Cambodia. However, only 372 questionnaires were valid, as those with missing or incomplete information were excluded from the analysis. Quantitative approach was applied to assess the research objectives the importance and performance of Cambodia's destination attributes, and second, to differentiate the preferences and satisfaction levels of visitors regarding these attributes. To achieve a thorough understanding of these objectives while ensuring accurate and reliable data, the study is divided into three parts. The first part presents the demographic, socio-demographic, travel motivation, and perception findings. The second part outlines the results of tourists' perceptions regarding the importance, performance, and satisfaction levels of Cambodia's destination attributes. Finally, the third part features the overall findings and discussion of the result.

Respondents Demographic Characteristics

Respondent characteristic data is crucial for this study, as it will later be used as variables to propose guidelines for improving Cambodia's destination attributes and enhancing its competitiveness as a tourism destination. Furthermore, this section helps determine which factors are significant enough to be used as variables in the analysis.

Table 7 Gender

Gender	Frequency	Average
Male	234	62.9%
Female	138	37.1%

The demographic profile of international tourists visiting Cambodia presents several distinctive patterns that offer valuable insights for tourism stakeholders. A clear gender disparity emerges from the data, with male tourists accounting for 62.9% of respondents compared to 37.1% female visitors.

Table 8 Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Average
18–25	77	20.7%
26–35	152	40.9%
36–45	65	17.5%
46–55	39	10.5%
55–65	36	9.7%
65+	3	0.7%

Age reveals Cambodia's strong appeal among younger travelers, with those aged 26-35 years constituting the largest cohort at 40.9% of respondents, followed by 18-25 years at 20.7%. Together, these two age groups represent nearly two-thirds of all visitors. Middle-aged tourists (36-55 years) comprise 28% of the sample, while senior travelers (56+ years) account for just 10.4% of visitors.

Table 9 Average Annual Income

Annual Income	Frequency	Average
Less than USD 49,000	189	50.8%
USD 50,000 to USD 99,000	136	36.6%
USD 100,000 to USD 149,000	47	12.6%

Income patterns show that half of visitors (50.8%) earn less than USD 49,000 annually, while 36.6% fall into the USD 50,000 to USD 99,000 range. This middle-income aligns with Cambodia's position as a value-oriented destination in Southeast Asia's tourism market. The combination of these demographic factors shows a clear

picture of Cambodia's core tourist demographic likely young, male, highly educated, and middle-income professionals.

Table 10 Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Average
High School	29	7.8%
Bachelor's Degree	198	53.2%
Master's Degree	115	30.9%
Doctorate	30	8.1%

Educational attainment among visitors is notably high, with 53.2% holding bachelor's degrees, 30.9% possessing master's degrees, and 8.1% having earned doctorates. This highly educated tourist base, where 92.2% have at least a bachelor's degree, suggests that Cambodia's rich cultural heritage and historical sites appeal particularly to intellectually curious travelers with strong academic backgrounds.

Table 11 Employee status

Employment Status	Frequency	Average
Private Sector	103	27.7%
Student	30	8.1%
Government Sector	93	25.0%
Business	101	27.2%
Unemployed	45	12%

The employment profile further reinforces this picture, showing a predominance of working professionals (79.9% employed across private sector, government, and business ownership roles) who likely combine leisure travel with professional interests.

These findings have significant implications for Cambodia's tourism strategy. The data supports the country's current appeal to younger, educated travelers while highlighting opportunities to address the gender imbalance and develop offerings for underrepresented groups like senior tourists. The high education levels suggest potential for more sophisticated cultural interpretation at heritage sites, while the income data confirms the importance of maintaining Cambodia's competitive value proposition.

Respondents Socio-Demographic

Table 12 First and Repeat visitors

First Time/Repeated	Frequency	Average
First Time	271	72.8%
Repeated	101	27.2%
• Second Time	• 60	• 16.1%
• Third Time	• 11	• 3.0%
• More than 3 times	• 30	• 8.1%

Table 12 shows that 72.8% of respondents were first-time visitors, indicating Cambodia's continued ability to attract new international tourists. Among repeat visitors (27.2%), the distribution reveals that 16.1% were on their second visit, 3% on their third visit, and 8.1% had visited more than three times. While these figures demonstrate some level of repeat visitation, the relatively low percentages beyond second visits suggest opportunities to enhance retention strategies and encourage more frequent return visits.

Table 13 Purpose of Travel

Purpose of Travel	Frequency	Average
Leisure, Holiday, and Recreation	342	91.9%
Business and Professional	30	8.1%

The socio-demographic analysis reveals important patterns in the travel behaviors and preferences of international tourists visiting Cambodia. Regarding travel purpose, an overwhelming majority (91.9%) visited for leisure, holiday, and recreational purposes, confirming Cambodia's strong position as a cultural and leisure tourism destination. Business and professional travelers constituted a much smaller segment (8.1%), suggesting that Cambodia's tourism appeal remains predominantly leisure focused.

Table 14 How Visitors knew About Cambodia (Multiple answers)

Source	Frequency	Average
Friends & Relatives	288	33.0%
The Internet	198	22.7%
Books & Travel Guides	166	19.1%
Travel Agent	83	9.5%
Media	137	15.7%

Information sources about Cambodia show that personal networks remain most influential, with friends and relatives accounting for 33% of responses. Digital channels follow closely at 22.7%, while traditional sources like books or travel guides (19.1%) and media (15.7%) maintain relevance. Travel agents (9.5%) play a more modest role in destination awareness. These findings highlight the continued importance of both word-of-mouth recommendations and digital platforms in shaping travel decisions.

Table 15 Travel Companion

Travel Companion	Frequency	Average
Spouse	167	44.9%
Family	90	24.2%
Friends / Colleagues	115	30.9%

The composition of travel parties presents an interesting distribution: spouses (44.9%) emerge as the most common companions, followed by friends/colleagues (30.9%) and family members (24.2%). This pattern differs from previous data, showing a stronger preference for couple travel compared to solo or family travel.

Table 16 Mode of Transportation

Mode of Transportation	Frequency	Average
By Air	232	62.4%
By Road	140	37.6%

Transportation modes indicate that air travel remains dominant (62.4%), though land crossings (37.6%) represent a significant portion of arrivals, likely reflecting Cambodia's growing regional connectivity with neighboring countries. The complete absence of sea arrivals in this dataset suggests minimal cruise tourism development.

These findings paint a picture of Cambodia as primarily attracting first-time leisure travelers who discover the destination through personal networks and digital channels. The high proportion of couple travelers (44.9% with spouses) present new opportunities for romance tourism and couple-oriented experiences. While repeat visitation shows room for growth, the strong first-time visitor numbers indicate healthy destination appeal.

Importance, Performance, and Satisfaction of Cambodia's Destination Attributes

To evaluate international tourists' perceptions of Cambodian destination attributes, a total of 372 questionnaires structured questionnaire were developed and collected with three distinct sections: importance, performance, and satisfaction. Each section utilized a 5-point Likert scale which allow the participants write their perspective as:

Importance Level:

Not Important at All = 1

Slightly Important = 2

Moderately Important = 3

Important = 4

Very Important = 5

Performance Level:

Very Poor = 1

Poor = 2

Fair = 3

Good = 4

Excellent = 5

Satisfaction Level:

Very Dissatisfied = 1

Dissatisfied = 2

Neutral = 3

Satisfied = 4

Very Satisfied = 5

The importance of destination attributes is the extent to which international tourists regard each attribute as essential or valuable when selecting or evaluating a travel destination. It is indicative of the expectations and priorities of tourists before or during their journey. Attributes that are held in high regard are those that have a substantial impact on the overall travel experience.

The performance of destination attributes is a measure of the extent to which Cambodia fulfills or delivers each attribute according to the actual experiences of tourists. It records tourists' evaluations of the extent to which their expectations were fulfilled by a variety of services, facilities, or experiences. Performance evaluation facilitates the identification of the current tourism infrastructure and service delivery's strengths and weaknesses.

The satisfaction level response of tourists to each attribute is reflected in the satisfaction level. It denotes the degree to which their expectations were met, exceeded, or not met during their visit.

Objective one: To evaluate the importance and performance of Cambodia's destination attributes

IPA method is a widely used and practical tool in tourism research. IPA facilitates the comparison of how important each destination attribute is to tourists versus how well they perceive its performance. The analysis is conducted by calculating the mean scores of importance and performance for each of the 31 attributes, followed by four quadrants includes “Keep Up the Good Work,” “Concentrate Here,” “Low Priority,” and “Possible Overkill”. The mean values are presented in **Table 17**, which ranks the attributes in descending order based on their average importance scores from the most to the least important according to tourist perceptions. This ranking provides a clear overview of which attributes are most valued by visitors and serves as the foundation for plotting the IPA matrix.

Table 17 Destination Attributes' Importance and Performance Ratings

No	Destination Attributes	Mean Importance	Mean Performance	Difference (+/-)
3	Significance of cultural heritage	4.70	4.55	-0.15
8	Taste and variety of local cuisine	4.66	4.44	-0.22
24	Concerns about petty theft/scam	4.65	4.41	-0.24
1	Quality of attraction	4.52	4.10	-0.42
21	Value for expenses	4.52	4.12	-0.40
23	Personal sense of safety	4.48	4.22	-0.26
14	Convenience of public facilities	4.47	4.44	-0.03
13	Service quality from service staff	4.45	3.50	-0.95
25	Support from local authorities	4.39	3.92	-0.47
27	Sufficiency of pre-arrival info	4.36	3.85	-0.51
26	Crime rate in the area	4.24	4.55	0.31
17	Social interactions with locals	4.22	3.06	-1.16
5	Hygiene standards in food	4.22	4.04	-0.18
7	Trying authentic dishes	4.27	3.94	-0.33

No	Destination Attributes	Mean Importance	Mean Performance	Difference (+/-)
4	Cleanliness of public spaces	4.06	2.99	-1.07
28	Influence of advertising	4.01	3.35	-0.66
16	Welcoming and friendliness	4.00	2.76	-1.24
19	Convenience of USD usage	3.98	3.56	-0.42
12	Communication skills	3.92	4.05	0.13
6	Waste disposal	3.90	2.37	-1.53
15	Quality of roads, airports, ports	3.76	3.75	-0.01
18	Access to assistance	3.66	3.67	0.01
22	Reasonable transport costs	3.66	4.09	0.43
31	Available of smart tourism tools	3.58	3.39	-0.19
11	Availability of signs, menus	3.53	3.73	0.20
10	Language barriers	3.40	3.38	-0.02
20	Fair pricing for tours/excursions	2.81	4.49	1.68
30	Ease of accessing tourist info	2.74	2.54	-0.20
9	Availability of other cuisine	2.69	3.52	0.83
2	Festivals and exhibitions ava	2.66	3.54	0.88
29	Branding or campaigns	2.64	3.13	0.49

The Importance of Cambodia's destination attributes

The ratings of importance indicate that both cultural and safety related conditions are the most critical among tourists visiting Cambodia. The significance of personal safety (4.48) and the safety factor with regard to petty theft/scams (4.65) indicates that tourists know the possible risks, yet they expect to get safe experiences. This could be reflective of the fact that Cambodia is known to be a relatively safe place with a remote security consideration, which is the same (Keo, & Banhidi, 2023). Tourists expect the professional standards of the destination to be similar with more developed tourist destinations in terms of which the scores of public facilities (4.47) and service quality (4.45) are high.

The moderate scores of hygiene standards (4.22) and cleanliness (4.06) are high, though not one of the highest. These elements are stronger in the developed destinations, meaning that tourists are not that critical of the flaws in Cambodia, but they do influence satisfaction. The insignificance of festivals and availability of exhibitions (2.66) and branding (2.64) will indicate that the tourism attraction of Cambodia is not dependent mainly on events as opposed to experience, and this offers the possibility of strategic marketing development.

The Performance of Cambodia's destination attributes

The tourism industry in Cambodia has been performing well in many aspects, which are considered critical. The performance rating of the attribute, signifying significant of cultural heritage sites is 4.55, almost equal to the high level of expectations as indicated by the attribute score of 4.70. This means that the tourist expectations of the visitors are largely fulfilled in the management of the world-known historical sites in Cambodia including the Angkor Archaeological Park. Likewise the local cuisine taste and variety is rated at 4.44 of which is sub-optimal with the value of 4.66. This implies that the food services offered in Cambodia offer authentic food experiences to tourists.

Safety-related attributes are examples of strong performance. Tourist areas have a remarkable crime rate of 4.55 performance score with a positive gap of +0.31 as compared to 4.24 importance rating. This means that the security precautions in key tourist destinations are more effective than tourists expect. Similarly, the significance of the petty theft and scams concerns is evaluated at 4.41, as compared to 4.65 which means that the problems in question are controlled successfully. Personal sense of security scores 4.22 in performance and 4.48 on importance, which once again confirms the image of the Cambodia as a safe generally safe tourist destination.

These gaps mean the destination is outstanding as regards safety and core cultural experiences, but has a challenge with the basic infrastructure and service delivery. The trend shows that the tourism development of Cambodia has focused on the attraction of high profile sites at the expense of basic visitor comforts leading to a state of affairs where the tourists could view the world heritage sites and still face problems with the normal tourism amenities.

Furthermore, **Figure 9** presents the IPA matrix, the x-axis represents tourists perceived performance of each attribute, while the y-axis reflects their perceived importance. The intersection point, which divides the matrix into four quadrants, is based on the overall mean scores 3.90 for importance and 3.72 for performance. Each quadrant of the IPA matrix is described in detail in the following section.

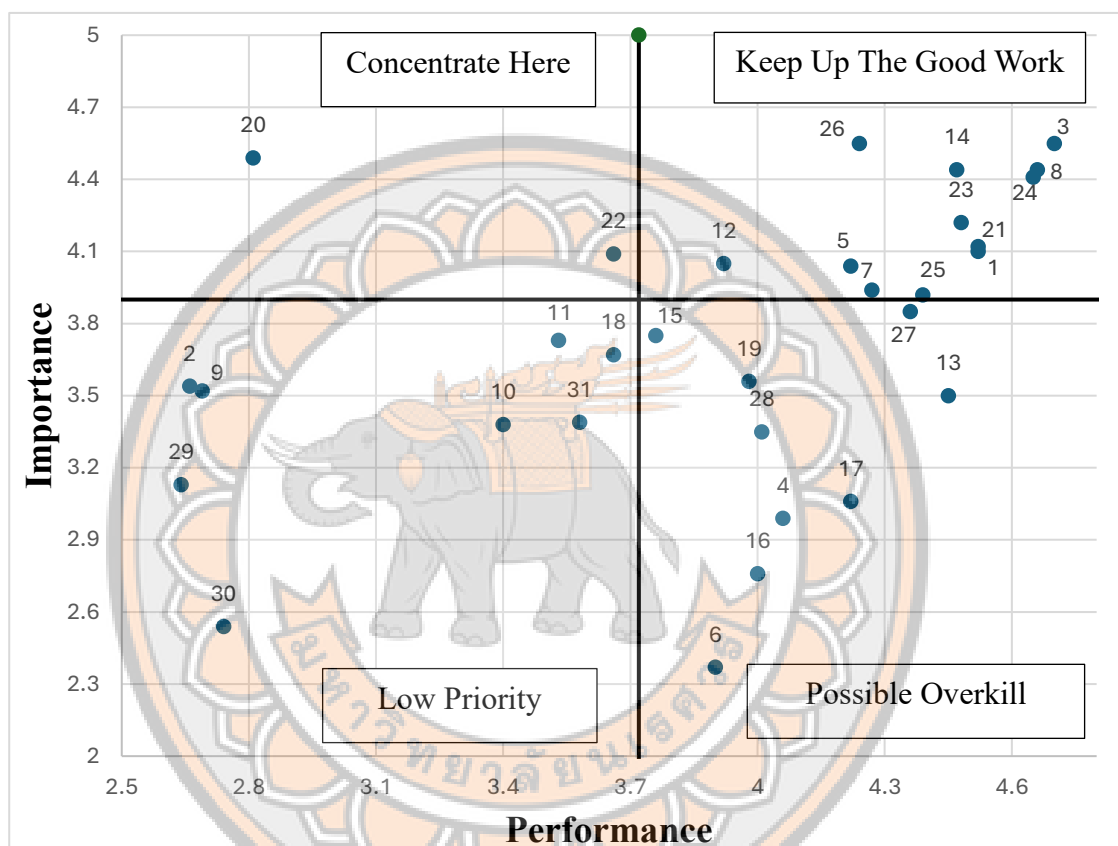


Figure 9 Importance and Performance Analysis of Cambodia's Destination Attributes

Figure 9 highlights areas where improvements could have a meaningful impact on customer satisfaction. While fair pricing for tours/excursions (20) performs well with a score of 4.49, its low importance rating of 2.81 suggests customers do not prioritize it highly, meaning further enhancements may not significantly boost overall satisfaction. On the other hand, reasonable transport costs (22) holds greater importance to customers (3.66) with a slightly lower performance score (4.09), showing an opportunity to refine pricing strategies or improve perceived value in this area. Since transport costs matter more to customers, even small adjustments such as

offering transparent pricing or bundled deals could lead to improvements in satisfaction. While tour pricing is already strong, transport costs present a clearer focus for strategic enhancements to better align with customer expectations.

Keep Up the Good Work

This quadrant delineates the destination's most significant competitive advantages, where the current performance meets the expectations of visitors. The following are critical attributes: the importance of cultural heritage (3), the taste and variety of local cuisine (8), personal sense of safety (23), concerns about petty theft/scams (24), quality of attraction (1), value for expenses (21), and hygiene standards in food (5). Supporting factors include the perception of a low crime rate (26), the convenience of public facilities (14), the support of local authorities (25), and communication skills (12). To preserve this robust position, it is imperative to prioritize the preservation of culinary excellence (8) and cultural authenticity (3), as these are the fundamental components of the destination's identity. The successful security measures that should be diligently maintained are indicated by the high marks in safety-related attributes (23, 24, 26). Although these areas are currently performing well, their ability to meet the changing expectations of visitors will be maintained through ongoing attention to quality control, staff training, and facility maintenance. Regular monitoring of these critical attributes will assist in the identification of any potential areas for improvement prior to their impact on the visitor experience.

Low Priority

This quadrant comprises attributes that are currently performing satisfactorily while being relatively less significant to visitors. These attributes include the availability of other cuisines (9), festivals and exhibitions (2), and branding or campaigns (29). Additionally, the availability of signs and menus (11), language barriers (10), and access to assistance (18) are of moderate importance and satisfactory performance. Consequently, they do not necessitate immediate attention in comparison to higher-priority areas. Although there is potential for improvement in the accessibility of tourist information (30) and the availability of smart tourism tools (31), their low importance scores indicate that they should not be prioritized over more critical areas. When opportunities arise, these elements could be addressed through cost-effective solutions; however, they are not currently essential to the overall visitor experience.

Possible Overkill

The performance levels of nine attributes in this quadrant, such as waste disposal (6), cleanliness of public spaces (4), and welcoming atmosphere (16), are below their importance scores. This suggests that they require additional attention rather than representing areas of potential overinvestment. The performance gaps that are evident in these fundamental aspects of the visitor experience, particularly in the areas of cleanliness and waste management, are essential for the appeal of a destination. Moreover, the performance of staff service quality (13), social interactions with locals (17), infrastructure quality (15), and USD convenience (19) is consistent with their relatively lower importance. Both the underperforming high-importance attributes and the properly serviced lower-priority items in this quadrant indicate the necessity of a thorough review of resource distribution. The strategic reallocation of resources from the performing areas to address the service quality and cleanliness gaps could result in significant improvements in the overall visitor experience without necessitating additional overall investment.

Objective Two: To Differentiate the satisfaction levels of visitors regarding Cambodia's destination attributes between First time and Repeated Visitors

In order to achieve the goal, the study quantifies the difference between factors considered by tourists as important and the level of satisfaction that they derive using the equation; $\text{Gap} = \text{Satisfaction} - \text{Importance}$. In order to understand the performance concerning the expectation of the tourists, performance of each destination attribute is evaluated separately.

Gap analysis is essential in the sense that it provides a holistic view of how much expectation of the tourists is being met based on the specific tourist category. Gap analysis relates satisfaction to the relative degree of relevance given by tourists to each destination attribute instead of taking satisfaction scores alone, which may be high on its own. This shows whether tourists are really satisfied with regard to their most significant values. A negative gap score is an indication of underperformance as it indicates that the destination is not performing to the expectations of the tourists. When the gap is positive, it means that the tourists are satisfied more than they had expected. A zero gap between significance and satisfaction is ideal.

By summing up the gap scores of the first time and repeat visitors on the attributes being compared, this analysis ascertains whether the same attribute is differentiated between the first-time and repeat visitors. As an example, though both groups believe the quality of attraction to be of utmost importance, repeat visitors might feel that it is more satisfying as compared to first-time visitors. The gap analysis, therefore, does not just mark the areas of priority improvement, but it also highlights the considerable variations in visitor experience and expectations, thus allowing the future, more efficient and focused destination management strategies.

Table 18 Gab Analysis (Satisfaction – Importance)

Destination Attributes	FTV	Mean	Mean	Differences
	RPV	Satisfaction	Importance	(+/-)
1. Quality of attraction	FTV	4.60	4.82	-0.22
	RPV	4.08	3.71	+0.37
2. Festival and Exhibition Availability	FTV	3.66	2.57	+1.09
	RPV	3.50	2.90	+0.60
3. Significance of cultural heritage	FTV	4.34	4.82	-0.48
	RPV	4.36	4.38	-0.02
4. Cleanliness of Public Spaces	FTV	3.48	4.02	-0.54
	RPV	3.10	4.18	-1.08
5. Hygiene standard in food outlets	FTV	3.03	4.00	-0.97
	RPV	3.40	4.79	-1.39
6. Waste Disposal	FTV	2.24	3.93	-1.69
	RPV	3.02	3.79	-0.77
7. Trying Authentic Cambodian dishes	FTV	4.24	4.11	+0.13
	RPV	4.11	4.70	-0.59
8. Taste and variety of local cuisine	FTV	4.47	4.69	-0.22
	RPV	4.07	4.58	-0.51
9. Availability of Western or other cuisine	FTV	3.94	2.55	+1.39
	RPV	4.39	3.08	+1.31
10. Language Barrier with locals' authority	FTV	3.27	3.29	-0.02
	RPV	3.98	3.70	+0.28
11. Availability of Signs, menus	FTV	3.72	3.47	+0.25
	RPV	4.40	3.68	+0.72

Destination Attributes	FTV RPV	Mean Satisfaction	Mean Importance	Differences (+/-)
12. Communication Skills	FTV	3.94	3.77	+0.17
	RPV	4.10	4.30	-0.20
13. Service quality from service staff	FTV	4.34	4.41	-0.07
	RPV	4.67	4.56	+0.11
14. Convenience of public transport facilities	FTV	4.58	4.43	+0.15
	RPV	4.69	4.58	+0.11
15. Quality of Road, airport, ports	FTV	3.87	3.82	+0.05
	RPV	3.71	3.61	+0.10
16. Welcoming and Friendliness of Locals	FTV	4.26	4.41	-0.15
	RPV	3.48	3.70	-0.22
17. Social interaction with locals	FTV	3.70	3.54	+0.16
	RPV	4.09	3.98	+0.11
18. Access to assistance	FTV	3.56	3.68	-0.12
	RPV	4.10	4.76	-0.66
19. Convenience of USD usage	FTV	4.21	2.81	+1.40
	RPV	3.18	2.82	+0.36
20. Fair pricing for tours/excursions	FTV	4.18	4.42	-0.24
	RPV	4.50	4.78	-0.28
21. Value for souvenirs and daily expenses	FTV	4.33	3.37	+0.96
	RPV	4.30	4.47	-0.17
22. Reasonable transport costs	FTV	4.59	4.33	+0.26
	RPV	3.50	4.89	-1.39
23. Personal sense of Safety	FTV	4.41	4.52	-0.11
	RPV	4.11	4.71	-0.60
24. Concerns about petty theft/scam	FTV	3.63	4.24	-0.61
	RPV	4.41	4.80	-0.39
25. Support from local authorities	FTV	3.25	4.03	-0.78
	RPV	4.41	4.80	-0.39
26. Crime rate in area	FTV	4.82	4.61	+0.21
	RPV	3.77	3.69	+0.08
27. Sufficiency of pre-arrival info	FTV	2.98	3.83	-0.85
	RPV	4.64	4.50	+0.14
28. Influence of Advertising	FTV	2.94	2.59	+0.35
	RPV	3.88	2.78	+1.10
29. Destination branding or campaigns	FTV	3.03	2.36	+0.67

Destination Attributes	FTV RPV	Mean Satisfaction	Mean Importance	Differences (+/-)
	RPV	4.01	3.77	+0.24
30. Ease of accessing tourist info	FTV	3.14	3.32	+0.18
	RPV	4.34	4.30	+0.04
31. Availability of smart tourism tools/ technologies	FTV	3.14	3.39	-0.25
	RPV	4.83	4.01	+0.82

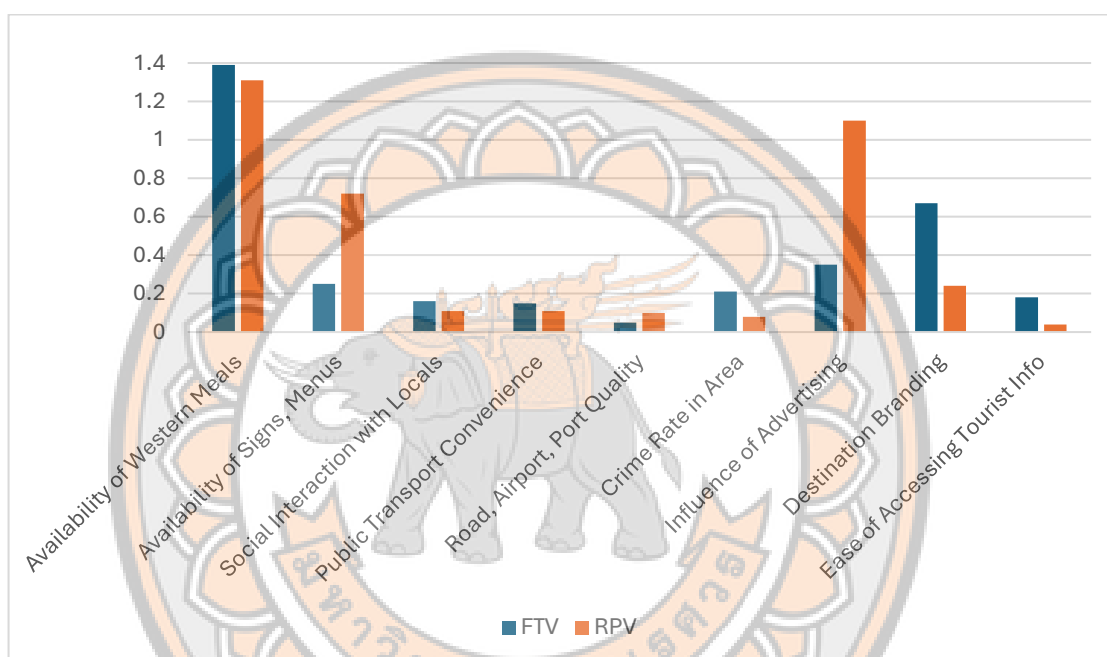


Figure 10 Attributes with Positive Gap for Both Groups (Overperformance)

Table 18 reveals 10 destination attributes where both first-time visitors (FTV) and repeat visitors (RPV) reported a positive satisfaction gap, indicating that their actual experiences exceeded their expectations. **Figure 10** shows the statistical differences of each attribute.

Festival and exhibition availability stood out with a gap of +1.09 for FTV and +0.60 for RPV, suggesting that cultural events were not only well-received but especially impressed first-time tourists. Similarly, the availability of western meals and other cuisines showed strong satisfaction across both groups, with gaps of +1.39 (FTV) and +1.31 (RPV), indicating a high level of familiarity in food options.

Communication skills also performed well. The availability of signs and menus received (+0.25 for FTV, +0.72 for RPV), showing that multilingual or clearly marked signage met tourists' navigation needs. Social interaction with locals was appreciated by both groups (+0.16 FTV, +0.11 RPV), reflecting positively on the destination's hospitality and interpersonal environment. public transport convenience (+0.15 FTV, +0.11 RPV) and quality of roads, airports, and ports (+0.05 FTV, +0.10 RPV) were slightly above expectations, indicating that essential transport infrastructure met tourist needs efficiently. In terms of safety, perceptions of crime rate were more favorable than anticipated (+0.21 FTV, +0.08 RPV), contributing to a general sense of security. Notably, the influence of advertising scored +0.35 for FTV and a strong +1.10 for RPV, suggesting that promotional campaigns were impactful, particularly for returning tourists. Similarly, destination branding saw a +0.67 gap for FTV and +0.24 for RPV, showing that branding strategies successfully shaped positive perceptions, especially for newcomers.

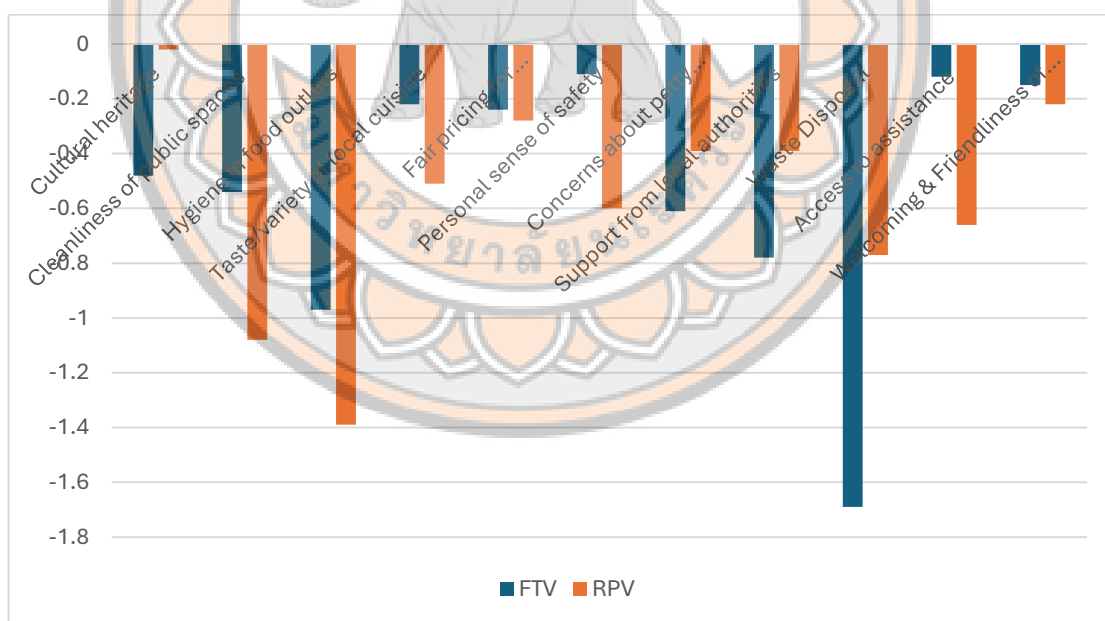


Figure 11 Attributes with Negative Gap for Both Groups (Underperformance)

Table 18 identifies 11 attributes where both first-time visitors (FTV) and repeat visitors (RPV) reported negative satisfaction gaps, indicating that their actual

experiences did not meet their expectations. **Figure 11** shows the statistical differences of each attribute.

The cleanliness of public spaces is a major concern, as evidenced by a substantial negative gap, particularly among repeat visitors (-0.54 FTV, -1.08 RPV). This highlights dissatisfaction with the maintenance and cleanliness standards. In the same vein, hygiene in food outlets was identified as a significant concern, with gaps of -0.97 for FTV and 1.39 for RPV. This indicates that both groups, particularly repeat visitors, perceived health and sanitation standards to be below acceptable levels. The overall experience was negatively impacted by environmental management issues, as evidenced by the strong negative feedback received regarding waste disposal, particularly from first-time visitors (-1.69 FTV, -0.77 RPV). The taste and variety of local cuisine did not fully meet expectations, as evidenced by gaps of -0.22 (FTV) and -0.51 (RPV). This suggests that there is room for improvement in the local food offerings. A slight negative gap was observed in the significance of cultural heritage, which was more apparent among first-time visitors (-0.48 FTV, -0.02 RPV). This suggests that cultural attractions may not be delivering the anticipated impact or authenticity.

In addition, both groups perceived that local authorities were not providing sufficient support (-0.78 FTV, -0.39 RPV), which could potentially impact visitor satisfaction and confidence. The personal sense of safety was lower among repeat visitors (-0.11 FTV, -0.60 RPV), and safety concerns about theft and scams generated negative gaps (-0.61 FTV, -0.39 RPV). Furthermore, both groups were disappointed by the availability of assistance services (-0.12 FTV, -0.66 RPV), suggesting that it is necessary to enhance support mechanisms for tourists. Finally, the fair pricing for tours and excursions did not meet expectations, as evidenced by the modest gaps (-0.24 FTV, -0.28 RPV) that visitors perceived that the cost did not accurately reflect the value provided.

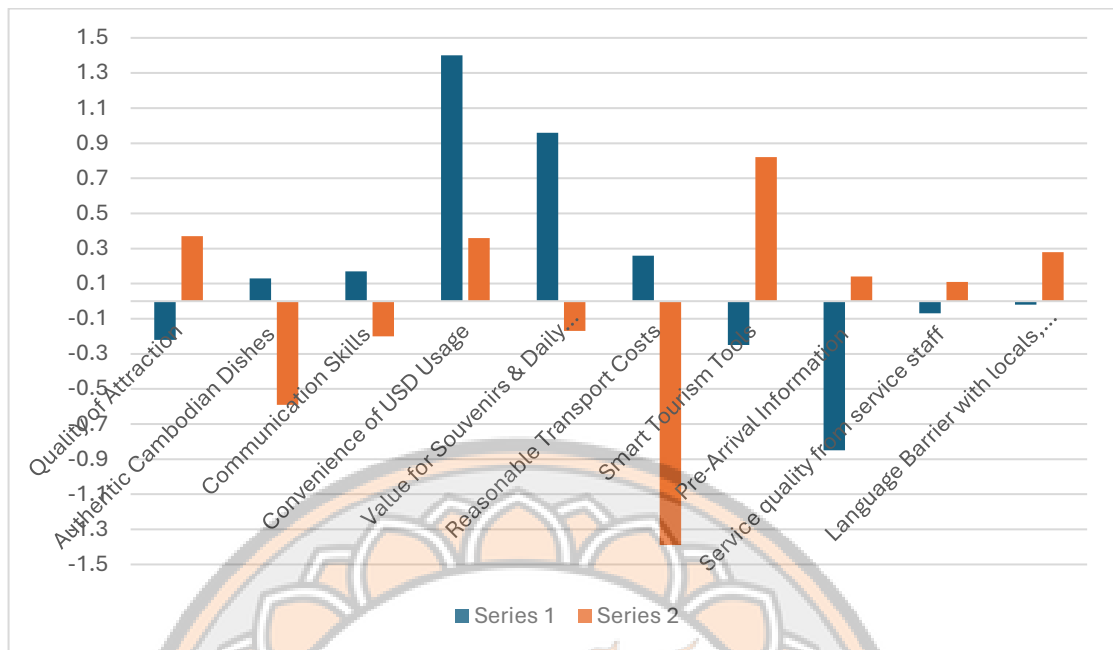


Figure 12 Attributes Perceived Differently by First-Time and Repeat Visitors

Table 18 shows 10 attributes where first-time visitors are more satisfied than repeat visitors, who are neutral or negative. Repeat visitors may have higher expectations because they have been there before. Each attribute's statistical differences are in **Figure 12**.

For instance, first-time visitors were disappointed by the attraction (-0.22), but repeat visitors were happier (+0.37), possibly due to site familiarity. First-timers were happier trying authentic Cambodian dishes (+0.13), while repeat visitors were less satisfied (-0.59), suggesting they expect more variety or better taste. First-time visitors liked service staff communication (+0.17), but repeat visitors didn't (-0.20), suggesting that repeat visitors are more critical of interaction. Repeat visitors were less impressed with local hospitality (-0.15 FTV vs. -0.22 RPV). First-time visitors (+1.40) liked USD usage but repeat visitors (+0.36) did not. Souvenirs and daily expenses were reasonable (+0.96) for first-time visitors but less so for repeat visitors (-0.17). Even more contrasting were reasonable transport costs, where first-time visitors were mildly satisfied (+0.26), but repeat visitors felt they were too high (-1.39). Smart tourism tools revealed a reversed pattern: first-time visitors were unfamiliar or less satisfied (-0.25), while repeat visitors benefited more and were happier (+0.82). First-time

visitors had more pre-arrival issues (-0.85), while repeat visitors were better prepared and happier ($+0.14$).

Gap analysis can identify differences between importance and satisfaction, but it cannot determine whether they are meaningful or random. A gap score of -0.8 for “cleanliness” among first-time visitors may seem concerning, but without statistical testing, we cannot determine if it is significantly larger than that of repeat visitors or if it is random. The independent samples t-test adds rigor. Using p-values and confidence intervals, the t-test confirms significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors ($p < 0.05$).

The result prevents misinterpretations and ensures recommendations focus on real, measurable, and actionable gaps rather than data noise. The t-test results also support objective 2 by demonstrating how different tourist segments perceive Cambodia’s destination attributes. For first-time visitors have significantly larger negative gaps in “hygiene standards” ($p = 0.01$) compared to repeat visitors. This indicates a specific pain point for the first-time visitor segment that requires targeted interventions. Conversely, if the gaps in “cultural experiences” are statistically similar across groups ($p = 0.25$), then improvements to these experiences can be applied universally. The study goes beyond descriptive statistics by integrating t-test findings with gap analysis, providing differentiated, evidence-based strategies to improve Cambodia's destination competitiveness for both first-time and repeat visitors. This gap analysis and t-test combination meets the objective and increases the research's practical value for policymakers and destination managers.

Additionally, the t-test results directly support Objective 2 by providing empirical evidence of how different tourist segments perceive Cambodia’s destination attributes. For instance, if first-time visitors show significantly larger negative gaps in “hygiene standards” ($p = 0.01$) compared to repeat visitors, this confirms a segment-specific pain point requiring targeted interventions (e.g., improved sanitation in tourist hotspots). Conversely, if gaps in “cultural experiences” are statistically similar across groups ($p = 0.25$), efforts to enhance them can be universally applied. By integrating t-test findings with gap analysis, the study moves beyond descriptive statistics to deliver differentiated, evidence-based strategies ensuring Cambodia’s destination competitiveness are tailored to the needs of first time and repeated visitor.

This combination of gap analysis and t test not only fulfills the objective but also elevates the practical value of the research for policymakers and destination manager.

Table 19 T Test Result on Satisfaction level Between First Time Visitors (FTV) and Repeated Visitors (RPV)

Destination Attributes	FTV RPV	N	Mean	Sig	t	P-value
Quality of Attraction	FTV	271	4.60	0.001	5.551	0.001
	RPV	101	4.08			
Try Authentic Cambodia dishes	FTV	271	4.24	0.731	1.249	0.212
	RPV	101	4.11			
Language Barrier	FTV	271	3.27	0.001	-6.054	0.001
	RPV	101	3.98			
Communication Skills	FTV	271	3.94	0.001	-1.462	0.145
	RPV	101	4.10			
Service quality from service staff	FTV	271	4.34	0.001	-4.358	0.001
	RPV	101	4.67			
Convenience of USD usage	FTV	271	4.21	0.001	5.729	0.001
	RPV	101	3.18			
Value for souvenir and daily expand	FTV	271	4.33	0.001	0.585	0.559
	RPV	101	4.30			
Reasonable transport cost	FTV	271	4.59	0.480	12.521	0.001
	RPV	101	3.50			
Pre arrival Information	FTV	271	2.98	0.001	-15.608	0.001
	RPV	101	4.64			
Smart Tourism	FTV	271	3.14	0.001	-17.524	0.001
	RPV	101	4.83			

Over multiple destination attributes, the independent sample t-test showed statistically significant differences in satisfaction between first-time visitors (FTV) and repeat visitors (RPV). Nine of the 31 destination attributes had Sig. values greater than

0.05, indicating that first-time and repeat visitors were satisfied similarly. Festival and exhibition availability (Sig. = .340), cultural heritage significance (.883), hygiene standards in food outlets (.072), trying authentic Cambodian dishes (.212), taste and variety of local cuisine (.955), quality of roads, airports, and ports (.133), service staff communication skills (.145), fair pricing for tours/excursions (.099), and value for souvenirs and daily expenses (.559). The consistently high Sig. values suggest that first-time and repeat visitors evaluate these aspects similarly. Thus, prior travel experience does not strongly influence how tourists perceive these attributes, making them stable performance areas whether as consistent strengths like cultural heritage or as areas where both groups share similar critiques like festival availability.

First-time visitors were more satisfied with attractions, locals, USD usage, and transport costs (FTV M = 4.60; RPV M = 4.08; $p < .001$). These findings suggest that Cambodia's accessibility, affordability, and cultural appeal impress FTVs more because they have less prior comparison. Repeat visitors reported higher satisfaction with food outlet hygiene, western meal availability, language accessibility, and local authority support (RPV M = 3.40 vs. FTV M = 3.03; $p = .012$, 4.39 vs. FTV M = 3.94; $p < .001$). This suggests that RPV values practical service, infrastructure, and institutional support improvements and sets higher standards. Compared to repeat visitors, first-time visitors reported higher personal safety (M = 4.41 vs. 4.11; $p < .001$) and lower concerns about petty theft (M = 3.63 vs. 4.41; $p < .001$). This suggests that RPVs may be more risk-aware due to personal experience or prior visits. Information-related attributes also had large gaps. Pre-arrival information, destination branding, and smart tourism tools significantly increased visitor satisfaction (M = 4.64 vs. 2.98; $p < .001$). FTVs may face informational barriers, but RPVs use information and technology to plan and enrich their trips. Overall, the results show satisfaction. FTVs value affordability, friendliness, and attraction novelty, while RPVs value service quality, infrastructure, and information.

These findings support the idea that first-timers' moderate expectations are easier to meet, while repeat visitors compare Cambodia to past experiences and regional alternatives, making stricter judgments. This supports Objective 2, showing that FTV and RPV differ significantly, which affects destination management. Policymakers should promote Cambodia's cultural heritage and affordability while

improving hygiene, infrastructure, and information systems to retain visitors and build loyalty.

Objective Three: To Propose a guideline for improving Cambodian destination attributes to enhance destination competitiveness

In the extension of the results of Objectives 1 and 2, the third research objective aims at postulating a guideline on how to enhance the destination attributes of Cambodia in order to enhance the overall competitiveness. This goal consists of the synthesis of the findings of Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA), gap analysis and utility score, to form an inter-layered and assessment structure that offers both directional strategies.

The outcomes of the IPA due to the Objective 1 provide a fundamental knowledge of the way the tourists understand the significance and quality of the destination attributes of Cambodia. The mapping of attributes into the four quadrants allow IPA to see key areas of interest that maintain competitiveness or need to be managed immediately.

The results of the gap analysis stemming out of Objective 2 add value to this image by comparing the level of satisfaction to the level of importance of each attribute. This approach explains how well the expectations of the tourists are being met. Negative gap denotes under-performance which can negatively impact on competitiveness whereas positive gap provides insight into areas where there is over-performance which can be leveraged to use in destination branding.

Finally, the utility score model developed in Objective 3 integrates both importance and satisfaction into a single composite measure of competitiveness. By multiplying normalized importance weights with satisfaction levels, utility scores quantify each attribute's contribution to Cambodia's tourism appeal.

The combination of IPA and gap analysis with the utility score model is important as it can be used to overcome the shortcomings of each of the tools when applied independently and establish a more fully informed decision-making approach. Although IPA provides an idea of the position of the attributes based on their importance and performance, it does not provide an idea of the degree of the extent of the under- or over-performances, gap analysis provides this information, but being alone it may overemphasize attributes of low significance. The utility score can be combined with it

by prioritizing attributes based on their real contribution to competitiveness, and it is obvious which improvements will have the highest payback.

These approaches are able to produce triangulated evidence which is not only statistically sound but actionable as well. This combined strategy aids the stakeholders to prioritize the resources, make tradeoff between immediate gains and long run investments and communicate priorities in a manner that is easily understandable by the policymakers, tourism managers and investors. Finally, it will make sure that the development of tourism in Cambodia is informed by evidence-based changes that improve its competitiveness, risk management, and the alignment of improvement to the national objectives in tourism.

Utility Score

A modified self-explicated utility approach as implemented in objective 3. Tourists' importance and satisfaction ratings are used to calculate a composite utility score for each destination attribute. This method quantifies self-reported perceptions. By multiplying normalized importance weights by satisfaction scores, the model calculates utility values that reflect each attribute's contribution to destination competitiveness. This method is intuitive and simple, providing data-driven insights that support Cambodia's global tourism goals.

Table 20 Utility score rank from Highest to lowest

Destination Attributes	Mean Importance	Mean Satisfaction	Utility Score
3. Significance of cultural heritage	4.70	4.80	22.56
14. Convenience of public facilities	4.47	4.61	20.61
8. Taste and variety of local cuisine	4.66	4.36	20.32
1. Quality of attraction	4.52	4.46	20.16
24. Concerns about petty theft/scam	4.65	4.33	20.13
27. Sufficiency of pre-arrival info	4.36	4.53	19.75
13. Service quality from service staff	4.45	4.43	19.71
21. Value for expenses	4.52	4.27	19.30

Destination Attributes	Mean Importance	Mean Satisfaction	Utility Score
23. Personal sense of safety	4.48	4.29	19.22
7. Trying authentic dishes	4.27	4.20	17.93
17. Social interactions with locals	4.22	4.05	17.09
25. Support from local authorities	4.39	3.84	16.86
22. Reasonable transport costs	3.66	4.32	15.81
12. Communication skills	3.92	3.98	15.60
26. Crime rate in the area	4.24	3.56	15.09
19. Convenience of USD usage	3.98	3.70	14.73
15. Quality of roads, airports, ports	3.76	3.83	14.40
18. Access to assistance	3.66	3.81	13.94
11. Availability of signs, menus	3.53	3.90	13.77
28. Influence of advertising	4.01	3.43	13.75
4. Cleanliness of public spaces	4.06	3.38	13.72
5. Hygiene standards in food	4.22	3.13	13.21
31. Available of smart tourism tools	3.58	3.65	13.07
16. Welcoming and friendliness of locals	4.00	3.14	12.56
10. Language barriers	3.40	3.46	11.76
20. Fair pricing for tours/excursions	2.81	3.93	11.04
9. Availability of other cuisines	2.69	4.06	10.92
2. Festivals and exhibitions availability	2.66	3.62	9.63
6. Waste disposal	3.90	2.45	9.56
30. Ease of accessing tourist info	2.74	3.29	9.01
29. Branding or campaigns	2.64	3.20	8.45

The destination competitiveness is strategized in the form of three priority levels of destination attributes in Cambodia. The competitive advantages of Cambodia in addressing the expectations of the tourists are reflected in top attributes with high scores on utility (which is normally more than 20). These ought to be eminently captured in the destination branding and be monitored and enhanced to ensure quality.

Five key attributes are shown in table 20 such as cultural heritage (22.56) which proves the existence of the destination and traditions of life. Like the increasing infrastructure and accessibility of Cambodia (20.61), tourists. The quality of attraction (20.16) indicates well-preserved historical and natural attractions with local cuisine (20.32) indicating culturally important and satisfying food. Tourists like safe choices (20.13) which have little theft/scam. This renders Cambodia a special place of genuine cultural experience, well-developed infrastructure and safety. These are important to the visitors and Cambodia provides. This implies that all branding and marketing should be based on these as competitive differentiators.

Little investments can be used to enhance mid-range attributes (scores 15-20). Table 20 demonstrates nine attributes in this category. Pre-arrival information (19.75) and service quality (19.71) are leaders in this category, fulfilling basic expectations, but untapped competitive potential. Cambodia is cheap and secure, yet native cuisine encounters (17.93) and native communication (17.09) may indicate opportunities of cultural immersion. This level consists of the transport expenses (15.81) and communication proficiencies (15.60), which please tourists. These are important to the visitors and Cambodia provides. This is the most promising quality-improving group of Cambodians. Better community involvement, information systems and better staff training can move the attributes up to the top few levels.

Categories with low scoring (under 15 utility score) indicate serious discrepancies between the expectation of tourists and their real experiences that need strategic investment, and urgent corrective measures. Table 20 is a list of 16 attributes to be covered. The ease of using USD (14.73) and quality of roads, airports, and ports (14.40) are average but can be improved. The availability of support (13.94), menus and signs (13.77), advertising (13.75) indicate tourist orientation and communication problems. Of more concern, is the cleanliness of the public areas (13.72) and the food hygiene standards (13.21) which have the potential of influencing visitor experiences. Smart tourism tools (13.07), local friendliness (12.56), language barriers (11.76), fair tour/excursion pricing (11.04) and culinary diversity (10.92) are poor. Festivals and exhibition availability (9.63) has less cultural programming influence. It has poor sanitation on waste disposal (9.56), access to tourist information (9.01) and destination marketing (8.45). The utility scores of the underperforming group demonstrate that

basic sanitation and infrastructure are the most pressing areas that should be improved, then service quality, experience, and marketing. The fact that low scores are concentrated around the core needs of visitors indicates the tourism sector in Cambodia needs to strive first to meet these fundamental needs before creating more sophisticated plans.

Top-scoring attributes	Mid-scoring Attributes	Low-scoring but Importance
1. Significance of cultural heritage 2. Convenience of public facilities 3. Taste and variety of local cuisine 4. Quality of attraction 5. Concerns about petty theft/scam	1. Sufficiency of pre-arrival info 2. Service quality from service staff 3. Value for expenses 4. Personal sense of safety 5. Trying authentic dishes 6. Social interactions with locals 7. Support from local authorities 8. Reasonable transport costs 9. Communication skills 10. Crime rate in the area	1. Convenience of USD usage 2. Quality of roads, airports, ports 3. Access to assistance 4. Availability of signs, menus 5. Influence of advertising 6. Cleanliness of public spaces 7. Hygiene standards in food 8. Available of smart tourism tools 9. Welcoming and friendliness of locals 10. Language barriers 11. Fair pricing for tours/excursions 12. Availability of other cuisines 13. Festivals and exhibitions availability 14. Waste disposal 15. Ease of accessing tourist info 16. Branding or campaigns
Suitable for Promote in Branding and Maintain Quality	Monitor and Modestly Improve But Do not need Immediate attention	Need immediate Attention Priority for Strategic Improvement

Figure 13 Result of Utility Score of Destination Attributes

Table 21 Integrated Approach for Immediate Attention Destination Attributes

Theme	Analysis Approach		
	DA from IPA	DA from Gap Analysis and SPSS	DA from Utility Score
Affordability & Fair Values	• Fair pricing for tours/excursions • Reasonable transportation costs	• Fair pricing for tours/excursions	• Fair pricing for tours/excursions
Tourist Accessibility & Comfort	–	• Access to assistance	• Quality of roads, airports, ports • Convenience of USD usage • Availability of signs, menus • Ease of accessing tourist info • Access to assistance
Tourist's Safety Concern	–	• Personal sense of safety • Concerns about petty theft /scams • Low crime rate	–
Cleanliness & Waste Management	–	• Cleanliness of public spaces • Hygiene in food outlets • Waste disposal	• Cleanliness of public spaces • Hygiene standards in food • Waste disposal
Cultural Activity & Experience	–	• Cultural heritage • Taste/variety of local cuisine	• Availability of other cuisines • Festivals and exhibitions availability
Welcoming & Support Staff	–	• Support from local authorities • Welcoming & friendliness of locals • Communication skills	• Welcoming & friendliness of locals • Language barriers

Theme	Analysis Approach		
	DA from IPA	DA from Gap Analysis and SPSS	DA from Utility Score
More Marketing & Smart tourism technology	–	–	• Influence of advertising • Branding or campaigns • Availability of smart tourism tools

Table 22 Integrated Approach of Destination Attributes that Monitor and Do not need Immediate attention

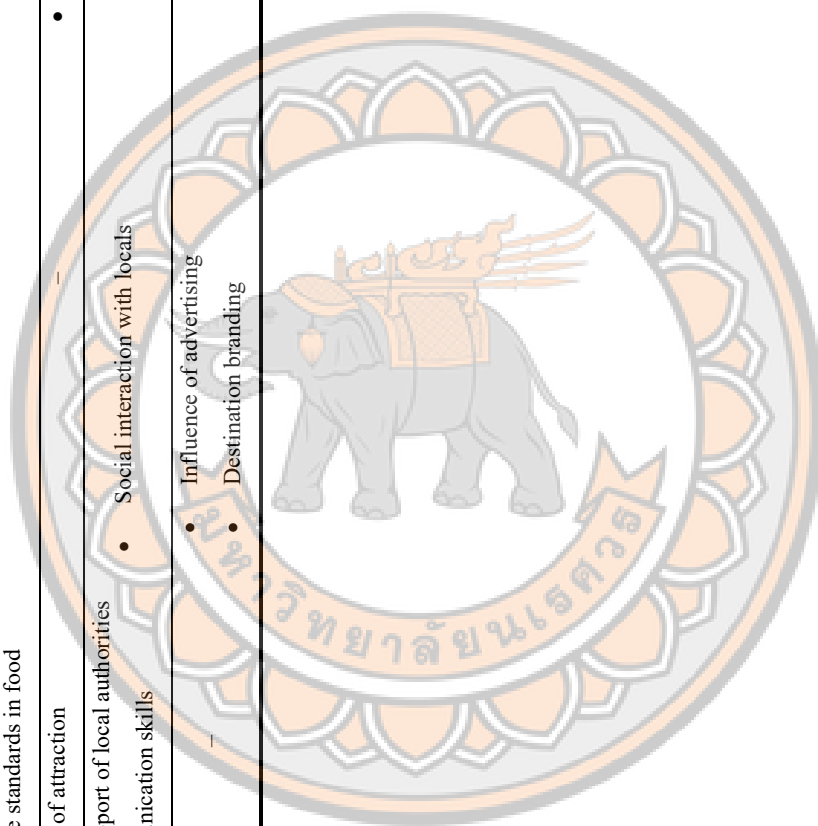
Theme	Analysis Approach		
	DA from IPA	DA from Gap Analysis and SPSS	DA from Utility Score
Supportive Tourism Environment	• Availability of signs and menus • Access to assistance • Availability of smart tourism tools	• Pre-arrival information; Smart tourism tools	• Sufficiency of pre-arrival info • Support from local authorities
Variety of Food Option	• Availability of other cuisines	• Authentic Cambodian dishes	• Trying authentic dishes
Fair Expenses & Value for tourist	–	• Reasonable transport costs • Value for souvenirs & daily expenses • Convenience of USD usage	• Reasonable transport costs • Value for expenses
Destination safety & crime concern	–	–	• Personal sense of safety • Crime rate in the area
Authorithies & Service standard	–	• Communication skills • Service quality from service staff	• Service quality from service staff • Communication skills

Theme	Analysis Approach		
	DA from IPA	DA from Gap Analysis and SPSS	DA from Utility Score
Destiantin Branding	• Branding or campaigns	• Destination branding	• Social interactions with locals
Festivals & Events availability	• Festivals and exhibitions	• Festival and exhibition availability	•
Authorities' language skill	• Language barriers	• Language barrier with locals/authorities	•
Tourist Information Access	• Accessibility of tourist information	•	•

Table 23 Integrated Approach of well-Performance Destination Attributes

Theme	Analysis Approach		
	DA from IPA	DA from Gap Analysis and SPSS	DA from IPA
Cultural & Heritage Value	• Significance Cultural & Heritage Value	• Festival and exhibition availability	• Significance of cultural heritage
Accessibility & Infrastructure	• The convenience of public facilities	• Public transport convenience • Road, airport, port quality • Ease of accessing tourist info • Availability of signs, menus	• Convenience of public facilities
Tourist's Sense of Safety & Security	• Low crime rate • Personal sense of safety • Concerns about petty theft/scams	• Crime rate in area	• Concerns about petty theft/scams
Taste & variety of Cuisines	• Taste and variety of local cuisine	• Availability of Western meals	• Taste and variety of local cuisine

Theme	Analysis Approach		
	DA from IPA	DA from Gap Analysis and SPSS	DA from IPA
	Hygiene standards in food	–	
Quality of Attraction	Quality of attraction	–	Quality of attraction
Professional & Supportive Staff	- The support of local authorities - Communication skills	Social interaction with locals	–
Destination Branding & Advertising	–	- Influence of advertising - Destination branding	–



CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter is to summarize the main results based on the research goals and talk about how the study adds to both theory and practice. This chapter not only shows the main findings, but it also suggests ways for future study to build on what is now known. The next part starts with a summary of the study results, which are organized by the three primary research goals.

This study examined international visitors' views of Cambodia's destination qualities via a mixed-methods methodology. The main goal was to find out how importance, performance and satisfaction destination qualities are, how satisfied first-time and repeat visitors are, and how to make Cambodia's destinations more competitive.

Evaluation of the Importance and Performance of Cambodia's destination attributes

The importance and performance study investigated fair tour and excursion pricing and appropriate transit expenses. Both criteria have high relevance but poor performance, indicating a mismatch between visitor expectations and experiences. This shows that Cambodia is facing price value mismatch, where visitors see excursions and transport as providing poor value. The Destination Competitiveness model of Dwyer, & Kim (2003) classifies this mismatch as "demand conditions," indicating a failure to match tourist services to visitor expectations.

Fair tour pricing implies that although visitors prioritize fair tour price, their Cambodian experiences often disappoint. Masiero, & Nicolau (2012) noted that pricing affects location choice and visitor willingness to pay for activities. Visitors are less satisfied if trips are costly for quality, inclusions, or length. Transport pricing is better than tour pricing but falls short of guest expectations for reasonable transit costs. The lack of clear pricing and tourist-targeted price inflation in tuk-tuks, taxis, and informal transfers may harm Cambodia's transportation economy. Issues such as pricing

skepticism may limit destination mobility. Mayer, & Avila (2014) propose that perceived pricing injustice elicits more negative emotions than service dissatisfaction.

Tourists' first and most frequent encounter with a location is usually transportation, which influences their value views. Research indicates that equitable transit pricing is critical. Ennew, & Binks (1999) discovered that perceived pricing justice fosters trust, whereas El Haddad et al. (2015) discovered that price fairness perceptions directly influence transport service intentions. Hensher (1998) and Alderighi et al. (2022) observe that unexpected or opaque fares may discourage use and foster distrust.

Chen, & Tsai (2007) discovered that perceived value has a strong influence on visitor behaviour, including return and referral rates. Petrick (2004) discovered that perceived value predicts repeat visits, and El Haddad et al. (2015) showed that pricing fairness has a direct impact on hospitality booking intentions and loyalty. Ennew, & Binks (1999) found that transparent and consistent pricing reduces negative perceptions and increases confidence.

Failure to resolve these price value disparities jeopardizes Cambodia's tourism industry. Assaf, & Josiassen (2012) warned that expensive or low-value destinations may experience reduced tourism performance, resulting in fewer tourists switching to cheaper destinations. Masiero, & Nicolau (2012) found that pricing influences visitors' choice of location and willingness to pay for a wide range of activities. Dwyer and Kim (2003) observed that destination competitiveness is dependent on product offerings that match customer desires. Prioritizing price fairness and value alignment for tours and transportation is critical to maintaining and expanding Cambodia's regional tourist appeal.

Cambodian tourist services, especially trips and getting around town, seem to be priced too high. This might mean that people won't come back or tell their friends about the business. Cambodia needs clear pricing structures, controlled fare systems, a range of price levels, and packaged deals that make savings clear so that perceived value and actual costs are in line with each other. Generation Z and Millennials with a median annual income make up Cambodia's tourism market. These strategies are backed by research and may help the country attract travelers on a budget and in the middle of the market.

The Differentiation of the satisfaction levels of visitors regarding Cambodia's destination attributes between First time and Repeated Visitors

The gap analysis shows first time visitors (FTV) tend to appraise Cambodia more on “access” and “convenience” attributes, if compared to repeat visitors (RPV) are more neutral, sometimes negative. For first-time visitors, the uniqueness of the trip tends to lower their standards for evaluation, making them more easily satisfied. Because their expectations are often uncertain, surprises that exceed them increase satisfaction (Oliver, 2014). People who have been to Cambodia before and other ASEAN countries judge the destination based on their previous trips, which raises standards and critical reviews (Kozak, 2001; Oppermann, 2000). According to Dwyer, & Kim (2003), this reflects demand changes. Despite the core destination product remaining unchanged, evolving reference points lead to different visitor satisfaction outcomes.

First, **“core destination value versus first-visit experience”** refers to the difference between the actual “quality of an attraction” and the way a first-time visitor experiences it. The data suggest that for FTV, encounters with Cambodia's attractions sometimes fail to deliver the anticipated “wow” factor. This usually not due to the attractions themselves but rather to how the visit is planned and presented such as limited pre visit information, unclear navigation, or visiting at crowded times (Moosavi, 2011). In contrast, RPV tend to rate these attractions more positively. Their familiarity with the sites allows them to plan better itineraries or choosing the best time of day to visit, selecting suitable interpretive materials, avoiding congestion, and aligning the visit with their own interests. This supports Chen, & Tsai (2007); Leask (2018) findings that both the quality of interpretation and the fit of the itinerary significantly influence satisfaction with heritage destinations.

Second, **“First-time and repeated food excitement”** For first-time visitors, “trying authentic Cambodian dishes” is exciting because it is new and unfamiliar. They are drawn to the uniqueness like the flavors, presentation, and cultural uniqueness all contribute to the “first-time food excitement.” Even small details, like street food stalls or the first taste of Amok curry, can feel memorable because the experience is fresh. Research on food tourism, Mak et al. (2012) shows that novelty dishes is one of the strongest drivers of initial food satisfaction for new tourists. For repeat visitors, however, the excitement of trying something completely new has usually faded. Instead,

they start to look for food improvement like better taste, more variety, higher quality, or a deeper cultural connection in the food experience. They may be less satisfied if the food options compare to their first visit or quality is inconsistent. Repeated tourists compare their current trip to their first and to food experiences in other destinations, so they expect improvement (Björk, & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Quan, & Wang, 2004). Cambodia's tourism industry must balance new and better. For example, for first-time visitors, the food should be authentic and "wow," and for returning visitors, the quality, variety, and presentation should be improved. Seasonal food festivals, chef-led takes on traditional dishes, or longer food trails in the area are some examples (Okumus et al., 2007).

Third, "**Service communication**" refers to the level of "communication skill quality" that a visitor considers "good enough". This threshold is not fixed it changes depending on the visitor's experience level with the destination. For FTV, expectations are modest as long as service staff can communicate basic information clearly such as directions, menu explanations, check-in details, or ticketing procedures since they feel reassured. This is because, on a first trip, reducing uncertainty and avoiding misunderstandings are the most important needs. The visitor is still learning about the destination, so even functional and simple communication feels adequate and satisfying (Wang, & Lopez, 2020). For RPV having already navigated the basics on previous trips, they expect service staff to move beyond transactional exchanges and deliver interpretive hospitality. In other words, while FTV want "clear and correct," RPV want "engaging and enriching." This difference is supported by service quality research showing that as customers gain more experience with a service, they tend to expect not just functional delivery but also emotional and intellectual value (Sparks, & Pan, 2009).

Forth, "**Value and Price Fairness**". For FTV, being able to use USD widely and thinking you're getting a good deal on small purchases like souvenirs or snacks make it easier for visitors to think clearly in a new place and make them feel in charge of their spending, which in turn supports a positive overall impression of the destination. This is in line with what Petrick (2004) found: perceived value is a strong predictor of initial satisfaction and intentions to buy again in tourism settings. By contrast, RPV are more price-attentive. Having prior experience, they are more likely to detect and react to price inconsistencies or signs of opportunistic pricing especially in flexible price like

tuk-tuk rides or local transport. According to Mayer and Avila (2014), perceptions of unfair could lead to negative emotional responses, because price is a tangible, easily comparable of equity in a transaction. Transaction value and price fairness. Convenience attributes linked to money such as USD usage and perceived value of small purchases are comforting for FTV. RPV, however, are more price attentive and more sensitive to fairness and consistency, especially in local transport.

Fifth, **“Information and Destination learning”**. The results show that RPV report higher utility from “availability of smart tourism tools” and “sufficient pre-arrival information” than FTV. For FTV, the most valuable resources are curated, low-friction tools that simplify the initial encounter with the destination. These include multilingual signage, straightforward maps, simple user interfaces in apps (Grab, google maps...). For RPV, the informational value changes from giving comfort to giving power. Once they know how to get around and how to get to major attractions, they want more in-depth features like advanced search filters for specific interests, interactive thematic maps (for example, street food zones and art districts), suggestions for the best time of day to avoid crowds, and news about events or transportation schedules. The experience accumulation effect, Oppermann (2000) states that returning to a place makes it easier to find things, make plans, and choose experiences. These tools support research that shows repeat visitors use information strategically to make their second or third trip different (Xiang et al., 2015).

Therefore, for first-time visitors, the data show that Cambodia excels at delivering an impressive “orientation value” the set of experiences that make a first encounter with the destination memorable, comfortable, and low in friction. Cultural events like festivals and exhibitions, along with the easy access to both traditional Cambodian food and Western food, create a balance of new and old. Signs and menus in multiple languages are easier to understand. Talking to locals also makes you feel more connected to them. A low crime rate and good roads, airports, ports, and public transport make people feel safer and more reliable. Advertising and destination branding set positive expectations before a trip. Easy-to-find tourist information encourages exploration. These qualities help first-time visitors exceed expectations, fostering loyalty and word-of-mouth advertising.

For repeat visitors have a more challenging situation. Cambodia's culture, infrastructure, and branding are still very impressive, but people have higher expectations after having been there before, which makes them less satisfied. Repeat visitors evaluate authentic Cambodian dishes, service staff communication, and price-related factors like reasonable transport costs more critically than first-timers. Repeat visitors also appreciate intelligent tourism tools and comprehensive pre-arrival information. According to the data, Cambodia still has a lot to offer tourists who come back time and time again, but if expectations are not met in terms of fair pricing, creative cuisine, and subtle service, loyalty may suffer.

The Guidelines for improving Cambodian destination attributes to enhance destination competitiveness

This part gives useful and important suggestions based on how foreign tourists rate the qualities of Cambodia as a vacation spot. The suggestions are divided into three groups: Need immediate Attention Priority for Strategic Improvement, Monitor and Modestly Improve But Do not need Immediate attention, and Suitable for Promote in Branding and Maintain Quality (see **Figure 14**). The suggestions are the result of integrated the IPA, Gap analysis and Utility score. It meant to make the destination more appealing to tourists by building on its strengths, fixing its moderate issues, and fixing its major flaws.

Furthermore, a narrative guidelines will be suggested start with the Need immediate Attention Priority for Strategic Improvement, Monitor and Modestly Improve But Do not need Immediate attention, and Suitable for Promote in Branding and Maintain Quality. These guidelines are the positive suggestions based on the integrated findings.

Need immediate Attention Priority for Strategic Improvement	Monitor and Modestly Improve But Do not need Immediate attention	Suitable for Promote in Branding and Maintain Quality
1. Affordability & Fair Values 2. Tourist Accessibility & Comfort 3. Tourist's Safety Concern 4. Cleanliness & Waste Management 5. Cultural Activity & Experience 6. Welcoming & Support Staff 7. More Marketing & smart tourism technology	1. Supportive Tourism Environment 2. Variety of Food Option 3. Fair Expenses & Value for tourist 4. Destination safety & crime concern 5. Authorities & Service standard 6. Destination Branding 7. Festivals & Events availability 8. Authorities' language skill 9. Tourist Information Access	1. Cultural & Heritage Value 2. Accessibility & Infrastructure 3. Tourist's Sense of Safety & Security 4. Taste & variety of Cuisines 5. Quality of Attraction 6. Professional and Supportive Staff 7. Destination Branding & Advertising

Figure 14 Guidelines for Enhancing Destination Competitiveness for Cambodia

Need immediate Attention Priority for Strategic Improvement

Destination competitiveness is shaped by interrelated themes, including affordability, accessibility, safety, cleanliness, cultural experiences, staff hospitality, and promotion strategies. To prioritize actions, these themes are evaluated using integrated approaches such as Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA), Gap Analysis, and Utility Scores. Within this framework, the category “Need Immediate Attention: Priority for Strategic Improvement” refers to attributes where tourist expectations are high but performance is low. These dimensions represent weaknesses that directly affect visitor satisfaction and therefore require urgent policy and management interventions.

1. Affordability & Fair Values
2. Tourist Accessibility & Comfort
3. Tourist's Safety Concern
4. Cleanliness & Waste Management

5. Cultural Activity & Experience
6. Welcoming & Support Staff
7. More Marketing & Smart Tourism Technology

Strategic Guidelines for Action

1. Affordability & Fair Values Building tourist trust is based on fair and transparent prices. Satisfaction, loyalty and repeat visitation are highly dependent on perceived value (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Pricing of transportation, accommodation and tour package should be controlled in Cambodia by use of standardized guidelines shown at airports, transport centers and online. For example, standardization of taxi prices and prices of tours that are suggested by the government reduce the cases of overcharge and enhance credibility in the destination. This could be imitated by Cambodia by implementing a national pricing transparency program with the help of QR-code fare cards and mobile verification apps.

2. Accessibility and Comfort to tourists. One of the most important sources of competitiveness is accessibility, both in infrastructure, signage, and information services. Cambodia needs to invest in road and airport infrastructure, increase multilingual signage, and come up with integrated smart tourism applications that would give maps, guides, and cultural etiquette information. For instance, in Japan, multilingual transport applications and Singapore, hassle-free airport services take care of the tourists and make their travel experience easier. Cambodia has an opportunity to launch a national smart tourism application that would combine ticket purchases, transportation, and information about attractions.

3. Tourist's Safety Concern. One of the best predictors of destination choice and satisfaction is safety (Keo & Banhidi, 2023). To make Cambodia perceived to have better security, it should employ visible security, create anti-scam awareness programs and offer tourist helplines in multiple languages. Example, Dubai maintains a tourist police force station that is available 24/7 and speaks multiple languages offering a multilingual as well as onsite services. The QR-code hotlines can be installed in tourist safety kiosk, placed at Angkor Wat, Phnom Penh and coastal centers in Cambodia.

4. Cleanliness & Waste Management. Destination image and perceived quality are determined by environmental cleanliness and hygiene (Koliotasi et al., 2023). Cambodia needs to embrace systematic waste disposal at heritage sites, street

food hygiene, and support eco tourism such as community clean up programs. A case of Clean and Green campaign in Singapore is a mixture of stringent measures against littering and active participation of the population in eco-programmes. Cambodia may also create Clean Angkor project with recycles, eco-volunteer activities and anti littering activities on tourists and locals.

5. Cultural Activity & Experience. Cambodia must not limit its product to Angkor alone but also encourage the regional festivals, food tours, and artisan workshops whereby there is the real host-guest interaction. The campaign on the Thailand region, amazing Thailand, has incorporated food, festivals, and local heritage performances as part of enhancing the culture tourism. Cambodia has the potential to establish Khmer cultural immersion packages that combine culinary tours, village homestays and traditional craft workshops.

6. Welcoming & Support Staff. Cambodia ought to promote staff communication, intercultural training and introduce hospitality excellence recognition programs at a national and community level. For instance, the Malaysia Truly Asia campaign in Malaysia requires that the front line employees be trained in hospitality and the stress is on cultural pride. Cambodia would have a Khmer Hospitality Certification program, which would be an indication of professional service and cultural authenticity.

7. More Marketing & Smart Tourism Technology. Global tourists are all about destination branding and digital interaction. To attract younger markets, Cambodia needs to invest in immensely marketing campaigns through AR/VR, influencer collaboration, and storytelling on social media. For example, in South Korea has been based on using K-pop and drama contents to reinforce cultural identity and global appeal. Cambodia has an opportunity to promote itself as part of a Digital Angkor campaign, which involves VR tours of temples, Tik Tok reels, and influencer partnerships.

Monitor and Do Not Need Immediate Attention

When evaluating destination competitiveness, all attributes do not need to be urgently enhanced. Certain themes are already doing satisfactorily well in terms of tourist expectations versus actual performance implying that tourists are mostly satisfied with the same issues of the destination experience. The category of Do Not

Need Immediate Attention is defined as attributes that can be positively related to competitiveness but do not imply any critical gaps. Although they do not necessarily require immediate strategic intervention, these dimensions still should be regularly monitored and improved by making small steps toward keeping the quality on the same level and preventing the subsequent decline. These attributes can be strengthened over time to make Cambodia a stronger competitor in the long-term and help the broader branding of Cambodia as a trustworthy and attractive destination.

1. Supportive Tourism Environment
2. Variety of Food Options
3. Fair Expenses & Value for Tourists
4. Destination Safety & Crime Concern
5. Authorities & Service Standards
6. Destination Branding
7. Festivals & Events Availability
8. Authorities' Language Skills
9. Tourist Information Access

Strategic Guidelines for Action

1. Supportive Tourism Environment. This will help visitors navigate through destinations without any fear of being lost due to clear signage, availed assistance, and intelligent tourism devices. It has been revealed that effective before arrival information and hassle-free access to services increase tourist satisfaction and help to decrease travel anxiety (Buhalis, 2000). Cambodia must further build its smart tourism ecosystem through incorporation of multilingual digital signage, travel guide applications before arrival, and live support applications. For example, travelers feel confident and navigate easier with multilingual rail applications and AI-driven information systems used to enhance smart tourism in. Cambodia might implement such a strategy using a national application named Smart Cambodia that provides transport information, cultural etiquette and emergency help.

2. Variety of Food Options. The culinary diversity is one of the significant pre-qualifiers of tourist destinations because genuine food experiences create cultural immersion and emotional bonding to destinations (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). To build a stronger competitive advantage, Cambodia needs to foster the

authentic Khmer foods by organizing culinary tours, food festivals, and collaborating with local markets and chefs. As in Singapore is home to UNESCO-designated Hawker Culture which shows how a destination brand can be built upon food heritage. To introduce local cuisine and to attract food tourists to the area, Cambodia can organize Khmer Food Festival in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap annually.

3. Fair Expenses & Value for Tourists. Perception of equity in transportation, accommodation and daily costs has direct impact on the destination image and satisfaction of the visitor on the whole (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Cambodia must make transport pricing transparent, set recommended price ranges of the souvenirs and local services and reinforce the convenience of using USD in all tourism establishments. Multi-lingual price labels, mobile payment support and price regulations provided by the government would help diminish uncertainty and boost confidence. In Vietnam, the government controls taxi prices and proposes normal pricing of souvenirs in the prime markets, and this maximizes undercharging and enhances reputation. On the same note, the tourism authority of Thailand has official estimates of transport and tour costs that it publishes online and which tourists can refer to. Cambodia can emulate such examples through the implementation of a Tourist Price Guarantee Program, suggested mobile apps based on the suggested prices of the suggested souvenirs, and encouraging the use of USD and digital wallet in more popular tourist destinations.

4. Destination Safety & Crime Concern. The strongest predictor concerning the destination choice and tourist loyalty is destination safety. Low levels of violent crime are already enjoyed in Cambodia but the country should not stop visible security, anti-scam schemes, and multilingual tourist hotlines. Example, Dubai has formed a tourist police force, which provides a multilingual 24/7 customer support, which has helped in boosting their reputation with regard to the safety of visitors. Cambodia can follow the same example and establish tourist support kiosks in Siem Reap, Phnom Penh and beaches.

5. Authorities & Service Standards. To improve the situation, Cambodia would need to increase training based on intercultural training, to implement service quality standards, and to reward excellence with a Khmer Hospitality Excellence award. Practical Case: In the case of Truly Asia campaign by Malaysia, staff training is

involved in their national branding so that the visitor experiences remain consistent. Cambodia is also capable of initiating the same program by offering compulsory frontline hospitality certification to staff.

6. Destination Branding. Cambodia ought to establish a twin-branding concept: the presence of UNESCO heritage sites along with the promotion of new experiences e.g., festivals, gastronomy, eco-tourism. Practical Case South Korea utilizes K-pop and cultural exports to draw youth tourists around the world. Cambodia has an opportunity to launch a campaign called Heritage and Modern Cambodia with VR/AR immersions of the Angkor and the advertisement of Khmer cultural festivals.

7. Festivals & Events Availability. There is some cultural immersion through festivals and events and this would ensure that the visitors would come back. Cambodia needs to increase the number of events that they have, advance bilingual marketing, and expand festivals to areas outside of Siem Reap. For instance, Amazing Thailand campaign in Thailand is a campaign that connects traditional festivals with tourism branding to promote tourism in the region. To attract seasonal visitors, Cambodia can do international marketing by encouraging Khmer New Year and Pchum Ben.

8. Authorities' language skills. The tourism authorities language competency is instrumental in minimizing cultural barriers as well as enhancing service delivery. The government of Cambodia ought to increase the level of training and training of frontline tourism personnel on the English, Chinese and Korean language, besides initiating seasonal volunteer interpreter programs. Case, Japan manages to address the language barrier by deploying volunteer language supporters at key transport centers as tourist support. The same model can be used by Cambodia by mobilizing students in universities to act as cultural ambassadors.

9. Tourist Information Access. The availability of information lowers uncertainty, improves planning, and positively influences the experience of traveling. Cambodia is advised to create centralized tourist information centers and scale up the number of QR-based information boards in the cultural sites and attractions. Practical Case: Singapore is establishing a precedent of physical tourist centers integrated with mobile applications in real-time guidance, which will serve as the example of convenient tourist information. Cambodia has the opportunity to establish a Tourist

Info Cambodia platform that would connect the official information kiosks with mobile applications.

Suitable for Promote in Branding and Maintain Quality

Not every attribute from the analysis needs to be addressed in a hurry; some of them are already satisfying or even surpassing the expectations of the tourist. These attributes are doing well and have been categorized into being suitable in Branding and Maintain Quality which implies that they are the strategic assets that lead to visitor satisfaction and add value to the tourism image of Cambodia. Such dimensions, unlike weak attributes, which require immediate consideration, serve as competitive advantages, which could be used in international branding, destination marketing and long term positioning strategies. With a strategic promotion of these assets, ensuring quality at the same time will ensure that Cambodia does not stop winning the confidence of the people, as well as coming back to partake in the same activities. Indicatively, such attributes as cultural and heritage value, safety perception, culinary diversity, and professionalism in service delivery not only enhance the on-site tourist experience, but also contribute to pre-travel decision-making and post-travel promotion through the word-of-mouth. These aspects must then be maintained, emphasized in branding, and intertwined in stories that make Cambodia more recognized as a tourist destination in the global scene.

1. Cultural & Heritage Value
2. Accessibility & Infrastructure
3. Tourist's Sense of Safety & Security
4. Taste & variety of Cuisines
5. Quality of Attraction
6. Professional & Supportive Staff
7. Destination Branding & Advertising

Strategic Guidelines for Action

1. Cultural & Heritage Value. The availability of festivals and exhibitions. The strongest asset to Cambodia is the cultural and heritage resources especially the global recognition of the Angkor Wat and other UNESCO listed sites. There are also festivals, traditional rituals and crafts, which add to the cultural activities, and provide an opportunity to immerse in tourism. Cambodia could build a Heritage conceptual

framework that would bring together regional heritage sites, performing arts and annual festivals around a consistent story. Invest in cultural storytelling campaigns through documentaries, AR/VR site tours and heritage-oriented YouTube/TikTok content. Vietnam is an excellent example of utilizing traditional festivals such as Tet to market the country as a national brand, and Japan has applied its UNESCO intangible cultural heritage to global cultural marketing. Cambodia can follow these foot steps and find value in Khmer heritage and festivals as a unique tourist attraction.

2. Accessibility & Infrastructure. Public facilities convenience such as Quality of roads, airport and ports; Easiness of access to tourist information; Signs and menus. The infrastructure and tourists information performance represents an indication of relative strength of Cambodia in comparison to its competitors in the region. Cambodia could increase existing infrastructure investments such as facilities in the airports, multilingual signs and tourist information offices. An excellent use of digital integration should be built through incorporating real-time transport updates, maps, and translation features in a national tourism app. Real-life Case Study: Singapore Changi Airport provides easy access and multilingual services, and it is always ranked the best airport in the world. Likewise, multilingual JR East transport applications in Japan render self-travelling very convenient. These best practices should be refined in Cambodia in an attempt to bring together its strengths.

3. Tourist's Sense of Safety & Security. Crime rate is low, Personally feels secure, Fears petty theft/scams. The rising safety image of Cambodia is also an asset and it should be shared during branding to minimize the adverse stereotypes. Intensify more visible but amicable safety protocols like tourism police, CCTV surveillance in tourist areas, and QR-code hotlines. To create pre-visit trust, the international marketing campaigns should incorporate safety success stories. In Dubai has set up a special tourist police that deals with multilingual services and this has greatly enhanced their image as a safe luxury destination. Cambodia can implement similar programs in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh in order to build confidence among visitors.

4. Taste & variety of Cuisines. Food and local cuisine delicacies; Hygiene in food; Availability of Western food. Food variety is becoming an increasing source of destination competitiveness, especially among millennials and returning customers (Björk, & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). The cuisine in Cambodia involves a blend of

both Khmerese and French colonial influences, which puts the country in an unmatched position in the region. Market Khmer food as a cultural identity using national Culinary Trails, who connect street food vendors, cooking schools and food markets. Conduct Khmer Food Festivals in Phnom penh, Siem Reap and Coastal cities every year. Ensure that there is a high level of hygiene in the food outlets to safeguard the destination image. For instance, the campaign of the Thais to the Thais promotions was very successful in cutting across culinary tourism by use of festivals and food tours in Thailand. Cambodia can follow suit and make cuisine a cultural and experiential property.

5. Quality of Attraction. Quality of attractions (natural, cultural, and man-made). The heritage sites, beaches and ecotourism areas of Cambodia already are already performing well but they need to be maintained to ensure that they remain competitive. Make a sustained investment in attraction maintenance, preservation and visitor management systems. Use online tools to offer 360 degree virtual tours of attractions, with emphasis on quality, accessibility, and sustainability efforts. For example, the Ban on visitor numbers and online booking tickets have helped Machu Picchu (Peru) to maintain quality of the sites as well as enhance visitor experiences. Comparable crowd management policies could be used in Cambodia at Angkor Wat.

6. Professional and Supportive Staff. local authorities; Interpersonal communication; Interpersonal socialization with locals. The supportive staff and local interaction in Cambodia have been found to be an asset that needs to be actively sustained by training and professional development. Develop a Khmer Hospitality Excellence Certification, which is a standard training in intercultural communication, customer service, and cultural storytelling. They should promote community based tourism projects in order to foster positive host-guest relationships. Example, The Malaysia Truly Asia campaign in Malaysia involved mandatory hospitality training to tourism frontliners and this improved consistency in service delivery. A similar system may be developed by Cambodia to strengthen its brand identity by professional service delivery.

7. Destination Branding/Advertising. Branding is a way of transferring good performance qualities into international awareness. The cultural legacy and the increased safety and food evolution that locals have embraced should be used as part

of the national branding strategy of Cambodia. Design a Digital Angkor branding that incorporates AR/VR tours of the temples, the influence of influencers and immersive storytelling campaigns on the international level (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok). The focus of the campaigns must be on the richness of Cambodian culture, food and friendly, safe environment. South Korea KTO (Korea Tourism Organization) used the content of K-pop and K-drama to reposition the country as a cultural destination in the world. Cambodia can do the same by emphasizing the Khmer culture using the modern narration and the use of digital technologies.

Research Limitations

Although the study offers valuable information about the perception of international tourists in the significance, input, and gratification of the destination features of Cambodia, a number of methodological and conceptual shortcomings must also be noted to put the results into perspective and to guide future research.

To start with, only international tourists who will be surveyed during the period between January and June 2025 were used. Seasonal and local bias may have been caused by this temporal scope. Also, the sample can be not representative of the variety of tourist segments (e.g., regional markets, age groups, income levels). It reduces the geographic representation and can lead to the reduction in the perception of under-visited areas, thus reducing the applicability of the results to all international tourists.

Second, despite the qualitative and quantitative methods used in the study, the quantitative survey was slightly below the suggested sample size. Of the 400 individuals who were to be used, only 372 usable responses were gathered. Although this number still creates a strong dataset to analyse, the small difference can have diminished statistical power and needs to be remembered when interpolating the findings.

Third, tourism experiences are subjective and complex in nature. Despite the research using 31 destination attributes, these dimensions are not enough in capturing the intangible, experiential, and emotional elements of the travel aspect. Tourists can develop perceptions and satisfaction based on quality of services and infrastructure, or on emotions like awe, nostalgia, or relaxation, which cannot be easily measured through a survey research.

Lastly, this study has a cross-sectional design, which means that it will only capture tourist perceptions at one time. Perceptions could change as the dynamics of tourism, infrastructure and destination marketing change. Follow-up or longitudinal studies may give more complex answers to how perception varies during the course of the time and different phases of the travel experience (e.g., pre-trip, on-site, post-trip).

All in all, these shortcomings do not nullify the results; however, it is clear that future studies should assume longitudinal designs, more diverse samples in terms of times and place, and the incorporation of both tangible and intangible elements of the travel experience, which will present a more comprehensive view of the destination competitiveness of Cambodia.

Recommendations for Future Research

To further the insights of destination competitiveness in Cambodia, various suggestions are made to future research studies, including increased sample, new methods, transnational research, and policy implications.

1. Geographic and Segment Coverage

It can be inferred that future research ought to be no longer focused on one season or one location, such as the one here, but rather focus on multi season, multi-site designs. Recording data in various tourism destinations like Siem Reap, Phnom Penh, coastal destinations like Sihanoukville, and also in selected areas of ecotourism would facilitate the identification of service quality, visitor experience, and assign value. It is also imperative to collect seasonal data because the demographics of tourists, their expectations and drivers of satisfaction may change during high and low seasons (Frechtling, 2013).

The sampling design must not be limited to on-site intercept surveys. To gauge the changes in expectations and satisfaction during the travel time, it would be practical to follow up online with returning tourists and interview potential travelers online. The group of workation travelers, digital nomads, wellness-sensitive travelers, and eco-conscious tourists is not also represented in the visitor base of Cambodia and has varying motivations and service expectations.

2. Different Methodological Approach

Mixed methods were employed in the present research; however, big data analytics have the potential to enhance validity and richness. Real-time and large-scale tourist sentiment and attribute performance can be obtained through online review, analysis of social media, and travel forums. Randomized controlled trials of tourism marketing messages, computer based itineraries and safety warnings could also connect communication plans to satisfaction.

In addition to quantitative and experimental approaches, researchers are advised to adopt an interpretive paradigm to research on the social phenomena that involve tourism. The subjective meanings and lived experiences of the participants highlighted in this paradigm form the nature of their perceptions of Cambodia as a destination. Such a standpoint would complement empirical results with the qualitative understanding of how first time and repeat visitors make evaluations of destination attributes.

3. Cross Country Study

This needs further studies in form of comparative comparisons using some standardized indicators to determine how well Cambodia has performed relative to its major rivals such as Malaysia, Vietnam as well as Indonesia in terms of its competitiveness within the ASEAN tourism market.

This will help in identification of competitive advantages and relative disadvantages, spillover effects which exist when policy alterations or crises in one destination influences the perception of others in the region. This cross-national study can be used to inform coordinated regional tourism policies and to steer the differentiation policy of Cambodia.

4. Evaluate Tourism Policy and Program Effectiveness

Tourism development projects, including infrastructure improvements, destination branding campaigns, and workforce training in the hospitality industry, need pre/ post intervention research and matched control group research to evaluate impact.

Measuring the change brought about by the intervention, both qualitative and quantitative measures are to be used together, including both local business owners and community leaders as one of the stakeholders on the one hand and pilots, scores of the satisfaction levels, and the rates of the repeat visits on the other hand.



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APPENDIX A THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTION

CONJOINT ANALYSIS OF CAMBODIA'S DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES FOR ENHANCING DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

Questionnaire objective: The goal of this step will be to identify the most important attributes from the perspective of travelers.

This is a semi-structured interview with a total of 5 questions which aim to answer research objectives in depth detail.

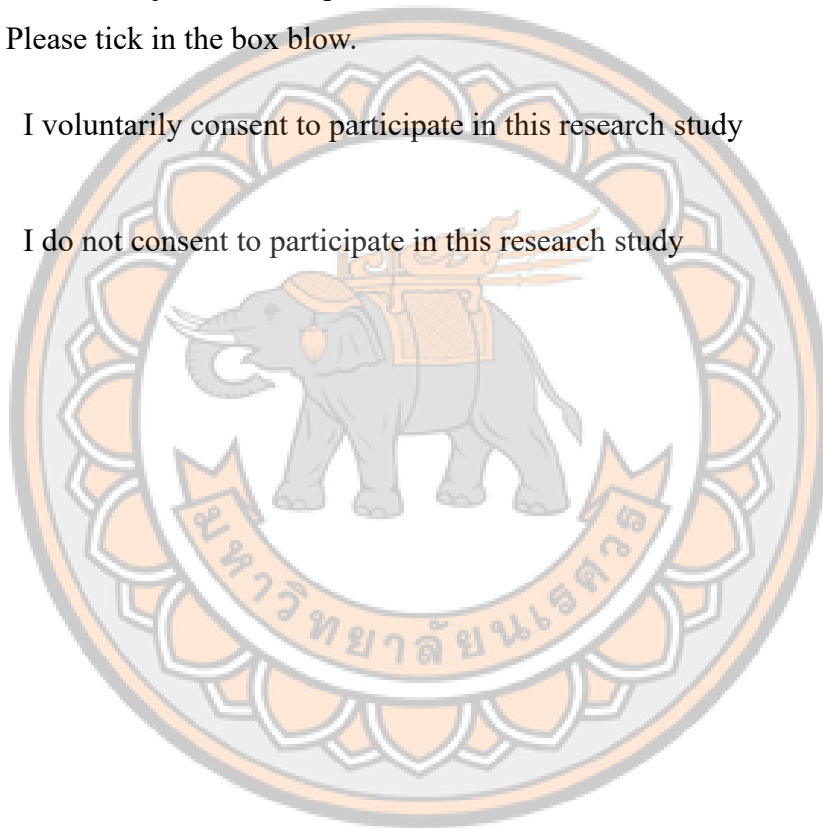
Please tick in the box below.



I voluntarily consent to participate in this research study



I do not consent to participate in this research study



Semi-structured Questionnaire

1. Travel Experience: Understand the visitor's motivation and purpose for visiting Cambodia.

Question: Why did you choose to visit Cambodia, and what was the main purpose of your trip?

2. Important Factors: Identifies factors that influenced the traveler's decision to visit, revealing the valued attributes and the reason.

Question: What factors mattered most to you when deciding to visit Cambodia? And why?

3. Visitor Experience: Assesses the performance of destination attributes that contribute to tourist satisfaction.

Question: How did you feel about the quality of things like accommodation, attractions, safety, and infrastructure during your trip?

4. Satisfaction: Evaluates the traveler's level of satisfaction with their experience and encourages suggestions for improvement.

Question: Were you happy with your experience in Cambodia? What could be improved to make it better?

5. Final Thoughts: Additional feedback, capturing unexpected insights that may influence their overall impression.

Question: Is there anything else about your trip that stood out or influenced your overall impression of Cambodia

APPENDIX B THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

A researcher is conducting this survey as part of a master's degree research in Tourism and Hospitality Management at Naresuan University, Thailand. The study is titled “**CONJOINT ANALYSIS OF CAMBODIA'S DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES FOR ENHANCING DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS**”

This survey aims to collect data to understand the importance, performance, and satisfaction levels of international tourists when visiting Cambodia. Key focus areas include **Destination Attributes, Destination Competitiveness, and Tourist Perception**. The findings aim to provide insights for policymakers, tourism managers, and academics to develop strategies for enhancing destination competitiveness in Cambodia.

We invite all international tourists to participate in this survey. Your responses will remain strictly confidential, and participation is entirely voluntary. Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes.

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Participation Guidelines:

- Please answer all questions based on your knowledge and perception.
- Your valuable opinion and participation are highly appreciated!
- Thank you again in advance for your valuable time and contribution!

Do you agree to participate in the survey?☐ Yes☐ No**Please confirm if you are 18 years old or above.**☐ Yes☐ No**SECTION I: SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC & GENERAL INFORMATION**

In this section, we kindly ask you to provide basic socio-demographic and general information by marking the box that corresponds to your appropriate answer. This information will help us better understand the profile of international tourists visiting Cambodia, offering valuable context for analyzing destination competitiveness.

1. Where are you from? _____

2. Gender

☐ Male☐ Female☐ Other (please specify) _____

3. Age

☐ 18 - 25 years☐ 26 - 35 years☐ 36 – 45 years☐ 46-55 years☐ 56 - 65 years☐ 65+ years

4. Education

☐ Doctorate☐ master's degree☐ Bachelor's degree☐ Diploma☐ Certificate☐ High school☐ Other (please specify) _____

5. Employment Status

☐ Government sector☐ Private sector☐ Business☐ Student☐ Unemployed☐ Retired☐ Other (please specify) _____

6. Average income **per year**

- ☐ Less than USD 49,000
 ☐ USD 50,000 to USD 99,000
☐ USD 100,000 to USD 149,000
 ☐ USD 150,000 +
☐ Other (please specify) _____

7. Purpose of travel to Cambodia

- ☐ Leisure, Holiday and recreation
 ☐ Business and professional
☐ Education and training
 ☐ Visiting friends and relatives
☐ Other (please specify) _____

8. Is this your first time visiting Cambodia?

- ☐ Yes, It is my first time in Cambodia.
☐ No.

If No, How many time _____

9. How to you know about Cambodia? (Can chose more than one answer)

- ☐ The internet
 ☐ Friends & relatives
 ☐ Book & guides
☐ Travel Agent
 ☐ Fairs and exhibitions
 ☐ Media
☐ Other (please specify) _____

10. Who's traveling with you to Cambodia?

- ☐ Alone
 ☐ Spouse
 ☐ Family
☐ Friends / Colleagues
 ☐ Other (please specify) _____

11. How did you get to Cambodia?

- ☐ By road
 ☐ Air
 ☐ Sea

12. Are you satisfying with your overall trip in Cambodia?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

SECTION II: INTERNATIONAL TOURIST PERCEPTION ON CAMBODIA'S DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES

In this section, we aim to explore your perceptions of Cambodia's destination attributes. Your responses will help us understand how international tourists evaluate the importance, performance, and satisfaction levels of key destination attributes when visiting Cambodia.

- **Importance** indicates how **crucial or relevant** the attribute is to you when traveling in Cambodia.
- **Performance** reflects **how well** you believe Cambodia is currently delivering or performing on the attribute.
- **Satisfaction** measures **your personal level of contentment** with each attribute based on your recent experience in Cambodia.

As you complete this section, please rate each attribute by filling the box with one number only from 1 to 5, using the following scales:

Importance: (1 = Not Important to 5 = Very Important)

Performance: (1 = Poor to 5 = Excellent)

Satisfaction: (1 = Not Satisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied)

Destination Attributes	Importance	Performance	Satisfaction
1. Quality of attraction (Natural, Cultural, historic)			
2. Festivals and exhibitions availability			
3. Significance of cultural heritage			
4. Cleanliness of public spaces			
5. Hygiene standards in food outlets/markets			
6. Waste disposal (trash bins, garbage collection)			
7. Trying authentic Cambodian dishes			
8. Taste and variety of local cuisine			
9. Availability of Western meals or other cuisine			

Destination Attributes	Importance	Performance	Satisfaction
10. Language barriers with locals, authorities			
11. Availability of signs, menus			
12. Communication skills (hostaff, tour ops)			
13. Service quality from service staff (hotels, etc.)			
14. Convenience of public transport facilities			
15. Quality of roads, airports, ports			
16. Welcoming and friendliness of locals			
17. Social interactions with locals			
18. Access to assistance (directions, etc.)			
19. Convenience of USD usage			
20. Fair pricing for tours/excursions			
21. Value for souvenirs and daily expenses			
22. Reasonable transport costs			
23. Personal sense of safety			
24. Concerns about petty theft/scam			
25. Support from local authorities			
26. Crime rate in the area			
27. Sufficiency of pre-arrival info			
28. Influence of advertising			
29. Destination branding or campaigns			
30. Ease of accessing tourist info			
31. Availability of smart tourism tools/technologies			

SECTION III: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING CAMBODIA'S TOURISM

In this section, we invite you to share your valuable insights to help enhance Cambodia's appeal as a tourist destination.

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations that you think could help attract more tourists to Cambodia?

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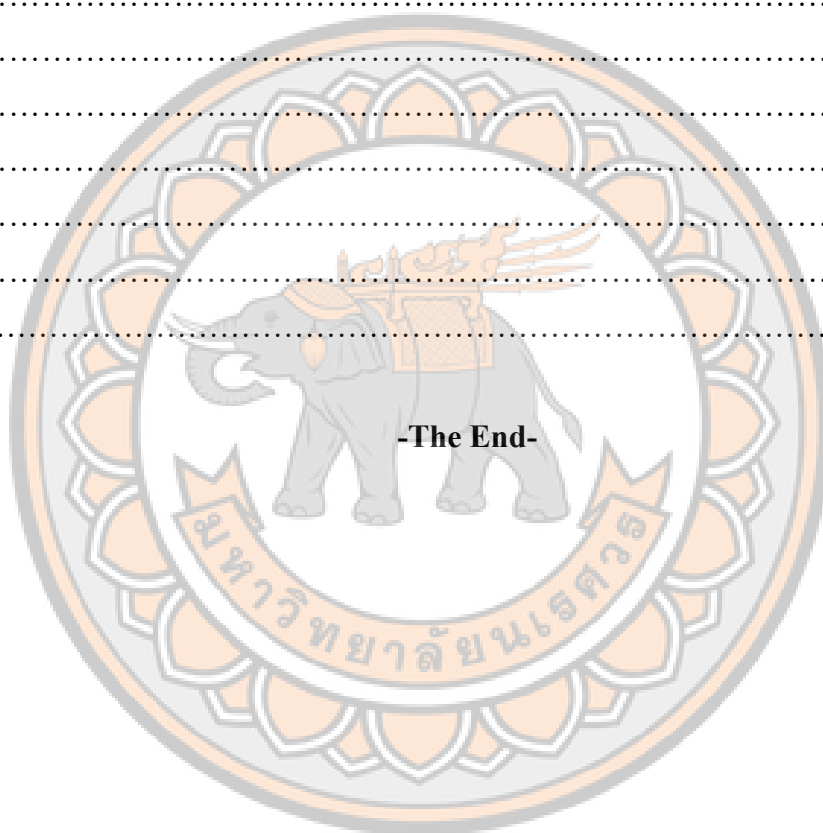
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-The End-