

Customer Journey in the Accommodation Sector

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Abstract

This study examined the customer journey in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur, Philippines, with emphasis on the major experience domains of pre-booking, booking process and interaction, arrival and check-in, accommodation, and post-stay experience and feedback. It also assessed the level of satisfaction of respondents in terms of emotional and psychological factors, identified the domain that significantly influenced overall satisfaction, explored the challenges and barriers encountered by guests, and proposed an evidence-based framework for service enhancement. The study employed an explanatory-sequential mixed methods design. Quantitative data were gathered from 399 tourists through a researcher-made questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through open-ended responses and key informant insights. Descriptive statistics, weighted mean, and multiple regression analysis were used for the quantitative phase, while Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis guided the qualitative data treatment. Findings revealed that respondents generally reported high levels of pre-booking experience, booking process and interaction, arrival and check-in experience, accommodation experience, post-stay experience and feedback, and overall satisfaction. Regression analysis showed that accommodation experience was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, followed by post-stay experience and arrival and check-in experience, while pre-booking and booking process and interaction did not significantly predict satisfaction. The qualitative findings further revealed recurring challenges and barriers related to expectation–reality gaps, pricing and payment concerns, booking system issues, operational inefficiency, and weak post-stay support. Based on these findings, the study proposed an Integrated Customer Experience Enhancement Framework centered on trust and transaction integrity in hospitality. The study contributes to hospitality research by providing localized evidence on customer journey dynamics and by offering a practical framework for strengthening customer satisfaction and loyalty in provincial accommodation settings.

Keywords: Customer Journey, Accommodation Sector, Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality, Trust and Transaction Integrity

Introduction

The customer journey in the accommodation sector refers to the complete set of experiences a guest undergoes before, during, and after a stay. Guests no longer evaluate hotels, resorts, guesthouses, and similar establishments based only on the physical room; they also consider convenience, communication, service quality, trust, comfort, accessibility, and the consistency of service across all contact points. Thus, examining the customer journey provides a broader basis for understanding how accommodation providers can meet guest expectations and improve the total guest experience. This study examines the customer journey in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur by analyzing guests' experiences across major

service experiences: pre-booking, booking process and interaction, arrival and check-in, accommodation experience, post-stay feedback, and overall satisfaction.

Recent hospitality studies show that customer experience is shaped by several connected factors across the service journey. Scholars have emphasized the role of immersion, social contact, service environment, and technology in shaping how guests evaluate hospitality services (Fan et al., 2026; Feng & Xu, 2026). Other studies have shown that smart technologies, service robots, and artificial intelligence influence customer satisfaction, acceptance, and continued engagement, although their effects differ across customer groups and service contexts (Begum et al., 2026; Cheng et al., 2026; Zhang & Li, 2026). At the same time, hospitality research also highlights that customers value not only speed and efficiency but also respect, authenticity, trust, emotional comfort, and meaningful interaction with service providers (Hitti & Ramadan, 2026; Zhang et al., 2026). These findings suggest that the customer journey in accommodation is not a simple sequence of transactions but an integrated experience shaped by human and technological encounters.

Although Philippine tourism continues to recover, accommodation services still face recurring customer experience issues. In 2024, tourism contributed 8.9% to the Philippine economy, highlighting its strong economic importance (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2025). However, studies on Philippine hotels report common guest concerns involving housekeeping, reliability, facility conditions, staff responsiveness, and the credibility of online information (Impa et al., 2023; Lalunio, 2022). Sese and Cabuang (2022) further found 164 complaints from 85 negative reviews of DOT-accredited hotels and resorts in Baguio City, with only 62.20% receiving managerial responses. These concerns show that problems occur across the customer journey from expectation formation and booking to actual stay and post-stay engagement, making this study in Surigao del Sur necessary.

This study contributes theoretically by viewing the customer journey as an integrated experience across pre-booking, booking, arrival, accommodation, post-stay feedback, and satisfaction. Practically, it provides evidence-based insights for improving service quality, digital booking, staff interaction, facility readiness, pricing transparency, and post-stay engagement. Locally, it supports accommodation providers, LGUs, tourism offices, and stakeholders in Surigao del Sur in strengthening guest satisfaction, destination competitiveness, and sustainable tourism development.

Theoretical Framework

This study advances the claim that customer satisfaction and loyalty in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur are shaped by the quality of the guest experience across the full customer journey pre-booking, booking, arrival and check-in, accommodation, and post-stay. In other words, guests do not judge an accommodation establishment based only on one service encounter or on physical amenities alone. Their overall evaluation develops through a series of connected experiences before, during, and after the stay. This position is consistent with the customer experience perspective, which explains that customer experience is formed across multiple experiences in the customer journey rather than at a single moment only. Recent hospitality studies also show that hotel experience is influenced by the combined effects of service encounters, digital interaction, physical environment, and communication with guests.

The main theory of the study is the customer experience perspective of Lemon and Verhoef (2016). This perspective explains that customer experience includes the customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory, and social responses throughout the journey. It is the most appropriate anchor for the present study because the study examines how guests experience accommodation services from the time they

search and book up to the time they evaluate the stay afterward. The theory supports the view that the five domains of the customer journey should be understood as one connected process of experience formation. More recent studies in hospitality strengthen this explanation. Cheng et al. (2026) show that hotel customer experience is multidimensional and increasingly shaped by interconnected service and technology encounters, while Feng and Xu (2026) explain that immersion in tourism and hospitality emerges from integrated experiences rather than isolated interactions. Bonfanti et al. (2021) likewise show that hotels actively design both physical and digital experiences to shape the intended customer experience.

The Servicescape Model of Bitner (1992) explains the role of the physical environment in shaping guest perceptions and responses. This theory holds that the service setting influences how customers feel, think, and behave. In the accommodation sector, this includes cleanliness, room condition, layout, ambience, signage, and amenities. These are especially important during arrival and check-in and during the actual stay, because guests often use physical cues to judge comfort, trustworthiness, and service quality. Recent hospitality studies continue to support the importance of servicescape. Li et al. (2021) found that servicescape elements influence customer engagement in hotels through the value guests perceive from the environment. Nanu et al. (2024) also report that the physical environment continues to have a strong effect on guest experience in hospitality research, while Bonfanti et al. (2021) show that hotels redesign physical and service environments to create reassurance and improve customer experience. Thus, the Servicescape Model helps explain why the quality of the accommodation environment remains central to guest satisfaction.

The Theory of Planned Behavior of Ajzen (1991) explains the behavioral side of the study. According to this theory, behavior is influenced by intention, and intention is shaped by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. In accommodation services, this helps explain why customers decide to book, revisit, recommend, or avoid a property. Their actions are affected by how they evaluate the accommodation, what they hear from other people, and whether they feel confident and able to make the booking or travel decision. This theory is especially useful for understanding the pre-booking, booking, and loyalty-related stages of the customer journey. Recent hospitality research supports this application. Yeh et al. (2021) used the Theory of Planned Behavior to explain green hotel consumption intention and found that attitudes and perceived behavioral control significantly shape hotel choice intention. This supports the idea that positive guest experiences can translate into stronger revisit and recommendation intentions.

The Expectation-Confirmation Theory of Oliver (1980) explains how satisfaction is formed through the comparison between expectations and actual performance. Customers enter a service encounter with expectations, and satisfaction occurs when the actual experience confirms or exceeds those expectations. Dissatisfaction happens when the experience falls short. This theory is highly relevant to accommodation because guests already form expectations before arrival through advertisements, prices, ratings, reviews, photos, and prior experiences. These expectations are then tested during the stay and later reflected in satisfaction and revisit intention. Recent hospitality studies support this logic. Tiwari and Mishra (2023) found that pre-stay expectations can affect during-stay confirmation, satisfaction, and revisit intention in hotel settings. Tran et al. (2025) also found that satisfaction with hotel responses to online reviews improves perceived service quality and intent to stay. These studies strengthen the argument that guest satisfaction is not random; it develops through the confirmation or non-confirmation of expectations across the journey.

Taken together, these theories provide a coherent explanation for the customer journey in the accommodation sector. The customer experience perspective explains why the journey must be examined as a whole. The Servicescape Model explains how the physical environment affects guest responses. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how those responses influence future intentions such as booking, revisiting, and recommending. The Expectation-Confirmation Theory explains how satisfaction results from the comparison between expected and actual experience. Therefore, the study is theoretically grounded on the proposition that overall satisfaction and loyalty are cumulative outcomes of guest experiences across the five domains of the customer journey, and that improvements in any one domain are most meaningful when viewed as part of the total guest experience. Recent accommodation research also supports the idea that both cognitive and emotional cues across the stay contribute to behavioral intentions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed the Explanatory-Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design, a design in which quantitative data are collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data that help explain, clarify, or elaborate the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006). This design was appropriate for the present study because it first established the extent of customer journey experiences, the level of satisfaction, and the domain that greatly influenced the overall satisfaction of respondents in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur. After the quantitative findings were obtained, qualitative data were gathered to provide deeper explanation of the challenges, barriers, and personal insights of the respondents regarding their accommodation experiences. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explain that this design is appropriate when qualitative follow-up is needed to interpret or explain statistical results, while Ivankova et al. (2006) describe it as a two-phase approach in which the second phase builds directly on the results of the first.

In the quantitative phase, the study used a structured survey questionnaire to gather data on the five domains of the customer journey, namely pre-booking, booking, arrival and check-in, accommodation, and post-stay experience, as well as the respondents' level of satisfaction in terms of emotional and psychological factors. The quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and regression analysis. In explanatory-sequential design, the quantitative phase is conducted first because it provides the general results, trends, or relationships that serve as the basis for the next qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006).

In the qualitative phase, open-ended questions were used to gather further explanation regarding the challenges and barriers experienced by the respondents. These responses were examined after the quantitative results had been analyzed so that they could explain, support, and deepen the interpretation of the statistical findings. This sequence reflects the logic of explanatory-sequential design, in which the qualitative phase is connected to the quantitative results and is used to provide a clearer understanding of the meaning behind the numerical patterns observed in the study (Ivankova et al., 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The use of the explanatory-sequential mixed methods research design made the study more comprehensive. The quantitative phase provided the general picture of customer journey experiences and satisfaction, while the qualitative phase offered supporting explanations for the statistical results. Through this design, the study was able to present both measurable patterns and deeper respondent insights, thereby

strengthening the interpretation of findings and providing a clearer basis for the proposed output of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006).

Research Locale and Participants

The study was conducted in the Province of Surigao del Sur, located in the Caraga Region in northeastern Mindanao, Philippines. The province is recognized for its natural and eco-tourism assets, including coastal destinations, waterfalls, caves, rivers, marine ecosystems, and island-based attractions. These resources make tourism an important contributor to local economic activity, particularly in generating demand for accommodation, food services, transportation, tour operations, and other support enterprises.

Specifically, the study covered the municipalities of San Agustin, Cagwait, Hinatuan, Barobo, and Cantilan. These municipalities were selected because they represent active tourism areas in the province and have accommodation establishments that serve both local and visiting travelers. Their inclusion provided a practical setting for examining customer experiences in actual lodging environments.

San Agustin and Cagwait are known for coastal and beach-related tourism activities, which create demand for resorts and short-stay accommodations. Hinatuan is one of the more recognized tourism destinations in Surigao del Sur because of its popular natural attractions and regular visitor flow. Barobo also contributes to provincial tourism through its coastal resources and local tourism sites, while Cantilan serves as a tourism and transit area in the northern part of the province.

The selection of these five municipalities allowed the study to capture customer journey experiences across different tourism settings within Surigao del Sur. These areas provided relevant data on how travelers experience the different stages of accommodation service, including pre-booking, booking, arrival and check-in, actual stay, and post-stay feedback. Therefore, the locale was appropriate for assessing the condition of the accommodation sector and for developing a framework to improve customer experience and service quality.

The respondents of the study consisted of tourists who stayed in accommodation establishments in Surigao del Sur from March to June 2025. These respondents included guests who had stayed in hotels, resorts, inns, guesthouses, and other lodging establishments located in the selected municipalities of San Agustin, Cagwait, Hinatuan, Barobo, and Cantilan. From a total tourist population of 118,803, a sample of 399 respondents was determined and selected through stratified sampling to ensure proportional representation from the covered municipalities. This sampling technique was considered appropriate because the respondents came from different municipalities with varying tourist volumes, and stratification allowed the researcher to obtain a more balanced and representative distribution of participants across the study areas.

In addition to the survey respondents, the study also included 25 key informants, with four (4) key informants from each municipality. The key informants were selected through purposive sampling, since they were chosen based on their direct knowledge, actual experience, and involvement as visiting tourists in the accommodation establishments during the actual conduct of the survey.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to address the objectives and variables identified in the study. It was composed of eight major parts corresponding to the stages of the customer journey and the variables under investigation.

The first part covered the pre-booking experience, particularly website usability, marketing strategies, pri-

ce transparency, online reviews, and promotional offers. The second part dealt with the booking process and interaction, including booking interface design, payment options, and booking system reliability. The third part covered the arrival and check-in experience in terms of staff interaction, waiting time, and ease of access. The fourth part examined the accommodation experience, specifically room quality, amenities, cleanliness, staff service, and in-house facilities. The fifth part evaluated the post-stay experience and feedback, including post-stay communication, check-out process, loyalty programs, and follow-up surveys. The sixth part measured the level of satisfaction in terms of emotional and psychological factors. The seventh part consisted of open-ended questions intended to identify the challenges and barriers experienced by respondents and to gather their suggestions and recommendations regarding their accommodation experiences.

The inclusion of open-ended questions was important because it allowed the respondents to freely express their views, concerns, and personal experiences beyond the fixed responses provided in the closed-ended items. While the closed-ended questions generated measurable quantitative data on the extent of customer journey experiences and the level of satisfaction, the open-ended questions provided qualitative insights that helped explain the difficulties, issues, and service gaps encountered by the respondents. These responses were useful in enriching the interpretation of the quantitative findings and in identifying practical concerns that may not be fully captured through scale-based items alone.

Each closed-ended item in the questionnaire was rated using a five-point Likert scale, where 5 corresponded to Strongly Agree, 4 to Agree, 3 to Neutral, 2 to Disagree, and 1 to Strongly Disagree. This response format enabled the researcher to quantify the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of the respondents in a consistent and interpretable manner. For purposes of data interpretation, the following scale ranges were used: 4.21–5.00 for Strongly Agree, 3.41–4.20 for Agree, 2.61–3.40 for Neutral, 1.81–2.60 for Disagree, and 1.00–1.80 for Strongly Disagree. This scale provided a standardized basis for analyzing the level and extent of the variables under study.

Data Collection Procedure

The data gathering procedure was conducted in a systematic, sequential, and ethical manner to ensure the accuracy, completeness, and credibility of the data. Since the study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, data collection was undertaken in two connected phases. The first phase involved quantitative data collection through a structured survey questionnaire, while the second phase involved qualitative data collection through open-ended responses to explain and enrich the numerical findings.

The researcher secured the required institutional and local permissions before the conduct of the study. A formal request was submitted to the Graduate School of North Eastern Mindanao State University for approval. Afterward, permission letters were forwarded to the concerned municipal officials, local tourism offices, and managers or owners of accommodation establishments in San Agustin, Cagwait, Hinatuan, Barobo, and Cantilan. This step ensured proper coordination, legitimacy, and access to the target respondents.

The researcher finalized the validated questionnaire and prepared it for online administration through Google Forms. The instrument contained sections on pre-booking experience, booking process and interaction, arrival and check-in experience, accommodation experience, post-stay experience and feedback, level of satisfaction, and challenges and barriers. The closed-ended items generated quantitative data using a five-point Likert scale, while the open-ended items gathered qualitative responses on actual experiences, difficulties, and suggestions.

The researcher identified qualified respondents based on the study's inclusion criteria. The respondents were travelers who had experienced staying in accommodation establishments within the selected municipalities during the period covered by the study. The survey link was distributed through appropriate digital channels such as email, social media platforms, travel-related online groups, and coordination with local tourism stakeholders and accommodation establishments.

Then, before answering the questionnaire, respondents were presented with an informed consent statement. The statement explained the purpose of the study, nature of participation, estimated time required, use of data, and assurance of confidentiality. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Only those who agreed to the consent statement were allowed to proceed.

The researcher monitored the submission of responses until the required number of valid responses was reached. Responses submitted through Google Forms were automatically recorded and later reviewed for completeness, consistency, and eligibility. Incomplete, duplicate, or invalid responses were excluded from the final dataset. After screening, 399 valid responses were retained for quantitative analysis, while open-ended responses were compiled separately for qualitative analysis.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected from respondents through survey and interview were organized, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and qualitative analysis to address the research questions.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the respondents' characteristics and experiences. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the extent of respondents' experiences and satisfaction across the different stages of the customer journey, including pre-booking, booking process, arrival and check-in, accommodation experience, post-stay experience, and overall satisfaction (Statement of the Problem Nos. 1–6).

To determine which domain significantly influences overall satisfaction, multiple regression analysis was employed. This technique identified the relative influence of the five customer journey domains pre-booking, booking, arrival and check-in, accommodation, and post-stay experiences on the overall satisfaction of tourists (Statement of the Problem No. 7)

Results

The results present and analyze the data gathered from the respondents, describing their customer journey experiences in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur.

Extent of Pre-Booking Experience

Table 1 presents the extent of the pre-booking experience of the respondents in terms of website usability, marketing strategies, price transparency, online reviews, and promotional offers.

Table 1: Extent of Pre-Booking Experience of the Respondents

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description
Website Usability	4.11	High Pre-Booking Experience
Marketing Strategies	4.10	High Pre-Booking Experience
Price Transparency	4.09	High Pre-Booking Experience
Online Reviews	4.13	High Pre-Booking Experience

Promotional Offers	4.10	High Pre-Booking Experience
Grand Mean	4.11	High Pre-Booking Experience

Among the indicators, Online Reviews obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.13, interpreted as high pre-booking experience. This indicates that online reviews were the strongest contributor to the respondents’ pre-booking experience. The finding suggests that travelers gave considerable importance to the comments, ratings, and feedback of previous guests in forming their initial perceptions and booking decisions. This implies that customer-generated content plays a crucial role in building trust and confidence among prospective guests. For accommodation providers, this means that maintaining a positive online reputation and encouraging satisfied guests to share their feedback may strengthen customer confidence and improve booking intention. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that digital feedback, re-engagement, and customer response systems influence perceived service quality and customer decision-making in hospitality settings (Tran et al., 2026; Cheng et al., 2026; Feng & Xu, 2026).

On the other hand, Price Transparency registered the lowest weighted mean of 4.09, which is likewise interpreted as high pre-booking experience. Although still positive, this indicates that price transparency was the least strong aspect among the pre-booking indicators. This may imply that some respondents found room rates, charges, or cost-related information slightly less clear compared with website usability, marketing strategies, online reviews, and promotional offers. The result suggests that accommodation establishments may still improve the way they present prices, inclusions, and possible additional charges in their websites and promotional materials. Clearer and more transparent pricing may reduce customer uncertainty, improve perceptions of fairness, and strengthen trust during the early stage of the customer journey. This implication is supported by studies emphasizing that customer expectations are formed through available pre-service information, including digital representations, price-related cues, and other online signals before actual service consumption (Mishra et al., 2023).

As presented in Table 1, the respondents had a high pre-booking experience, as indicated by the grand mean of 4.11. This finding shows that, in general, the respondents positively experienced the pre-booking stage of the customer journey, suggesting that accommodation establishments in Surigao del Sur were generally effective in providing useful information, visible promotions, and accessible digital experiences before the actual booking and stay. This result implies that the pre-booking stage already serves as a favorable starting point in shaping customers’ first impressions and expectations. This supports the view that customer experience begins even before the actual service encounter and is influenced by early experiences such as digital communication, information quality, and online interaction (Feng & Xu, 2026;).

Level of Ease and Efficiency of Booking Process and Interaction

Table 2 presents the level of ease and efficiency of the booking process and interaction of the respondents in terms of booking interface design, payment options, and booking system reliability.

Table 2: Level of Ease and Efficiency of Booking Process and Interaction

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Booking Interface Design	4.15	High Level of Ease and Efficiency

Payment Options	4.08	High Level of Ease and Efficiency
Booking System Reliability	4.09	High Level of Ease and Efficiency
Grand mean	4.11	High Level of Ease and Efficiency

Among the indicators, Booking Interface Design obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.15, interpreted as high level of ease and efficiency of booking process and interaction. This shows that the respondents gave the most favorable assessment to the design, structure, and user-friendliness of the booking platform. The result implies that accommodation establishments were generally successful in presenting booking systems that were easy to understand and navigate. This is an important finding because a clear and convenient interface can reduce customer effort, improve transaction confidence, and support successful booking completion. In practical terms, this suggests that accommodation providers should continue improving the layout, clarity, and accessibility of their reservation platforms to maintain a positive booking experience. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing that digital interaction and system design significantly shape customer experience in hospitality settings (Begum et al., 2026; Zhang & Li, 2026).

On the other hand, Payment Options registered the lowest weighted mean of 4.08, which is still interpreted as high level of ease and efficiency of booking process and interaction. Although the result remains positive, it indicates that payment options were the least strong aspect of the booking process among the indicators presented. This may imply that some respondents found the available payment methods less flexible or less convenient compared with the booking interface and system reliability. The implication of this finding is that accommodation establishments may need to expand and improve their payment channels by offering more accessible, secure, and user-friendly payment methods. Doing so may further strengthen customer convenience and reduce possible hesitation during the booking process. This is relevant because ease of transaction and perceived convenience are important factors in customer evaluation of booking systems and service technologies (Hitti & Ramadan, 2026)

As shown in Table 2, the respondents had a high level of ease and efficiency of booking process and interaction, as reflected in the grand mean of 4.11. This indicates that, in general, the respondents positively assessed the booking stage of their customer journey in the accommodation sector. The result suggests that the accommodation establishments were generally able to provide booking processes that were convenient, understandable, and dependable for the respondents. This finding implies that the booking stage served as an effective transition from pre-booking interest to actual reservation, thereby supporting a positive customer experience before arrival. This supports the view that booking-related interactions are important experiences in hospitality because they influence customer confidence, convenience, and early service evaluation (Park and Kim (2025).

Extent of Arrival and Check-In Experience of the Respondents

Table 3 presents the extent of arrival and check-in experience of the respondents in terms of staff interaction, waiting time, and ease of access.

Among the indicators, Staff Interaction obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.12, interpreted as high arrival and check-in experience. This indicates that the respondents gave the most favorable assessment to the way staff communicated and interacted with them during arrival and check-in.

Table 3: Extent of Arrival and Check-In Experience of the Respondents

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Staff Interaction	4.12	High Arrival and Check-In Experience
Waiting Time	4.06	High Arrival and Check-In Experience
Ease of Access	4.05	High Arrival and Check-In Experience
Grand mean	4.08	High Arrival and Check-In Experience

The result implies that staff courtesy, responsiveness, and professionalism were among the strongest aspects of the respondents’ early service experience. This is a positive finding because human interaction remains a major element of hospitality service, especially during the first point of personal contact. The implication of this result is that accommodation establishments should continue strengthening frontline staff performance through customer service training, courtesy, and responsiveness, since positive staff interaction can create a welcoming atmosphere and enhance guest satisfaction from the very beginning of the stay (Zhang, Wu, & Liu, 2026).

On the other hand, Ease of Access registered the lowest weighted mean of 4.05, which is still interpreted as high arrival and check-in experience. Although the result remains favorable, it indicates that ease of access was the least strong among the indicators in this domain. This may imply that some respondents experienced minor difficulty in locating, reaching, or entering the accommodation establishments compared with their assessment of staff interaction and waiting time. The finding suggests that accommodation providers may improve physical accessibility, directional signage, entrance convenience, and location information to make access easier for guests. Strengthening this aspect may reduce inconvenience upon arrival and improve the overall first impression of the establishment. This implication is consistent with the view that customer experience is influenced not only by staff service but also by the design and convenience of the service environment (Zhang & Li, 2026).

As reflected in Table 3, the respondents had a high arrival and check-in experience, as indicated by the grand mean of 4.08. This result shows that, in general, the respondents positively assessed their experience upon arriving at and checking in to the accommodation establishments. It suggests that the accommodation providers were generally able to deliver acceptable service during the initial on-site stage of the customer journey. This finding is important because arrival and check-in serve as the first direct encounter between the guest and the establishment, and this stage often shapes the guest’s first physical impression of the service. A favorable arrival and check-in experience may therefore help strengthen customer comfort, confidence, and readiness for the rest of the stay (Feng & Xu, 2026).

Extent of Accommodation Experience of the Respondents

Table 4 presents the extent of accommodation experience of the respondents in terms of room quality, amenities, cleanliness, staff service, and in-house facilities.

Table 4: Extent of Accommodation of Experience of the Respondents

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Room Quality	4.04	High Accommodation Experience

Amenities	4.13	High Accommodation Experience
Cleanliness	4.16	High Accommodation Experience
Staff Service	4.03	High Accommodation Experience
In-house Facilities	4.22	Very High Accommodation Experience
Grand Mean	4.12	High Accommodation Experience

Among the indicators, In-house Facilities obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.22, interpreted as very high accommodation experience. This indicates that the respondents gave the most favorable assessment to the facilities available within the accommodation establishments. The result implies that the presence, accessibility, and usefulness of in-house facilities contributed strongly to the respondents’ positive accommodation experience. This suggests that facilities such as dining areas, lounges, recreational spaces, and other service-related amenities may have enhanced guest comfort and convenience during their stay. In practical terms, this means that accommodation providers may continue investing in the improvement and maintenance of in-house facilities, since these appear to be one of the strongest contributors to customer satisfaction during the stay. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing that hospitality experience is shaped by the overall service environment, physical setting, and the integrated quality of amenities and facilities available to guests (Wang et al. (2025).

On the other hand, Staff Service registered the lowest weighted mean of 4.03, interpreted as high accommodation experience. Although still favorable, this indicates that staff service was the least strong among the indicators under accommodation experience. This may imply that while respondents were generally satisfied with the service given by staff, there may still be room for improvement in terms of responsiveness, attentiveness, courtesy, or consistency of service during the stay. The implication of this finding is that accommodation establishments may further strengthen staff development through customer service training, service monitoring, and reinforcement of hospitality standards. Since human interaction remains a key part of the guest experience, improving staff service may further raise the quality of accommodation experience and contribute to stronger customer satisfaction and loyalty. This is supported by studies showing that service interaction, social contact, and customer treatment remain central elements in shaping hospitality experience and guest evaluation (Liu, 2026).

As shown in Table 4, the respondents had a high accommodation experience, as reflected in the grand mean of 4.12. This indicates that, in general, the respondents positively evaluated their actual stay in the accommodation establishments. The result suggests that the core service experience of the respondents was generally favorable, particularly in terms of the physical and service-related aspects of their stay. Since accommodation experience represents the central stage of the customer journey, this finding implies that the establishments were generally able to provide acceptable standards of comfort, convenience, and service during the actual stay. This supports the view that the accommodation stage is a major basis of customer evaluation because it is where the service promise is most directly experienced and assessed by guests (Verma and Chandra (2024); Zhang & Li, 2026).

Extent of Post-Stay Experience and Feedback of the Respondents

Table 5 presents the extent of post-stay experience and feedback of the respondents in terms of post-stay communication, check-out process, loyalty programs, and follow-up surveys.

Table 5: Extent of Post-Stay Experience and Feedback of the Respondents

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Post-Stay Communication	4.12	High Post-Stay Experience and Feedback
Check-Out Process	4.13	High Post-Stay Experience and Feedback
Loyalty Programs	4.16	High Post-Stay Experience and Feedback
Follow-Up Surveys	4.22	Very High Post-Stay Experience and Feedback
Grand Mean	4.16	High Post-Stay Experience and Feedback

Among the indicators, Follow-Up Surveys obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.22, interpreted as very high post-stay experience and feedback. This indicates that follow-up surveys were the strongest aspect of the respondents’ post-stay experience. The finding implies that respondents highly appreciated being given the opportunity to express their opinions and evaluate their stay after leaving the accommodation establishment. This suggests that follow-up surveys may strengthen customer engagement and make guests feel that their feedback is valued. In practical terms, accommodation providers may continue using and improving follow-up survey systems as a way of collecting customer insights, identifying service gaps, and sustaining communication with guests. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that post-consumption interaction, re-engagement, and customer response systems can shape perceived service quality and future customer behavior in hospitality settings (Tran et al., 2026).

On the other hand, Post-Stay Communication registered the lowest weighted mean of 4.12, interpreted as high post-stay experience and feedback. Although still favorable, this indicates that post-stay communication was the least strong among the indicators under this domain. This may imply that some respondents perceived the communication they received after their stay as less consistent, less timely, or less meaningful compared with check-out process, loyalty programs, and follow-up surveys. The implication of this finding is that accommodation establishments may improve the quality of their post-stay communication by making it more personalized, timely, and relevant to the guest’s experience. Strengthening this aspect may help maintain customer connection after departure and may improve the likelihood of repeat patronage and positive word of mouth. This is supported by studies emphasizing that customer experience in hospitality is influenced by how service providers continue interaction and demonstrate customer respect even after the actual stay has ended (Hitti & Ramadan, 2026).

As shown in Table 5, the respondents had a high post-stay experience and feedback, as reflected in the grand mean of 4.16. This indicates that, in general, the respondents positively assessed the post-stay stage of their customer journey. The result suggests that accommodation establishments were generally effective in maintaining communication, managing guest departure, offering loyalty-related benefits, and gathering customer feedback after the stay. This finding implies that the post-stay stage was not merely an ending phase, but an important continuation of the customer experience that may influence guests’ overall satisfaction, memory of the stay, and future behavioral intentions. This supports the view that hospitality experience extends beyond actual service consumption and continues through re-engagement, response systems, and relationship-building efforts (Fan et al., 2026).

Level of Satisfaction of the Respondents

Table 6 presents the level of satisfaction of the respondents in terms of emotional factors and psychological factors.

Table 6: Level of Satisfaction of the Respondents

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Revised Verbal Description
Emotional Factors		
My stay at the hotel made me feel valued and respected.	4.22	Very High Level of Satisfaction
I felt a sense of relaxation and comfort during my stay.	4.22	Very High Level of Satisfaction
The overall ambiance of the hotel contributed to my enjoyment.	4.11	High Level of Satisfaction
The hospitality of the staff positively impacted my experience.	4.12	High Level of Satisfaction
I would recommend this hotel based on my emotional satisfaction.	4.21	Very High Level of Satisfaction
Mean	4.17	High Level of Satisfaction
Psychological Factors		
The hotel met my expectations regarding safety and security.	4.14	High Level of Satisfaction
I felt a sense of trust in the hotel’s services.	4.12	High Level of Satisfaction
My experience at the hotel reduced my travel-related stress.	4.17	High Level of Satisfaction
The hotel's environment promoted a positive mental state.	4.20	High Level of Satisfaction
I would confidently book this hotel again based on my psychological satisfaction.	4.08	High Level of Satisfaction
Mean	4.14	High Level of Satisfaction
Grand Mean	4.16	High Level of Satisfaction

For the two major dimensions, emotional factors obtained a mean of 4.17, while psychological factors registered a mean of 4.14, both interpreted as high level of satisfaction. This shows that the respondents were slightly more satisfied in the emotional dimension than in the psychological dimension. The implication is that the accommodation experience was somewhat stronger in making guests feel valued, comfortable, and emotionally pleased than in shaping deeper cognitive judgments such as confidence to rebook, trust, and mental assurance. Still, the closeness of the two means indicates that both dimensions contributed consistently to the respondents’ overall satisfaction. This affirms the idea that hospitality satisfaction is not limited to functional performance alone but also includes how the service affects the guest emotionally and mentally throughout the stay (Hitti & Ramadan, 2026).

Under emotional factors, the highest results were “My stay at the hotel made me feel valued and respected” and “I felt a sense of relaxation and comfort during my stay,” both with a weighted mean of 4.22, interpreted as a very high level of satisfaction. These findings imply that the strongest emotional outcomes of the respondents’ stay were feelings of personal worth, respect, comfort, and relaxation. This suggests that the accommodation establishments were generally effective in creating a welcoming and emotionally

supportive environment for their guests. Such results are important because feeling valued and comfortable is central to hospitality, and these responses may strengthen favorable impressions, intention to return, and positive word of mouth. In contrast, the lowest result under emotional factors was “The overall ambiance of the hotel contributed to my enjoyment,” with a weighted mean of 4.11, still interpreted as a high level of satisfaction. Although still positive, this suggests that ambiance was the least strong emotional contributor among the listed indicators. The implication is that some accommodation establishments may still improve environmental design, atmosphere, and sensory appeal to further enhance guest enjoyment. Recent hospitality studies support the importance of emotional experience, social interaction, and environmental quality in shaping guest satisfaction (Feng & Xu, 2026; Zhang & Li, 2026).

Under psychological factors, the highest result was “The hotel’s environment promoted a positive mental state,” with a weighted mean of 4.20, interpreted as a high level of satisfaction. This implies that the hotel environment helped respondents feel mentally at ease and psychologically positive during their stay. The finding suggests that the physical and service environment of the accommodation establishments contributed to reassurance and mental comfort, which are important aspects of psychological satisfaction. On the other hand, the lowest result was “I would confidently book this hotel again based on my psychological satisfaction,” with a weighted mean of 4.08, also interpreted as a high level of satisfaction. Although the result remains favorable, it indicates that repeat-booking confidence was the weakest psychological indicator. This may imply that while respondents were generally satisfied, some still needed stronger assurance before fully committing to future repeat booking. The implication of this finding is that accommodation providers may further strengthen consistency of service, trust-building, and memorable guest value in order to convert satisfaction into stronger repeat-booking intention. This is aligned with literature showing that customer satisfaction is linked to future behavioral outcomes such as loyalty, recommendation, and continuance intention when expectations are met or exceeded (Zhang, Wu, & Liu, 2026).

As shown in Table 6, the respondents had a high level of satisfaction, as reflected in the grand mean of 4.16. This indicates that, in general, the respondents were satisfied with their accommodation experience in both emotional and psychological terms. The result suggests that the accommodation establishments were generally able to create favorable guest experiences that supported comfort, trust, enjoyment, and overall positive evaluation of the stay. Since satisfaction is a central outcome of the customer journey, this finding implies that the combined pre-booking, booking, arrival, accommodation, and post-stay experiences were generally successful in meeting respondents’ expectations and producing positive guest responses. This supports the view that customer satisfaction in accommodation develops across multiple experiences and is shaped by emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to the total service experience (Burkett and Nuria (2025).

Multiple Regression Analysis of Experience Domains Predicting Overall Satisfaction

Table 7 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis showing the experience domains that predict the overall satisfaction of the respondents.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis of Experience Domains Predicting Overall Satisfaction

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized β	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Pre-booking Experience	Overall Satisfaction	0.12	1.89	0.060	Not Significant
Booking Process Experience	Overall Satisfaction	0.10	1.67	0.097	Not Significant
Arrival and Check-in Experience	Overall Satisfaction	0.18	2.94	0.004	Significant
Accommodation Experience	Overall Satisfaction	0.41	6.87	< 0.001	Highly Significant
Post-Stay Experience	Overall Satisfaction	0.27	4.52	< 0.001	Significant
Model Summary					
R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p-value	Interpretation
0.79	0.62	0.61	127.84	< 0.001	Model Significant

The regression model was found to be statistically significant, with $R = 0.79$, $R^2 = 0.62$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.61$, and $F = 127.84$ at $p < 0.001$. This indicates a strong relationship between the identified experience domains and overall satisfaction, and it further shows that 62% of the variance in overall satisfaction can be explained by the combined effects of pre-booking experience, booking process experience, arrival and check-in experience, accommodation experience, and post-stay experience. This means that the customer journey domains, taken together, are important predictors of how satisfied respondents are with their accommodation experience. The result supports the idea that satisfaction in hospitality is not formed by a single encounter only, but by the combined influence of multiple experiences across the guest journey (Feng & Xu, 2026).

Among the predictor variables, Accommodation Experience emerged as the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.41, $t = 6.87$, and $p < 0.001$, interpreted as highly significant. This indicates that accommodation experience had the greatest influence on respondents' overall satisfaction compared with the other domains. The finding implies that the actual stay itself, including room quality, amenities, cleanliness, staff service, and in-house facilities, played the most important role in shaping guest satisfaction. This is understandable because the accommodation stage is the core of the service experience, where guests directly evaluate whether the establishment has delivered comfort, value, and quality. The implication of this result is that accommodation providers should prioritize improving the actual stay experience, since enhancements in this area are most likely to yield the strongest gains in customer satisfaction. This interpretation is consistent with hospitality studies showing that the actual service environment, physical setting, and integrated quality of the stay strongly influence guest evaluation and satisfaction (Zhang & Li, 2026).

The second strongest significant predictor was Post-Stay Experience, with a beta coefficient of 0.27, $t = 4.52$, and $p < 0.001$, interpreted as significant. This indicates that post-stay experience and feedback also had a meaningful positive influence on overall satisfaction. The finding implies that what happens after the stay, such as follow-up surveys, loyalty programs, post-stay communication, and check-out process, contributes significantly to how respondents evaluate their total accommodation experience. This suggests

that customer satisfaction continues to develop even after the physical stay has ended. The implication is that accommodation establishments should not neglect post-stay activities, since continued communication and feedback mechanisms can reinforce satisfaction, strengthen customer relationships, and encourage future patronage. This supports the view that hospitality experience extends beyond the actual service encounter and continues through re-engagement and relationship-building practices (Fan et al., 2026; Cheng et al., 2026).

Likewise, Arrival and Check-in Experience was found to be a significant predictor of overall satisfaction, with a beta coefficient of 0.18, $t = 2.94$, and $p = 0.004$. This indicates that the respondents' first direct encounter with the accommodation establishment also had a meaningful effect on their overall satisfaction. The finding suggests that staff interaction, waiting time, and ease of access contribute to the early formation of guest impressions, which later influence how the total experience is judged. The implication of this result is that accommodation establishments should continue improving arrival-related service delivery, particularly in terms of staff courtesy, efficiency, and accessibility, because first impressions matter in the hospitality experience. This is aligned with studies emphasizing that early on-site encounters and human interaction play a substantial role in shaping guest perceptions and emotional responses (Hitti & Ramadan, 2026).

On the other hand, Pre-booking Experience with $\beta = 0.12$, $t = 1.89$, and $p = 0.060$, and Booking Process Experience with $\beta = 0.10$, $t = 1.67$, and $p = 0.097$, were both found to be not significant predictors of overall satisfaction. Although these domains were positively evaluated in the earlier descriptive tables, the regression results show that they did not significantly predict overall satisfaction when the other domains were considered simultaneously. This may imply that while pre-booking and booking experiences are important in attracting customers and shaping early expectations, they are not the strongest determinants of final satisfaction compared with the actual stay, arrival, and post-stay experience. The implication is that accommodation establishments should still maintain efficient digital and booking systems, but greater managerial attention should be focused on the stages that significantly shape customer satisfaction, particularly the actual stay and post-stay processes. This finding supports the idea that not all stages of the customer journey contribute equally to overall satisfaction, and that some experiences have more direct impact on the guest's final evaluation than others (Park et al. (2024).

Further, the regression results imply that the most critical domains influencing respondents' overall satisfaction were accommodation experience, followed by post-stay experience and arrival and check-in experience. The model also demonstrates that the identified customer journey domains, as a group, strongly explain customer satisfaction in the accommodation sector. Therefore, accommodation establishments in Surigao del Sur may improve overall satisfaction more effectively by strengthening the quality of the actual stay, sustaining meaningful post-stay engagement, and ensuring a positive arrival experience. These results provide strong empirical support for the study's proposed output, since they identify the specific domains that should be prioritized in enhancing the customer journey and improving service quality in the accommodation sector (Fan et al., 2026; Feng & Xu, 2026; Tran et al., 2026).

Challenges and Barriers Encountered by the Respondents towards Identified Experience

Table 8. Challenges and Barriers Encountered by the Respondents towards Identified Experiences

This section presents the consolidated challenges and barriers encountered by respondents across the customer journey in the accommodation sector. The ten themes were generated through thematic analysis and arranged according to their logical flow in the customer journey: expectation formation, promotional

communication, pricing and payment, booking and digital systems, service delivery, staff coordination, and post-stay relationship management.

Theme 1. Mismatch Between Expectations and Actual Experience

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the key informants’ narratives was the mismatch between customer expectations and the actual accommodation experience. This theme reflects the gap between the image and quality of service projected during the pre-booking stage and the actual condition encountered upon arrival and stay. The findings suggest that unmet expectations significantly influenced customer dissatisfaction and negatively affected overall evaluation of the accommodation experience.

KI3: “Sa website, gwapa kaayo tan-awon ang kwarto, pero pag-abot namo, lahi ra gyud diay sa actual.” (“On the website, the room looked very beautiful, but when we arrived, it was actually very different.”)

KI11: “Murag oversell ra ang ilang pictures kay dili man ingon ato ka nindot ang place.” (“On the website, the room looked very beautiful, but when we arrived, it was actually very different.”)

KI19: “Pagtan-aw nako sa ilang post, abi gyud nako kumpleto ang amenities, pero kulang diay pag-check-in.” (“When I saw their post, I thought the amenities were complete, but upon check-in, some were actually lacking.”)

Themes	Sub-Themes
Mismatch Between Expectations and Actual Experience	Difference between online presentation and actual condition; unmet expectations; incomplete amenities; dissatisfaction with actual room/facility quality
Misrepresentation in Promotional Communication	Overly polished advertisements; unrealistic promotional images; inaccurate service descriptions; selective online presentation
Pricing Transparency Issues	Hidden charges; unclear pricing structure; inconsistent billing; undisclosed additional fees
Payment Accessibility Limitations	Limited payment methods; absence of e-wallet options; inconvenience in payment transactions; lack of prior notice on accepted payment channels
Booking System Reliability Problems	Booking system errors; page timeouts; delayed reservation confirmation; double charging issues
Weak Digital Service Infrastructure	Unstable online platforms; unreliable digital systems; weak technological support; poor digital readiness
Operational Inefficiency	Long waiting time; delayed room preparation; manual service procedures; inefficient workflow management
Staff Communication and Coordination Gaps	Inconsistent staff responses; weak front desk–housekeeping coordination; delayed assistance; poor internal communication
Weak Post-Stay Engagement	Lack of follow-up communication; absence of feedback surveys; weak customer relationship maintenance; limited post-service interaction
Lack of Retention and Loyalty Management	Absence of loyalty programs; lack of repeat-guest recognition; no return incentives; weak customer retention strategies

This theme highlights that expectation gaps, fueled by unrealistic online representations, are a leading cause of guest dissatisfaction. To address this, accommodations must consistently update their digital content to accurately reflect actual conditions, building trust from the very first customer experience.

These responses indicate that dissatisfaction was shaped by expectation disconfirmation. The problem was not only the actual condition of the facility but the gap between promised and experienced value. This implies that accommodation establishments should ensure that online photos, room descriptions, and amenity lists accurately reflect the actual service condition. Yousofi et al. (2024) explained that customer expectations in hospitality are strongly shaped by digital information and online interaction before the actual stay. Gomez-Suarez and Veloso (2024) further noted that online presentation and customer perception influence trust formation, while Tran et al. (2026) emphasized that expectation disconfirmation often leads to dissatisfaction in accommodation services.

Theme 2. Misrepresentation in Promotional Communication

Another prominent theme identified in the study was the issue of misrepresentation in promotional communication. Key informants emphasized that some promotional materials, online advertisements, and digital presentations did not accurately reflect the real condition of the accommodation establishments. This theme highlights the importance of truthful and transparent communication in building customer trust and shaping realistic service expectations.

KI9: “Murag masyado ra ka-polished ang ilang online presentation kumpara sa actual place.” (“Their online presentation seemed too polished compared to the actual place.”)

KI20: “Dili fully reflected sa ilang ads ang tinood nga kondisyon sa accommodation.” (“The true condition of the accommodation was not fully reflected in their advertisements.”)

KI6: “Parang kulang sa honesty ang ibang descriptions kasi hindi tugma sa actual setup.” (“Some descriptions seemed lacking in honesty because they did not match the actual setup.”)

The findings show that exaggerated promotional materials damage credibility and discourage repeat business. Honest, transparent advertising is essential for establishing long-term trust and positive word-of-mouth in the hospitality sector. These narratives suggest that promotional communication affects trust formation. When advertisements do not reflect actual service conditions, guests may interpret the inconsistency as misrepresentation rather than simple service limitation. The implication is that accommodation providers should adopt truthful representation in online marketing by using updated images, accurate facility descriptions, and realistic service claims. Foroudi et al. (2025) emphasized that authenticity in promotional communication significantly affects customer trust and experience evaluation. Similarly, Yang and Nie (2025) argued that digital representations influence customer perception of service quality, while Hitti and Ramadan (2026) highlighted the importance of transparency and honesty in hospitality communication.

Theme 3. Pricing Transparency Issues

Pricing transparency emerged as a significant concern among the key informants, particularly in relation to hidden charges, unclear fees, and inconsistencies between advertised and actual rates. This theme reflects the role of transparent pricing in influencing perceptions of fairness, trustworthiness, and transaction satisfaction within the accommodation sector.

KI14: “Abi nako mao na to tanan bayranan, naa pa diay additional fee paghuman.” (I thought that was already the total payment, but there was still an additional fee afterward.)

KI2: “Walay klaro sa presyo kay lain sa post, lain pud sa actual billing.” (The pricing was unclear because the posted price was different from the actual billing.)

Unclear pricing not only frustrates guests but also undermines their trust in the establishment. Industry research supports the need for clear, upfront communication of total costs to improve fairness and increase booking satisfaction. These responses reveal that unclear pricing weakens perceived fairness and

transaction trust. Guests expect that the rate displayed during inquiry or booking reflects the total amount to be paid. The implication is that accommodation establishments should clearly disclose room rates, taxes, deposits, service charges, environmental fees, and cancellation conditions before confirmation. Costa and Ferreira (2024) explained that transparent pricing practices strengthen perceptions of fairness and customer trust. Verma and Chandra (2024) also observed that unclear charges negatively affect transaction satisfaction.

Theme 4. Payment Accessibility Limitations

The key informants also identified limitations in payment accessibility as a challenge encountered during the customer journey. This theme highlights the difficulties experienced by guests when preferred payment methods, particularly digital and cashless options, were unavailable or restricted. The findings suggest that payment convenience has become an important component of customer experience in contemporary hospitality services..

KI21: “Nahirapan ako kasi hindi available ang payment option na gamit ko usually.”

(I had difficulty because the payment option I usually use was not available.)

KI9: “Wala silay GCash, so kinahanglang mangita pa gyud ko lain paagi sa pagbayad.” (They did not have Gcash, so I still had to find another way to pay.)

KI17: “Medyo hassle kasi limited lang ang payment methods tapos walang prior notice.” (It was quite inconvenient because the payment methods were limited and there was no prior notice.)

Limited payment options create barriers to bookings and lower guest satisfaction. Expanding digital and cashless payment choices meets modern expectations and can directly improve conversion rates. These responses indicate that limited payment accessibility creates inconvenience and may discourage booking completion. In the current hospitality environment, guests expect flexible payment methods such as e-wallets, bank transfers, cards, and other cashless options. The implication is that providers should expand payment channels and inform customers in advance about available payment methods. Burkett and Nuria (2025) noted that flexible payment systems improve customer convenience and accessibility in hospitality transactions. Park and Kim (2025) further explained that diversified payment methods enhance customer satisfaction, while Zhang and Li (2026) emphasized the growing importance of technology-enabled payment systems in modern hospitality services.

Theme 5. Booking System Reliability Problems

Problems associated with the reliability of booking systems also emerged as a major theme in the study. Key informants reported technical issues such as booking errors, unstable platforms, delayed confirmations, and payment-related system failures. This theme demonstrates the growing importance of reliable digital booking infrastructure in ensuring customer confidence and transaction security.

KI5: “Nag-error ang booking page several times, so nakulbaan ko basin dili ma-confirm among reservation.” (The booking page showed errors several times, so I became worried that our reservation might not be confirmed.)

KI23: “Nag-hang ang system while nagbabayad ko, so wala ko kabalo kung successful ba gyud.” (The system froze while I was paying, so I did not know if the transaction was really successful.)

KI10: “Na-double charge ko tungod kay ni-time out ang page unya nag-retry ko.” (I was double charged because the page timed out and I tried again.)

System errors and unreliable booking platforms cause anxiety and mistrust among guests. Reliable, user-friendly digital infrastructure is now a critical part of the guest experience and should be regularly maintained. These verbatim responses show that unreliable booking systems create anxiety and weaken

customer confidence. The booking platform functions as the digital front desk of the accommodation establishment; therefore, system errors, payment uncertainty, and double charging may affect trust even before arrival. The implication is that accommodation providers should maintain stable booking platforms, automatic confirmation systems, secure payment verification, and quick assistance for online transaction concerns. Youssofi and Rahimi (2024) explained that stable digital booking systems are essential in building customer confidence during online transactions. Begum et al. (2026) also emphasized that technology reliability affects overall customer experience, while Wang et al. (2025) highlighted that system instability and transaction errors negatively influence customer trust.

Theme 6. Weak Digital Service Infrastructure

Weak digital service infrastructure was another recurring issue identified by the Key informants. Beyond booking-related concerns, key informants described broader technological limitations, including unstable online platforms and inefficient digital support systems. This theme emphasizes the increasing dependence of hospitality services on digital readiness and technological reliability.

KI14: “Makulbaan ang guest kung sige ug error ang booking platform.” (Guests become worried when the booking platform keeps showing errors.)

KI1: “The system feels unreliable kay usahay mo-timeout lang kalit.” (The system feels unreliable because sometimes it suddenly times out.)

KI24: “Kapag unstable ang platform, nababawasan ang tiwala ng customer.” (When the platform is unstable, customer trust decreases.)

The instability of digital systems impacts not just convenience but also the perceived professionalism of the business. Continuous investment in robust technology infrastructure is vital for maintaining guest trust and operational efficiency. These statements suggest that digital instability is not merely a technical issue but a service credibility problem. In modern hospitality, digital systems are part of the customer experience and influence perceptions of professionalism and reliability. The implication is that establishments should invest in stable websites, secure payment systems, reliable reservation platforms, and responsive online support. Hsu (2025) emphasized that digital readiness and smart hospitality systems significantly influence customer evaluations of service quality. Arici et al. (2024) further explained that customers increasingly rely on technological systems in hospitality encounters, while Zhang (2024) noted that unstable digital platforms reduce customer confidence and perceived professionalism.

Theme 7. Operational Inefficiency

Operational inefficiency emerged as a significant barrier affecting the customer journey, particularly during arrival and accommodation stages. Key informants described delays in check-in procedures, room preparation, and front desk transactions, indicating weaknesses in workflow management and operational coordination. This theme reflects the importance of service efficiency in shaping first impressions and overall guest satisfaction.

KI25: “Pag-abot namo, taas 20aan ang hulat bisan 20aan a among reservation.” (When we arrived, the waiting time was very long even though we already had a reservation.)

KI8: “Na-delay ang room preparation mao nga dugay pa mi naka-check-in.” (The room preparation was delayed, so it took a long time before we were able to check in.)

KI6: “Manual pa ilang ubang proseso, mao hinay ang lihok sa front desk.” (Some of their processes were still manual, which made the front desk service slow.)

Delays and manual processes during check-in or room preparation negatively affect first impressions and overall satisfaction. Streamlining operations and adopting automation where possible are essential steps

for improving service quality. These responses indicate that operational inefficiency weakens first impressions and reduces perceived service readiness. Delays during arrival and check-in may make guests feel that the establishment is unprepared or disorganized. The implication is that accommodation providers should improve check-in procedures, queue management, room readiness monitoring, and workflow systems. Park et al. (2024) explained that operational responsiveness and efficient service flow contribute to positive customer impressions. Karim and Mehzabeen (2025) also noted that workflow efficiency affects perceived service quality, while Fan et al. (2026) emphasized that delays and inefficient processes weaken customer satisfaction during hospitality encounters.

Theme 8. Staff Communication and Coordination Gaps

Another important theme identified in the study was the presence of communication and coordination gaps among staff members. Key informants observed inconsistent information, delayed responses, and weak coordination between service units, particularly between front desk and housekeeping personnel. This theme highlights the critical role of internal communication and teamwork in delivering a seamless customer experience.

KI5: “Makita nimo nga dili synchronized ang ubang staff sa paghatag og impormasyon.” (You can see that some staff are not synchronized in giving information.)

KI13: “Usahay murag kulang sa coordination between front desk ug housekeeping.” (Sometimes, there seems to be a lack of coordination between the front desk and housekeeping.)

KI8: “Naay communication gap kay lahi-lahi ug tubag ang staff.” (There is a communication gap because the staff give different answers.)

Communication breakdowns among staff lead to inconsistent service and guest confusion. Strengthening internal communication and coordination through training and standardized procedures is key to delivering a seamless guest experience. These responses suggest that some service problems resulted from internal coordination gaps rather than individual staff performance alone. Inconsistent information and weak coordination between front desk and housekeeping make the service experience fragmented. The implication is that establishments should strengthen staff training, service scripts, pre-shift briefings, and internal communication systems. Lei et al. (2025) emphasized that coordinated staff interaction contributes to seamless hospitality experiences. Liu (2025) further explained that communication consistency influences customer trust and comfort, while Feng and Xu (2026) highlighted the importance of integrated service coordination in customer experience management.

Theme 9. Weak Post-Stay Engagement

Weak post-stay engagement also emerged as a recurring theme in the respondents' experiences. Participants reported limited follow-up communication, absence of feedback mechanisms, and lack of post-service interaction after check-out. This theme indicates that many accommodation establishments still treat customer interaction as ending after the stay rather than continuing through relationship-building efforts.

KI4: “Human sa among stay, wala na gyud silay any follow-up or pangumusta.” (After our stay, they no longer made any follow-up or checked on us.)

KI18: “Wala ko kadawat ug survey or feedback form after check-out.” (I did not receive any survey or feedback form after check-out.)

KI12: “Parang natapos na lang agad ang transaction pagkatapos naming umalis.” (It felt like the transaction immediately ended after we left.)

Neglecting follow-up after a guest's stay limits opportunities for feedback and loyalty-building. Implementing structured post-stay engagement, such as thank-you messages and feedback requests, can enhance long-term guest relationships. These responses indicate that the customer journey often ends immediately after departure. Weak post-stay engagement limits opportunities for feedback collection, service recovery, and relationship building. The implication is that accommodation establishments should send thank-you messages, feedback forms, and service recovery communication after check-out. Tran et al. (2026) explained that post-stay communication influences customer relationship continuity and future behavioral intention. Reyes and Cruz (2024) also observed that follow-up interaction strengthens customer engagement, while Del Rosario et al. (2025) emphasized the role of feedback systems in improving hospitality relationships.

Theme 10. Lack of Retention and Loyalty Management

The final theme identified in the study was the lack of structured retention and loyalty management practices. Respondents noted the absence of loyalty programs, repeat-guest recognition, and incentives encouraging future patronage. This theme reflects the limited emphasis placed on long-term customer relationship management within the accommodation sector.

KI22: "Bisag nakabalik nami, wala gihapoy bisan unsang loyalty reward or discount." (Even though we came back again, there was still no loyalty reward or discount.)

KI15: "Okay ang stay, pero walay something nga maka-engganyo nga mubalik mi." (The stay was okay, but there was nothing that encouraged us to come back.)

KI12: "Walang clear retention strategy kasi kahit repeat customer ka, pareho lang ang treatment." (There is no clear retention strategy because even if you are a repeat customer, the treatment is still the same.)

The absence of loyalty programs and personalized retention efforts means missed opportunities for repeat business. Developing structured retention strategies is proven to boost guest loyalty and lifetime value. These responses show that satisfaction does not automatically lead to loyalty. Without retention mechanisms, the customer relationship ends as a one-time transaction rather than becoming a continuing relationship. The implication is that accommodation providers should develop loyalty rewards, repeat-guest recognition, personalized communication, and return incentives. Sallaku and Vigolo (2024) explained that loyalty programs and customer engagement strategies influence repeat patronage in hospitality services. Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown (2025) further emphasized the importance of customer retention practices, while Cheng et al. (2026) noted that relationship-building mechanisms contribute to long-term customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Discussion

The findings revealed that respondents generally had favorable experiences across the customer journey in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur. The pre-booking, booking, arrival and check-in, accommodation, and post-stay domains were all evaluated positively, suggesting that the overall guest journey was generally satisfactory.

The pre-booking experience was rated highly, indicating that respondents found early-stage information, online reviews, promotional offers, and booking-related details useful in shaping their expectations. This suggests that accommodation establishments were generally able to support customers during the information-search and decision-making stage.

The booking process and interaction were also perceived favorably. Respondents generally found the booking stage convenient, understandable, and manageable, although later qualitative findings showed

that system reliability and payment accessibility still require improvement.

The arrival and check-in experience was likewise rated highly, showing that the first on-site encounter with accommodation establishments was generally positive. This implies that staff interaction and check-in procedures contributed to favorable first impressions among guests.

The accommodation experience emerged as a major strength of the customer journey. Respondents generally viewed the actual stay positively, particularly in terms of core service and facility-related aspects, making this domain central to their overall satisfaction.

The post-stay experience and feedback were also evaluated positively, suggesting that respondents perceived some level of continued engagement after their stay. However, qualitative findings revealed that follow-up communication, loyalty incentives, and retention practices still need strengthening.

The respondents demonstrated a high level of overall satisfaction in both emotional and psychological terms. This indicates that satisfaction was shaped not only by tangible service features but also by feelings of comfort, trust, relaxation, and positive mental state.

The regression analysis revealed that accommodation experience was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, followed by post-stay experience and arrival and check-in experience. Meanwhile, pre-booking and booking process experiences, although rated positively, were not significant predictors, suggesting that they function more as supporting or enabling stages rather than primary satisfaction drivers.

The qualitative findings revealed recurring challenges and barriers, including expectation experience mismatch, promotional misrepresentation, pricing transparency issues, payment accessibility limitations, booking system problems, weak digital infrastructure, operational inefficiency, staff communication gaps, weak post-stay engagement, and lack of retention management.

The findings served as the basis for the proposed Trust and Transaction Integrity in the Hospitality Industry Framework. This framework focuses on truthful promotion, transparent pricing, reliable booking systems, efficient service delivery, coordinated staff communication, and stronger post-stay engagement. It is intended to guide accommodation providers and tourism stakeholders in improving customer satisfaction and destination competitiveness in Surigao del Sur.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the customer journey in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur is generally favorable, indicating that accommodation establishments are able to provide satisfactory experiences across the major stages of guest interaction. This suggests that the overall service environment in the selected accommodation establishments is generally responsive to customer needs and expectations.

The positive evaluation of the pre-booking experience implies that accommodation establishments are generally effective in providing accessible information, online visibility, and promotional communication that assist guests during the information-search and decision-making stage. Pre-booking activities therefore contribute to shaping favorable customer expectations before the actual stay.

The favorable assessment of the booking process indicates that guests generally perceive reservation procedures as convenient and manageable. However, the findings also imply that transaction convenience alone is insufficient to guarantee overall satisfaction when issues related to payment accessibility and booking system reliability are present.

The positive arrival and check-in experience suggests that first impressions significantly contribute to customer perceptions of service quality. Efficient check-in procedures and favorable staff interaction help

establish early customer confidence and influence the tone of the overall stay experience.

The study further concludes that the accommodation experience is the most important component of the customer journey because it directly shapes overall satisfaction. The actual stay, including facilities, room condition, amenities, and service delivery, remains the central basis by which guests evaluate accommodation quality.

The favorable post-stay experience implies that customer engagement beyond the actual stay contributes to maintaining positive guest impressions. However, the findings suggest that accommodation establishments still need to strengthen follow-up communication, customer retention, and loyalty-building practices to sustain long-term customer relationships.

The high level of emotional and psychological satisfaction indicates that customer satisfaction in the accommodation sector is not determined solely by functional service quality. Guests also evaluate their experiences based on comfort, trust, relaxation, and positive emotional responses generated throughout the stay.

The regression analysis confirms that accommodation experience is the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, followed by post-stay experience and arrival and check-in experience. This implies that customers place greater importance on the actual service encounter and continued engagement than on the preparatory stages of the customer journey.

The qualitative findings conclude that recurring challenges and barriers weaken customer trust and transaction confidence despite the generally positive ratings. Problems related to expectation gaps, promotional misrepresentation, pricing transparency, payment accessibility, booking systems, operational inefficiency, staff coordination, and weak retention practices indicate the need for more integrated and customer-centered service management.

Finally, the study concludes that the proposed Trust and Transaction Integrity in the Hospitality Industry Framework is an appropriate and evidence-based response to the identified findings. The framework provides strategic guidance for accommodation providers and tourism stakeholders in improving truthful communication, transaction transparency, digital reliability, operational efficiency, customer engagement, and long-term relationship management in the accommodation sector of Surigao del Sur.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the identified beneficiaries in the Significance of the Study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Local Accommodation establishments such as hotels, resorts, and guesthouses should prioritize the improvement of the actual stay experience, since accommodation experience was found to be the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction. They may regularly maintain rooms, facilities, amenities, cleanliness, and service quality. Providers may ensure truthful promotional materials, transparent pricing, reliable booking systems, accessible payment options, efficient check-in procedures, and stronger post-stay engagement. Simple loyalty programs, follow-up messages, and feedback forms should be introduced to encourage repeat visits and strengthen customer trust.

LGUs and tourism offices should use the findings as basis for strengthening local tourism standards and accommodation service monitoring. They may conduct service quality trainings, digital readiness workshops, and customer experience seminars for accommodation providers. Tourism authorities should also encourage transparent pricing, truthful online promotion, and basic service standards among lodging establishments to improve destination competitiveness in Surigao del Sur.

Tourists and visitors are encouraged to use verified information sources, compare online reviews, and clarify prices, payment options, and accommodation inclusions before booking. They may provide honest feedback through surveys, reviews, or direct communication with accommodation providers. Their feedback can help establishments identify service gaps and improve the overall guest experience.

Local suppliers, transport providers, food establishments, tour operators, and other tourism-related businesses should coordinate with accommodation providers to create a more seamless visitor experience. They may develop joint service packages, referral systems, and coordinated customer assistance mechanisms. Strengthening collaboration among tourism businesses can improve visitor satisfaction and generate wider economic benefits for the local community.

Policy makers and planners are encouraged to integrate customer experience improvement into local tourism development plans. Investment priorities may include tourism infrastructure, digital connectivity, service quality standards, and support for small accommodation establishments. They may consider policies or guidelines that promote transparency in pricing, digital transaction reliability, and consumer protection in tourism services.

Academic institutions may use the findings as reference for hospitality management, tourism studies, service quality, and customer experience research. Future researchers may expand the study by including other municipalities, other tourism services, or additional variables such as revisit intention, loyalty, service recovery, and destination image.

The proposed Trust and Transaction Integrity in the Hospitality Industry Framework may also be tested, validated, or refined in future studies to strengthen its applicability across different tourism and hospitality contexts. Future researchers may examine the framework in other provinces, tourism destinations, or accommodation categories such as luxury hotels, budget inns, eco-tourism lodges, and resort establishments to determine whether the identified customer journey domains and service barriers operate similarly in varying environments. Additional variables such as customer loyalty, revisit intention, destination image, service recovery, cultural expectations, and digital readiness may also be integrated to further improve the explanatory power of the framework. Through continuous empirical testing and contextual refinement, the framework may evolve into a more comprehensive model for understanding customer trust, transaction integrity, and service quality in the broader hospitality and tourism industry.

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