


Article

Evaluating Tourist Experience of Rural Homestays in Coastal Areas by Importance–Performance Analysis: A Case Study of Homestay in Dapeng New District, Shenzhen, China

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Abstract: In recent years, the rural homestay has developed rapidly against the background of rural-revitalization policies. However, in early 2020, COVID-19 broke out in China, and the homestay industry was faced with a great challenge. It was difficult for self-employed homestays to resist the risks of the pandemic. As a result, defective operation and business failure occurred in some regions. However, rural homestays with a background in the brand, chain and cluster development mode persisted in the market with a diversity of operation principles. This paper tries to set up an evaluation system for understanding the occupancy needs of tourists, in order to improve the ability of rural homestays to resist risks. The article offers a methodology for assessing the tourist experience of rural homestays in coastal areas, with homestays in Dapeng New District of Shenzhen taken as the research objectives. Then, the evaluation system of rural homestays is set up from the perspective of tourist experience. Based on the results of a questionnaire survey and interviews of operators, this paper proposes the tourist experience–importance analysis in Jiaochangwei and Xichong by the importance–performance analysis (IPA) method. Finally, it suggests policy recommendations that can resist high risk based on tourist experience, for the sustainable development of rural homestays in China.

Keywords: operation strategy; rural homestay; coastal area; tourist experience



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1. Introduction

High-quality rural homestays with profound experiences that consider service and unique design as their features of operation have received a large number of tourists, who choose to travel around cities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, since 2020. These rural homestays increasingly pay more attention to the sense of tourist experience in the process of accommodation and establish higher requirements for the quality of rural homestays. They form a consumption industry chain of food, housing and entertainment around their locations through a diversified and multi-dimensional operation concept.

Tourist experience, as the core of tourism products, is the key for the successful operation of rural homestays in the new era of consumption. Tourist experience refers to a time-sequence process of individual realization by means of sightseeing, communication, consumption and other activities [1]. It is the result of an interaction between tourists’ internal psychological activities and external performance by their interacting with the external world [2]. Tourist experience can also be seen as “consumers’ direct observation or participation in the process of tourism, and the feelings formed on this basis, which divides the process into the generation of tourism demand, the planning, selection and progress of tourism, the communication after leaving the scenic spot, and the end of the travel” [3]. In this paper, tourist experience is defined as a kind of rich and comprehensive feeling

generated by tourists' observation and use of tourism products, which includes individual emotional and sensory experience. Tourist experience is a complete process experience. The tourist experience of a rural homestay is mainly generated from tourists' observation of the courtyard environment, housing construction, facilities decoration, etc., during the process of check in, and their feelings about the atmosphere and service after they check in (Figure 1).

Previous research demonstrated the significant role tourist experience plays in the success of rural tourism and the operation of rural homestays. By evaluating tourist satisfaction with their accommodation experience when staying in the rural homestays, awareness of the advantages and disadvantages existing in the current homestay service can be encouraged and developing strategies for improvement in the changing market can be facilitated. However, the existing evaluation system of rural homestays only established a general framework for common homestays; the research for those with unique features in special categories is lacking, especially for those with coastal features. Coastal homestays constitute a great part of a rural homestays market that has become one of the most popular choices for accommodation for those who hope to experience local culture and a leisure atmosphere. With the advantage of coastal features such as seaside views or sea activities, coastal homestays create a different atmosphere and provide different services, which become important factors that influence tourist experience differently from other rural homestays. In addition, these differences require the development of a targeted evaluation system of tourist experience for coastal rural homestays.

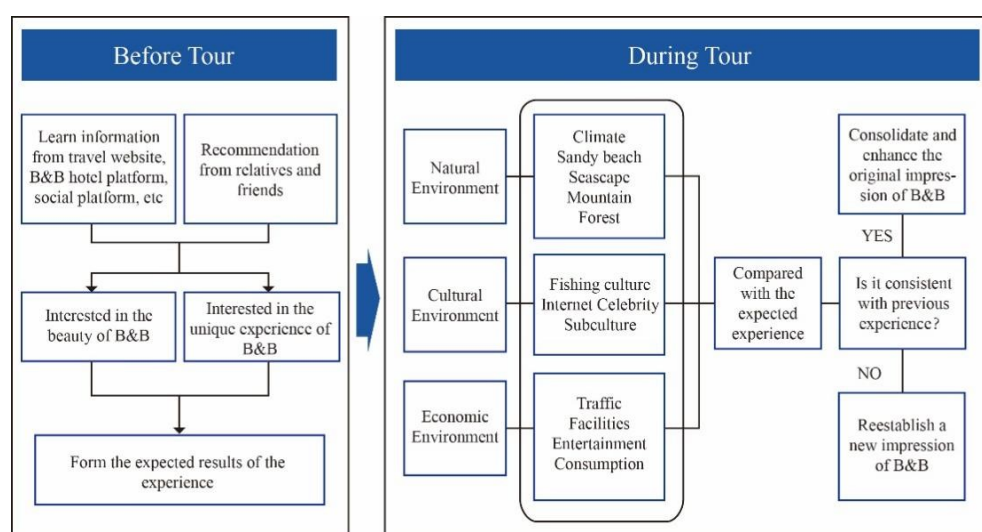


Figure 1. Tourist experience at different stages.

Thus, this paper presents an analysis of an evaluation system of rural homestays in coastal areas in terms of the tourist experience. To execute the aim, the importance–performance analysis (IPA) method was used to facilitate analysis of the gap between the actual and ideal situation of the tourist destination. As part of the primary aim, the authors specified two detailed objectives. The first was to analyze the reasons tourists of the study sites selected their tourist destination and the second was to determine the evaluation indicators of the selection of the tourist destination and the tourist experience at the destinations, and the background reasons for the above phenomena.

2. Literature Review

Tourist experience has been researched under various disciplines, including sociology, marketing and economics, and social psychology. Tourist experience is comprehensive, as a result of observation of tourist products and after-use experience. It is a holistic processing of experience that contains individual emotion, sensory experience, and rational thinking.

Traditional tourist-role theory [4,5] proposes that tourists are novelty seekers or familiar seekers pursuing a fixed model of tourist-role orientation. Grewal [6] defined tourist experience, stating that brand, price, promotion, location, advertising, label, and atmosphere are the seven factors that affect tourist experience. Another representative explanation was given by Schmitt [7]. This definition considers tourist experience as a five-dimensional SEM (strategic experiential module) model that includes sense, feel, think, act, relate.

2.1. Evaluation of Tourist Experience of Rural Homestays

The existing studies mainly attempt to establish a framework of indicators of different dimensions, obtain feedback from tourists, and conduct analysis and research on the tourist experience. The studies can be divided into two categories, according to the sources of the research samples: the first set uses questionnaire surveys developed and recruited by the researchers; the other uses a wide range of data results obtained through data screening and analysis from the network platform.

Earlier studies that used questionnaire surveys focused on the analysis of the relationship between experience value and tourist demand [8]. Chen Xiaoqi, Jui-Ho and Shwu-Ing [9] proposed four dimensions of experience, namely, aesthetic pleasure, interpersonal interaction, modern functional, and daily life experience, as well as fourteen indicators of experience, by analyzing online text and questionnaires. Zuo Xian [10] divided tourists into five dimensions: thinking, action, sensory, emotional, and relevant experience. In addition, this study calculated the sample reliability and analyzed the questionnaire data to propose a development strategy for Lhasa Homestays.

From the perspective of tourists, Ke Tingmin [11] classified satisfaction indicators into six items and 13 actors. Data was obtained by online questionnaire surveys and analyzed to obtain the influencing factors of tourist satisfaction and purchase thinking. This type of research usually starts with the establishment of factors, followed by the distribution of network or field questionnaires. Gunasekaran N [12] took a coastal city in India as a case and analyzed the influencing factors of the choice of hotels and homestays through a survey of the experience and feelings of homestay occupants. Based on the analysis of questionnaire data including 22 factors in 4 categories, the study found that, among the reasons for choosing homestays as tourist accommodation in this area, family atmosphere accounted for the largest effect, followed by the economy, local culture, and host–guest relationship. Bungon Sawatsuk [13] used clear strategy, effective risk management, discipline, fairness, transparency, social responsibility, and self-evaluation as parameters in assessing the governance of homestay management.

Research that uses network evaluation data generally begins by collating tourists' comments on tourism information platforms and then analyzing the text to filter out useless information. Fan Ouli [14] used five macro-level categories and 16 micro-level categories to establish models and study tourists' consumption intentions based on network evaluation data. Qiu Feng [15] used Rost Content Mining software to determine personalized service, room facilities, where the homestays are located and the service attitude of homestays. Other researchers extracted the high-frequency words of Simingshan houseguest reviews to explore the perceptions of houseguests. Pi Changling and Zheng Xiangmin [16] established four core categories, 15 main categories, and 33 micro categories after collecting reviews from an online platform. Jing Yua, Kuo-Yan Wang [17] analyzed influencing factors for homestay accommodation based on online tourist ratings and comments to explore the impact of urban homestay purchase behaviors.

2.2. Evaluation of Rural-Homestay Service Quality

Research on the conceptual level of service quality first concentrated on the evaluation content of the hotel industry, and was widely used in the standard accommodation industry. Rust [18] established the SERVQUAL scale based on the service quality gap model, which is widely used in research on service quality in the accommodation industry [19]. Ivan

Ka [20] applied the IPA analysis method to analyze service-quality improvement in a Macau homestay. In the research on the service quality of homestays, Tichaawa [21] evaluated the service quality of family homestays in East London, South Africa from the perspective of tourist experience. Mohd [22] studied the relationship between the service quality and behavioral intentions of homestays and the conditional effect of tourist evaluation on the development of homestays. To conduct service-quality research on inns and hotels, Huang Pei and Chen Xueqiong [23] established an evaluation system made up of three parts: overall evaluation, business premises, and facilities and equipment.

Perera and Vlosky [24] indicated that service quality is an important antecedent of tourist satisfaction. Homestay service can be evaluated from the perspective of tourists. Research undertaken from this perspective focuses on the population composition, purchase intention, and repurchase intention of homestay consumers. Such research mainly studies the operation strategy of homestays from the perspective of consumer group composition and consumption motivation. Jones et al. [25] investigated Hong-Kong tourists who prefer to stay in homestays. Ta-Wei Tang [26] established a structural equation model based on the results of a survey to analyze the social capital composition of the respondents, and also carried out an investigation of homestays. The development of homestays is affected by the ability to undertake service innovation. Chen C [27] took a homestay in Kinmen Island as an example to study the relationship between service quality, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty.

Currently, more researchers are integrating tourist cultural and emotional experience. Qi Lin [28] expressed the lack of tourist experience from the perspective of mobile Internet and proposed improvement strategies from the perspective of experience marketing. Zhan Chai et al. [29] conducted surveys on consumers and operators in 20 homestay clusters in Ningbo through small data, which summarized four branding paths, viz.: natural scenery, history and culture, characteristic experience, and new village display. They proposed branding strategies from the perspectives of government, industry, society, and information technology. Zhao Xinwei [30] emphasized the importance of brand experience by analyzing the role of brand sensory experience, brand tactile perception, and brand emotional experience in the design of homestays.

2.3. Research on Rural Homestays with Coastal Features

Coastal rural homestays are a unique type of rural homestay with coastal characteristics, being located in a small fishing village or with special sea views. The existing research on rural homestays in coastal areas mainly involve two aspects: the economic benefit they produce and the spatial transformation they cause.

Regarding factors affecting the price of homestays, a quantitative framework was established to evaluate how sustainable development on a regional scale could affect the price of homestays [31]. Coastal area homestays have unique marine resources, such as sea-view rooms, beach accessibility, and other bidding factors, based on different conditions. For example, Jorge [32] and Luis Moreno-Izquierdo [33] both used the hedonic pricing model to study tourism environment and network evaluation, and found that the value-added price of seaside homestays was impacted by the environmental conditions and network evaluation on the price of homestays. M. Hamilton [34] used the characteristic price model, taking the development length of the coastline in coastal areas as the research element, and analyzing its impact on accommodation prices based on the macroscopic regional development perspective.

For the spatial features of coastal homestays, researchers focus on landscape improvement and evaluation of the vitality of public space. Nicole Gurran [35] and Arie Nurzaman [36], respectively, established an indicator system for the development of the luminous surface in homestay areas. This system is to measure the resilience of coastal communities against natural disasters and the transportation capacity of coastal tourist areas by means of quantitative research. Sheela Agarwal [37] and Sheena Carlisle [38]

used two different quantitative methods, namely, the reorganization strategy table and the system dynamics model, to study the sustainable development of seaside tourism resorts.

To sum up, for coastal homestay research, more attention has been paid to development models and experience modes, which reflects the characteristics of homestays as a product of the experience economy. Therefore, this study focuses on how to leverage the characteristics of the seaside for the placement of guest houses, in order to fully explore coastal-area culture and support the sustainable development of homestays.

2.4. The AHP/IPA Scheme and Its Application in Tourist Satisfaction

Some scholars have applied the AHP (analytic hierarchy process) method into the research of tourism. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and AHP for quantitative analysis are used to investigate the basis of tourism development [39]. A methodological approach consisting of assessing tourist perspectives of an STA (smart tourist attraction) via a fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method and analytic hierarchy process (FCEM-AHP) and importance performance analysis (IPA) approach has been explored, and tourists' key evaluation factors of STAs, such as a smart information system and intelligent tourism management, have been put forward [40]. A combination of fuzzy AHP and TOPSIS (technique for order performance by similarity to ideal solution) were employed to select five rural tourism destinations in a central Java province with the aim to evaluate rural tourism using sustainable indicators, namely, quality, facilities, management system, and outcome [41].

Importance–performance analysis (IPA) was introduced by Martilla and James [42] for use in marketing analysis and planning. They suggested two dimensions—importance and performance—that should be prioritized when decision makers consider actions to take or improvements to make in various fields of service quality and customer management [43,44]. It comprehensively considers the importance and satisfaction factors in tourism research, reflects the gap between tourism expectations and reality, and then proposes targeted opinions for behavior improvement [45]. It has been widely adopted in such research areas as airport and airline services [46], tourism policy and development [47–51], and hotel operation [52,53].

Chon et al. [54] were the first scholars to introduce IPA to tourism research. The IPA method is easy to understand and intuitive, and is often used in destination-tourism image evaluation and positioning research. It reflects the gap between the actual and ideal situation of the tourist destination, and proposes a targeted increase in the attractiveness of recommended tourist destinations [55]. The main point of this method is to construct an IP map by obtaining the mean value of importance and satisfaction, and then to locate four quadrants in the map according to the importance and satisfaction of each index. In the first quadrant, importance and satisfaction are both high; the second quadrant is moderately regulated, with high satisfaction and low importance; the third quadrant is an active expansion area with low importance and satisfaction; the fourth quadrant is an urgent need area with high importance but low satisfaction [56]. Combining importance and satisfaction for analysis can improve the interpretation of indicators and help in making targeted recommendations [57].

In related studies, IPA has become an important method for research on tourist satisfaction for the development of sustainable tourism. The IPA scheme has been used as a tool to explore tourist satisfaction with 16 attributes of popular nature-focused boat tours [58]. Greg D. Simpson [59] used the IPA scheme to analyze management of tourism experiences at marine wildlife destinations. Gangwei Cai [60] attempted to evaluate the customer satisfaction of Japanese homestays for built-environment efficiency (CASBEE) after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hsing-Chih Chen [61] established an evaluation framework for sustainable forest management (SFM) development based on locals' perspectives in a rural area of Taiwan.

Online data and the IPA method have been applied in combination for research on tourist satisfaction in recent years. Jian-WuBi [62] proposed an innovative methodology for

conducting IPA through online reviews by applying the latent dirichlet allocation (LDA), the improved one-vs-one strategy based support vector machine (IOVO-SVM) and the ensemble neural network based model (ENNM). Jinyan Chen [63] introduced a novel approach for assessing tourist satisfaction by identifying attributes of interest from social media text.

3. Methodology

3.1. Framework Creation

To assess the tourist experience with coastal rural homestay, a combined method of AHP and IPA were used in this paper. The evaluation indexes were categorized generally basing on the analysis of the existing research firstly, and then they were refined by collecting the evaluation data of on-line platforms for coastal homestays. It helped to set up the primary determinants and sub-dimensions, correspondingly. Then, the interviews with specialist and homestay operators were conducted to re-adjust the evaluation factors and weight, and finally the final evaluation system of tourist experience on coastal rural homestay was set up.

The criteria that were selected to show the influence on tourist experience were verified due to regional features. Together with characteristics of rural homestays in coastal area, this paper applied the data acquired from an online tourist platform to refine the evaluation framework. As the most influential online travel platform in China, Xiecheng was selected for data collection, considering both the quantity of rural homestays and registrants. For Xichong, the platform shows that 2841 homestays are available with links. Various information of homestays was collected by data scraping, including homestay's brand, type of room, current price, occupants' number, bed number, distance from beach, score by reviewers, number of reviews, and review content. Then, the reviews were regrouped by the keywords selected and the frequency of occurrence in two steps: (1) Preliminary processing of web text: the network text was filtered to a TXT file, and then imported into the ROST CM6 software for analysis, in order to filter out the high-frequency words of invalid elements. (2) Semantic differential analysis: 300 high-frequency words were extracted, semantic analysis performed, and words with high relevance organized, such as service linked with warm, clean linked with tidy, etc. The result shows that the words to describe physical environment are more independent from each other, but the words to describe the operation and service of a homestay are inter-linked with high relevance. (3) A total of 37 invalid words were removed from the high-frequency words selected above and reordered by frequency to summarize the top 100 words with the highest frequency. Then, following the suggestions received from the result of interviews with specialists and homestay operators, these words were translated into evaluative sentences for further assessment to construct the preliminary evaluation index (Table 1).

3.2. Analysis of the Study Site

Dapeng New District is located to the southeast of Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, China. It has three coastlines, one adjacent to Huizhou, bordering Daya Bay in the east; the second bordering Dapeng Bay in the west; and the last bordering Hong Kong New Territories in the distance. It is an important node in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area. Dapeng New District covers an area of about 600 square kilometers, with a land area of 295 square kilometers, sea area of 305 square kilometers, and coastline of about 128 km (Figure 2). It has over 20 coastal-resource tourism areas, including Judiaosha, Yangmei Hang, Dongxi Chong, Guanhu, Kwai Chung, and Jinsha Bay. At the foot of the inland mountains, there are Dapengsuo City and Dongshan Temple, which have a long history as sites of profound cultural heritage. Historic sites, temples, and many ancient houses and villages are located all over Dapeng New District. In 2019, the total revenue from tourism in Dapeng New District was CNY 5.109 billion. There were 10.5292 million domestic tourists, an increase of 20.1% from 2018. Domestic tourism revenue was CNY 5.027 billion, an increase of 17.3%. There were 105,200 overseas tourists, an increase of 6.1%.

International tourism revenue was CNY 83 million, an increase of 1.2%. Among the tourists who visited the zone, there were 2,144,800 overnight tourists, an increase of 38.3%. There were 8,489,500 day-trip tourists, an increase of 16.0%. The number of visitors to scenic spots was 9,498,800, an increase of 14.8%. Among them, the number that paid for scenic spots was 1,743,600, a decrease of 16.5% [64].

Table 1. Evaluation system.

Criterion Layer	Sub-Criterion Layer	Indicator Layer
A. Service Quality	Attitude	A1 Consulting service (provide detailed consulting service experience before check-in) A2 Reception experience when checking in A3 Patient communication and help (patient communication and help can be provided throughout the whole process of check in) A4 Atmosphere experience (Be able to experience a positive and enthusiastic atmosphere)
	Hygiene	A5 Cleaning service (Clean and tidy room, provide cleaning service in time) A6 Household products (Comfortable use of household products) A7 Service products with local characteristics (going to the sea/surfing, etc.)
B. Physical environment and facilities	Leisure facilities	B1 Spaciousness and brightness of the room (The rooms are spacious and bright with visual experience) B2 Room ventilation (The guest room is well-ventilated and has no peculiar smell) B3 Sound insulation of room (The sound insulation of the guest room is good, and the listening experience is good)
	Public space	B4 User experience of public space (courtyard/terrace) B5 Entertainment facilities/space
	Decoration	B6 Architectural design style (Beauty and uniqueness of architectural design style)
	Room facilities	B7 Ornamentation of green landscape
C. Environment and location	Surrounding supporting facilities	C1 Distance to the seaside
	Traffic accessibility	C2 Completeness of surrounding facilities
	Location	C3 Comfort of surrounding environment
	Coastal landscape	C4 Accessibility of public transport C5 Rationality of parking position

Multiple homestays are distributed in Dapeng New District, which leverages its own coastal resources in different ways to form a coastal area with diverse and rich industries. According to the relationship between the homestay communities and the seashores, and from the perspective of tourist experience, Dapeng New District homestays can be divided into the leisure-viewing type and the entertainment-experience type. The homestay cluster of the leisure-viewing type can be found in the Jiaochangwei area, as well as in Haibei Bay, Guanhu Village, and Yangmei Keng. The main attraction of these homestays is the seaside view. The buildings have an intricate shape, forming a seaside pedestrian street, so that visitors staying at a homestay can enjoy walking on the seaside at any time. Haibei Bay is backed by the mountains and the sea, and the stepped building-distribution pattern ensures that the homestays have the widest sea view possible. The entertainment-experience type of homestay is represented by Xichong, Dong Chong, Qixing Bay, and other homestay groups. Xichong is equipped with a special surfing area, Tung Chung has a hiking route, and Seven

Star Bay has sailing yachts. The experience of going out to sea is a significant attraction in these homestays. For the purpose of accommodation in the coastal entertainment industry, the homestays of the entertainment–experience type are less attractive than those of the leisure viewing type.

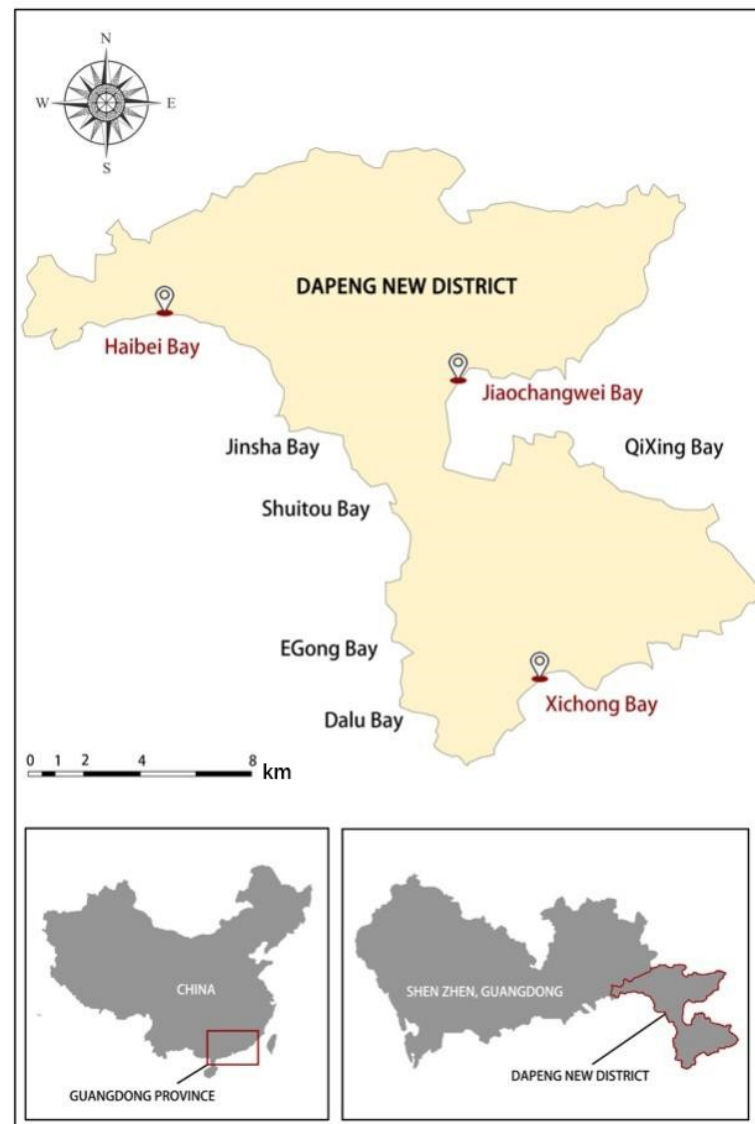


Figure 2. Location of research objects.

Therefore, this paper selected Xichong and Jiaochangwei as the main research objects. On the one hand, they have different resource utilization methods, and, on the other hand, they have higher tourist flows and influence. Xichong is located in the southern part of the Dapeng Peninsula; it is surrounded by mountains on three sides, is relatively flat in the middle, and overlooks the sea in the south. It has 4.5 km of Shenzhen's longest coastline. Xichong homestays are distributed in communities, relying on the original villages for their development. Three communities make up Xichong, including Hetou Village, Shagang Village and Xinwu Village. The development of homestays mainly relies on the existing bathing beaches, and the homestays are only used for accommodation. Xichong homestays developed from Hetou Village as the center, and the villages are less than 10 min' walk from the beach. The infrastructure in Xichong meets basic daily needs, but the quality is poor and needs to be improved greatly.

Jiaochangwei is located on the north side of Dapeng Peninsula, to the east of Dapeng Yintan Road, and to the south of Pengfei Road and Longqi, which is a narrow coastal area between the bays adjacent to Dapengsuocheng and Pengcheng Village to the north and Qiniang Mountain to the south. Niangshan faces Jiaochangwei across the sea. Longqi Bay, backed by Jiaochangwei, is the birthplace of water sports in Shenzhen. In 2007, the first batch of water-sports enthusiasts rented private houses in Jiaochangwei and became the early homestay tourists in Jiaochangwei. Taking this as a starting point, within a few years, hundreds of homestays were opened gradually in Jiaochangwei. The year 2011 was the preparatory period for globalization, when homestays flourished at the end of the Jiaochangwei stadium. After more than ten years of development, Jiaochangwei has become a well-known homestay town, and has become the main destination for group-activity weekends and leisure vacations for Shenzhen citizens. The homestays have distinctive themes and features, and the overall atmosphere is great. However, the construction quality is poor, the room facilities are generally outdated, and the service quality needs to be improved urgently.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was performed in two stages. In the first stage, an administrated questionnaire-based survey was designed for this study. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part 1 and 2 contained 19 indicator layers for tourists' satisfaction (see Table 1) in the form of 5-point Likert statements [65]. These factors were converted back to the 19 indicator layers in the IPA. Respondents were asked to rate the levels of importance (1 denoted the least important and 5 denoted the most important) and performance (1 denoted the poorest performance and 5 denoted the best performance) of the items, respectively, according to the respondents' travel experience. The perceived level of performance indicates the level of satisfaction. The mean scores of the importance and performance of each indicator were plotted graphically and finally generated an importance–performance (I-P) grid, which can be seen in Figure 3 or Figure 4. These answers provided the data for the subsequent analyses, including the identification of AHP factors and the site condition by IPA. Part 3 included questions about respondents' sociodemographic information (see Table 2, Figure 5).

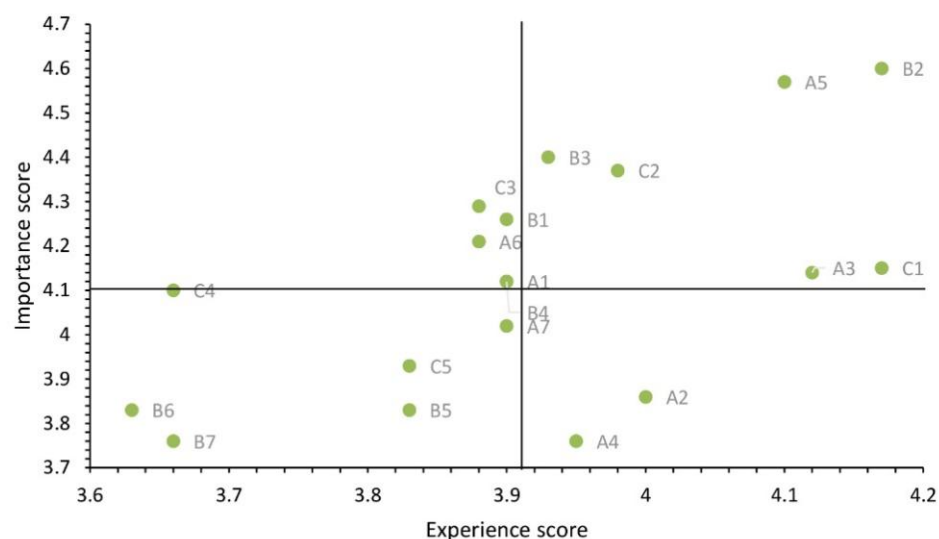


Figure 3. Result of IPA in Xichong.

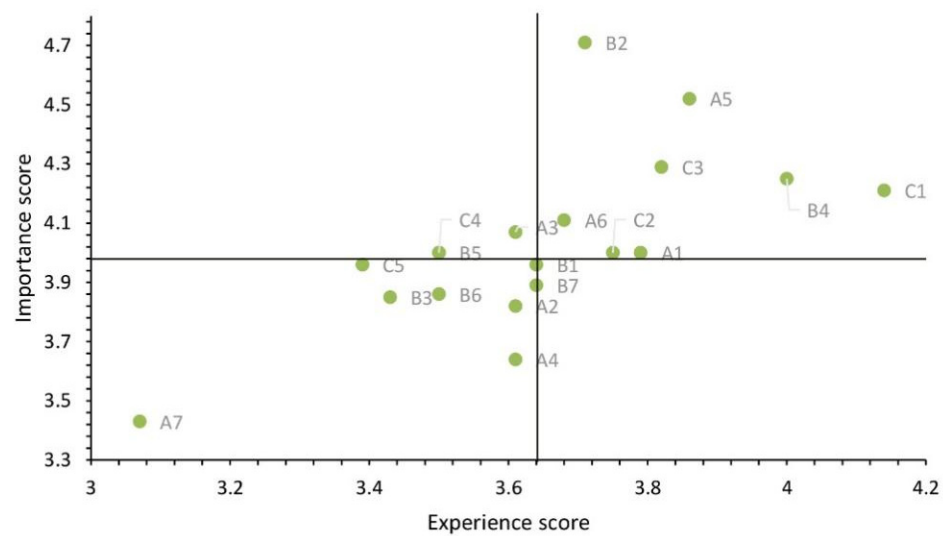


Figure 4. Result of IPA in Jiaochangwei.

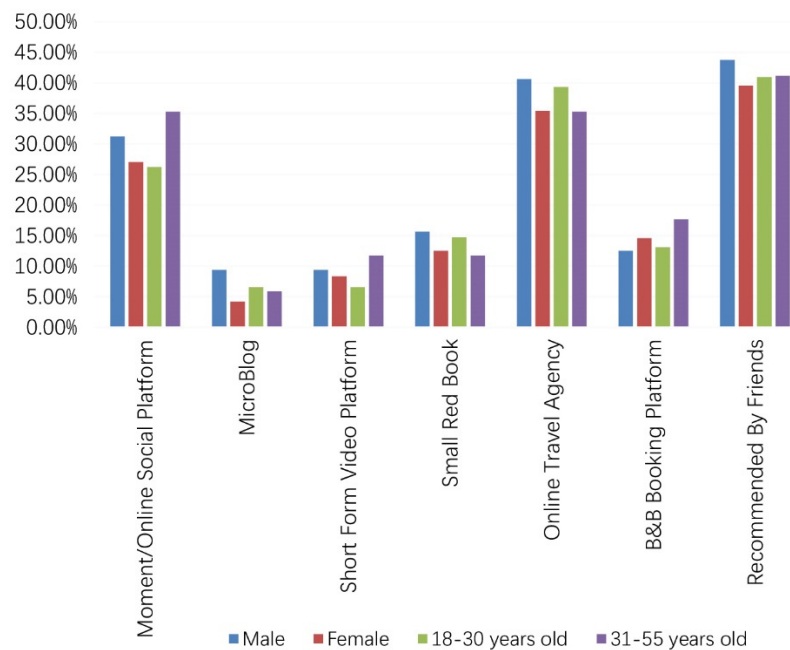


Figure 5. Statistics of information-acquisition methods.

A pilot-study round was conducted, which consisted of 80 preliminary questionnaires, to confirm the clarity and the language of the questions, before undertaking the main survey which was subsequently determined to be a formal questionnaire consisting of 3 criterion layers and 19 indicator layers. Then, a total of 233 questionnaires were distributed in Jiaochangwei and Xichong among a convenience sample of tourists during April and June 2021 (133 questionnaires in Jiaochangwei, 100 questionnaires in Xichong). The entire survey was conducted by ten trained interviewers at different public locations and tourist attractions in the village. After familiarization with the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature, and confidentiality procedures, a participant completed a self-administered questionnaire and each session took about 10 to 15 min. The interviewers provided clarifications about the questions upon request. The quality of the collected responses was checked by the interviewers separately. A returned questionnaire was deemed invalid when any respondent provided multiple answers to single-choice questions, or when a substantial number of questions was left unanswered. A total of 133 questionnaires were collected

in Jiaochangwei with 126 valid responses included. A total of 100 questionnaires were collected in Xichong with 96 valid responses included. The effective response rates of the two places of the survey are thus 94.74% and 96%, respectively.

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic profile and the visitation characteristics of the respective respondent groups. It does not show a very uneven gender distribution or a certain gender-dominant pattern (the percentages of either male or female respondents do not exceed 60% in either). The majority of the sample has an age range of between 18 and 30 years old (about 51.4%). A total of 27 percent of respondents work in the private sector.

Table 2. Socio-demographics of the respondents ($n = 222$).

Variable	Type	Number	Frequency Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	49.1
	Female	113	50.9
Age	Below 18	30	13.5
	18–30	114	51.4
	31–55	58	26.1
	Over 55	20	9
Working status	Student	41	18.5
	Private sector employee	60	27
	Public sector employee	41	18.5
	Non-fixed occupation	34	15.3
	Retired	46	20.7

4. Results

4.1. Selection on the Tourist Destination

For information acquisition, tourists who visited the homestays due to a recommendation from friends were higher than those who did from recommendation by Moments or other online social platforms' recommendation; the number of tourists who visited because of their friends' recommendation was followed by the number that visited because of information they obtained from tourism reservation platforms and those that visited because of information on residential-tourism rental platforms. Few tourists visited because of information they obtained from Small Red Book, micro blogs and short videos. However, tourists who visited because of information from these three sources exceeded those who made reservations via short-rental platforms. Therefore, there are more diverse channels for tourists to obtain information, and the publicity effect of online social platforms is gradually differentiating from that of the traditional online travel agencies (OTA). Online social platforms have a higher tourist conversion rate. There were no significant differences in tourist behavior according to gender or age (Figure 3).

Geographical environment (35%) and safety and health (36.25%) were the main factors that influenced tourists' intentions to choose rural homestays. Besides the advantages of geographical conditions, good health conditions can give an accommodation good reputation. About 50% of tourists were willing to have entertainment facilities (50%) in their homestays and 46.25% were ready for self-service cooking. Some tourists also wanted transfer and catering services. Compared with hotel accommodation, rural homestays often do not provide breakfast and other convenient transfer services. For atmosphere feeling and design style, 76.25% and 62.25% of tourists chose "quiet and comfortable" and "artistic atmosphere", a respectively, which is in line with the image of rural homestay in people's mind. The two indicators "personality experience" and "regional customs" ranked

second, which is in line with the consumption tendency of tourists within the context of an experience economy.

For organization and operation, the survey results showed that the number of tourists who wanted to participate in the activities organized by the homestay operators was far greater than the number of those who did not want to participate. At the same time, tourists who did not want to participate in the activities would not resent the promotion of activity information, which indicates that there should be more investment in the promotion of activities to enhance the participation intention of tourists.

4.2. Tourists Experience on the Spots

According to the survey results of “your experience” and “how would you rate the importance of rural homestays”, we built an importance experience four-quadrant diagram with the experience score as the abscissa and the importance score as the ordinate. In the chart of the survey results of Xichong District, we can see that “A3 Patient communication and help”, “A5 Cleaning service”, “B2 Ventilated room”, “B3 Sound insulation of room”, “C1 Distance to the seaside” and “C2 Completeness of surrounding facilities” are in the first quadrant, indicating the advantages of Xichong homestays. “A1 Consulting service”, “B1 Spaciousness and brightness of the room”, “B4 User experience of public space” and “C3 Comfort of surrounding environment” are located in the second quadrant, indicating that their experience is poor, but they are of high importance and need urgent optimization. “A7 Service products with local characteristics”, “B5 Entertainment facilities”, “B6 Architectural design style”, “B7 Ornamental green landscape”, “C4 Accessibility of public transport” and “C5 Rationality of parking position” are located in the third quadrant, indicating that the experience is low and of low importance. It is suggested to improve them gradually. “A2 Reception experience” and “A4 Atmosphere experience” are located in the fourth quadrant, indicating that the experience is higher and less important, and should be maintained (Figure 4).

In the chart of the survey results for Jiaochangwei District, we can see that “A1 Consulting service”, “A5 Cleaning service”, “A6 Household products”, “B2 Room ventilation”, “B4 User experience of public space”, “C1 Distance to the seaside”, “C2 Completeness of surrounding facilities” and “C3 Comfort of surrounding environment” are in the first quadrant, indicating the advantages of Jiaochangwei residential area. “A3 Patient communication and help”, “B5 Entertainment facilities” and “C4 Accessibility of public transport” are located in the second quadrant, indicating that their experience is poor, but they are of high importance and need urgent optimization. “A2 Reception experience when checking in”, “A4 Atmosphere experience”, “B1 Spaciousness and brightness of the room”, “B3 Sound insulation of room”, “B6 Architectural design style”, “B7 Ornamental green landscape” and “C5 Rationality of parking position” are located in the third quadrant, which indicates that the tourist experience is undesirable and of low importance. It is suggested that they are improved gradually. There are no indicators in the fourth quadrant, and, from the overall situation, this shows that the factors with better experience are relatively important (Figure 5).

Xichong and Jiaochangwei are both popular coastal tourism destinations in Dapeng New District. In the analysis of the evaluation results, four indicators that tourists thought were important and showed better experience were “A5 cleaning service”, “B2 room ventilation”, “C1 Distance to the seaside”, “C2 Completeness of surrounding facilities”.

In regard to location of homestay, Xichong is a tourist destination with entertainment experiences as the main attraction, while Jiaochangwei is a tourist destination with leisure and vacation as the main attraction. The indicators of better and more important elements of homestays in the Xichong area included “A3 communication help” and “B3 room sound insulation”, which indicates that homestay operators in the Xichong area provide timely help for tourists during their whole period of stay and patiently answer their inquiries. As there are few entertainment activities in homestays in the Xichong area, more attention is paid to the privacy and comfort of the room. For homestay experiences in the Jiaochangwei

area, the evaluation indexes with higher importance included “A1 consulting service”, “A6 household goods”, “B4 public space” and “C3 comfortable environment”. This implies that the homestay operators provide detailed answers to the tourists’ questions before check-in and the spatial arrangement of the homestays are characteristic and full of artistic atmosphere. A variety of public spaces provide a good leisure experience for community building, and the coastal footpaths around the homestays bring tourists a comfortable, immersive experience.

The evaluation results of Xichong homestays with poor experience and high importance included “A1 consulting service”, “A6 household goods”, “B1 room is spacious”, “B4 public space” and “C3 environment is comfortable”. Tourists who wished to experience coastal entertainment wanted to know more about related local industries before staying in homestays. More consideration was given to location and other factors. These initial considerations were also due to the scattered homestay groups in Xichong, which led to some problems for tourists when they made choices before check in. Therefore, the importance value of “consulting service” was higher. In addition, the poor experience of compact rooms was due to the fact that the most homestays in Xichong are transformed residential buildings. In general, the overall structure of the rooms remains as it was before it was converted to a homestay, resulting in a cramped room type, less public space and a poor experience. In terms of environmental perception, Xichong homestays are not completely adjacent to the sea. Even if there are relatively complete supporting facilities, the homestays lack the landscape characteristics of coastal villages, which led to the low evaluation of comfort of the surrounding environment, by tourists. The evaluation results of “A3 communication help”, “B5 entertainment facilities” and “C4 traffic accessibility” were less important than those in the Jiaochangwei. Tourists who wanted a leisure and vacation experience hoped that the homestay operators could provide enough entertainment facilities inside the building to meet their relaxation needs. At the same time, homestay operators could provide a whole-process service to solve all the problems tourists may face from check in to check out.

From the overall data comparison, it can be found that Xichong’s experience perception score was higher than that of Jiaochangwei, which indicates that, although Xichong was only recently developed, more attention was paid to the development quality of the homestays, and the vicious competition market at Jiaochangwei led to the overall decline in homestay evaluation. Regarding “B4 public space”, the score at the end of Jiaochangwei evaluation was slightly higher than that at Xichong. The two indicators “A5 cleaning service” and “B2 room ventilation” had the maximum importance evaluation scores. For the two types of homestay groups, the importance scores for these two indicators were highest, indicating that the cleanliness and smell of the room would have a greater impact on the tourist experience. In addition, there was a big difference in the index of “A7 characteristic products” between Xichong and Jiaochangwei, which shows that tourists in Xichong paid more attention to the activities experiencing local characteristic products. Homestay operators should pay more attention to exploring their own resources and characteristics, developing a variety of industrial situations, forming a homestay-linkage industry, and promoting the development of homestays.

There was little difference between the tourist experience evaluation and importance evaluation of each index for homestays in Xichong, which reflects that tourists had a high recognition of homestays in the Xichong area and were relatively satisfied with the experience of the homestays. In contrast, the difference between the experience score and the importance score at Jiaochangwei was larger, which indicates that the tourists had higher expectations of the leisure and vacation type homestay products at Jiaochangwei, and many aspects of these products still need to be improved (Figure 6).

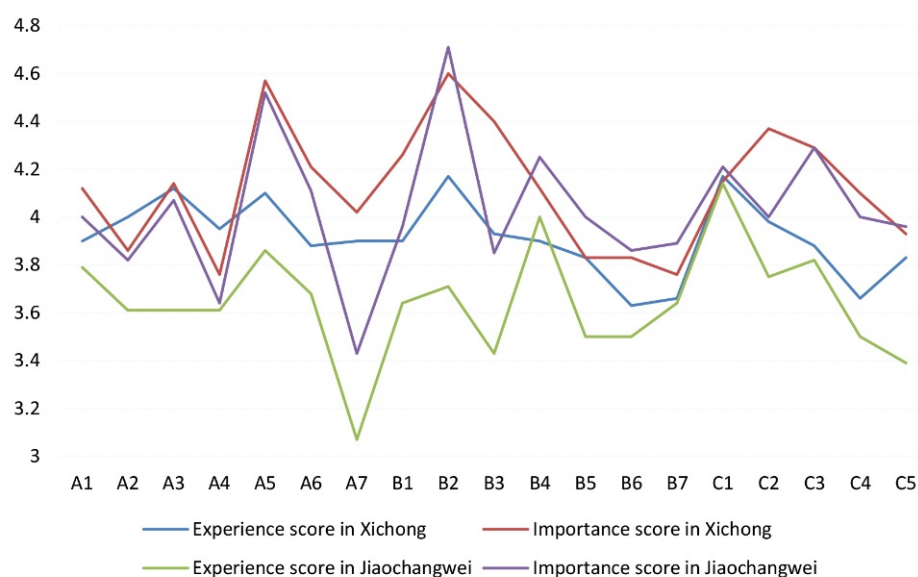


Figure 6. Experience–importance comparison.

5. Conclusions and Implications

With the rapid development of the homestay tourism industry as a part of the non-standard accommodation industry, rural homestays effectively meet the market demand of the accommodation industry beyond the “standard accommodation” of the hotel industry, and play a very important role in the tourism development of Dapeng New District. Rural homestays have gradually developed into one of the core attractions of tourism destinations in the Nan’ao community. They not only take the beach as their core resource, but also meet the tourist experience requirements for theme creativity, cultural connotation, characteristic extension industry, etc.

This paper proposes a qualitative evaluation system for costal rural homestays in China. This study contributes to theoretical grounds by incorporating tourist experience in the evaluations of rural homestays. The establishment of this system was derived from interviews of operators, followed by tourist experience of rural homestays, based on the empirical cases of Jiaochangwei and Xichong. The measurement of the strengths and weaknesses of rural homestay was conducted through AHP and IPA. Although this study is exploratory in nature, it offers useful insights into the theoretical development for quantifying the quality of rural homestay in general, and practical recommendations of costal rural homestays as a showcase for other similar rural tourist destinations.

5.1. Policy Recommendations

According to the IPA analysis results, this paper summarizes the deficiencies of the tourist evaluation results in Jiaochangwei and Xichong from the aspects of operation experience and space experience, and puts forward optimization strategies for the development and operation of the homestay industry in the Dapeng area from the perspective of the operators, guided by the feedback of tourist experience, and combined with the interview contents of homestay operators, mainly including tourist group, function configuration, service characteristics and network marketing.

5.1.1. Subdividing Target Customers According to Regional Characteristics

In the early stages of homestay operation, the main target group and secondary target group of homestays should be defined according to the destination attributes of the location where the homestay are located, and the attributes of tourists in the area where the homestay is located should be understood, and the characteristics of tourists in different seasons should be understood. For example, Xichong takes small groups of families and company departments as the main target groups, while different main

customer groups exist in different seasons in Jiaochangwei. For homestay operators, the age characteristics, demand characteristics, crowd attributes and preferences of homestay tourist groups require clarification, so as to determine the design style, function ratio, room-type ratio, and even site-selection strategies.

5.1.2. Determining the Function Configuration According to the Needs of Tourists

A homestay in the Dapeng area should reasonably allocate the area proportion based on the market environment and the needs of tourists. From the ratio of public area to guest room area, when the total building area is small, if group tourists are the main target group, a large centralized public area can be appropriately configured to provide group tourists with rest and entertainment; if individual customers are the main target group, the public areas can be distributed to provide a more private space for small groups to rest. When the total building area is large and contains enough courtyard space, it can undertake various customer groups. Under the condition of ensuring the reasonable and sufficient area of the guest room area, some space can be endowed with other consumption functions, such as restaurants, cafes, bars, fitness rooms, etc.

5.1.3. Strengthening Characteristic Service Management System

From the experience evaluation results obtained from the perspective of tourists, most homestays in Dapeng do not yet reflect the service characteristics of coastal culture. A small number of guest houses adopt the systematic management mode of “service housekeeper”, and tourists are assigned a fixed service housekeeper before arriving. Any problems of tourists during check-in are handled by the housekeeper, providing tourists with a detailed and thoughtful service experience.

5.1.4. Establishing a Multi-Channel Network Marketing Platform

At present, most homestay groups in the Dapeng area show obvious differences between the low and peak seasons. In the peak season, the rooms are full, and the operators do not need to publicize, so a large number of visitors cannot find accommodation when booking. In the off-season, the business of the whole region is poor, and only the sea view room might be ordered. Optimizing network resources in many aspects and formulating modern Internet marketing strategies are necessary. At present, besides the three channels of Internet marketing, such as the electronic business platform, social network and word-of-mouth marketing, operators should gradually expand the marketing channels of “Internet plus home stay”, and provide value-added products such as catering, entertainment, shopping, cultural arts and crafts, and so on. Forming a multi-dimensional and multi-channel B & B marketing model, getting rid of the constraints of low and peak seasons in the development process of B & Bs, and forming a benign compound development model are necessary.

5.2. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged, which may provide guidance for future research. Firstly, this study used convenience sampling to survey the tourists in Jiaochangwei and Xichong, which may limit the ability to generalize its research findings to the entire tourist population there. It is necessary to extend the research approach to other coastal rural homestays so as to verify the applicability of this evaluation system of rural homestays. Secondly, the study mainly focuses on the survey of tourists, but the development of rural homestays should not neglect the existence of original villagers and the influence on them, although most of them have moved away from Jiaochangwei and Xichong already. Third, the study evaluates the general accommodation experience of tourists. It is necessary to research space-sharing behavior in the specific social context of maintaining physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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