

Exploring The Gap Between Travel Expectations and Actual Experiences of Young Adults Living in Helsinki

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Abstract

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Abstract		
<p>This study explores the gap between travel expectations and actual experiences of young adults in Helsinki and analyzes the impact of expectations and actual experiences on trip satisfaction, based on the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory. The research methodology combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Data was collected from surveys of 106 young adults aged 18 to 34 living in Helsinki who had travelled domestically in Finland or internationally within the past 12 months.</p>		
<p>Quantitative results show that both travel expectations and actual experiences contribute positively to satisfaction, and actual experiences have a stronger impact. Conversely, the gap between expectations and experience partially mediates the relationship between expectations and satisfaction and negatively impacts satisfaction.</p>		
<p>Furthermore, the qualitative analysis using thematic analysis of opened-ended responses revealed that young people's travel expectations are primarily shaped by social media, online reviews, and recommendations from friends and relatives. The difference between expectations and experiences often relates to cost, service quality, cuisine, actual conditions at the destination, and unforeseen situations. Despite the remaining gaps between expectations and reality, most participants still rated their trips positively and were satisfied.</p>		
<p>The research findings suggest that travel satisfaction can be improved by effectively managing expectations and ensuring high-quality experience. Simultaneously, the study contributes empirical evidence to the theory of the expectation-experience gap in the context of youth travel.</p>		
Keywords		
Expectations, Experiences, Tourism, Travel, Young Adults, Young People, Satisfaction, Expectation-Experiences Gap, Helsinki.		

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Thesis Statement

Tourism is a large and rapidly growing industry worldwide (Sofronov 2018). The World Travel and Tourism Council stated that in 2024, tourism account for approximately 10% of the global economy, contributing 10.9 trillion USD to GDP and creating around 357 million jobs worldwide. At the same time, international tourist spending continues to increase, reaching nearly 1.9 trillion USD, demonstrating the important economic role of the tourism industry. Beyond its crucial role in economic development, tourism also provides numerous practical benefits for individuals, such as improvement of mental health (Gilbert & Abdullah 2004) and stress reduction (Chen et al. 2014). Moreover, it provides new experiences that broaden new knowledge and personal development (Stone & Petrick 2013, Kim & Ritchie 2014). With the strong development of tourism and the numerous benefits it brings to people, research on the behaviour, experiences, and satisfaction levels of tourists is becoming increasingly necessary.

Youth tourism has a long-established tradition in Europe, and its importance is increasingly recognized worldwide (Horak & Weber 2014). Besides, young adults are strongly influenced by tourism advertisement videos (Fong et al. 2017), social media, Facebook, online reviews (Pietro & Pantano 2013) when forming travel expectations and leading destination choice. However, some vacations do not meet the expectations, the difference can range from small to large, sometimes leading to pleasant surprises or complete disappointment (Skinner & Theodossopoulos 2011, 116). The difference between expectations and the actual travel experience is called the expectations - experiences gap, and it affects satisfaction levels, emotions, and the decision to return to a destination (Yan et al. 2026).

Although many studies on travel satisfaction have been conducted based on the Expectations-Discrepancies Theory, most previous studies have focused on specific destinations or popular tourist spots. Studies examining the relationship between travel expectations, actual experiences, the gap between these factors, and travel satisfaction among young people in the context of their specific place of residence are limited. Especially, there are relatively few studies focusing on analyzing the gap between travel expectations and experiences of young people living in Helsinki, as well as the impact of this gap on their overall trip satisfaction.

In this research, Helsinki was chosen as the research context not as a tourist destination, but as the residence of a large young community with high levels of travel and mobility. The current development of social media, the internet, and online advertising contributes to high

expectations among young people living in Helsinki. When actual experiences do not fully align with these expectations, the gap between expectations and experience can impact overall trip satisfaction. However, the extent and way expectations, actual experiences, and the gap between them affect travel satisfaction among young people in Helsinki remain unclear.

Therefore, this study will examine the gap between travel expectations and actual experiences of young people in Helsinki and analyze the impact of expectations and actual experiences on trip satisfaction, based on the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory. Understanding the gap between travel expectations and experiences not only sheds light on the travel behavior of young people living in Helsinki but also contributes valuable insights that support the improvement of tourism service quality to ensure satisfying travel experiences.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

1.2.1 Research Aim

This thesis aims to explore the difference between travel expectations and the actual experiences of young adults who are living in Helsinki when travelling and impact of this gap on travel satisfaction.

1.2.2 Research Objectives

- Identify the travel expectations of young adults in Helsinki before traveling.
- Analyse the gap between travel expectations and actual experiences of young adults in Helsinki.
- Evaluate the impact of travel expectations and actual experiences on the expectations - experiences gap of young adults in Helsinki.
- Evaluate the direct effect of expectations and actual travel experiences on the travel satisfaction of young adults in Helsinki.
- Assess the effect of the expectations - experiences gap on travel satisfaction of young adults in Helsinki.

1.3 Significance of the study

1.3.1 Academic significance

This research broadens the use of Expectations–Discrepancies Theory (EDT) within the tourism sector through a simultaneous analysing the roles of expectations, actual experiences, expectations-experiences gap, and satisfaction of young people. In particular, the

study adds empirical evidence in a specific residential context, focusing on young people living in Helsinki – a context rarely addressed in previous studies.

This study offers theoretical and empirical support for future research on travel behaviour, expectations, expectations-experiences gap, and satisfaction among young people, creating an important basis for future research. The process of synthesizing and expanding existing theories to develop new theoretical is basis for guiding future research (Webster & Watson 2002). Other researchers could build on these findings to further explore the differences between expectations and actual experiences, analyse factors influencing young people's travel decisions and behaviour, and develop models to predict levels of satisfaction in tourism.

1.3.2 Practical significance

In practical terms, the research results can help tourism businesses, marketers, and service providers better understand how actual experiences and the gap between expectations and experiences affect travel satisfaction among young people. This can enable travel companies, hotels, and related businesses to better tailor their services to meet travel expectations, leading to greater tourist satisfaction and giving to better growth in the tourism industry.

1.4 Delimitations

This study focuses on young adults aged 18 to 34 living in Helsinki who have traveled domestically in Finland or International within the past 12 months. The research subjects include Finnish citizen, international student and immigrant.

Specifically, the study examines the travel expectations and experiences of these young people, assessing how these differences affect their travel satisfaction. The research focuses on key factors influencing travel satisfaction: expectations, travel experiences, and the discrepancies between expectations and experiences.

The research is limited to the context of Helsinki; therefore, the results are not applicable to other cities in Finland or elsewhere. The focus of the study is leisure tourism, with the purpose of sightseeing, relaxation, and entertainment; and does not examine other forms of tourism such as business travel, educational travel, visiting relatives, or other specific purposes.

The study used a mixed-methods design. The researcher constructs a Likert-scale questionnaire and open-ended questions with the expectation of collecting survey data from approximately 100 participants. The Likert-scale questions provide quantitative data, while qualitative insights were derived from responses to open-ended questions. Quantitative data allows for direct measurement of variables and is easily quantified, while qualitative data depends on the researcher's coding and interpretation process, and therefore may be subject to certain subjective understandings and analyses (Lahmer 2022). With a cross-sectional study design, data were recorded at a specific point in time (Cvetkovic-Vega et al. 2021); therefore, the research does not examine how travel experiences and satisfaction levels of young people living in Helsinki change over time.

Despite these limitations, the research still provides insights into expectations, travel experiences, and how these differences affect the travel satisfaction of young people living in Helsinki.

1.5 Research Questions

The main research question: **How does the gap between travel expectations and actual experiences influence travel satisfaction of young adults living in Helsinki?**

The secondary research questions:

- What are the expectations of young adults living in Helsinki before a trip?
- What factors influence travel expectations of young adults living in Helsinki?
- How do actual experiences differ from the initial travel expectations of young adults living in Helsinki?
- What factors affect expectations-experiences gap of young adults living in Helsinki?
- How do actual experiences relate to travel satisfaction of young adults living in Helsinki?

2 Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

An overview of the theoretical foundation and reviews relevant previous studies is presented in this chapter. First, it clarifies core concepts including travel expectations, actual travel experiences, expectation-experience gap, travel satisfaction and young adult in tourism context.

Next, the chapter introduces Oliver's Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) as the main theoretical framework to analyse the relationship between expectations, actual experiences, and satisfaction. This theory was chosen because it emphasizes the role of comparison between initial expectations and actual experiences in forming post-consumption evaluations.

Finally, this chapter proposes a conceptual framework that describes the relationship between travel expectations and actual experiences, the gap between these two factors, and travel satisfaction. It also develops hypotheses to test the model in the context of young people living in Helsinki.

2.2 Key Concepts

2.2.1 Travel Expectations

According to Skinner and Theodossopoulos (2011), expectations are a concept encompassing a state of eager anticipation, prospects of benefits or losses, and beliefs about behavioural norms; they are formed before a trip and accompany travellers throughout their journey. Furthermore, expectations are a fundamental and crucial element in tourism, both driving movement, consumption, and social change, and shaping the success or failure of a travel experience (Skinner and Theodossopoulos 2011). In other words, expectations are the initial driving force behind every trip.

At the centre of this process is anticipation – a key factor in forming and reinforcing expectations. In tourism, expectations are understood as consumers' predictions about specific conditions at a destination, allowing them to visualize what will happen, build a relatively clear perception of the place's appearance, and feel ready for their planned trip. (Grissmann et al. 2019.) This anticipation and prediction help travellers shape their upcoming experience, thereby directly influencing how they perceive the reality of the trip.

Therefore, tourism and expectations are inseparable. Without expectations, there would be no tourists, because expectations drive the process of imagination, planning, booking, and participation in experiences. However, expectations are not fixed; they are formed within specific cultural and social contexts, are constantly evolving, and can be confirmed or adjusted during and after the journey. This interaction between expectations and actual experiences leads to changes in travellers' perceptions, levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Skinner & Theodossopoulos 2011, 7), thereby influencing decisions to revisit to the destination in the future (Yan et al. 2026).

Furthermore, customer expectations can be further understood through two levels: desired expectations and adequate expectations (Parasuraman et al 1991, according to Hsieh & Yuan 2010). Desired expectations describe the service customers wish to obtain, in contrast to adequate expectations, which represent the minimum service level they consider acceptable. When service providers meet or exceed desired expectations, customers are often surprised and more satisfied, resulting in a more positive evaluation of service quality. (Hsieh & Yuan 2010.)

2.2.2 Actual Travel Experiences

Travel experiences are what people experience as tourists (Sharpley & Stone 2011, 24). These are the traces of an individual's perceptions, emotions, and behaviours, shaped by their desires and expectations from the moment they decide to travel throughout their journey (Atasoy & Türkay 2025). Therefore, travel experiences are personal and unique, each defined by themselves, even within the same context or destination. In this process, the experiences is significantly shaped by travellers, through their relationship with the destination and the surrounding social structure. Travelers' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes influence how they interact with, feel, and interpret their travel experiences. Thus, the travel experiences are part of social life and possess lasting value, increasingly personalized through consumption and technological support. (Sharpley & Stone 2011, 24-29.)

Atasoy & Türkay (2025) and Kim et al. (2012) developed a memorable tourism experience scale grounded in Churchill's and Hinkin's frameworks, and seven dimensions constitute the scale, including hedonism, meaningfulness, novelty, knowledge, involvement, local culture, and refreshment.

Hedonism is a tendency to pursue excitement and passion for valuable things (Güven 2009, according to Atasoy & Türkay 2025). In tourism, these factors are present before, during, and after the trip. People engage in tourism activities to satisfy the pleasure aspect, as tourism activities and destinations meet the need to seek new experiences and emotions.

Furthermore, tourists not only seek material benefits but also expect to learn more about the world and broaden their perspectives on life through rich travel experiences, spiritual values such as satisfaction, freedom, entertainment, and meaning in life - experiences that can become the most memorable moments of their lives (Kim & Ritchie 2014). In addition, tourism fulfills the need to explore new things, different from familiar environments. Changes in landscape, culture, and activities create a sense of novelty for tourists; the novelty of travel experiences involves breaking away from ordinary and familiar routines. (Atasoy & Türkay 2025). One important aspect is the opportunity to learn new things and develop knowledge, skills, and personal growth through travel experiences (Stone & Petrick 2013; Kim & Ritchie 2014). On each trip, tourists gain knowledge about the culture, people, lifestyle, nature, and religion of the destination, thereby enhancing their satisfaction with the trip. Besides, the travel experience is enhanced when tourists directly interact with and immerse themselves in activities at the destination; however, the level of this parameter still depends on everyone's needs, financial capabilities, and time. Through participation, tourists engage with local culture and resources – elements that make a destination unique and foster connections between customers and the local community. This cultural interaction enriches the experience and enhances tourist satisfaction (Kim & Ritchie 2014). Finally, tourism is not simply about sightseeing but also helping people to escape the daily pressures, relax, and recharge, providing a sense of comfort, tranquility, and mental recovery (Atasoy & Türkay 2025; Kim & Ritchie 2014).

2.2.3 Expectation-Experiences Gap

Expectation–experience gap refers to the difference between individuals' prior expectations and their actual experiences after using a product or service (Oliver 1980).

People often dream of an idealized world, especially when preparing for important choices or trips. However, this type of dream usually has no practical purpose or concrete goal. Such dreams shape strong expectations about what travel should be like. People frequently yearn to escape from everyday life and seek a better place. Travel appears to offer that escape, moving or traveling to another destination does not eliminate personal fears and difficulties. (Comic & Kalmic 2015.)

At the same time, Comic & Kalmic (2015) suggested humans both avoid undesirable aspects of their lives and seek opposite values such as beauty, truth, fulfilment, and authenticity. However, the goals they pursue are often vague and idealized, making them difficult to achieve. As a result, the journey toward these expectations can resemble an illusion.

The gap between expectations and actual experience becomes apparent during travel. According to Comic & Kalmic (2025), travelers often have high expectations stemming from a tendency to idealize travel. When the actual experience fails to meet expectations, disappointment arises. The higher the expectations, the greater the potential gap. Travelers may even feel disappointed in themselves for not experiencing the "magic" or excitement they anticipated.

The difference between expectations and actual experience on a trip can sometimes lead to pleasant surprises or unique and authentic journeys (Skinner & Theodossopoulos 2011, 16), which makes travel meaningful and appealing. Conversely, when everything is planned and predictable, the experience loses its element of discovery and easily becomes boring or monotonous (Comic & Kalmic 2025). The gap of expectations and actual experience can also create tensions or conflicts that can affect how the travel experience is shaped (Skinner & Theodossopoulos 2011, 16).

2.2.4 Travel Satisfaction

Satisfaction reflects the interaction between earlier expectations and the degree to which these expectations are realized or not by actual performance. (Oliver 1980).

Satisfaction represents the consumer's sense of fulfillment. It refers to the consumer's evaluative response to the degree to which a product or service delivers a satisfying and enjoyable experience, including under or exceeds expectations. (Oliver 2010, 8.)

Travel satisfaction is a key factor in enhancing a person's general and happiness. There is a connection between life satisfaction with health, work, family, or leisure, and travel satisfaction constitutes a distinct and highly influential factor. Positive travel experiences generate joy and emotional fulfillment, enhancing happiness through relaxation and enjoyment. Simultaneously, meaningful travel experiences can foster personal growth and social connection, thereby supporting mental health. Therefore, travel satisfaction serves as an essential component in overall life satisfaction. (Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín 2008.)

In this research, travel satisfaction is defined as young people's overall assessment of their travel experience after comparing their initial expectations with the actual experience. Based on the Expectation-Discrepancy theory framework proposed by Richard L. Oliver, Satisfaction arises when consumers evaluate their actual experience against their prior expectations. Satisfaction increases when travellers find that their experiences meet or exceed their initial expectations, creating a positive gap, whereas experiences that fail to meet expectations produce a negative gap, leading to dissatisfaction. Therefore, travel satisfaction represents the outcome of evaluating the gap between expectations and experience

and is an important indicator of how successful travel experience met young people's expectations.

2.2.5 Young Adults in Tourism Context

Young people are considered one of the most influential groups of tourists in the tourism industry. The WYSE Travel Confederation and UNWTO estimate that in 2023, this group accounted for approximately 23% of total international tourist arrivals, equivalent to more than 296 million visitors. Young tourist group is typically defined as being between 15 and 30 years old, or 18–35 depending on the research definition, representing a transitional period between adolescence and full adulthood. This group is familiar with modern technology, socially conscious, seeking new discoveries and experiences, and prioritizes relaxation and cultural experiences in their travel decisions (Marlina et al 2026).

Young people frequently update their knowledge and entertainment online and are influenced by new technology, social media and online reviews (Pietro & Pantano 2013). This contributes to forming pre-trip expectations based on images, reviews, and content derived from what they regularly access and interact with. Therefore, their expectations are high and strongly influenced by social media and the internet (Marlina et al 2026). When the actual experience does not fully meet these expectations, the gap between expectations and experience can become more pronounced.

Furthermore, young people often prioritize personal experiences, authenticity, connection, and uniqueness in their trips, rather than traditional factors like amenities or standard service such as the value of a hotel or food and beverage brand (Popsa 2024). This makes them more sensitive to the quality of their actual experiences and more likely to make clearer assessments of their own satisfaction levels. Therefore, this group is particularly well-suited for research within the framework of Expectation-Discrepancy Theory, where the comparison between expectations and experiences plays a central role in shaping satisfaction.

In 2025, Helsinki's population was 684,018, with the largest age group being 30–34 years old, including 64,325 people (Helsinki facts and figures 2025). Focusing on young people living in Helsinki allows for research into the tourism behaviour and evaluations of a specific demographic group within a particular residential context, thereby identifying how the gap between expectations and experience affects tourist satisfaction. In this study, the age group chosen was 18–34 because this age group has a high level of mobility, actively participates in tourism, and is strongly influenced by digitalization and social media trends.

Therefore, limiting the scope of the study to this age group allows for a deeper analysis of the travel behaviour and motivations of the young generation living in Helsinki.

2.3 Theories

The basic theoretical framework derived from Oliver's theory is called Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). This theory posits that post-purchase satisfaction is generated by expectations, coupled with perceived performance. Satisfaction following a purchase occurs when outcomes exceed expectations (positive disconfirmation), and dissatisfaction occurs when the product or service does not live up to expectation (negative disconfirmation). EDT theory suggests that the gap between perceived performance and expectations defines satisfaction. Satisfaction is the primary dependent factor, while expectations and perceived performance are the primary independent factors in EDT (Oliver 1977; 1980, according to Nsobiari & Anyadighibe 2014).

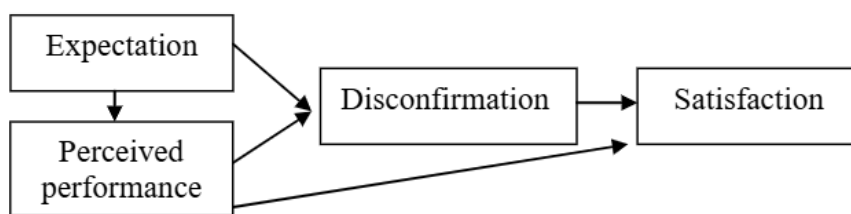


Figure 1. Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver 1980, according to Nsobiari & Anyadighibe 2014)

2.4 Theoretical Model

The study adopts Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) as the foundation for its theoretical model. Travel expectations are formed before the trip and serve as a benchmark for comparison, while the actual travel experience is created during the trip. Travellers compare their actual experience to their initial expectations. This comparison creates a gap between travel expectations and the actual experiences. This gap can be positive if the experience exceeds expectations or negative if the experiences fall short of expectations. The gap between expectations and the actual experiences directly affects travel satisfaction. Travellers are satisfied after their trip (positive disconfirmation) when the actual experience exceeds their initial expectations. Conversely, travellers' dissatisfaction (negative disconfirmation) occurs if the actual experience fails to meet their initial expectations.

Model of Travel Expectations and Actual Experiences is applied in the context of young people (aged 18-34) living in Helsinki. The model serves as the basis for constructing research questions, research hypothesis, survey design and data analysis.

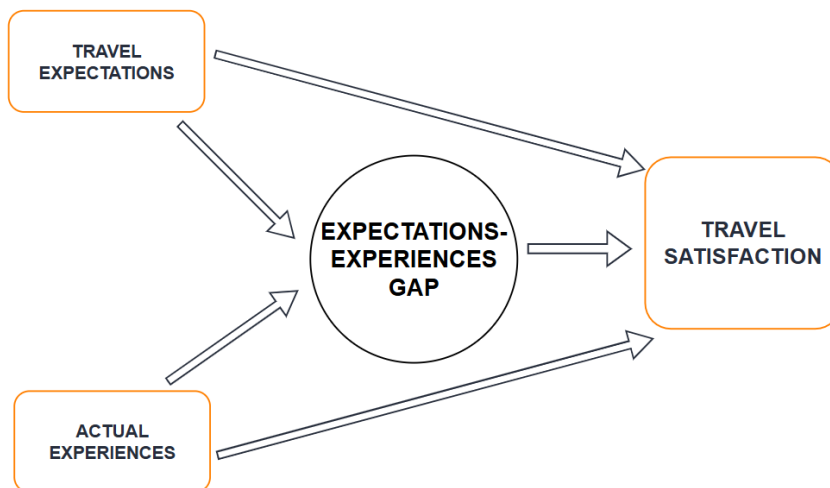


Figure 2. Model of Travel Expectations and Actual Experiences

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The research framework is built on the Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). Travel expectations are formed before the trip, while actual travel experiences are formed during and after the trip. Travel expectations, actual experiences and the expectation–experience gap are assumed to influence travel satisfaction.

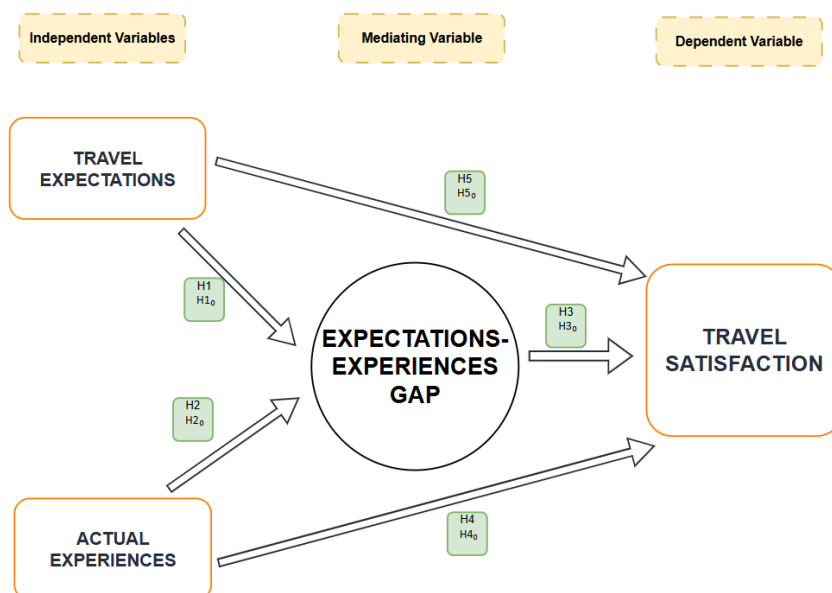


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

The expectation–experience gap reflects the degree of disconfirmation between what travellers expect and what they experience. Expectations and actual travel experiences are assumed to influence the expectation–experience gap.

In Model of Travel Expectations and Actual Experiences Travel, satisfaction is main dependent variable, while travel expectations and actual travel experiences are main independent variables and expectation–experience gap functions as a mediator.

2.6 Research Hypothesis

The study suggests five alternative hypotheses (H1–H5) and their respective null hypotheses (H1₀–H5₀) in which the travel expectations, actual experiences, and expectation-experiences gap are tracked in the context of their impact on travel satisfaction.

Table 1. Hypothesis

Hypothesis Code	Statement
H1	Expectations have a significant influence on the Expectation - Actual Experiences Gap
H1 ₀	Expectations have no significant influence on the Expectation - Actual Experiences Gap.
H2	Actual Experiences have a significant influence on the Expectation - Actual Experiences Gap.
H2 ₀	Actual Experiences have no significant influence on the Expectation - Actual Experiences Gap.
H3	Expectation- Actual Experiences Gap has a significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.
H3 ₀	Expectation- Actual Experiences Gap has no significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.
H4	Actual Experiences have a significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.
H4 ₀	Actual Experiences have no significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.
H5	Expectations have a significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.
H5 ₀	Expectations have no significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Initially, this chapter introduces the research methodology, covering the overall research strategy, research approach and mixed-research design aimed at measuring the relationships among variables in the model, as well as developing a deeper insight into participants' experiences and perceptions. Next, this chapter presents data collection methods, sampling methods, and survey tools.

Next, the study combines analytical methods applied to process both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the relationship among travel expectations, actual experiences, differences between these factors, and overall travel satisfaction.

Finally, the chapter addresses issues related to reliability, validity, and ethical practices to ensure the study is conducted with transparency and produces trustworthy results.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

Positivism philosophy is a model of reasoning based on pre-formed hypotheses that are then tested through observation and experimentation using variables and measures. These studies aim to find explanatory or causal relationships using quantitative methods, prioritizing empirical evidence from large samples. In positivist studies, the researcher mainly engages in data collection and interpretation while maintaining objectivity. (Park et al. 2019.)

This study employs positivism to identify and measure the relationship between several variables such as expectations, actual travel experiences, the difference between pre-trip expectations and actual experiences, and travel satisfaction. These factors can be collected through quantitative research and statistical analysis. Furthermore, the researcher is independent and have no connection to the study subjects – young people living in Helsinki. Applying positivism enables the outcomes to be generalized to young people living in Helsinki, built on empirical data, provides an objective and highly reliable explanation concerning the influence of the gap between expectations and experience on travel satisfaction.

3.2.2 Research Time Horizon

Cross-sectional studies involve collecting information at a particular point in time, in contrast to longitudinal studies that examine changes by following subjects over an extended period.

In addition, cross-sectional designs can be used to explore relationships among two or more variables. (Cvetkovic-Vega et al. 2021.)

This topic is well suited to a cross-sectional research design, as the study focuses on collecting data at one specific moment to assess participants' perceptions and post-trip evaluations. Research variables such as expectations, actual experience, the gap between the two factors, and satisfaction levels were all measured and evaluated at the respondents' present moment, rather than tracking their changes over time. Therefore, the research objective is to identify the associations among variables at a particular point in time instead of observing the process of change or causal relationships over a long period.

Furthermore, this approach aligns with the theoretical model used, where the comparison between expectations and experience is formed immediately after travel and can be measured through a survey. This allows researcher to effectively test the relationships within the model without having to track participants across multiple time periods.

3.2.3 Mixed Methods

According to McLeod (2024), mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. Mixed research is useful when the research question requires consideration of both numerical data collection and personal experience and opinions that quantitative methods cannot address. Integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods makes them complementary and collaborative in achieving a common research objective.

This research integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the associations among the model's variables and to understand how participants interpret their travel experiences. Quantitative research allows for the measurement of expectations, actual experiences, the gap between the two factors, and satisfaction levels to test hypotheses and assess the impact between variables through statistical analysis. However, the gap between expectations and experiences is a matter of personal perceptions and emotions, which are difficult for data to fully explain. Therefore, qualitative research is used to explore more deeply how young people interpret their experiences, the reasons for forming expectations, and the specific factors that create the difference between expectations and experience. Integrating both research methods allows for the validation of the theoretical model while providing contextual insights to explain quantitative findings, thereby enhancing the overall reliability and comprehensiveness of the study. Therefore, a mixed-methods design is suitable for examining both the relationship between variables and individual travel experiences.

3.3 Research Approach

Deductive approach begins with previous theories or studies related to the phenomenon under study. Based on these theories, researchers formulate specific hypotheses and then test them using empirical data to determine whether the hypotheses are supported. (Mohammed 2024, 29.)

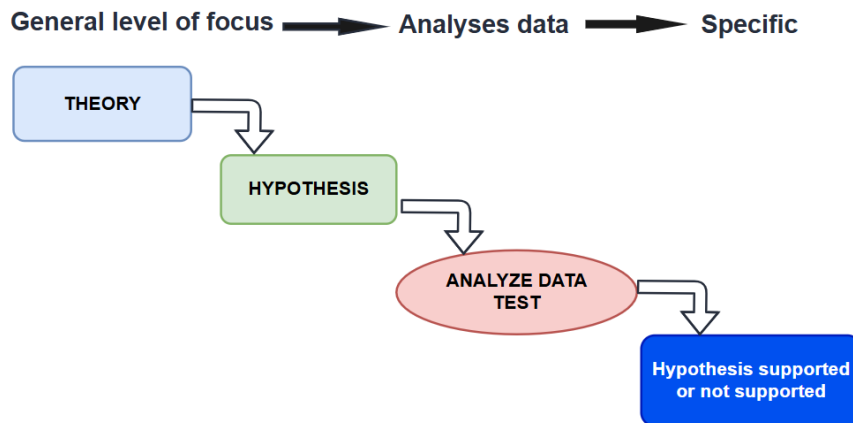


Figure 4. Deductive Research (adapted from Mohammed 2024, 33)

This study employs a deductive reasoning approach because it is based on an existing theoretical framework and aims to test a theoretical model in a specific context.

The research process follows a sequence from theory → theoretical hypothesis → data collection → statistical testing/ analyse → conclusion, rather than constructing a new theory from observation. Specifically, the study applies Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) to formulate hypotheses about the relationship between travel expectations, actual experiences, the gap between these two factors, and travel satisfaction. Instead of discovering a new theory from data, the study starts from an existing theory, then develops conceptual models and hypotheses, and finally tests them using empirical data collected from young adults living in Helsinki.

3.4 Research Strategy

A survey method is applied to obtain data for measuring perceptions and evaluation of young people living in Helsinki regarding pre-trip expectations, actual experiences, the gap between these factors, and trip satisfaction.

Quantitative data for testing the model's hypotheses were gathered through a Likert scale questionnaire. Additionally, to better understand how participants interpreted their travel experiences, the study also used open-ended questions to collect additional qualitative data.

Combining quantitative and qualitative information helps measure the relationships between variables and explain the context and causes of the gap between expectations and experiences.

Using a survey approach makes it possible to access a large of respondents, increasing the generalizability of the research results for young people living in Helsinki and ensuring efficiency in terms of time and resources during data collection.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data collection represents a fundamental and important stage in the research process, as obtaining reliable and unbiased information is essential for producing meaningful results. Researchers collect primary data directly through methods such as experiments, observation, or direct interaction with respondents through surveys. Many techniques are used to collect primary data, including observation, interviews, questionnaires, and schedules. (Mazhar et al. 2021.)

In this study, researcher used a questionnaire survey conducted among young people living in Helsinki to collect primary data. This survey gathered quantitative data to measure the key variables in the research model, including travel expectations, actual travel experiences, the gap between expectations and experience, and travel satisfaction. The questionnaire used a Likert scale, allowing participants to easily rate their responses. Quantitative findings supported the validation of relationships among the variables in the research.

Additionally, the open-ended questions allowed for the collection of qualitative data. These questions allowed participants to describe their actual travel experiences, explain possible reasons for the gap between expectations and experience, and share experiences that could not be fully expressed through number. This qualitative data complements the quantitative data, strengthening the measurement results of the variables in the study.

For secondary data, the research also reviewed academic articles, books, reports, and other relevant publications that have been published to support the theoretical foundation, key concepts and the research framework.

3.6 Sampling

Sampling refers to selecting a portion of the population for research purposes (Makwana et al., 2023). In this study, the researcher collects data by applying probability sampling, spe-

cifically simple random sampling. Because the research population is relatively homogeneous, using simple random sampling will help the research results more accurately reflect the characteristics of the whole population (Makwana et al. 2023).

The expected sample size is 100. The questionnaire was created by Google Form and send via an online survey link, which was posted on some Facebook groups such as Americans in Helsinki, Study in Finland, SriLankans In Helsinki, Beautiful Finland, Finland Travel Community.

The data will be collected over a period of 10 days from 14.02.2026 – 23.02.2026.

3.7 Data Analysis

Research is a systematic process used to solve problems in the short or long term. After the research problem is identified and the research plan is developed, researchers begin collecting relevant and reliable data. Then, this data is analysed using qualitative or quantitative methods. Researchers can draw conclusions and generate useful findings from collecting, reviewing, and analysing data from multiple sources. (Alem 2020.)

Patton (1990) stated that data analysis involves inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data to extract meaningful insights, reach conclusions, and aid in decision-making (Alem 2020).

According to Alem (2020), data analysis is a crucial stage because it determines the outcome of the study. Its goal is to transform data into useful information. Through analysis, researchers can summarize data, identify relationships between variables, compare them, detect differences, and even predict outcomes. In some cases, data collection simply involves recording events that occur, which are then analysed qualitative. In other cases, data is collected numerically through questionnaires or rating scales and analysed using quantitative methods.

3.7.1 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data analysis is a method of analyzing data in numerical terms. In quantitative research, traits are categorized, counted, and analyzed using a list of statistical methods to address symbolic observations. Quantitative analysis results are generally highly reliable and can be used to isolate a larger population if sampling and statistical list testing are performed correctly. (Bryman & Cramer 2005, according to Alem 2020.)

Weiss (1999) proposed that descriptive statistics, a branch of statistics, is used to summarize and describe the features of a dataset using numerical measures (Alem, 2020). This

method primarily organizes and summarizes information of a specific data set, rather than generalizing to the entire population (Hinkle et al 2003, according to Alem 2020). Common techniques include frequency distribution, skewness testing, kurtosis, percentiles, and dispersion (Agresti & Finlay 1997, according to Alem 2020).

SPSS, a statistical program often utilized in the social sciences, is commonly applied for analysing numerical data. While many other statistical analysis software programs exist, SPSS is widely used by educational and research institutions due to its efficiency in data management, statistical analyses, and research reports creating. (NYU 2021; Ong & Puteh 2017; Arkkelin 2014; Wagner 2019, according to Rahman & Muktadir 2021.)

Using SPSS is appropriate because the research relies on quantitative data analysis to examine relationships between variables in the research model. Bala (2016) showed that in SPSS, data is organized into variables such as independent variables, dependent variables, mediating variables, and moderating variables, helping to explain the relationships between factors in the study (Rahman & Muktadir 2021). In this study, travel expectations and actual travel experiences are independent variables, travel satisfaction is the dependent variable, and the expectation–experience gap serves as a mediating variable. SPSS can effectively manage these variable types and perform statistical analyses to examine the proposed relationships.

Furthermore, to analyze the mediating variable (expectations-experiences gap), the researcher used Hayes Process Macros, which is integrated into SPSS. Mediation analysis, as a method for analyzing often complex problems with many interacting factors, utilizes Hayes Process Macros to increase accuracy, reduce assumptions, and improve the efficiency of testing mediation relationships (Abu-Bader & Jones, 2021). Specifically, this study analyzes the mediating variable by examining the indirect impact of expectations and actual experiences on satisfaction through the gap.

Moreover, data collected through a Likert-scale survey questionnaire makes SPSS suitable for data management, calculating means and standard deviations, and hypothesis testing. The user-friendly interface allows researchers to easily input data, conduct analysis, and present results through tables and graphs. Overall, SPSS provides a reliable and efficient platform for analyzing and testing research models on the gap between expectations and travel experiences of young people in Helsinki.

3.7.2 Qualitative Analysis

In qualitative analysis, non-numerical data are examined, usually presented in descriptive or linguistic form. The data are usually obtained via interviews, focus groups, open-ended

questions, or observations. The purpose of analytical computation is to categorize and interpret the data to understand the meaning, perspectives, and experiences of people within the research context. (Migrant & Seasonal Head Start 2006; Cohen et al. 2007, according to Alem 2020.)

Among qualitative research methods, thematic analysis is particularly prevalent. Thematic analysis helps researchers systematically flexibly identify, analyse, and present patterns or themes that appear in data (Braun & Clarke 2006). The method not only helps organize and describe data in detail but also allows for deeper interpretation of aspects related to the research topic.

In thematic analysis, researchers must make flexible and important decisions, such as defining what constitutes a theme. A theme is a recurring pattern in the data that holds significance for the research question. However, there are no fixed rules regarding the frequency with which a theme appears in the data to be considered important; this determination is mostly reliant on the researcher's subjective assessment. Consistency in defining and presenting the prevalence of themes is crucial. (Braun & Clarke 2006.)

Braun & Clarke (2006) highlighted that thematic analysis consists of six distinct phases for processing and understanding qualitative data. The first phase is familiarization with the data, where the researcher may need to transcribe the data, read and review it multiple times to fully understand its content, and note down initial ideas or observations. The second phase is generation initial codes, which means systematically identifying and coding noteworthy features throughout the data, then grouping data segments related to each code. The third phase is searching for themes, where similar codes are grouped together to form potential themes and data segments related to each theme are collected. The next phase, the themes are reviewed and evaluated to check if they fit the coded data segments as well as the entire dataset. Next, the researcher defines and names the themes, further analysing them to clarify the core content of each topic and the overall meaning reflected in the data, thereby providing a clear definition and name for each topic. Finally, writing the report is the step of synthesizing and presenting the results of the analysis, including selecting representative data, analysing them in detail, and relating them to the research question to create a complete research report.

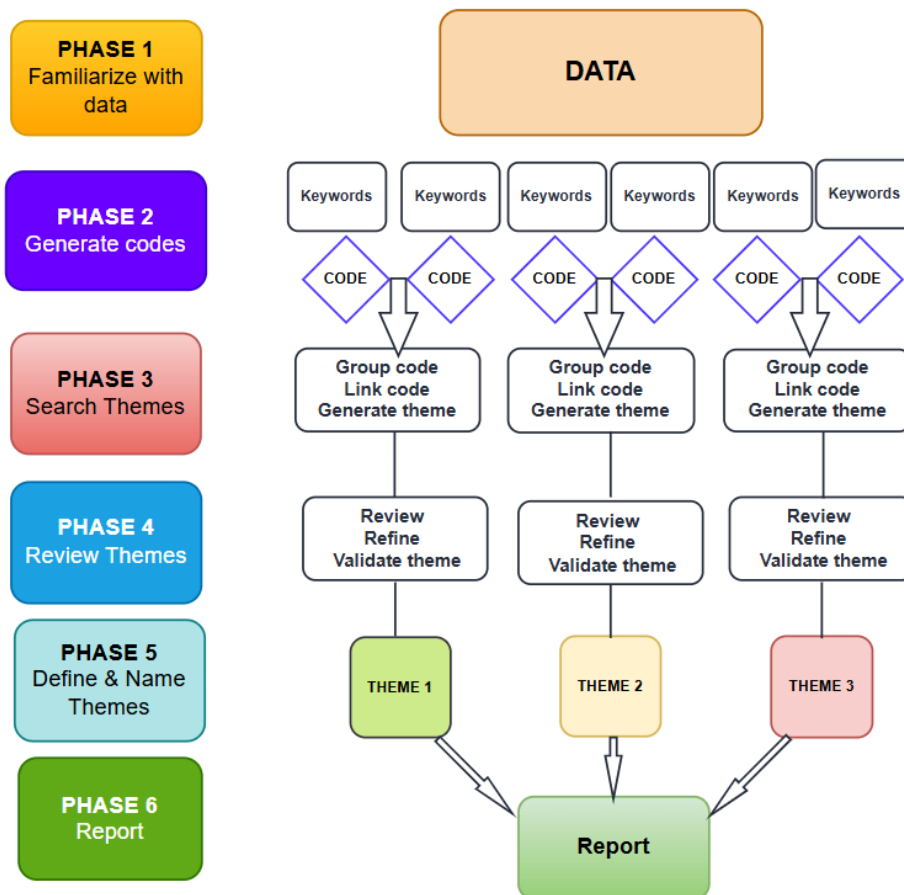


Figure 5. Six phases in thematic analysis (created by the author based on Braun & Clarke 2006)

In this study uses thematic analysis for responds to provide further explanation and depth to the quantitative findings. Since the study used a mixed-methods design, qualitative analysis was used to supplement and clarify statistical findings regarding the differences between expectations and realities of young people living in Helsinki when traveling.

The analysis process was carried out through six thematic analysis stages, each step specifically described in Figure 5. The responses were carefully read multiple times to identify meaningful patterns and recurring ideas. Codes were generated based on significant statements in the data and grouped into broader themes that reflected participants' explanations and perceptions.

3.8 Validity, Reliability and Ethical Considerations

According to Andersson et al (2024), validity refers to the degree to which a test accurately measures the concept it is intended to assess, reflecting the correctness and suitability of the conclusions derived from its results. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency of a measurement tool over time, indicating whether the test results are stable and reliable. In

research, validity and reliability are crucial because they help ensure that research results are reliable, scientifically valid, and therefore applicable in practice.

3.8.1 Validity

The research is applied validity in qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative method included statistical techniques to examine and measure the relationship between factors. Qualitative methods utilize fundamental thematic analysis, aligning with the research objectives and supplementing the results of quantitative methods.

This study collected quantitative and qualitative data through a questionnaire survey. The researcher attempted to create clear and concise questions appropriate to the research objectives and combined Likert scale questions with open-ended questions. The survey was distributed online via Facebook. To encourage honest responses and higher participation rates, participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by the researcher. In addition, the researcher also maintained ethical standards, ensuring informed consent and the option for participants to withdraw at any point during the survey, as well as providing appropriate feedback to participants.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability indicates the stability and dependability of a measurement over repeated applications, helping to ensure reliable research findings and minimize measurement errors (Andersson et al. 2024). This study is applied reliability, which is assessed using statistical methods such as correlation analysis, reliability coefficients and Cronback Alpha coefficient.

3.8.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research is crucial at all stages of the research process, from topic selection and research methodology to reporting and discussion of results, as well as citation and referencing of sources (Hasan et al. 2021).

The researcher carefully selected the topic, considering its academic and practical significance, demonstrating ethical conduct in the research topic. In the research methodology, the researcher was honest and transparent in data collection, analysis, and results, and ensured the confidentiality of participants. Furthermore, the researcher accurately cited and referenced all sources according to LAB University of Applied Sciences guidelines. All these factors helped the research maintain ethical standards throughout the entire thesis writing process, from beginning to end.

4 Data Analysis and Presenting

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the collected data are systematically analysed, and the results are presented to address the research goals and assess the proposed hypotheses. A mix of quantitative and qualitative data was examined to offer a thorough insight into the study topic.

This chapter starts with organizing and cleaning the data for analysis, covering the handling of missing entries and identification of anomalies to ensure data quality and accuracy. Next, quantitative analysis was conducted, including demographic data analysis, descriptive statistics, and validity and reliability tests. Finally, correlation and regression analysis were performed to explore connections among variables and test the proposed hypotheses.

Finally, qualitative analysis is presented through thematic analysis of the open-ended responses. This analysis complements the quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into respondents' perspectives and experiences.

4.2 Preparation of Data for Analysis

Questions were created using Google Forms and sent via online survey links posted on several Facebook groups. The collected data were identified, extracted, cleaned, and integrated to minimize errors and ensure appropriate reliability for discovery and analysis (Fernandes et al. 2023).

The survey was conducted from February 14th to February 23rd, 2026, and received a total of 113 responses. Invalid responses included one respondent who refused to answer the question and three respondents who had not travelled in the past 12 months. In total, 106 responses were considered valid. Additionally, three responses submitted after the survey period were excluded from the analysis.

Finally, some responses were unclear in wording and were adjusted to ensure greater objectivity. Data analysis was performed using SPSS for Social Sciences, version 31.0.2.0 (126).

4.2.1 Missing Value Analysis

The data from 106 responses showed no gaps in all variables including Expectations, Actual Experiences, Satisfaction, and Gap.

Table 2. Missing Value Analysis

Statistics				
	Expectation	Actual Experience	Gap	Satisfaction
N (Valid)	106	106	106	106
N (Missing)	0	0	0	0

4.2.2 Outlier Detection

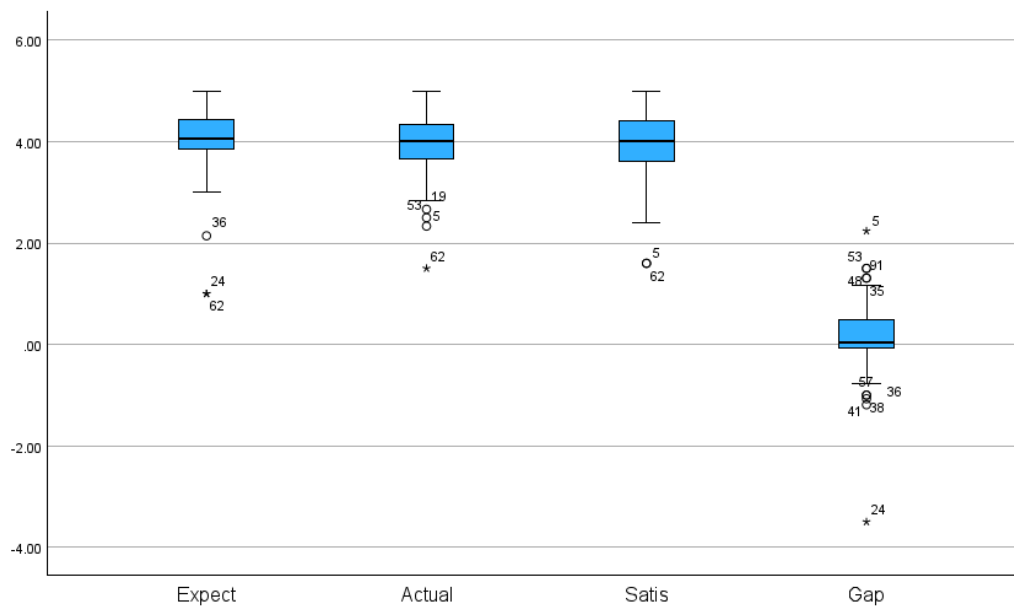


Figure 6. Outlier detection

Box plot analysis was performed to detect potential outliers in the variable's expectation, actual experiences, satisfaction, and the gap between expectations and experiences. The results revealed the presence of some outliers across all variables, particularly at the lower end of expectation, actual experiences, and satisfaction. Additionally, the gap variable showed both positive and negative extremes, suggesting that some respondents experienced significantly better or worse outcomes than expected. However, the number of outliers was relatively small and did not significantly distort the overall distribution. Therefore, all observations were retained for further analysis.

4.3 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative methods were systematically applied in the study to test the proposed hypotheses and analyse the research model. Initially, the survey participants were described using their demographic characteristics and descriptive statistics. Next, reliability and validity tests

were conducted to ensure data quality. Researcher used correlation analysis to investigate the associations between expectations, experiences, gap, and satisfaction variables. Based on this, advanced analyses including mediation analysis and regression analysis were performed to assess the degree of influence between variables. Finally, hypothesis testing was conducted to confirm or refute the research hypotheses.

4.3.1 Demographic Data Analysis

Age

Figure 6 presents the age distribution of the respondents through a pie chart.

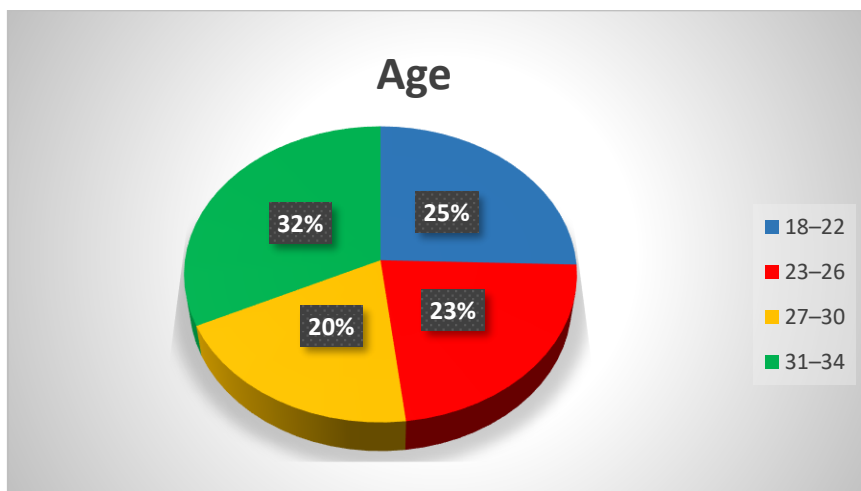


Figure 7. Age

According to the collected data, the 31-34 age group accounted for the highest proportion with 34 people, equivalent to 32% of the total, indicating their dominance in the survey. The 18-22 age group with 27 people (25%) and the 23-26 age group with 24 people (23%), contributed significantly to the data. The 27-30 age group had the lowest number with 21 people (20%), but the difference from the largest group was only 12%, so the overall distribution remained even. Although the 31-34 age group is slightly higher than other groups, overall, the age group data shows a balanced distribution among the groups. This balanced provides valuable insights into the behaviour and perceptions of each age group, reflecting the overall young adults living in Helsinki.

Gender

Figure 7 presents the Gender distribution of the respondents through a pie chart.

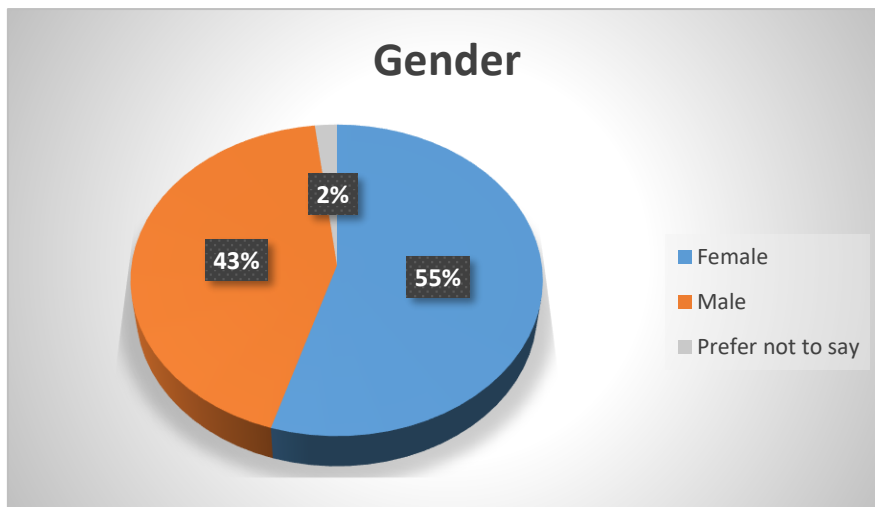


Figure 8. Gender

Based on gender data, participants include 58 female (56%), 46 male (43%), and 2 people (2%) chose not to say their gender. Thus, the female group accounted for a slightly higher proportion than the male group, while the proportion of those who did not say their gender was very small. Overall, there are no significant differences in the gender distribution between males and females, allowing for a fair assessment of the behaviour and perceptions of young people in both groups in Helsinki.

Current Status

Figure 8 illustrates the current status distribution of the respondents through a pie chart.

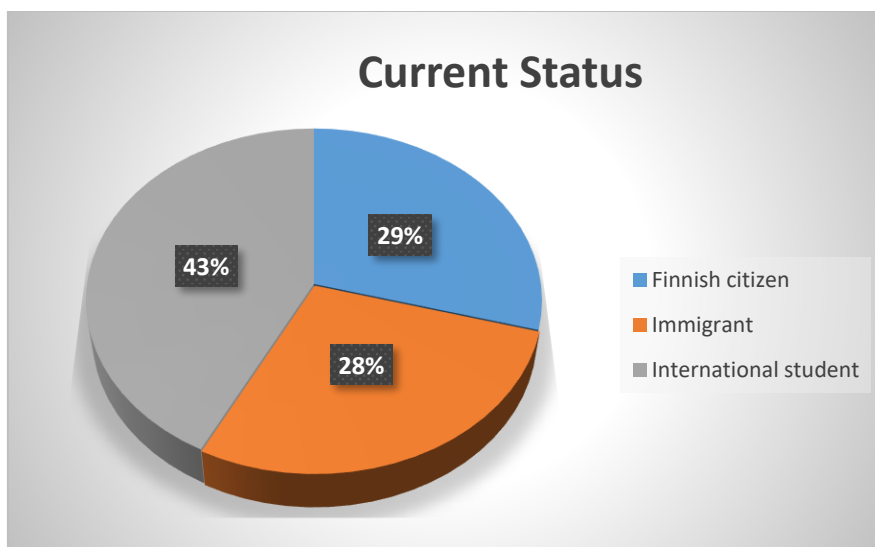


Figure 9. Current Status

The current status data reveals a clear distribution among the three surveyed groups. International students accounted for the highest proportion with 45 people (43%), indicating they constituted the majority of survey participants. This was followed by Finnish citizens with 31 people (29%) and immigrants with 30 people (28%). These two groups had nearly equal proportions, lower than the international student group. Overall, the data shows diversity with the participation of many different resident groups, but there is a tendency for a higher proportion of international students.

Length of residence in Helsinki

Figure 9 illustrates the length of residence in Helsinki of the respondents through a bar chart.

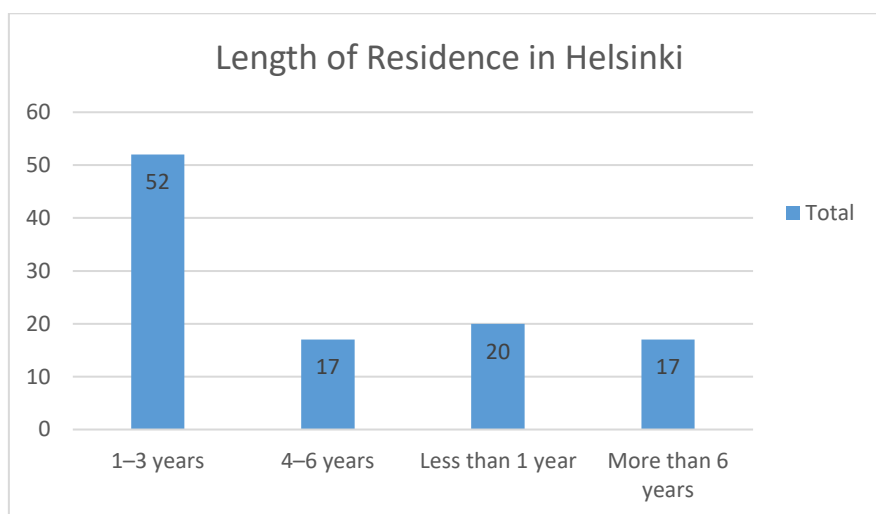


Figure 10. Length of residence in Helsinki

Data on residency duration in Helsinki shows that the majority of survey participants had lived there for 1 to 3 years, with 52 people (49%), accounting for almost half of the total participants. The group with residency duration of less than 1 year had 20 people (19%), while the groups with residency duration of 4 to 6 years and those with more than 6 years each had 17 people (16%), indicating a lower proportion of long-term residents. The diversity in residency duration among the groups reflects the different levels of experience of the participants.

Number of leisure trips in the past 12 months

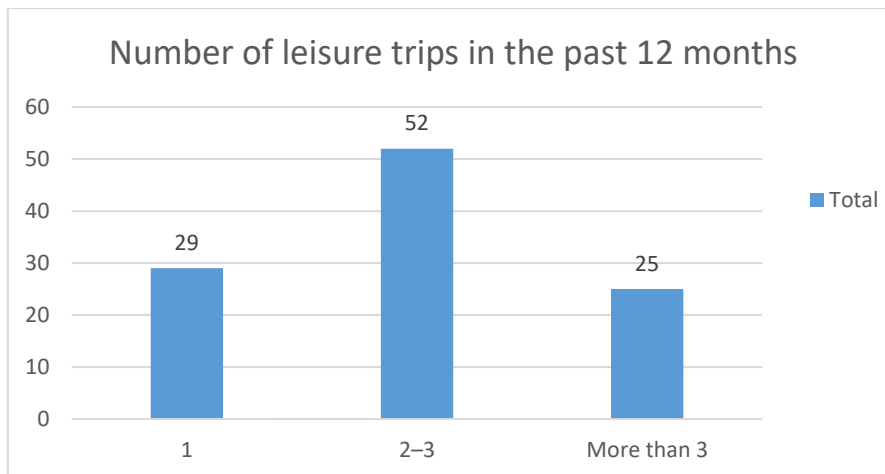


Figure 11. Number of leisure trips in the past 12 months

Based on the data shown in the bar chart in Figure 11, most participants travel quite frequently. 52 people chose 2-3 trips, representing the highest percentage (49%), nearly half of the total participants. This indicates that most participants travel several times a year.

The group with 1 trip comprised of 29 people (27%), suggesting a lower frequency of travel among some participants. Meanwhile, 25 people (24%) reported having taken more than 3 trips, reflecting a relatively high level of travel activity among young people.

Type of the most recent trip

Figure 11 presents the types of respondents' most recent trips using a pie chart.

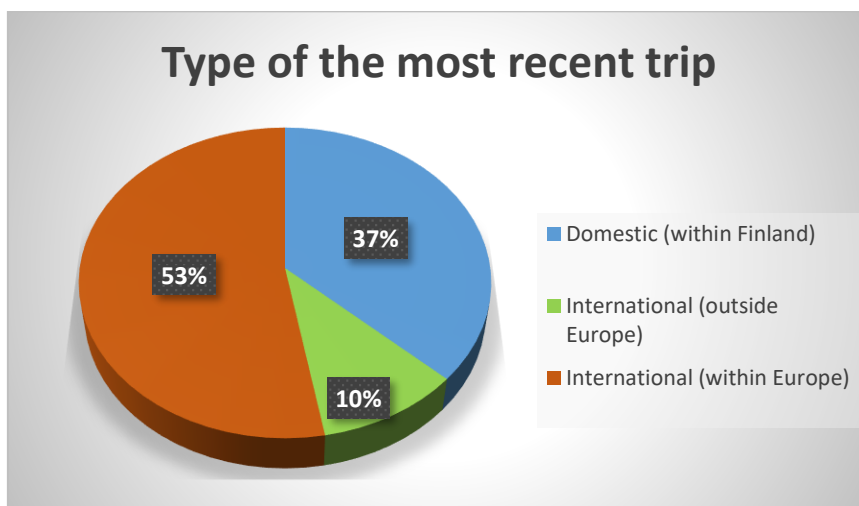


Figure 12. Type of the most recent trip

Data shows that the majority of trips of young people living in Helsinki were international within Europe. Specifically, 56 people (53%) chose their most recent trip to another European country, representing the highest proportion. In addition, 39 people (37%) indicated their most recent trip was within Finland, showing that domestic travel still accounts for a significant proportion. Meanwhile, only 11 people (10%) made an international trip outside of Europe, the smallest group among the three travel types.

Summary of Demographic Data Analysis

After analyzing each item above, the researcher compiles the data into a single table to provide a thorough summary of the demographic information.

Table 3. Summary of demographic data analysis

Variable	Category	Count	Percentage (%)
1. Age	18-22	27	25%
	23-26	24	23%
	27-30	21	20%
	31-34	34	32%
2. Gender	Female	58	55%
	Male	46	43%
	Prefer not to say	2	2%
3. Current status	Finnish citizen	31	29%
	Immigrant	30	28%
	International student	45	43%
4. Length of Residence in Helsinki	1-3 years	52	49%
	4-6 years	17	16%
	Less than 1 year	20	19%
	More than 6 years	17	16%
5. Number of leisure trips in the past 12 months	1	29	27%
	2-3	52	49%
	More than 3	25	24%
6. Type of the most recent trip	Domestic (within Finland)	39	37%
	International (outside Europe)	11	10%
	International (within Europe)	56	53%

Demographic data shows that the proportion of participants aged 31-34 is slightly higher than other age groups, while the remaining 18–30 age groups are fairly balanced. The number of female participants is higher than the number of male participants. Regarding status, the highest proportion were international students, while most participants had lived in Helsinki for 1–3 years. Nearly half of participants took 2–3 leisure trips per year, with the most recent trip was international within Europe, followed by domestic trips within Finland. Thus,

international travel within Europe is the most popular choice for young adults living in Helsinki.

4.3.2 Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Expectation	106	1.00	5.00	4.0660	.65811	-2.018	.235	7.889	.465
Experience	106	1.50	5.00	3.9198	.60781	-.617	.235	1.900	.465
Satisfaction	106	1.60	5.00	3.9943	.67807	-.866	.235	1.751	.465
Gap	106	-3.50	2.24	.1462	.66293	-1.189	.235	8.543	.465
Valid N (listwise)	106								

Mean of expectation (4.066) is the highest average value, indicating that young people living in Helsinki tend to have high expectations for their trip. The mean of actual experience was lower (3.920), suggesting reality did not fully meet expectations. However, satisfaction levels remained relatively high (3.994), indicating that participants were generally satisfied with their travel experiences despite the small discrepancy between expectations and actual experience (gap=0.146).

With standard deviations ranging from 0.607 to 0.678, the data show a moderate degree of variation among respondents. The relatively small dispersion suggests that young adults living in Helsinki have relatively similar perceptions of their travel expectations, actual experiences, and levels of satisfaction.

Negative skewness values for all variables (< 0) indicate that respondents generally have high expectations for travel, positive travel experiences, and relatively high levels of satisfaction. The skewness value of Expectation (-2.018) shows a strong left skewness, reflecting the very high expectations of young people living in Helsinki. The skewness value of Actual Experiences is (-0.617), showing a slight left skewness, meaning that most participants also rated the experience quite highly, but not as highly as expectation. Therefore, we see that the skewness value of Gap is (-1.189), also showing a clear left skewness. This means that the actual experiences were generally lower than expected. However, the skewness value of Satisfaction is (-0.866), a moderate left skewness, indicating that most participants felt quite satisfied.

The kurtosis values indicate a distribution with more peaks than a normal distribution. Specifically, the kurtosis of Expectations variable (7.889) and the kurtosis of Gap variable

(8.543) show a high kurtosis distribution, indicating that responses are strongly concentrated around the mean with a few extreme values. With a standard error of 0.465, the kurtosis highlights a pronounced deviation from normal distribution assumptions. This suggests that while most respondents reported similar levels of expectation and experiences, a small number of participants exhibited significantly different responses.

Overall, descriptive statistics show that young people living in Helsinki have high expectations and relatively positive travel experiences. However, actual experiences have not fully met expectations. Despite the discrepancies between expectations and actual experiences, the level of travel satisfaction among young adults living in Helsinki remains relatively high.

4.3.3 Validity and reliability test

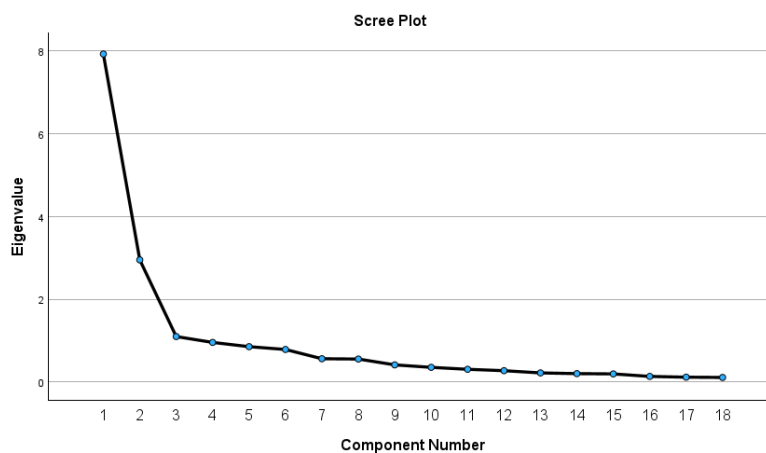
Validity test

To evaluate the validity of Expectations, Experiences, and Satisfaction, the researcher conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

Table 5. Validity test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.853
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1367.483
	df	153
	Sig.	<.,001

Figure 13. Scree Plot



0.853 is the KMO index of sampling adequacy for all three variables, indicating a high level of sampling suitability and confirming that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. Besides, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) was statistically significant, demonstrating that the variables were adequately correlated to justify factor analysis.

The Scree Plot supports the three-factor structure. This finding aligns with the theoretical model, which conceptualizes Expectations, Experience, and Satisfaction as distinct constructs. Consequently, the measurement model's validity is confirmed.

Reliability test

To measure the consistency reliability of Expectations, Experiences, and Satisfaction, Cronbach's Alpha was applied.

Table 6. Reliability test

Reliability Statistics		
	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Expectations	7	.891
Experiences	6	.868
Satisfaction	5	.893

The results show that all constructs have high internal consistency. All values are higher than the recommended standard of 0.7, confirming that the measurement scales are reliable and suitable for further analysis. That means young people living in Helsinki who participated in the survey understood and answered the questions within the same group very consistently.

Overall, the results of KMO and Bartlett's, Scree Plot, and Cronbach's Alpha confirm that the measurement model demonstrates good validity and high reliability. The constructs of Expectations, Experiences, and Satisfaction are well-established and show strong internal consistency. Therefore, the scales are appropriate and consistent and can be used for further statistical analyses.

4.3.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 7. Correlation

		Correlations			
		Expectation	Experience	Satisfaction	Gap
Expectation	Pearson Correlation	1	.454 ^{***}	.359 ^{***}	.577 ^{***}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<,001	<,001	<,001
	N	106	106	106	106
Experience	Pearson Correlation	.454 ^{***}	1	.809 ^{***}	-.466 ^{***}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001		<,001	<,001
	N	106	106	106	106
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.359 ^{***}	.809 ^{***}	1	-.386 ^{***}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001		<,001
	N	106	106	106	106
Gap	Pearson Correlation	.577 ^{***}	-.466 ^{***}	-.386 ^{***}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	
	N	106	106	106	106

***. Correlation at 0.001 (2-tailed)

Pearson Correlations

- Highly Positive: (None)
- Positive: (Expectation <---> Experience), (Expectation <---> Satisfaction), (Expectation <---> Gap), (Experience <---> Satisfaction)
- No Linear Correlation: (None)
- Negative: (Experience <---> Gap), (Satisfaction <---> Gap)
- Highly Negative: (None)

Note: Curated Help is calculated based on actual cell values, not the formatted values.

In Correlation table, all variables have a Sig < 0.001, indicating that the variables are statistically related.

The correlation between Experiences and Satisfaction is the strongest in the table. This relationship is positive with an $r = 0.809$, which is very strong, showing that better experiences lead to greater satisfaction.

Next is the correlation between Expectations and Gap with $r = 0.577$ (positive), showing that higher expectations are associated with a larger gap between expectations and actual experiences. In addition, the correlation between Expectations and Satisfaction is weaker with $r = 0.359$ (positive), indicating that expectations are related to satisfaction, but not strongly.

Furthermore, the table shows two negative r values. These are the correlation between Gap and Satisfaction with $r = -0.386$ (negative), showing that a larger gap indicates less satisfaction, but not to a very strong degree. With $r = -0.466$ (negative) representing the correlation between Experiences and Gap, it shows the better the experiences, the smaller the gap.

In general, all variables were found to be significantly related, as shown by the correlation analysis ($p < 0.001$). Expectations were positive related to experiences and satisfaction, while Experiences were most strongly correlated with Satisfaction ($r = 0.809$), indicating that actual experiences are the primary determinant of satisfaction. The expectations-experiences gap increased with high expectations but decreased with high experiences, thereby enhancing satisfaction. The results are consistent with the proposed theoretical model.

4.3.5 Mediation Analysis

To explore the mediating role of the expectations-experiences in the connecting between expectations and satisfaction, as well as between experiences and satisfaction, mediating analysis was performed using Hayes Process Macros, integrated into SPSS.

Effect of Expectations on Satisfaction through the Expectations–Experiences Gap

(Y: Satisfaction, X: Expectations, M: Gap)

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Gap

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
      ,5766      ,3325      ,2962      51,8068      1,0000      104,0000      ,0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      -2,2155      ,3324      -6,6661      ,0000      -2,8746      -1,5565
Expect      ,5809      ,0807      7,1977      ,0000      ,4208      ,7409

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Satis

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
      ,8093      ,6549      ,1617      97,7438      2,0000      103,0000      ,0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      ,4792      ,2934      1,6331      ,1055      -,1027      1,0612
Expect      ,8972      ,0730      12,2910      ,0000      ,7524      1,0419
Gap      -,9082      ,0725      -12,5325      ,0000      -1,0519      -,7644

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Direct effect of X on Y
      Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
      ,8972      ,0730      12,2910      ,0000      ,7524      1,0419

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
      Effect      BootSE      BootLLCI      BootULCI
Gap      -,5275      ,1483      -,8169      -,2475

```

Figure 14. Effect of Expectations on Satisfaction through the Gap

The results showed that expectations had a significant positive influence on the gap ($\beta = 0.5809$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher expectations were associated with a larger gap between expectations and actual experience. Furthermore, this gap had a significant negative influence on satisfaction ($\beta = -0.9082$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that a larger gap led to lower satisfaction levels.

Additionally, expectations had a strong and statistically significant positive direct effect on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.8972$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher expectations were associated with higher satisfaction when controlling for this gap.

The indirect impact of expectations on satisfaction through the gap between expectations and experiences was also statistically significant ($\beta = -0.5275$), with bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero (BootLLCI = -0.8169, BootULCI = -0.2475).

Effect of Actual Experiences on Satisfaction through the Expectations–Experiences Gap

(Y: Satisfaction, X: Actual Experiences, M: Gap)

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Gap

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
,4663  ,2175  ,3472  28,9003  1,0000  104,0000  ,0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  2,1399  ,3752  5,7027  ,0000  1,3958  2,8840
Actual    -,5086  ,0946 -5,3759  ,0000 -,-6962 -,-3210

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Satis

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
,8093  ,6549  ,1617  97,7438  2,0000  103,0000  ,0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  ,4792  ,2934  1,6331  ,1055  -,1027  1,0612
Actual    ,8972  ,0730  12,2910  ,0000  ,7524  1,0419
Gap       -,0110  ,0669  -,1642  ,8699  -,1437  ,1217

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Direct effect of X on Y
      Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
,8972  ,0730  12,2910  ,0000  ,7524  1,0419

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
      Effect      BootSE      BootLLCI      BootULCI
Gap       ,0056      ,0397      -,0632      ,1006

```

Figure 15. Effect of Actual Experiences on Satisfaction through the Gap

The findings revealed that actual experiences had a significant negative effect on the gap between expectations and experiences ($\beta = -0.5086$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that higher levels of actual experience are associated with a smaller gap. However, this gap did not significantly influence satisfaction. ($\beta = -0.0110$, $p = 0.8699$).

Conversely, actual experiences had a strong and significant direct positive influence on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.8972$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the indirect impact of actual experiences on satisfaction through this gap was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.0056$), as the bootstrap confidence interval included zero (BootLLCI = -0.0632, BootULCI = 0.1006).

These findings suggest that the expectations-experiences gap does not mediate the relationship between actual experience and satisfaction. Instead, satisfaction is primarily directly influenced by actual experience.

In conclusion, the mediating analysis shows the role of the expectations-experiences gap variable in the association between expectations and satisfaction, while not acting as a mediator between actual experiences and satisfaction. This suggests that satisfaction is primarily influenced directly by actual experience, while the influence of expectations is partly conveyed through this gap.

4.3.6 Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression was applied to evaluate how travel expectations, actual experiences, and the expectation–experience gap directly influence satisfaction.

The direct effect of travel expectations on travel satisfaction

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.359 ^a	.129	.120	.63596	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expect

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.214	1	6.214	15.365	<.001 ^b
	Residual	42.062	104	.404		
	Total	48.277	105			

a. Dependent Variable: Satis
b. Predictors: (Constant), Expect

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.491	.388		6.414	<.001
	Expect	.370	.094	.359	3.920	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Satis

Figure 16. The direct effect of Expectations on Satisfaction

The regression analyse was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that travel expectations significant impact on travel satisfaction. R^2 value is 0.129, suggesting that travel expectations explain approximately 12.9% of the variance in travel satisfaction. Furthermore, the regression coefficient for expectations is significant positive ($\beta = 0.359$, $B = 0.370$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that greater expectations correspond to increased travel satisfaction.

Therefore, the results support the hypothesis that travel expectations have a significant positive effect on satisfaction.

The direct effect of actual experiences on travel satisfaction

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.809 ^a	.655	.652	.40028	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Actual

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.613	1	31.613	197.307	<.001 ^b
	Residual	16.663	104	.160		
	Total	48.277	105			

a. Dependent Variable: Satis
b. Predictors: (Constant), Actual

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.456	.255		1.788	.077
	Actual	.903	.064	.809	14.047	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Satis

Figure 17. The direct effect of Actual Experiences on Satisfaction

The regression analysis was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that actual experiences significantly influence satisfaction.

The regression coefficient of actual experience variable is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.809$, $B = 0.903$, $p < 0.001$), implying that as the actual experiences increase, the level of satisfaction also increases significantly.

Therefore, the actual experiences have a very strong and positive impact on travel satisfaction.

The effect of expectations- experiences gap on travel satisfaction

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.386 ^a	.149	.141	.62858	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gap

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.184	1	7.184	18.182	<.001 ^b
	Residual	41.092	104	.395		
	Total	48.277	105			

a. Dependent Variable: Satis
b. Predictors: (Constant), Gap

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.052	.063		64.796	<.001
	Gap	-.395	.093	-.386	-4.264	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Satis

Figure 18. The effect of the Gap on Satisfaction

The regression model was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that the gap has a significant influence on satisfaction.

The unstandardized coefficient of Gap is $B = -0.395$, with a standardized coefficient $\beta = -0.386$, and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that the gap between expectations and experiences has a negative impact on satisfaction. Specifically, as this gap increases, the level of satisfaction of tourists decreases.

4.3.7 Hypothesis Analysis

Based on the results obtained from the correlation, regression, and mediation analyses, the findings are used to determine whether the hypotheses are supported or not. The results are recorded on the table below.

Table 8. Hypothesis Result

Hypothesis Code	Statement	Result (p-value)	Decision
H1	Expectations have a significant influence on the Expectation - Actual Experiences Gap	$p < 0,001$	Accepted
H1 ₀	Expectations have no significant influence on the Expectation - Actual Experiences Gap.	—	Rejected
H2	Actual Experiences have a significant influence on the Expectations - Actual Experiences Gap.	$p < 0,001$	Accepted
H2 ₀	Actual Experiences have no significant influence on the Expectations - Actual Experiences Gap.	—	Rejected
H3	Expectations- Actual Experiences Gap has a significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.	$p < 0,001$	Accepted
H3 ₀	Expectations- Actual Experiences Gap has no significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.	—	Rejected
H4	Actual Experiences have a significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.	$p < 0,001$	Accepted
H4 ₀	Actual Experiences have no significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.	—	Rejected
H5	Expectations have a significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.	$p < 0,001$	Accepted
H5 ₀	Expectations have no significant influence on Travel Satisfaction.	—	Rejected

Overall, all proposed hypotheses are supported by empirical results. Both expectations and actual experiences were found to have a significant impact on the gap between expectations and experiences, consequently influencing travel satisfaction. Furthermore, both expectations and actual experiences directly influence satisfaction, with actual experiences having a strong positive effect.

4.4 Qualitative Analysis:

In the study "Exploring the Gap Between Travel Expectations and Actual Experiences of Young Adults Living in Helsinki", six phases of thematic analysis are applied flexibly to exploit and interpret the data.

First, the researcher familiarizes themselves with the responses by carefully reading them multiple times to understand the participants' perspectives, expectations, and actual experiences, and noting the prominent ideas related to the gap between expectations and reality. Next, the responses are coded by the researcher by identifying keywords or content and assigning codes to relevant data segments. These codes are then grouped to form themes reflecting general trends. In the review and evaluation step, the themes are re-examined by the researcher to ensure consistency with the coded data and the entire dataset. Each

theme is then clearly defined and named to accurately reflect the nature of the content being analysed.

Finally, the results are aggregated and presented in a research report, in which representative excerpts from the open responses are used to illustrate the themes and clarify the differences between expectations and actual experiences of young people living in Helsinki.

4.4.1 What were the main expectations before the most recent trip of young adults living in Helsinki?

The table shows the results of thematic analysis of main expectations of young adults living in Helsinki before their most recent trip (N = 106). The themes reflect the different motivations and expectations of travellers before traveling.

Table 9. Thematic analysis result of Main Expectations before the Most Recent Trip

Theme	Code	Frequency	% (N=106)
Relaxation & Escape	Relaxation, rest, escape stress, refresh, break daily life	43	40.6%
Cultural & Historical Exploration - Learning	Cultural experiences, immersion, historical, history, new experiences, language, broaden worldview, see the world	38	35.8%
Scenery Exploration	Scenery, old town, architecture, landscapes, sightseeing, popular destination	35	33.0%
Fun - Enjoyment & Hobbies	Fun, enjoyment, enjoy, memories, meaningful, photos	29	27.4%
Food - Cuisine Experiences	Local food, street food, cuisine, cheap food, delicious food	20	18.9%
Cost & Service Quality	Low cost, cheap price, service, hotel, high quality	12	11.3%
Connection	Meet friends, family, people	11	10.4%
Nature Exploration	Hiking, nature, activities	8	7.5%
Climate	Weather, winter	3	2.8%
Imagination	Childhood imagination, dreaming	2	1.9%

Relaxation & Escape was the most common expectations, with 43 mentions (40.6%), indicating that the main expectations of young people living in Helsinki when traveling was to rest, relax, and escape the stress of daily life. This was followed by Cultural & Historical Exploration - Learning with 38 mentions (35.8%), showing that the need to experience culture, learn history, and broaden their understanding of the world was also a significant motivation. Scenery Exploration came in third with 35 mentions (33.0%), reflecting the desire to visit scenic spots, architecture, old town, and famous tourist attractions.

Additionally, participants also expected the trip to be fun and enjoyable, as indicated by the theme Fun - Enjoyment & Hobbies (27.4%). Food - Cuisine Experiences was also mentioned by 18.9% of participants, showing that local cuisine is an attractive factor in their choice and expectations for the trip. Other expectations related to cost and service quality (11.3%), social connection with friends or family (10.4%), and exploring nature (7.5%). Less frequently mentioned topics included climate (2.8%) and imagination (1.9%), suggesting these factors were not the primary motivators for most travellers.

Overall, the results show that relaxation, cultural exploration, and scenic experiences are the most prominent expectations before a trip, while factors such as climate or personal imagination play a smaller role in shaping travel expectations of young adults living in Helsinki.

4.4.2 Which factors influenced travel expectations the most (before the most recent trip) of young adults living in Helsinki?

Table 10. Thematic analysis result of Factors Influenced Travel Expectations the Most (before the most recent trip)

Theme	Code	Frequency	% (N=106)
Social media	Social media, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, viral clips, videos	61	57.5%
Online review & Blogs Online advertising	Google reviews, blog reviews, forums, travel articles, travel photos online, online advertising	40	37.7%
Friends & Family Recommendations	Friends, family, peer review, previous visitors, personal recommendations	29	27.4%
Previous experience	Visited before, previous experience, previous trip	18	17.0%
Budget & Cost	Price, cost, budget	6	5.7%

Imagination & Cultural	Childhood imagination, Santa Claus, Christmas media	3	2.8%
Climate / Weather	Weather	3	2.8%
Curiosity	Interest, excitement, excited	4	3.8%
Food - Cuisine	Cuisine, food, delicious food	3	2.8%
Marketing & Official	Travel agency, "Visit Finland" marketing materials	2	1.9%

The results show that social media is the strongest influencing factor on the expectations of young adults living in Helsinki before their trip, with 61 mentions (57.5%) of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. This indicates that online content, especially viral videos and images, plays a significant role in shaping destination images and creating pre-trip expectations.

The second most influential factor is online reviews, blogs, and online advertising, with 40 mentions (37.7%). Sources such as Google Reviews, travel blogs, forums, and online articles provide information and experiences from other users, thereby impacting the perceptions and expectations of young people living in Helsinki about travel destinations.

In addition, recommendations from friends and family are also a significant source of influence with 29 mentions (27.4%). Personal advice and real-life experiences from acquaintances are often considered reliable, contributing to shaping travel expectations. Previous travel experiences also influence expectations by 17.0%, indicating that memories or impressions from previous trips can guide expectations for the next trip.

Other factors such as budget and cost (5.7%), curiosity (3.8%), imagination and cultural influence (2.8%), climate/weather (2.8%), and local cuisine (2.8%) are mentioned less frequently. Meanwhile, official marketing materials from tourism organizations or travel companies have the lowest influence (1.9%).

Overall, the results show that social media and online information play a dominant role in shaping travel expectations among young people living in Helsinki, while traditional sources such as official marketing have a more limited influence. This reflects the increasing importance of digital content and shared online experiences in the travel decision-making of young adults living in Helsinki before traveling.

4.4.3 In what ways did actual travel experience differ from expectations (during the most recent trip) of young adults living in Helsinki?

Table 11. Thematic analysis result of Differences Between Expected and Actual Travel Experiences

Theme	Code	Frequency	% (N=106)
Cost & Price Differences	High price, lower price, high costs, costs, expensive, accommodation, transportations costs higher than expected.	49	46.2%
Atmosphere & Vibes	Atmosphere, nostalgic feeling, authenticity, depressive, positive vibes	26	24.5%
Food Quality & Taste	Food quality, food not delicious, non-diversity, not as special, not match personal taste, local cuisine, less restaurants	18	17.0%
Service Quality	Service, service quality needs to improve	17	16.0%
Crowding	Crowd, too many people	9	8.5%
Climate / Weather	Rain, bad weather, climate	5	4.7%
Time pressure	Time consuming, rushed schedule and tiring, short time, exhausted	3	2.8%
Accommodation	Accommodation location	2	1.9%
Transportation	Not convenient, slow	2	1.9%
Unexpected Incidents	Phone was stolen, unexpected problems	2	1.9%
No Difference Met Expectations	Not different, nothing, met expectations, not bad, satisfied	9	8.5%
Difference	Different, slightly different than expect	6	5.7%
Exceed Expectations	Exceed expectations, the technical infrastructure, atmosphere, overall experience better than expect	4	3.8%

Thematic analysis shows that cost and price are the factors causing the biggest difference between expectations and reality (46.2%). Most tourists responded that the higher-than-expected prices for accommodation and transportation services. Atmosphere and vibes (24.5%) also contributed to the difference, with travellers experiencing feelings ranging from nostalgic and authentic to negative or gloomy.

The next contribution factors, food quality & taste (17.0%) and service quality (16.0%) with food lacking variety or service quality not meeting expectations. Other objective factors such

as crowds (8.5%), unfavourable weather (4.7%), and time pressure (2.8%) also contributed to altering the actual experience. Notably, only a small group of travellers felt the trip completely met expectations (8.5%) or exceeded expectations (3.8%). There were differences, but not specific ones (5.7%): Different, slightly different than expect whether it was positive or negative.

4.4.4 What caused the difference between expectations and actual experiences (during your most recent trip) of young adults living in Helsinki?

Table 12. Thematic analysis result of Factors Causing Differences Between Expectations and Actual Experiences

Theme	Code	Frequency	% (N=106)
Personal Preferences & Emotion	Personal preferences, emotion, nostalgia	27	25.5%
Unexpected situations	Robbery, strike, delays, scams, sudden events	22	20.8%
Planning/ Time management	Time, plan, manage, tight schedule, schedule, long travel, timing	17	16.0%
High costs, prices	High cost, price, money	15	14.2%
Social Media Idealization Online content	Social media, Idealized Perceptions, Unrealistic Standards, False information and fake pictures, marketing content, TikTok, Instagram, online sources, photos, reviews	13	12.3%
Food Quality & Taste	Not delicious food, taste, cuisine	11	10.4%
Climate/Weather	Rain, bad, change weather	9	8.5%
Crowding	Crowd, seasonal tourism peaks	8	7.5%
Accommodation	Airbnb, homestay location	2	1.9%
No difference	Nothing, none, no significant differences	7	6.6%

Exceed expectations	Exceed Expectation	1	0.9%
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Differences between expectations and actual experiences primarily from personal preferences and emotions, accounting for the highest percentage (25.5%). In addition, unexpected situations such as theft, strikes, delays also contribute significantly (20.8%).

Another important cause is the impact of social media and online content (12.3%), where idealized images and unrealistic information on platforms like TikTok or Instagram are prevalent. In terms of management, poor planning and time management (16.0%) along with pressure from higher-than-expected costs and prices (14.2%) are factors that cause trips to deviate from initial expectations. Factors such as food quality (10.4%), weather (8.5%), and crowding (7.5%) were also noted as contributing factors.

Additionally, only 6.6% of tourists had an experience that fully met their expectations, and one case (0.9%) felt that the actual experience exceeded their initial expectations.

4.4.5 How did the difference between expectations and actual experiences affect overall travel satisfaction (during your most recent trip) of young adults living in Helsinki?

Table 13. Thematic analysis result of the Impact of Expectations–Experience Gap on Overall Travel Satisfaction

Theme	Code	Frequency	% (N=106)
High satisfaction	Exceed expectations, happy, satisfied, memorable, worth it, fine, nice, enjoy	55	51.9%
Moderate satisfaction	Slight disappointment but overall satisfied	20	18.9%
No significant effect	Not affected, insignificant impact, not much.	12	11.3%
Negative impact	Disappointed, frustrated, reduced enjoyment, sad	17	16.0%
Neutral evaluation	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, not bad not good, normal.	2	1.9%

The thematic analysis results showed that the impact of the gap between travel expectations and actual experiences on overall satisfaction of young adults living in Helsinki was generally positive. 55 young people chose high satisfaction, indicating that over half of participants (51.9%) felt very satisfied with their trip despite expectations-experience gap. Next, 20 people chose moderate satisfaction, this group (18.9%) included responses showing slight disappointment or some difference from initial expectations, but overall, the trip was still rated positively. Thus, a total of 75 young people living in Helsinki (70.8%) satisfied with their trip, even when there was a difference between expectations and the actual experience.

12 young people living in Helsinki indicated that there was no significant effect of the expectations-experience gap on overall satisfaction when they travelled. This result shows that for 11.3% of participants, the expectation-experience gap did not play a significant role in evaluating the trip.

Conversely, 17 negative impacts were mentioned by young people living in Helsinki when traveling (16%), reflecting instances where the difference between expectations and actual experience led to lower levels of travel satisfaction. In these cases, the expectations-experience gap created disappointment or reduced the enjoyment of the trip. Possible causes include service not meeting expectations, higher-than-expected costs, unfavourable weather or actual conditions, and crowds at the destination.

Only 2 people chose neutral evaluation, representing 1.9%, the smallest group in the table. Participants in this group did not express strong positive or negative feelings about the trip. It suggests that the difference between what was expected and what was experienced was insufficient to significantly influence the overall rating.

Overall, even when there was a gap between expectations and actual experience, young people still satisfied with their trips. In some cases, the actual experiences even exceeded their initial expectations, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction. Moreover, several participants noted that positive aspects of the trip, such as beautiful scenery, cultural experiences, and enjoyable activities, could compensate for minor disappointments. These elements helped maintain a positive and memorable overall experience. In almost situations, young people living in Helsinki can adapt to unexpected differences and still enjoy and satisfied their trip.

5 Conclusion and Research Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the association between travel expectations, actual experience, the expectation-experience gap, and overall travel satisfaction among young adults living in Helsinki using both quantitative and qualitative methods based on survey data.

Quantitative results show that for young people living in Helsinki, both expectations and actual experiences significantly influence on travel satisfaction. Specifically, actual experiences have a strong, direct positive influence on satisfaction, while expectations also contribute positively but to a lesser extent. Furthermore, the gap between expectations and experiences was found to negatively affect satisfaction, confirming that a larger difference between expectations and reality can reduce overall travel satisfaction. Additionally, mediating analysis shows that this gap partially influences the relationship between expectations and satisfaction but does not mediate the relationship between actual experiences and satisfaction. This suggests that while expectations shape satisfaction partly through the gap, actual experiences have a more direct and stronger impact on satisfaction.

Qualitative results provide deeper insights into these relationships. The main expectations of young people living in Helsinki when traveling are relaxation, cultural exploration, and sightseeing. Furthermore, their expectations are strongly influenced by social media, online reviews, and recommend from friends and family. However, the differences between expectations and actual experiences are pronounced in aspects such as high costs, atmosphere, food quality, and services. These differences are mainly due to personal preferences, unrealistic images on social media, unexpected situations, and issues related to planning and time management.

Interestingly, even when there is a gap between expectations and actual experiences, in most cases, young people remain relatively satisfied with their trips. In some other cases, the actual experience even exceeds initial expectations, bringing pleasant surprises and leading to greater satisfaction. Some people mentioned that the positive aspects of the trip could compensate for minor disappointments, such as beautiful scenery, cultural experiences, and enjoyable activities. These factors have contributed to maintaining an overall positive and memorable experience. Although the gap between expectations and actual experiences strongly influences travel satisfaction, young people living in Helsinki still enjoy their trips and feel satisfied.

In summary, while setting expectations before a trip is important, providing high-quality actual experiences is even more crucial because it strongly influences the travel satisfaction of young people living in Helsinki. The study also explores the adaptability of young people in Helsinki when a gap exists between expectations and actual experiences. Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of providing accurate travel information—such as images and prices—along with effective trip planning and time management. This helps bridge the difference between expectations and actual experiences, thereby enhancing the overall travel experience.

5.2 Research Recommendations

5.2.1 Practical Recommendations

First, the research findings suggest that the tourism industry should focus on managing and creating more realistic tourist expectations, especially in the context of the current social media landscape. Social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, as well as online advertising, often present idealized images; therefore, destination marketers should provide more accurate and transparent information about prices, services, and actual conditions to reduce unrealistic expectations for tourists before they decide to travel.

Second, the actual experience has the strongest direct impact on satisfaction; tourism service providers should prioritize improving service quality, authenticity, and enhancing the overall experience. Attention should be paid to the key dissatisfaction factors identified in the study, such as cost, food quality, service, crowd management, and safety enhancement.

Third, because the gap between expectations and experiences negatively impacts satisfaction, businesses should aim to minimize this gap by tailoring destination marketing to the actual experiences. Some suggestions include honest reviews and realistic, unedited images instead of overly promotional content.

Furthermore, tour operators should enhance trip planning support, including clearer itineraries, budget guidance, and time management tips, as poor planning and unexpected expenses are major causes of disappointment.

Finally, service travel providers can further enhance satisfaction by creating memorable and emotionally rich experiences, such as by enhancing cultural activities, unique exhibitions, and personalized service.

5.2.2 Academic Recommendations:

The research contributes to understanding the gap between expectations and experiences and its role in shaping travel satisfaction. However, future research could expand on this in several ways.

First, future studies could add mediating or modulating factors, such as emotions, perceived values, or personality traits, to better explain how expectations are translated into satisfaction.

Second, the current study focuses on young people living in Helsinki; therefore, future research could expand the sample to include other age groups such as middle-aged individuals or different geographic locations to improve generalizability.

Additionally, further research could investigate deeper insights into the effects of social media, or the influence of influencers in shaping expectations and contributing to the gap between expectations and experiences. Finally, combining quantitative methods with more qualitative methods, such as interviews, can deeper understanding of tourists' emotions and experiences.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey

Exploring The Gap Between Travel Expectations and Actual Experiences of Young Adults Living in Helsinki

Hello,

Thank you for considering participation in this survey.

My name is Phuong Thanh Le. A bachelor's student in Tourism and Hospitality Management at LAB University of Applied Sciences, Lappeenranta.

This survey is a part of my bachelor's thesis. The questionnaire is part of an academic research project examining the gap between travel expectations and actual travel experiences among young adults living in Helsinki, and how this gap influences travel satisfaction.

The survey is anonymous and will take approximately 8–10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be used for research purposes only, and no personal identifiable information will be collected.

Your participation is voluntary, and all responses are confidential and anonymous.

By continuing, you confirm that:

- You are between 18 - 34 years old
- You currently live in Helsinki
- You have taken at least one leisure trip in the past 12 months

I would like to thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this research.

I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in the survey.

Agree Disagree -> (*End survey*)

PART 1: Background Information

1. Age

- 18–22
- 23–26
- 27–30
- 31–34

2. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3. Current Status

- Finnish citizen
- Immigrant
- International student

4. How long have you lived in Helsinki?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–3 years
- 4–6 years
- More than 6 years

5. Have you travelled for leisure (sightseeing, relaxation, and entertainment) in the past 12 months?

- Yes
- No → *(End survey)*

PART 2: Travel Profile

1. Number of leisure trips in the past 12 months

- 1
- 2–3
- More than 3

2. Type of most recent trip

- Domestic (within Finland)
- International (within Europe)
- International (outside Europe)

PART 3: Travel Expectations

Before the most recent trip, I expected that:

1. The trip would be enjoyable

- Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

2. The destination would meet my personal interests

- Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

3. The quality of services (accommodation, transport, attractions) would be high

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

4. The trip would provide good value for money

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

5. The trip would be relaxing

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

6. The trip would be well-organized

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

7. The trip would match the information I saw online or on social media

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

PART 4: Actual Travel Experiences

During my most recent trip:

1. The destination matched my personal interests

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

2. The quality of services met my expectations

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

3. The trip provided good value for money

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

4. I felt relaxed during the trip

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

5. The trip was well organized

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

6. The experience matched the information I had before the trip

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

PART 5: Travel Satisfaction**1. Overall, I am satisfied with my most recent trip**

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

2. The trip met my overall expectations

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

3. I would consider this trip a successful experience

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

4. I would recommend this destination to others

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

5. I would like to revisit this destination in the future

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

PART 6: Open-Ended Questions**1. What were your main expectations before your most recent trip?**

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2. Which factors influenced your travel expectations the most (before your most recent trip)?

.....

3. In what ways did your actual travel experience differ from your expectations (during your most recent trip)?

.....

4. What caused the difference between your expectations and actual experiences (during your most recent trip)?

.....

5. How did the difference between your expectations (question 1) and actual experiences (question 3,4) affect your overall travel satisfaction (during your most recent trip)?

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