

EXPLORING THE TOURISM APPEAL OF BRAN CASTLE: VISITOR PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

OGLINDOIU CORINA MIHAELA¹, RADONI IOAN CIPRIAN¹,
PETELENA¹, GORDAN MARIUS-IONUȚ^{1*}

¹*University of Life Sciences „King Mihai I” from Timisoara,
Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Romania*

*Corresponding author's e-mail: mariusgordan@usvt.ro

***Abstract:** Bran Castle, a landmark steeped in history and folklore, holds a unique position in Romania's tourism sector, mainly due to its association with the Dracula legend. This paper investigates the elements contributing to the castle's tourism appeal by analyzing visitor perceptions and experiences. Utilizing surveys distributed to tourists in 2024, the study examines which aspects of the castle most significantly influence visitor satisfaction. The paper proposes strategies for enhancing the visitor experience, including improving educational materials, optimizing crowd management, and upgrading amenities. These recommendations aim to promote sustainable tourism practices at Bran Castle and enhance its value as a cultural heritage site.*

***Key words:** tourism destination image, cultural tourism, Bran castle, tourism satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Bran Castle's association with Bram Stoker's fictional character Count Dracula has transformed it into more than just a historical monument; it has become a symbol of mystery and intrigue, linking it to dark tourism. [4,5,7] This link, while not based on historical fact, has been instrumental in attracting tourists eager to explore the myths and legends of Transylvania. [11,13]

The castle's blend of authentic history and literary myth offers a diverse experience, appealing to a wide range of visitors—from history enthusiasts and architecture lovers to fans of gothic literature and popular culture. [3,10,15]

Understanding visitor perceptions and experiences at Bran Castle is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into which aspects of the attraction resonate most with tourists, enabling stakeholders to enhance those elements and improve overall satisfaction. Secondly, as tourism demand continues to grow, there is an increasing need to manage the impact on the site to preserve its cultural and historical integrity.

Visitor feedback can inform strategies that balance tourist enjoyment with conservation efforts, promoting sustainable tourism practices. [2,9,14] The findings of this study are intended to assist policymakers, tourism managers, and stakeholders in making informed decisions that align with both visitor expectations and preservation goals. [12]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper aims to investigate the elements that contribute to Bran Castle's tourism appeal from the visitors' perspective. Utilizing surveys distributed to tourists in 2024, the study analyzes which aspects of the castle most significantly influence visitor satisfaction. By examining these factors, the research seeks to identify areas for improvement and develop recommendations that enhance the visitor experience while promoting the sustainable management of the site. [1,2,6,8]

RESEARCH RESULTS

Overall visitor satisfaction with Bran Castle is notably high, as shown in Figure 1, where 91% of respondents report being satisfied (49%) or completely satisfied (42%) with their experience, while only 7% remain neutral and 2% express dissatisfaction. In terms of

ticket pricing (Figure 2), the majority (68%) are satisfied or very satisfied, 17% are neutral, and 15% are unsatisfied. These findings suggest that although most visitors view their time at Bran Castle positively, there is still an opportunity to address ticket pricing perceptions. This could signal an opportunity to re-evaluate pricing strategies, introduce more transparent value propositions, or offer tiered options to better align perceived cost with the overall experience. While these figures underscore the castle’s success in delivering a memorable visit, refining pricing structures and improving communication around ticket value may further elevate visitor satisfaction and engagement.

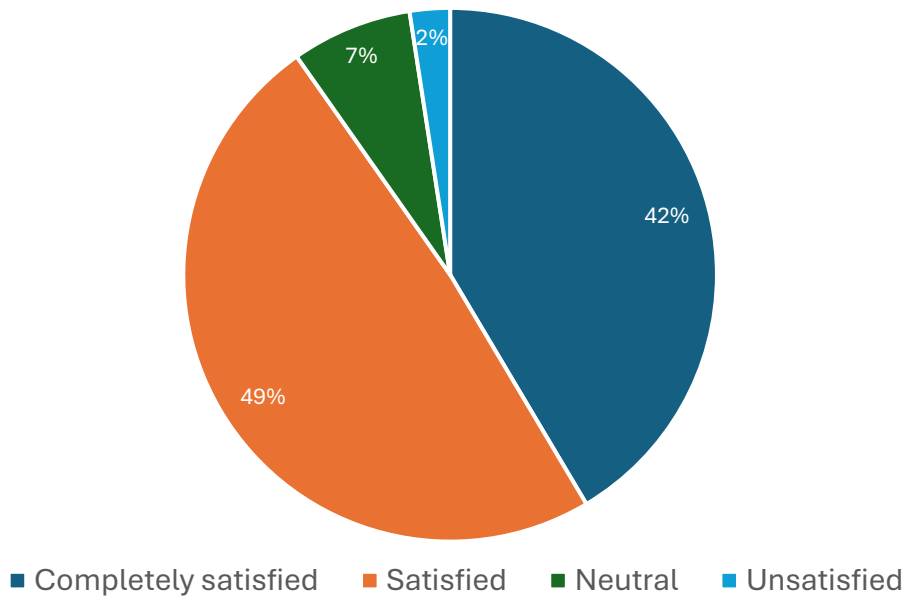


Figure 1. Overall satisfaction

Source: Own work, 2024

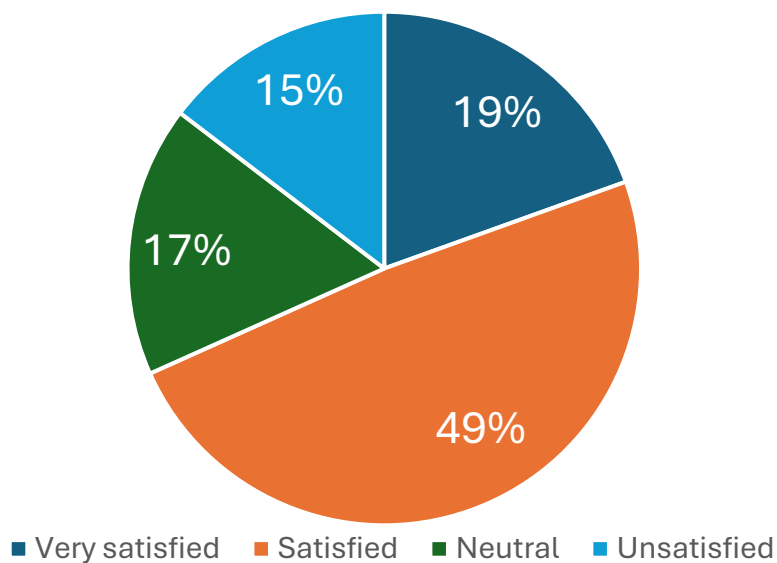


Figure 2. Satisfaction with ticket prices

Source: Own work, 2024

These observations suggest that Bran Castle generally manages visitor flow effectively, as evidenced by the majority (85%) finding waiting times acceptable. However,

the 15% who remain dissatisfied indicate room for refinement—potentially through queue management techniques or additional visitor engagement during waits. Furthermore, the strong preference for self-guided tours highlights a trend toward more autonomous exploration. Nonetheless, enhancing self-guided tools and diversifying guided tour options could further improve the overall experience, ensuring that both independent and guided-tour-oriented visitors are well accommodated.

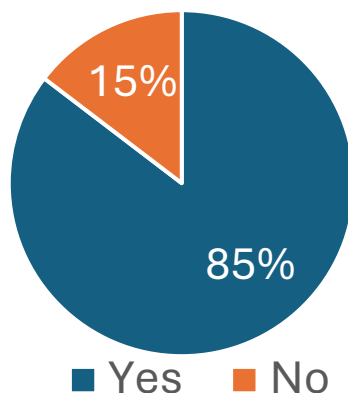


Figure 3. Are waiting times acceptable at the Bran Castle?

Source: Own work, 2024

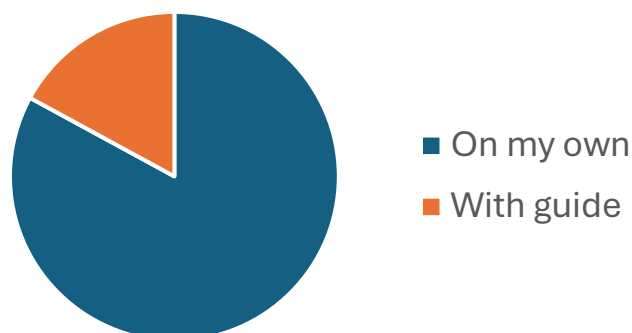


Figure 4. Type of tour

Source: Own work, 2024

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Bran Castle exhibits a high level of visitor satisfaction, with 91% of respondents reporting a positive experience and only 2% expressing dissatisfaction. Ticket pricing, while acceptable for most visitors, remains a point of concern for 15%, suggesting an opportunity for reevaluation or more transparent value offerings. Waiting times appear well-managed, as 85% find them acceptable. Lastly, while a strong preference for self-guided tours is evident, enhancing guided tour options and improving self-guided tools could appeal to both independent explorers and those seeking more structured experiences, ultimately broadening the castle's visitor appeal.

REFERENCES

- [1]. AL-ABABNEH MUKHLES, 2013, Service Quality and Its Impact on Tourist Satisfaction, Institute of Interdisciplinary Business Research
- [2]. ARDANI WAYAN, RAHYUDA KETUT, GIANTARI I GUSTI AYU KETUT and SUKAATMADJA I PUTU GDE, 2019, Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions

- in Tourism: A Literature Review, International Journal of Applied Business and International Management (IJABIM), pp. 84-93
- [3]. **BÎCA IOAN**, 2021, Places of Literary Tourism in Romania. Case Study: Borgo Pass and Bram Stoker's Heritage, *GEOREVIEW*, pp. 63-77
- [4]. **BUZEA TEODORA**, 2022, How a Book Changed a Nation
- [5]. **CANDREA ADINA NICOLETA and PETRE DIANA**, 2019, Is Bran Castle the Place to Meet Dracula? A Qualitative Study on Visitors'opinions Regarding Dracula Tourism in the Medieval Fortress, *Journal*, pp.187-194
- [6]. **CHEN YINING, ZHANG HUI and QIU LI**, 2013, A Review on Tourist Satisfaction of Tourism Destinations, *Journal*, pp.593-604
- [7]. **CRETU ROMEO CĂTĂLIN, BEIA SILVIU IONUȚ, ALECU IOAN IULIAN and ȘTEFAN PETRICĂ**, 2023, Comparative Analysis of Black Tourism in Romania and Worldwide, *Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*,
- [8]. **DELLA CORTE VALENTINA, SCIARELLI MAURO, CASCELLA CLELIA and DEL GAUDIO GIOVANNA**, 2015, Customer Satisfaction in Tourist Destination: The Case of Tourism Offer in the City of Naples, *Journal of Investment and Management*, pp.39-50
- [9]. **HEUNG VINCENT CS and QU HAILIN**, 2020, Hong Kong as a Travel Destination: An Analysis of Japanese Tourists' Satisfaction Levels, and the Likelihood of Them Recommending Hong Kong to Others, *Journal*, pp.57-80
- [10]. **LIGHT DUNCAN**, 2016, The Undead and Dark Tourism: Dracula Tourism in Romania, *Journal*, pp.121-133
- [11]. **LUPU CRISTINA, BROCHADO ANA and STOLERIU OANA MIHAELA**, 2017, Experiencing Dracula's Homeland, *Tourism Geographies*, pp.756-779
- [12]. **MIRCA DENISA ANA, PEPA MARTINA, PET ELENA and GORDAN MARIUS IONUȚ**, 2023, Tourism Destination Image of the Alba Iulia Fortress, *Lucrări Științifice Management Agricol*
- [13]. **PURCARU ANCA RALUCA**, 2023, The Image of Romania and the Vampire Obsession, *International Journal of Communication Research*, pp.117-120
- [14]. **SUKANTHASIRIKUL KANCHANA and TRONGPANICH WANNEE**, 2016, Cultural Tourism Experience on Customer Satisfaction: Evidence from Thailand, *Journal of Economic and Social Development*, pp.17-25
- [15]. **TEODORESCU CAMELIA, SZEMKOVICS LAURENTIU STEFAN, POP V, BIRA N, DUCMAN A and RADOI IV**, 2020, The Importance of a Brand in the Local Economy-Effects of the Local Economy in Bran Given by the Dracula Brand, *Quaestus Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, pp.55-65