

Expectations and Attraction Preferences of Gen Z Tourists: A Case Study of Kampoeng Eropa Malino

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the increasing trend of thematic tourism based on artificial attractions, which has developed alongside Generation Z's preference for tourism experiences that are aesthetic, fast, and easily shared through digital media. Kampoeng Eropa Malino was chosen as the study object due to its popularity among young tourists, yet it has never been academically studied regarding how Gen Z forms expectations and preferences towards the attractions offered. This study aims to analyze Gen Z's expectations and preferences regarding visual, thematic, and facility attractions, as well as spatial experiences at the destination. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through the experience stories of three Gen Z informants who had visited more than twice and the researcher's direct observations at the location. The analysis was carried out by categorizing the informants' experiences, comparing them with field conditions, and interpreting them through a framework of push and pull motivations in tourist behavior. The results of the study indicate a gap between Gen Z's visual expectations shaped by digital media and the actual experiences at the location. The Europe theme was considered not immersive, the variety of photo spots was limited, and facilities, including culinary options and accessibility, were deemed insufficient to meet the needs of young tourists. These findings suggest that Gen Z's internal motivations do not result in satisfaction when external attractions do not meet their aesthetic and comfort standards. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on medium-scale artificial thematic destinations and how Gen Z interprets visually and thematically based tourism experiences.

Keywords: Tourism; Gen Z; Expectations; Attractions; Malino

INTRODUCTION

Thematic tourism based on artificial attractions has grown rapidly in Indonesia in recent years, alongside the increasing demand for man-made destinations that offer visual, thematic, and immersive experiences. This trend shift is closely related to changes in the characteristics of young travelers, particularly Generation Z, the largest group in Indonesia's population, reaching 74.93 million people (Mustika et al., 2025). As digital natives, Gen Z shows a strong preference for travel experiences that are quick, aesthetic, interactive, and easy to share through digital platforms.

Several studies emphasize the dominant role of social media in shaping this generation's travel decisions. Fibri and Ernawati (2025) found that Instagram and TikTok are major sources of inspiration for Gen Z when choosing destinations. Mustika et al. (2025) even demonstrated that TikTok content storytelling has a significant impact on travel interest, showing that the power of visuals and digital narratives surpasses the effectiveness of conventional promotions. Similar

findings were seen in Susilo & Supono (2025), indicating that social media explains 44.2% of the variation in Gen Z's interest in visiting places, affirming that this generation's travel consumption behavior is highly influenced by digital exposure.

Besides digital factors, Gen Z's preferences also show a strong orientation toward aesthetics and comfort. Mahayasa (2023) asserts that creative photo spots are the most dominant factor in enhancing tourist satisfaction. Research by Wibawa et al. (2024) found that 88.3% of Gen Z tourists rated the glamping experience positively due to visual uniqueness (novelty) and spatial comfort. Research by Ikhwan et al. (2025) also highlights that Gen Z, especially females, highly prioritize aesthetic value when choosing destinations and often look for places that are “aesthetic for social media.” Data from other studies reinforce this pattern: Gen Z's preference for thematic, visually-driven, and instant experiences is evident in adventure tourism (Rahayu et al., 2025), set-jetting tourism (Djunaid & Alexander, 2025), and even modern tourist transportation like Jakarta Explorer (2024).

However, although the travel consumption patterns of Gen Z have been widely studied, most previous studies still focused on the context of nature tourism, urban tourism, glamping, heritage, or viral destinations. There is limited research specifically examining thematic man-made tourist destinations that adapt foreign cultural concepts such as Europe. In fact, the study by Himmatin & Kusuma (2025) shows that Gen Z has a strong interest in visual quality, unique experiences, and atmospheres designed thematically, while the research by Fero & Silalahi (2024) proves that Gen Z tends to consume and produce travel content for 2–3 hours per day, making thematic destinations a space for representing digital identity.

In this context, Kampoeng Eropa Malino emerges as one of the thematic tourist destinations based on artificial attractions, offering European-style architecture and atmosphere in the highlands of Malino, Gowa Regency. Its main attractions include aesthetic photo spots, thematic architectural designs, European-style rides, and visually curated landscapes that cater to the tastes of young tourists. This destination falls into the mid-range category—not as large as national theme parks, but quite popular among Gen Z, making it interesting to study within the framework of digital generation travel behavior.

Nonetheless, until now, there has been no academic study discussing how Gen Z interprets the experience of artificial tourism themed around foreign cultures. It is still unclear whether visual appeal alone is enough to meet their expectations, how they assess facilities, services, accessibility, and whether digital aesthetic value becomes a key factor compared to direct experience. In fact, various previous studies have emphasized that Gen Z is highly sensitive to visual quality, digital information, comfort, price, and emotional experience (Nurina et al., 2023; Kadafi et al., 2024; Naufal Abiyyu et al., 2023).

Thus, there is a significant research gap: studies on Gen Z tourism behavior are abundant, but there is no evidence-based research examining medium-scale artificial thematic destinations that adapt European culture, such as Kampoeng Eropa Malino. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by thoroughly analyzing the expectations and preferences of Gen Z tourists regarding Kampoeng Eropa Malino. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of theories on young generations' tourism behavior, while also offering strategic recommendations for managers to enhance the quality of tourist experiences and the effectiveness of digital marketing.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how Generation Z perceives tourist attractions, their expectations, and preferences regarding Kampoeng Eropa Malino. This approach was chosen because the study aims to explore tourist experiences based on direct accounts from informants and the researcher's observations in the field. The study is designed using an experience-centered description model. The primary data comes from the personal experiences of three Gen Z tourists who have visited Kampoeng Eropa Malino more than twice. In addition, the study is supplemented with direct observation of the tourist site. The observation was conducted to clearly see what attractions are available, how tourist activities flow, the atmosphere of the space, and how the informants' expectations compare to the actual conditions on site.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which is selection based on suitability for the research needs. There were three informants, all aged 18–21 years old and had visited Kampoeng Eropa Malino more than twice.

The data analysis technique was carried out descriptively in several stages:

1. The researcher reads and understands the entire story of the informants to identify points of their tourism experiences.
2. Grouping the data based on key points, such as expectations before visiting, attraction preferences, actual experiences on-site, and impressions of facilities and atmosphere.
3. Comparing the informants' experiences with the results of the researcher's field observations.
4. The analysis results are presented in the form of a narrative description that illustrates Gen Z's tourism experience patterns holistically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate a clear gap between the expectations of Gen Z tourists and the reality of the experiences they encounter at Kampoeng Eropa Malino. Most informants arrived with high expectations due to the influence of social media content portraying this destination as an aesthetic, modern European-themed area filled with trendy photo spots. These expectations are quite reasonable considering the characteristics of Gen Z, who are inherently more attracted to destinations with strong visual appeal, easily expressible through digital content, and capable of providing experiences that align with their lifestyle.

However, the reality on the ground shows that the appeal of Kampoeng Eropa Malino has not fully been able to meet that expectation. Informants in the data reduction revealed that the atmosphere they encountered resembled a family recreation park more than an immersive European-themed area. The existing buildings and decorations have not strongly conveyed a European vibe, so the expected 'vibes' are not consistently delivered. The available photo spots are also considered very limited and tend to be simple, which does not support Gen Z's need to gain aesthetic and unique visual experiences. In addition, the limited number of food tenants and lack of variety make this destination lose one of the important elements that usually attract young

tourists, especially considering that contemporary cuisine is an integral part of the travel experience for this generation. Access to the location, which is considered difficult, further widens the gap between initial expectations and actual experience.

This discrepancy can be explained through the push and pull motivation theory, which serves as the main analytical framework of the study. From the perspective of push factors, Gen Z is driven by internal desires such as the need to relieve stress, seek new experiences, and create visual content for social media. This drive is a psychological motivation that leads them to choose certain destinations. However, for the experience to be satisfying, this internal motivation must be balanced by strong pull factors from the destination—namely external attractions such as visual uniqueness, completeness of facilities, quality of photo spots, ease of access, and thematic distinctiveness. In the context of Kampoeng Eropa Malino, these pull factors have not yet been optimized. The European theme, which should be the main identity of the destination, has not been fully developed in depth, resulting in a lack of a cohesive and immersive thematic experience.

These field findings are in line with various journal literature you attached, particularly the findings of Rahmadina et al. (2025), Ermawati & Prihandono (2018), and Febrianto et al. (2025), which emphasize that a combination of internal motivation and external appeal will affect tourist satisfaction. In the case of Kampoeng Eropa, Gen Z's internal motivation is actually very strong, but the weak external appeal results in an experience that does not meet their expected standards. Consequently, the level of satisfaction decreases, which in turn impacts the low interest in revisiting and recommending the destination.

This dissatisfaction also reflects a typical phenomenon among the Gen Z generation, which is a high sensitivity to the gap between what is promoted on social media and what they actually encounter. Since Gen Z heavily relies on digital visualization before traveling, they tend to feel disappointed when the destination's branding does not match the real conditions. In this context, Kampoeng Eropa faces the challenge of maintaining consistency between its promotional image and the quality of experiences offered on the ground.

Furthermore, this study also highlights Gen Z's preference for certain types of tourist attractions. They want destinations that can provide strong visual experiences, creative and thematic decorations, as well as “Instagrammable” spaces. In addition, contemporary culinary variations and comfortable supporting facilities are part of their preferences in determining the quality of a destination. Gen Z also shows interest in interactive and immersive experiences, such as themed costumes or areas representing specific European countries. Overall, these preferences illustrate that Gen Z seeks more than just a tourist spot; they want a complete, thematic experience with strong visual storytelling value.

Thus, this discussion emphasizes that the gap between expectations and reality at Kampoeng Eropa Malino occurs due to an imbalance between tourists' internal motivations and the destination's external attractions. To attract and retain the interest of Generation Z, this destination needs to enhance thematic quality, enrich photo spots, offer more creative culinary

tenants, and improve overall accessibility and spatial experience. These efforts will not only improve satisfaction levels but also have the potential to strengthen loyalty and revisit intentions, as indicated by various literature on the relationship between motivation, satisfaction, and revisit intention.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Gen Z tourists' expectations for European-themed visual and experiential elements at Kampoenng Eropa Malino have not been met, thus addressing the research objective that there is a gap between the portrayal in digital promotions and the actual condition of the destination. Theoretically, this finding reinforces the concept of push and pull motivation, indicating that Gen Z's internal motivation does not lead to satisfaction if the external attractions of the destination are inadequate; practically, this study emphasizes the importance of enhancing theme consistency, adding photo spots, culinary facilities, and accessibility. For future research, it is recommended to increase the number of informants, compare other thematic destinations, and use a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z travel preferences.

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