

Research Article

The Role of Tour Guides in Enhancing Tourist Experiences on Talempong Cultural Tourism in West Sumatra

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Abstract: Talempong cultural tourism as a cultural identity of the Minangkabau people. Tour guides play a crucial role in cultural tourism, but empirical research specifically examining the role of guides in the context of Talempong cultural tourism is still limited. This study aims to analyze the role of tour guides in enhancing tourists' experiences on Talempong cultural tourism in West Sumatra. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The research informants consisted of 12 certified tour guides, 25 domestic and international tourists, and 5 cultural practitioners in West Sumatra. The results revealed that tour guides perform five main roles: cultural interpreters who translate and contextualize the history and philosophy of Talempong music, cultural mediators who bridge the differences in perception between tourists and local culture, experience facilitators who create meaningful interactions between tourists and Talempong artists, identity guardians who ensure the authenticity of Talempong cultural offerings, and co-creators of memorable tourism experiences. This study found that tour guide competencies, particularly cultural knowledge and communication skills, significantly shape tourist satisfaction and create memorable cultural experiences. This contribution enriches the literature on the role of tour guides in intangible cultural heritage tourism and provides practical recommendations for tour guide training programs in West Sumatra.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism; Minangkabau; Role of Tour Guides; Talempong; Tourist Experience.

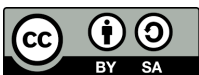
1. Introduction

Tourism is experiencing rapid growth. As a country rich in cultural heritage, Indonesia has the potential to develop both tangible and intangible cultural tourism. As a province with a strong Minangkabau cultural identity, West Sumatra boasts a variety of unique and diverse cultural attractions, one of which is traditional Talempong music.

Talempong is a traditional Minangkabau percussion instrument made of brass and played collectively. This music represents the philosophy, beliefs, and identity of the Minangkabau people, more than just entertainment. Talempong is a nationally recognized intangible cultural heritage and a major tourist attraction in West Sumatra. More than 2.3 million people have visited this cultural attraction, with the majority drawn to traditional arts performances, including talempong (Dinas Pariwisata Provinsi Sumatera Barat, 2022).

However, the quality of the artistic performance is not the only factor that determines a tourist's experience in cultural tourism. Tour guides are also responsible for the interpretation and communication provided. Tour guides help visitors understand the cultural richness of a place. Tourists often struggle to understand the meaning, context, and values of

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cultural heritage, including Talempong music, if they lack adequate interpretation. This can lead to a shallow and less meaningful tourism experience (Hadi & Sulistiyani, 2021; Huang & Weiler, 2022).

A memorable tourism experience is achieved by experienced tour guides who understand Minangkabau culture, particularly Talempong. Previous studies have shown that tour guides significantly influence customer satisfaction and return intention (Arslan & Kim, 2022; Kim & Ritchie, 2023). However, this research gap needs to be addressed, as empirical research specifically examining the role of tour guides in the context of Talempong cultural tourism in West Sumatra is still very limited.

Field observations indicate significant differences in the quality of explanations provided by tour guides when guiding visitors to Talempong performances. Some guides can provide in-depth and in-depth explanations of the history, philosophy, and socio-cultural context of Talempong, while others provide only factual explanations. Visitor experiences are directly affected by these differences in quality (Anggraini & Kurniawan, 2023; Azmi et al., 2023)

Based on this background, this study aims to This study analyzes the role of tour guides in enhancing tourist experiences during Talempong cultural tourism in West Sumatra. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide theoretical contributions to the advancement of tourism, particularly in studying the role of tour guides in cultural tourism that relies on intangible heritage.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Cultural Tourism and Talempong Tourism

Travel motivated by the desire to experience, understand, and appreciate a community's cultural heritage, traditions, arts, and lifestyle is called cultural tourism. Cultural tourism encompasses tangible aspects such as museums, historical sites, and architecture, as well as intangible aspects such as performing arts, traditional music, and traditional rituals (Chen, 2021) . Talempong tourism in West Sumatra falls into the category of intangible cultural heritage-based tourism, which has unique ways of being conveyed and interpreted by visitors.

As a traditional Minangkabau musical instrument, the talempong holds a rich cultural significance. According to "Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah," this instrument has a philosophical meaning related to the Minangkabau people's philosophy of life in addition to its musical aesthetic value (Azmi et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2024) . Talempong music is played in various traditional ceremonies, guest receptions, and arts festivals for tourists. This diversity of contexts complicates the interpretations that tour guides must provide.

Studies on intangible cultural heritage and tourism experiences have shown that traditional music such as Talempong has great potential to become a unique and authentic tourist attraction, provided it is supported by a good interpretation system (Aprilia & Widodo, 2024) . Tourists' experiences in Talempong depend on the quality of the performance. Understanding the history, symbolic meaning, and cultural context of the music is necessary (Anggraini & Kurniawan, 2023; Lestari & Prasetyo, 2023) .

The Role of Tour Guides in Cultural Tourism

Tour guides are a crucial part of the tourism experience chain, particularly in cultural tourism. Heritage interpretation has shown that a good tour guide goes beyond simply conveying information; they must also be able to create meaning for tourists through a creative and empathetic interpretation process. Tilden's principles of interpretation emphasize that interpretation must connect information to tourists' lives and real-life experiences (Tilden & Beck, 2021).

In cultural tourism, tour guides perform several important roles. First, they serve as cultural speakers, conveying cultural heritage to tourists in accessible language (Hadi & Sulistiyani, 2021). Second, they serve as cultural mediators, bridging the gap between the host culture and tourists, preventing misunderstandings or culture shock (Fatimah & Haryanto, 2022). Finally, they serve as experience facilitators, enabling tourists to actively engage (Hadi & Sulistiyani, 2021).

Successful tour guides in cultural heritage tourism identified four main dimensions of expertise that tour guides must possess, namely in-depth knowledge that includes a deep understanding of cultural heritage, history, and socio-cultural contexts, communication skills that include storytelling skills, appropriate use of language, and message adjustments according to the tourist's background, and interpersonal competencies that include empathy, rapport-building skills, and conflict management, as well as professional competencies that include ethics, responsibility, and commitment to service quality (Huang & Weiler, 2022).

A specific dimension of cultural competence for the context of heritage tourism is the ability of tour guides to convey cultural narratives in a sensitive and accurate manner, while fostering tourists' appreciation of local cultural values. Talempong cultural tourism is crucial because guides must understand Minangkabau philosophy, matrilineal social structures, and the role of music in community life (Zamani et al., 2022).

Tourist Experience and Co-creation

According to contemporary economic theory, visitors demand meaningful, authentic, and memorable experiences, not just goods or services. The tourist experience in cultural tourism is shaped by numerous interactions between the tourist, the guide, the cultural attractions, and the destination environment. Various components, such as emotional engagement, cognitive understanding, and sensory sensations gained during the visit, contribute to the quality of the tourist experience. (Pine & Gilmore, 2022).

According to the concept of co-creation in tourism, the best tourism experiences are created through a co-creation process between visitors and service providers, including tour guides (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2021). Tourists visiting Talempong cultural attractions can experience co-creation when given the opportunity to interact directly with musicians, try playing instruments, or participate in cultural rituals associated with Talempong (Lestari & Prasetyo, 2023). Tour guides are crucial in supporting the co-creation process.

The six main components that make up a memorable tourism experience are referred to as memorable tourism experiences: engagement, local knowledge, culture, involvement, renovation, and novelty (Kim & Ritchie, 2023). Tour guides in Talempong cultural tourism can activate these six factors through innovative interpretations, enabling significant interactions, and creating unforgettable emotional experiences (Chen, 2021; Ismayanti & Rahayu, 2021).

Interpretation of Cultural Heritage

Freeman Tilden, often referred to as the father of heritage interpretation, described interpretation as an educational process aimed at revealing meanings and relationships through the use of authentic objects, direct experiences, and illustrative media, rather than simply conveying factual information (Tilden & Beck, 2021). In understanding cultural heritage, personal relevance, a holistic approach, the art of communication, and the goal of intellectual provocation are crucial, according to Tilden's principles.

According to the sustainable heritage interpretation framework, effective interpretation requires three dimensions: the cognitive dimension (meaning intellectual understanding), the affective dimension (meaning emotional engagement), and the conative dimension (meaning the desire to act or change). When it comes to Talempong tourism, there are cognitive dimensions, including the affective dimension, demonstrated by the beauty and meaning of its music, and the conative dimension, demonstrated by tourists' desire to help preserve Minangkabau culture (Andriessen & Cooper, 2021).

Goffman and Holloway incorporate a dramaturgical perspective into their analysis of cultural heritage interpretation, depicting tour guides as actors playing roles in staging tourism experiences. In this perspective, tour guides not only convey information but also create atmosphere, create dramatic tension, and organize the peak moments of the cultural tourism experience. Talempong performances have a strong performative element, making this dramaturgical analogy particularly relevant (Goffman & Holloway, 2021).

3. Proposed Method

Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach because the aim is to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of the role of tour guides in Talempong cultural tourism from the perspectives of both the tour guide and the tourist (Moleong, 2021). A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the complexity of the tour guide's role within a specific sociocultural context, identify details in the tourist experience, and understand the dynamics of interactions between the tour guide and the tourist.

This research uses a multi-site case study approach by selecting three main research locations in West Sumatra: Padang Panjang City, which serves as the center of Talempong arts and culture education (Padang Panjang Indonesian Arts Institute); Tanah Datar Regency, which serves as the origin and cultural center of Talempong; and Bukittinggi City, a tourist city in West Sumatra that regularly hosts Talempong performances. These three locations were chosen because they represent various Talempong cultural tourism practices well. The research period was from January to May 2025.

Data Sources and Informants

Primary and secondary data were obtained directly from research informants through interviews and participant observation. Purposive sampling method was used to select informants. The criteria used for selecting informants were tour guides who have official certification and at least three years of experience in guiding Talempong cultural tours, domestic and international tourists who have participated in Talempong cultural tours, and cultural practitioners, such as artists, cultural figures, and administrators of Minangkabau traditional institutions, who have expertise and in-depth knowledge of Talempong.

The informants of this research were 12 certified tour guides who actively guided in three research locations, 25 tourists consisting of fifteen domestic tourists and ten foreign tourists from various countries and 5 cultural practitioners consisting of senior Talempong artists, Minangkabau cultural figures, and art studio managers.

Data Collection Techniques

Research data was collected through three main techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to allow for flexible examination of informants' experiences and perspectives. A literature review formed the basis for the development of interview guides, which were tailored to each informant group. Tour guides and tourists were interviewed about the roles and strategies of cultural interpretation, tourists were interviewed about their experiences and perceptions of tour guide performance, and cultural practitioners were interviewed about the authenticity and accuracy of cultural interpretations delivered by tour guides.

The second participatory observation was conducted directly for three months (January to March 2025) by participating in various Talempong cultural tours led by tour guide informants. Researchers recorded the behavior, interactions, and communication tactics of the tour guides, as well as tourists' responses to the interpretations provided. Comprehensive and detailed field notes were made daily during the observation period. Third, documentation consisted of collecting various relevant sources, such as tour guidebooks, tour guide training materials, cultural tourism programs, and promotional publications related to Talempong tourism in West Sumatra.

Data Analysis Techniques

The thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke was used to analyze the data. This approach consists of six stages: familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes, systematic initial coding of all data, reviewing and refining themes, defining and explaining themes, defining and naming final themes, and writing a research report that integrates the findings with the theoretical foundation.

Several triangulation techniques were used to ensure the validity of the research data. Source triangulation involved comparing data from three different groups of informants: tour guides, tourists, and cultural practitioners. Method triangulation involved comparing data from observations, documentation, and interviews. Time triangulation was conducted by checking data at various points during the research period. Member checking was also conducted by communicating interim analysis results to key informants for confirmation and correction.

4. Results and Discussion

Result

Based on data analysis obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation at three research locations in West Sumatra; Padang Panjang City, Tanah Datar Regency, and Bukittinggi City, five primary roles were identified for tour guides in Talempong cultural tourism. The following presents the comprehensive results of this research.

Tour Guides as Cultural Interpreters

Observations and interviews revealed that the most important role played by tour guides is as cultural interpreters. Tour guides are responsible for translating and contextualizing various elements of Talempong music that are unfamiliar to tourists, making them easier to understand. All tour guides interviewed agreed that this role is crucial and acknowledged that their interpretations are crucial to the tourist experience.

The tour guide provided a wide range of interpretations. He recounted the history of Talempong's origins, which are believed to have arrived in Minangkabau through trade routes with Southeast Asian kingdoms in the 14th century. He provided technical explanations of instrument construction, playing techniques, and the musical scale system used in Talempong music. From a philosophical perspective, he explained the symbolic meaning of Talempong's rhythmic and melodic patterns, as they relate to Minangkabau traditional values.

Mr. Ridwan, a senior tour guide with over ten years of experience, explains how to understand Talempong: "I always start explaining Talempong not from the instrument itself, but from the Minangkabau values reflected in this music." The philosophy of nature, *takambang*, conveys how the Minangkabau people learn from nature. He then explains that Talempong expresses this philosophy through rhythmic patterns that complement and complement each other, like the relationships between members of the Minangkabau community. This method creates a strong emotional connection between visitors and Talempong music.

During the Talempong tour in Bukittinggi City, the tour guides used various narrative strategies to explain the story to tourists. These strategies included using analogies related to the tourists' lives, telling engaging stories, and using visual aids such as photographs and objects related to Talempong. Throughout the tour, these strategies successfully captured visitors' attention.

Tour Guides as Cultural Mediators

Tour guides have a secondary role as cultural mediators. Their job is to bridge the cultural background of tourists with the principles and customs of Minangkabau culture, as reflected in the Talempong tradition. This role is especially crucial for guides to foreign tourists whose cultural contexts differ significantly from those of the Minangkabau.

Research shows that tour guides actively mediate culture in various ways. First, they provide tourists with a sociocultural context to understand why Talempong is performed in certain places. For example, it is played every time during the inauguration ceremony of a *penghulu* (traditional leader) or during Minangkabau wedding processions. Second, tour guides help tourists understand cultural codes that may be unfamiliar or confusing, such as seating arrangements for audience members, dress codes for traditional performances, and etiquette for interacting with Talempong performers.

Interviews with international tourists demonstrate the importance of this cultural mediation. A tourist from the Netherlands, Ms. Eline, said, "Without an explanation from the tour guide, I might have been confused at first about why the music sounded so disorganized. But after the guide explained the concept of interlocking patterns in Talempong and compared it to Javanese gamelan music, which may be more familiar to Westerners, I immediately understood and was deeply impressed by its complexity and beauty. "

Tour guides also have a responsibility to manage tourists' expectations. Some tourists arrive with unrealistic expectations for Talempong performances, such as expecting a spectacular performance like a modern music concert. A good tour guide is able to manage these expectations gently but effectively, allowing tourists to enjoy the Talempong performance with its appropriate value and aesthetics.

Tour Guide as Experience Facilitator

According to this study, tour guides play a third role as experience facilitators by organizing various interactive activities that allow tourists to directly and meaningfully engage with Talempong culture. The study shows that the most engaging Talempong tours for tourists are those that allow them to observe and actively participate.

Tourists can benefit greatly from the various ways offered by tour guides, such as holding short workshops where traditional artists teach tourists how to hold and play the Talempong gong, allowing tourists to have interactive Q&A sessions with Talempong artists through live interpretation, inviting tourists to visit Talempong production sites and interact with the craftsmen, and guiding tourists through tours where Talempong is still played in the context of the community's daily life.

Field observations show that good tour guides consistently maintain a sense of the pace of the experience throughout the tour. This maintains a balance between passive (listening to explanations and watching performances) and active (participating and interacting directly). A good tour guide also understands the energy levels and interests of their clients, allowing them to adjust the tour schedule accordingly.

Tour Guides as Guardians of Cultural Identity

The fourth role identified is being a guardian of cultural identity. In the context of tourism, traditional culture is at risk of being altered or over-sold, diminishing its authenticity. Tour guides who are passionate about cultural preservation play an active role in ensuring that Talempong cultural tourism retains its essence and authenticity, yet is packaged in a user-friendly manner.

According to interviews with tour guides, many feel a moral obligation to preserve the authentic and pure representation of Talempong culture. Mr. Deri, a tour guide and researcher of Minangkabau art, said: "I always explain to tourists that what they see is a version of Talempong that has been adapted for tourism, but the essence and philosophy remain the same as those performed in traditional ceremonies." Furthermore, he always emphasizes the importance of respecting the artists and avoiding treating the performances as mere entertainment.

Tour guides are also responsible for preventing conflicts between commercial interests and cultural preservation. Guides collaborate with tourist attraction managers and travel agents to ensure that Talempong performances presented to tourists respect the sacred values and traditions inherent in this music. Tour guides can also refuse requests from tourists deemed disrespectful to the culture, such as asking for photos in inappropriate situations.

Tour Guides as Co-Creators of Memorable Experiences

The fifth role, a combination of the previous four, is the co-creator of memorable experiences. This role demonstrates the tour guide's ability to create truly meaningful and unforgettable moments during a tour. Tour guides in this role not only provide information or offer activities, but also collaborate with tourists to create unique experiences.

According to data analysis, the most memorable Talempong cultural tourism experiences are created by tour guides who are able to create a genuine emotional connection between tourists and Minangkabau culture. The interaction between tour guides, Talempong artists, and tourists often creates these moments spontaneously. Guides are not explicitly present in the tour program. Experienced tour guides are able to identify and capitalize on these moments during Talempong performances.

Data collected from interviews with tourists indicates that experiencing Talempong music live is the most memorable and frequently mentioned experience. One tourist from Jakarta said, "I'll never forget the moment when the guide invited me to sit with the Talempong artists during a break and have a casual chat." Tourists truly feel the spirit of Minangkabau culture there, not only in the music but also in the friendliness and warmth of the people.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal five key roles of tour guides in Talempong cultural tourism in West Sumatra. The following discussion links these findings to relevant theories and previous research to strengthen the meaning and implications of each finding.

The Role of Cultural Interpretation: Between Knowledge and the Art of Storytelling

Research demonstrating that tour guides function as cultural interpreters supports and extends Tilden and Beck's theory of cultural heritage interpretation (Tilden & Beck, 2021). The results of this study indicate that, just as Tilden emphasized the principle of intellectual provocation in interpretation, Talempong tour guides naturally apply this principle by connecting information about Talempong with experiences and values relevant to tourists. This ability is the result of pedagogical intuition developed over years of working with various types of tourists.

These findings align with research by Huang and Weiler, who found that a good interpretation by a tour guide is the most important factor determining the quality of a tourist's experience in heritage tourism (Huang & Weiler, 2022). This research suggests that the interpretation of traditional music, such as Talempong, should encompass affective and aesthetic aspects, not just cognitive (knowledge transfer). A good Talempong tour guide can help visitors understand the "why" and "how" of this music's importance to the Minangkabau people.

Research on storytelling in cultural tourism experiences provides a relevant basis for understanding how Talempong tour guides interpret experiences. This research shows that the most effective tour guides use story-based narratives that have dramatic plots, engaging characters, and strong moral messages. This storytelling method not only makes information more memorable but also fosters a stronger emotional connection with Talempong culture. This supports Goffman and Holloway's argument that tour guides must master storytelling as a key skill in heritage tourism (Goffman & Holloway, 2021).

According to Kusuma and Ramadhani's research on strategies for conveying Minangkabau cultural narratives, the most effective cultural narratives are those that combine historical facts with folklore and the artist's personal experiences (Kusuma & Ramadhani, 2022). This study confirms these findings and adds the dimension that the tour guide's ability to adapt to the depth of the narrative also significantly impacts its effectiveness.

Cultural Mediation: Bridging Cultural Distances

The theoretical framework proposed by Fatimah and Haryanto on the formation of cultural destination images is strengthened by findings on the cultural mediator role of tour guides (Fatimah & Haryanto, 2022). This study found that effective cultural mediation not only prevents cultural shock or misunderstanding but also builds tourists' appreciation and respect for the culture they visit. Talempong tour guides often play a role in cultural mediation, determining whether tourists take home positive or negative impressions of Minangkabau culture.

In research on cultural mediation in the history of Islam, tour guides skilled in cultural mediation can create effective "cultural bridges" between the host culture and the tourist culture. This study reinforces the conclusion that, in the Minangkabau cultural context, the most effective cultural bridges are built by combining conceptual explanations of traditional values, inspiring stories that appeal to tourists, and opportunities for direct interaction with the local community (Zamani et al., 2022).

A study by Indrayani and Sulistiawati on the influence of tour guide skills on international tourist satisfaction at cultural destinations in West Sumatra found that the skill most associated with international tourist satisfaction was cross-cultural communication skills (Indrayani & Sulistiawati, 2022). These results are consistent with previous research findings showing that a tour guide's ability to communicate about aspects of Minangkabau culture in a language understandable to tourists from diverse backgrounds is a crucial component in creating a satisfying tourism experience.

Cultural mediators, such as tour guides, also protect local communities from the negative effects of mass tourism, such as cultural commodification and exploitation (Arslan & Kim, 2022). According to this study, experienced Talempong tour guides consciously fulfill this protective role by managing tourist expectations and ensuring that interactions between tourists and Talempong artists are conducted in a manner that fosters mutual respect and dignity.

Facilitating Experience: From Passive Spectator to Active Participant

The concept of co-creation in tourism proposed by Buhalis and Amaranggana is closely related to research on the role of tour guides as experience facilitators (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2021). The results indicate that visitors experience the most memorable Talempong tourism when they transform from passive spectators to active participants in cultural events. Good tour guides recognize the importance of this transformation and offer tourists ample opportunities to directly participate in Talempong-related activities.

Research on collaboration in traditional music tourism in West Sumatra found that visitors who actively participated in the experience reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction than those who simply watched (Lestari & Prasetyo, 2023). This study identified several concrete approaches used by tour guides to encourage tourist participation, ranging from short Talempong playing classes to visits to Talempong artist communities. This study reinforces and extends these findings.

Tourist experience identifies four dimensions of satisfying experiences: entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics (Pine & Gilmore, 2022). The findings of this study indicate that the most effective Talempong tour guides are able to activate all four dimensions simultaneously in the facilitated experience. Talempong performances provide the entertainment and aesthetic dimensions, the in-depth interpretation provided by the tour

guide provides the educational dimension, and direct involvement in the performance or community provides an escape from the routine of tourists' daily lives.

Research conducted by Nugroho and Wahyono on digital storytelling in heritage travel adds a new aspect related to the role of travel facilitators in the modern era (Nugroho & Wahyono, 2024). Although this study focused on tour guides interacting directly with tourists, the results demonstrate the importance of incorporating digital elements into facilitating experiences, such as using music translation apps or authentic video documentation of Talempong performances. These findings have significant implications for the future development of tour guide expertise.

Identity Preservation: Maintaining Authenticity Amidst the Flow of Commercialization

The most unique finding of this study is the role of tour guides as guardians of cultural identity in Talempong tourism, as it has not been thoroughly studied in previous literature. This finding broadens the understanding of the role of tour guides as agents of cultural preservation and guardians of cultural heritage integrity, a role that is increasingly important in the midst of modern technology.

In their research on sustainable heritage interpretation, Andriessen and Cooper emphasize that tour guides focused on cultural preservation must be able to balance accessibility (making the culture easily understood and appreciated by tourists) and integrity (ensuring that the essence and values of the culture are not distorted during the delivery process) (Andriessen & Cooper, 2021). This research shows that the best Talempong tour guides can consistently maintain this balance and confirms its importance.

In a study on the authenticity of cultural tourism experiences, Ismayanti and Rahayu found that tourists who were aware of authenticity issues tended to rate cultural tourism experiences perceived as authentic more favorably than those perceived as less authentic (Ismayanti & Rahayu, 2021). This study agrees with these findings and adds that tour guides are crucial in building tourists' authentic perceptions, both through oral storytelling and concrete actions in protecting and respecting Talempong's cultural values.

Research on the role of Talempong performing arts in strengthening the cultural tourism identity of West Sumatra (Rahmawati et al., 2024) found that Talempong has become one of the most powerful markers of West Sumatra's cultural tourism identity. Therefore, the quality of Talempong's representation in the tourism industry has an impact far beyond overall tourist satisfaction.

Memorable Experience Co-Creation: Unforgettable Moments

The finding regarding the role of tour guides as co-creators of memorable experiences is the most complex and multidimensional finding in this study. This finding strengthens and develops the theory of memorable tourism experience (MTE) (Kim & Ritchie, 2023). This study found that in the context of Talempong cultural tourism, tour guides act as catalysts, enabling tourists to achieve peak experiences rarely achieved without the mediation of a competent tour guide.

Research on experience quality and perceived value in heritage tourism found that tourists who reported highly memorable experiences also reported higher perceived value, satisfaction, and revisit intentions. This study suggests that tour guide co-creation plays a

crucial role in the causal chain between the quality of Talempong cultural offerings and tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Chen, 2021) .

In their study on the role of local tour guides in Minangkabau cultural tourism, Afriani and Wahyudin (2021) found that tourists who used experienced local tour guides reported higher levels of satisfaction compared to tourists who used less experienced or no local guides (Afriani & Wahyudin, 2021) . These results are consistent with previous research findings, which indicate that the quality of the tour guide is a very important factor in shaping the overall quality of the Talempong cultural tourism experience.

Sari and Firdaus in their recent research on the transformation of the role of tour guides in the digital era adds an important perspective on how digital technology can help or hinder the ability of tour guides to create memorable experiences. (Sari & Firdaus, 2025) . It was found that tour guides who are able to integrate digital technology appropriately into their services, for example through the use of augmented reality to visualize historical contexts, or digital platforms to share travel memories, tend to create more memorable and valuable experiences for today's tourists.

5. Conclusions

This study identified and analyzed five key roles of tour guides in Talempong cultural tourism in West Sumatra. First, they serve as cultural interpreters, second, they serve as cultural mediators, third, they facilitate experiences, fourth, they create memorable experiences, and finally, they collaborate, strengthening each other to create an exceptional Talempong cultural tourism experience. Tour guides who can fulfill all five roles simultaneously and adapt to various contexts and tourist needs are the most effective.

This research provides several strategic suggestions from a practical application perspective. First, tour guide training programs in West Sumatra should enhance knowledge of Minangkabau and Talempong culture, including its historical, philosophical, and sociocultural aspects. Second, specific competency standards should be developed for tour guides working in Talempong cultural tourism destinations, including skills in interpretation, cultural mediation, experience facilitation, and cultural preservation ethics. Third, tour guide training programs in West Sumatra should broaden knowledge. Fourth, tour guides who demonstrate a strong commitment to preserving and promoting Talempong culture should be recognized and incentivized by the local government and tourism associations.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it focused on three specific locations in West Sumatra, so generalizing the findings to the entire province requires caution. Second, this qualitative study cannot quantitatively measure the influence of each tour guide role on tourist satisfaction. These three studies were conducted over a specific time period, so they may not fully capture dynamics that change over time. Future research recommends conducting longitudinal studies that examine changes in tour guide roles along with changing tourism trends, as well as mixed-methods research that can quantify the impact of each tour guide role on various indicators of tourist satisfaction.

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