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## **A Study of Guests' Experiences in the Context of Luxury Heritage Hotels in Portugal: Themes and Dimensions in Online Reviews**

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Master of Business Management

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PhD, Ana Margarida Mendes Camelo Oliveira Brochado, Associate Professor with Habilitation

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Department of Marketing, Operations, and General Management

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## **DEDICATION**

As I conclude this dissertation, I dedicate it to my beloved parents, whose memory fills this day with both joy and longing. This accomplishment is a tribute to your love, guidance, and constant belief in me. I carry your spirit in every step I take.

September 18, 2024



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## ABSTRACT

As global travelers increasingly seek experiences that merge luxury with heritage, Portugal's luxury hotels market may become a source of opportunities for this unique blend. The present study explores guests' narratives shared on TripAdvisor, focusing on Portuguese high-end luxury hotels with distinctive historic, cultural, social, and natural heritage attributes, or luxury heritage hotels. Through content analysis of secondary data using Leximancer, this research identifies sixteen dominant themes, categorized into five overarching dimensions—Hotel, Journey, Room, Gastronomy, and Location—that capture the essence of guests' experiences. A conceptual model illustrates the relationship between the core attributes of luxury and heritage and the dominant themes and dimensions derived from guests' online reviews. Positive experiential themes (e.g., *beautiful*) are absent among dissatisfied guest reviews, suggesting that dissatisfaction impacts guests' ability to appreciate or recall positive aspects of their stay. Moreover, while the vast majority of guests express satisfaction in broad terms, feedback from the relatively few dissatisfied guests tends to be more specific, with a smaller number of dominant themes (14) and certain themes, (e.g., *people, top, and fresh*), being uniquely emphasized. This suggests that when guests experience dissatisfaction, their narratives tend to focus on specific issues related to interactions with personnel (*people*), unmet expectations concerning the hotel's claimed luxury status (*top*), and concerns about different aspects of guests' experiences from comfort and value perception to hygiene, aesthetics, and the hotel's overall ambiance (*fresh*). The results also suggest that while dissatisfaction brings specific themes to the forefront, some overlap with those associated with satisfaction, depending on delivery (e.g., *price*). Ultimately, this study offers guidance for hotel management and other stakeholders by highlighting the strategic importance of leveraging hotels' core heritage attributes to enhance guests' experiences within a high-end luxury context.

**Keywords** – Guests' experiences, Luxury hotels, Heritage, Online reviews, TripAdvisor, Secondary data, Content analysis, Leximancer, Portugal.

### JEL Classification System Codes

M31 – Marketing

Z32 – Tourism and Development





## RESUMO

À medida que o turista global procura experiências que combinem luxo e património, o mercado dos hotéis de luxo em Portugal pode tornar-se numa fonte de oportunidades para essa combinação única. Este estudo explora narrativas de hóspedes partilhadas no TripAdvisor, com foco em hotéis de alto luxo em Portugal caracterizados por distintos atributos de património histórico, cultural, social e natural, i.e., hotéis de luxo e património. Através da análise de conteúdo de dados secundários utilizando o Leximancer, o estudo identifica dezasseis temas dominantes, categorizados em cinco dimensões abrangentes — Hotel, Journey, Room, Gastronomy e Location — que captam a essência das experiências dos hóspedes. Um modelo concetual ilustra a relação entre os atributos fundamentais de luxo e património e os conceitos, temas e dimensões dominantes derivados das avaliações dos hóspedes. Temas experienciais positivos (por exemplo *beautiful*) estão ausentes de avaliações de hóspedes insatisfeitos, o que sugere que a insatisfação impacta a capacidade de apreciar ou relembrar aspetos positivos da estadia. Enquanto a grande maioria dos hóspedes expressa satisfação em termos gerais, o feedback dos relativamente poucos hóspedes insatisfeitos é mais específico, com um menor número de temas dominantes (14) e com certos temas (por exemplo *people*, *top* e *fresh*) a serem enfatizados, o que sugere que quando os hóspedes se sentem insatisfeitos, as suas narrativas estão focadas em questões específicas relacionadas com interações com o pessoal (*people*), expectativas goradas sobre o nível de luxo esperado (*top*) e preocupações relativas a diferentes aspetos das experiências dos hóspedes, desde o conforto e a perceção de valor a aspetos de higiene, estética e o ambiente do hotel em geral (*fresh*). Os resultados sugerem ainda que em casos de insatisfação, alguns dos temas dominantes se sobrepõem aos associados à satisfação, dependendo de como são executados pelo hotel (por exemplo *price*). Em última análise, este estudo visa proporcionar orientações para a gestão hoteleira e outros stakeholders, destacando a importância estratégica de aproveitar os atributos fundamentais de património para aprimorar as experiências dos hóspedes num contexto de alto luxo.

**Palavras Chave:** Experiências de hóspedes, Hotéis de luxo, Património, Avaliações online, TripAdvisor, Dados secundários, Análise de conteúdo, Leximancer, Portugal.

**Códigos JEL (Journal of Economic Literature):**

M31 – Marketing

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## **GLOSSARY**

In the present dissertation, abbreviations and acronyms are employed consistently to enhance readability and conciseness. At the beginning of each chapter, or wherever necessary to ensure clarity, the complete term is introduced followed by its corresponding abbreviation or acronym enclosed in brackets. For example, "luxury heritage experience (LHE)" is introduced initially, ensuring that "LHE" is understood in all subsequent references within the text. This approach aims to facilitate comprehension while maintaining precision in terminology usage across the study. Furthermore, abbreviations and acronyms are consistently used in their singular form, irrespective of whether they denote a plural meaning (e.g., "LHE" will be used also when referring to "luxury heritage experiences"). Abbreviations and acronyms are not used in titles of chapters, sections, and subsections. Additionally, throughout the dissertation italics are used to emphasize Latin expressions and terms when they are introduced or defined for the first time. Italics are also used for key terms that are being specially defined or are central to the dissertation, such as online reviews concepts, themes, and dimensions. Specific mentions are added for each case of italicization as it appears.



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AHC	Australian Heritage Commission
CGC	Consumer-Generated Content
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
HH	Heritage Hotel
LHE	Luxury Heritage Experience
LH	Luxury Hotel
LHH	Luxury Heritage Hotel
OCR	Online Content Review/Online Review
ORM	Online Reputation Management
RP	Research Proposition
RQ	Research Question
UGC	User-Generated Content
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHS	World Heritage Site
WOM	Word of Mouth
WTA	World Travel Awards



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is a broad category within the service sector that includes accommodations (like hotels and other types of lodging), food and beverage services (including restaurants and bars), event planning, theme parks, travel and tourism services (including travel agencies), and other related sectors (Walker, 2017). At its core, it consists of people and organizations providing these services and entertaining activities at the destination (Amatulli et al., 2020).

Part of the experience economy, in which customers increasingly expect unique and memorable experiences, luxury hospitality holds the distinction of being among the top five largest market segments within the global luxury industry, ranking third, behind the automobile and personal goods markets (Peng & Chen, 2019). The sector is projected to achieve a global market size in excess of \$US 220 billion in 2024, which in part is the result of a growing emphasis on experiential luxury (Amatulli et al., 2020).

In recent years, Portugal has consistently excelled in international tourism awards, particularly at the World Travel Awards (WTA), often regarded as the “Oscars of Tourism.” Keeping a trend that goes back to 2017, when it was named Europe’s Leading Tourism Destination at the WTA for the first time, Portugal’s achievements in 2024 include Lisbon being named as Leading City Destination, Porto as Leading Seaside Metropolitan Destination, and Braga as Emerging Tourism Destination. Additionally, Madeira is now the Leading Island Destination, Porto Santo the Leading Beach Destination, and the Azores the Leading Adventure Tourism Destination (Turismo de Portugal, 2024). In 2023, the sector surpassed pre-pandemic levels in the main demand indicators (growth of 10.0% in overnight stays, 10.7% in visitors, and 18.9% in revenue). In 2023, the country set a new record number of 30 million tourists—60.7% foreigners and 39.3% nationals—which generated 77.1 million overnight stays, 62.8 million in hotels and 14.3 million in other types of lodging (Turismo de Portugal, 2023). This trend of qualitative and quantitative growth in tourism led Portugal's luxury hotels (LH) to experience a notable growth in the same period, marked by an increasing demand for high-end 5-stars luxury properties, which correspond to approximately 18% of the total number of hotels in the country (Horwath HTL, 2023).

One of Portugal's most compelling draws for luxury travelers is its repository of 5-stars hotels that seamlessly blend the charm of high-end luxury with heritage. Among these are restored palaces, convents, and manor houses—e.g., Pousadas de Portugal (Prista, 2015)—which provide guests with a luxurious glimpse into the country's past. However, demand driver data suggests that the potential for heritage experiences in Portugal's

hotels is featured in the Art & Business and Other Leisure categories combined, which include approximately 60.3% of all the hotels in the country (Horwath HTL, 2023); in the LH market, this potential may reach a considerable 11% of the properties.

In a LH context, the rapid growth of online social review platforms creates opportunities and challenges for guests and hosts. User-generated content (UGC), in particular online reviews, have emerged as pivotal in managing reputations and shaping brand narratives (Dolan et al., 2016; Fernandes & Fernandes, 2018). At the same time, social review platforms such as TripAdvisor have become essential for guests to share their experiences and for hosts to gain insights, engage with guests, and enhance their service offerings (Mahat & Hanafiah, 2020).

Despite the recognized importance of online reviews in LH management, research within this sector in Portugal remains scarce, with a noticeable gap in both qualitative and quantitative research that is specifically LH focused, as will be seen in the literature review. This gap is even more pronounced for luxury properties with distinct heritage attributes, or luxury heritage hotels (LHH) in Portugal.

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by using content analysis to examine online reviews to identify the concepts that emerge from the reviews, the broader themes formed by clusters of these concepts, and how these themes are organized into larger dimensions that characterize guests' experiences in LHH, or luxury heritage experiences (LHE), while also exploring how the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions vary between satisfied and dissatisfied guests.

## **1.1 Topic Selection**

The selection of the research topic is driven by three factors. Firstly, the relevance of online reputation management (ORM) in the LH and LHH sectors, where unique challenges are often faced, including value co-destruction (Dolan et al., 2019). Secondly, the significance of TripAdvisor and its role in shaping public perceptions and influencing consumer travel choices worldwide as a leading online social review platform; its extensive database contains over one billion reviews (TripAdvisor, 2022), underscoring the substantial level of user engagement on the platform. Thirdly, the research gap in the characterization of guests' experiences in LHH in Portugal combined with the need to seek practical insights and recommendations for the sector's stakeholders in the country.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Online reviews serve a dual purpose: they act as rich data sources capturing the nuanced and diverse nature of guests' experiences, while also providing valuable information for

prospective guests and direct feedback for the hotels themselves. However, in a LHH context, the nature of these guest experiences is inherently multifaceted, shaped by a complex interplay of various factors. This complexity stems from the unique combination of tangible and intangible attributes that characterize LHE, deeply embedded in the historical, cultural, social (Marghany et al., 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), as well as the natural heritage significance of the properties. Online reviews therefore reflect a dense mixture of different inputs, such as the specific offerings and attributes of the hotels and its locational attributes, and are influenced by several moderating factors, namely guests' degree of satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

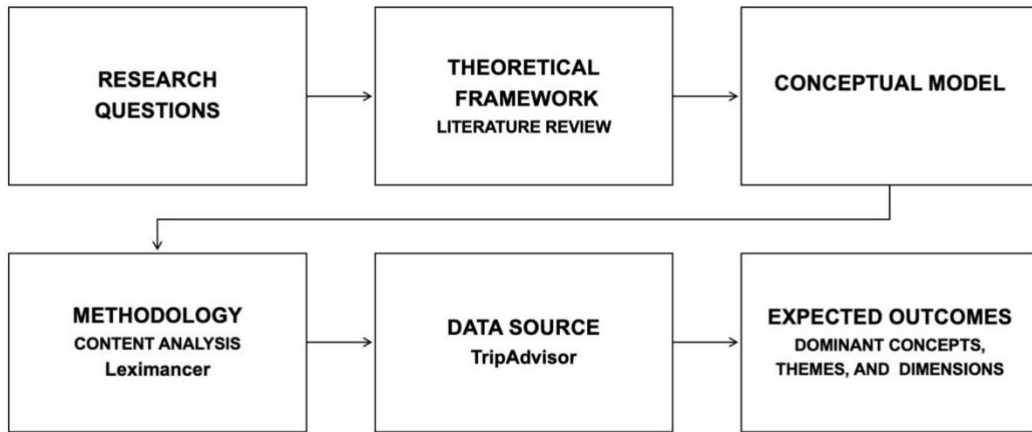
Considering the diversity and subjectivity inherent in online reviews there is a need to systematically deconstruct the narratives to identify recurring patterns and to pinpoint the main concepts, encompassing themes, and overarching dimensions that define guests' LHE. This process requires a thorough analysis of the reviews' content to uncover the terms most frequently mentioned by guests and how they are related in the narratives, and the underlying reasons for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This deconstruction is essential for bridging the gap between LHE theoretical conceptualization—which may often focus on predefined attributes or standard definitions of luxury and heritage—and lived guests' experiences as articulated in their online reviews.

### **1.3 Objectives and Research Model**

The objective of the present study is the identification and analysis of the emergent concepts, themes, and dimensions from the narratives. This understanding is vital not only for enriching the academic discourse on the topic but also for informing practical strategies to enhance guests' satisfaction and improve experience management in LHH.

Figure 1.1 (below) illustrates the adopted research model. The starting point is anchored in the research questions, RQ1 and RQ2, which are meant to guide the study by establishing a framework for conducting the analysis and guiding the subsequent findings. The research questions are:

- RQ1 – What are the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions that characterize guests' luxury heritage experiences (LHE) in high-end luxury heritage hotels (LHH) in Portugal, as described in TripAdvisor's reviews?
- RQ2 – In what ways do the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions of such guests' experiences vary between satisfied and dissatisfied guests, as described in TripAdvisor's reviews?



**Figure 1.1** – Overview of the proposed research model (Own elaboration).

The literature review and the conceptual model establish the theoretical framework of the research. The methodology, based on content analysis via Leximancer, sets the tools to systematically examine the reviews, sourced at TripAdvisor. Finally, the objective of this study—and its expected outcomes—is the identification and analysis of the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions that characterize guests' experiences.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into sections that systematically address the research topic. The Introduction (chapter 1) sets the context and introduces the problem statement, objectives, and research model. The Literature Review (Chapter 2) explores the existing theoretical and empirical body of work on the research topic, allowing the identification of a research gap that this dissertation aims to fill. The Conceptual Framework (Chapter 3) builds on the literature review to develop a conceptual model and introduce the research propositions that provide a structure for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of results. The Methodology (Chapter 4) describes the research context and design, data collection and methods of analysis, as well as the procedures adopted to ensure validity, reliability and replicability of the results, and transparency of the research process. A detailed critical analysis of the aggregated sample and the research findings are presented in Results and Discussion (Chapter 5). The study's main findings are synthesized in Conclusions and Recommendations (Chapter 6). This chapter addresses the research questions and propositions, emphasizing the theoretical framework and conceptual model. It also discusses practical implications, including recommendations for management and other stakeholders. Additionally, the final section outlines the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research to further enhance understanding of the topic.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of topics that are key to understanding the dynamics of online reviews within luxury hospitality. It delves into the significance of consumer-generated content (CGC), illustrating its impact on the sector. The discussion extends into the concepts of luxury and heritage, examining how their intersection shapes the unique category of luxury hotels (LH) that exhibit distinct heritage characteristics, or luxury heritage hotels (LHH). Furthermore, this chapter explores the broader tourist experience with a specific focus on the luxury heritage experience (LHE), highlighting how its components converge to offer distinct guests' journeys. Lastly, the chapter identifies an existing research gap, setting the stage for the current study's contribution to the field.

### 2.1 Introduction

LH are susceptible to both internal and external disruptions that place the sector under constant threats (Casal-Ribeiro et al., 2023). External challenges, i.e., factors outside direct management control, often stem from reputational issues that tend to be unpredictable and may have a profound impact on the sector, leading, *inter alia*, to cancelled bookings. In contrast, as Casal-Ribeiro et al. (2023) also emphasize, internal disruptions, which tend to be within management control, can still lead to a range of negative outcomes if not addressed. Dealing with both types of disruptions effectively is essential to avoid value co-destruction (Dolan et al., 2019), protect brand reputation, and maintain guests' satisfaction.

Online reviews play a crucial role in this context, as they directly influence the hotel's reputation and prospective guests' booking decisions (Mahat & Hanafiah, 2020). Positive reviews can mitigate the impact of external disruptions by reinforcing the hotel's image and attracting new guests. According to Duan et al. (2016), online reviews influence up to 50% of all hotel booking decisions. Negative reviews, often a result of unaddressed internal issues, can exacerbate reputational damage and lead to decreased guests' satisfaction (Dolan et al., 2016). Mitigating risks associated with such potential disruptions by implementing online strategies that safeguard and enhance guests' satisfaction and brand reputation is therefore necessary. A keen focus on management practices that preemptively address potential challenges can ultimately ensure LH reputation, especially in an environment where online reviews significantly influence guests' perceptions and decisions (Baka, 2016).

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that enhance CGC creation and exchange (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It includes social networks (e.g., Instagram) and blogs (e.g., The Huffington Post), social review platforms (e.g., TripAdvisor), bookmarking sites (e.g., reddit.com), collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), and content communities (e.g., YouTube).

The influence of social media on guests' expectations and decision-making processes has led to notable developments in the hospitality industry. Online social review platforms have become critical in shaping perceptions, with CGC and social media interactions playing a key role in influencing potential guests' choices (Iyengar & Venkatesh, 2024). As a result, there is an increased focus on online reputation management (ORM) and digital engagement with guests. Hotels are more invested in actively managing their reputation through real-time monitoring of online reviews and engaging with their audiences. Simultaneously, changing guests' behaviors have prompted LH to adapt to new preferences and demand for personalized experiences (Greiner & Goh, 2021). Guests seek personalized services and have expectations for unique experiences which are often shared online. LH therefore increasingly have to focus on understanding their guests' specific needs and preferences and provide customized and responsive services and experiences, meeting and exceeding guests' expectations, and paying close attention to their feedback, particularly online.

## **2.3 Consumer-Generated Content**

In the context of online consumer behavior and digital marketing, CGC includes user-generated content (UGC), electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and online consumer reviews (OCR) (Yang, 2017). Also known as online interpersonal influence, eWOM is among the most persuasive information sources on the internet (Litvin et al., 2008). Encompassing all types of content created by users rather than brands or professional content creators (Daugherty et al., 2008), UGC can include posts on social media, such as videos, images, and reviews, and can be either positive or negative. A specific type of UGC, eWOM focuses on online communications about brands, products or services and can also be either positive or negative (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016). Including any form of online sharing or recommendation eWOM has led to significant changes in consumer behavior (Gómez-Suárez et al., 2017). OCR is a particular type of eWOM that consists of formal online reviews, typically structured and detailed, offering specific feedback on products or

services and providing ratings on dedicated platforms. The focus of this study, OCR can likewise be positive or negative.

In a LH context, a detailed online review can simultaneously be classified as UGC, eWOM, and OCR. Such a content is UGC because it is created by a user based on their personal experience, positive or negative, eWOM because it serves as a form of online communication where the user shares their opinions about the hotel, and OCR because it provides structured, specific feedback on the hotel. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, the terms UGC, eWOM, OCR, and online reviews are used consistently with the definitions and contexts provided in the reviewed studies. The term online review is used throughout the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

OCR has evolved significantly with Internet and digital technologies. Its proliferation began with the rise of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s, which introduced more interactive and participatory web platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the advent of online platforms like TripAdvisor, OCR creation and dissemination became more widespread and influential. This social review platform enables users to share their content with a broad audience, promoting a transition from passive consumption to active content generation. In the realm of the hospitality industry, TripAdvisor became a key OCR repository, where travelers can post reviews and ratings of their experiences at hotels, restaurants, attractions, and points of interest (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

A valuable resource for understanding guests' preferences and expectations, OCR provides unfiltered feedback from guests about their experiences, highlighting areas of excellence, and identifying aspects that may need improvement (Tsiotsou, 2022). By systematically analyzing OCR, hotels can gain insights into what guests value most, such as specific amenities, services, or unique experiences. This information can guide the hotel in tailoring its offerings to better meet guests' needs, thereby enhancing overall customer satisfaction (Brochado & Brochado, 2019), since guests often share specific experiences online, such as exceptional service, unique amenities, and memorable moments, which can set a hotel apart from its competitors. This organic promotion through positive eWOM can effectively attract new guests seeking distinctive and personalized luxury experiences (Litvin et al., 2008). Conversely, guests are equally inclined to share negative experiences that may leave a lasting negative impression.

In a context of consumer decisions that are increasingly shaped by online reviews, credibility builds trust and influences the behavioral intentions of travelers (Mahat & Hanafiah, 2020). Moreover, credibility is widely recognized as a key predictor of eWOM adoption (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). Trust is fundamental to eWOM's persuasive

power, as consumers generally perceive the experiences shared by peers to be sincere, believable, and trustworthy (Sparks et al., 2013).

The importance of the UGC's source, its content, and its user in shaping a response and driving UGC adoption is highlighted by Ukpabi and Karjaluoto (2018). Source-based characteristics include credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and homophily (i.e., the perceived similarity between user and source), all of which affect how reliable and relatable users perceive the content to be. Content-based characteristics focus on the content's attributes, such as its novelty, valence (i.e., the overall positive or negative tone), and aesthetics, as well as argument and information quality. These elements determine how attractive, relevant, and persuasive is the content. User-based characteristics include the consumer's profile, degree of involvement and level of satisfaction, experience, and perceived benefit, personal attributes that shape how other users engage with and respond to the content.

User characteristics influence the perception of how easy it is to extract valuable insights or make informed decisions based on the content, which in turn shape their overall response towards it (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). This response ultimately impacts UGC adoption, where positive evaluations often lead to a higher users' willingness to consider and rely on the content in their travel planning or decision-making processes, follow through with their intentions, and engage with the content by, for example, booking a hotel or visiting a destination recommended by other users.

Notably, positive feedback may have limited impact on LH when not incorporated into a comprehensive learning process, whereas negative feedback can actually lead to value co-creation when its "potential of transformation" (Baka, 2016; p. 160) is used in shaping reputation. This outcome is contingent on the specific type of negative feedback employed and the interactions among complaining guests, hosts (i.e., hotel management), and other guests, namely solution-seeking, support-seeking, and social engagement-seeking (Dolan et al., 2019).

Solution-seeking complaints, often aimed at rectifying service deficiencies, can lead to value co-creation when hotels effectively address the issues raised (Leung et al., 2013). Conversely, unresolved negative feedback can result in value co-destruction, diminishing the experiences' perceived quality. Support-seeking complaints, which highlight shared experiences and narratives, can foster collective appreciation or dissatisfaction and influence potential guests' perceptions. Lastly, social engagement-seeking complaints, which involve broader discussions about the experience, can also either positively or negatively affect the hotel's reputation and perceived value.

## 2.4 Introduction to Luxury and Heritage

The desire for luxury arises from the need for esteem, recognition, and voluntary admiration granted by others (Anderson et al., 2020). This need influences the ways in which consumers choose, utilize, and interpret signals linked with luxury (Dubois et al., 2021). The emphasis on experiences rather than products or services results in a more emotional view of luxury, as defined by the consumers themselves, focused on the value derived from its use (Thomsen et al., 2020). In a LH context, this shift highlights the practical and psychological benefits of luxury, which are derived more from how people travel and where they stay and the quality of their experiences during their journey, rather than the specific places they visit (Correia et al., 2022).

Heritage is the legacy inherited from the past, experienced in the present, and subsequently passed on to future generations (Rodwell, 2008). This broad definition of heritage is coherent with the notion of present-day use of the past (Ashworth, 2013) and includes tangible and intangible expressions, encompassing historical, cultural, and social elements. The terms “heritage,” “culture,” and “cultural heritage” often serve as comprehensive umbrellas under which key heritage attributes converge, incorporating historical, cultural, and social elements (Marghany et al., 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

Contemporary to Boyd and Butler’s (2000) and Thorsell and Sigaty’s (2001) endorsement of the concept of natural heritage, in the contexts of National Parks and Natural World Heritage Sites (WHS), the Australia Heritage Commission’s working definition of natural heritage (AHC, 2002) remains among the most comprehensive in the literature, according to which natural heritage refers to natural elements, including both physical and biological formations, geological and physiographical features, and specific areas that serve as habitats for native species, also including natural sites or well-defined regions that are notable for their scientific value, conservation importance, or exceptional natural beauty (AHC, 2002).

### 2.4.1 The Intersection of Luxury and Heritage in Hotels

Throughout the present section, reviewed attributes, concepts, themes, and dimensions, drivers and constructs central to the theoretical framework are italicized to underscore the importance of these terms as they are discussed across various studies.

Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition, different attributes can be found in the literature that help LH conceptualization. Tangible attributes like prime *location* and exceptional *facilities* and *accommodations* are commonly recognized, as are intangible aspects such as outstanding *service* and *personalization* (Chu et al., 2016). These

attributes are often evident in LH chains (Xu & Chan, 2010). Despite this, there is a notable lack of consensus and scarcity of research focusing on the core attributes that define luxury properties.

Talbott (2004) highlights *style*, *comfort*, *service*, and *pampering* as essential contributors to the LH experience and suggests these attributes as criteria for classifying a hotel as a luxury establishment, regardless of chain affiliation or rating. Complementing these findings, Chu et al. (2016) focus on *exclusivity*, *refinement*, and *quality*, associating these attributes with *opulence* and *indulgence*, which encompasses *exclusive* and *personalized* services and activities, all designed to provide an unparalleled level of luxury.

Chaves et al. (2012), in their study of small and medium-sized hotels in Portugal, though not specifically luxury properties, found that *room*, *staff*, and *location* were the most frequently mentioned concepts in online reviews. Ariffin and Maghzi (2012) identify *personalization*, *authenticity*, and *comfort* as key predictors of LH guest satisfaction. Padma and Ahn (2020) further expand on these themes by emphasizing *hotel-*, *room-*, *staff-*, and *travel-*related attributes, noting that *room quality* and *comfort*, and *staff interactions* are significant factors driving positive eWOM and LH repeat patronage intentions, i.e., a behavior that is indicative of guests' loyalty and satisfaction with the services provided (Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). In line with these perspectives, Ríos-Martín et al.'s (2019) analysis of online reviews lead to the identification of *style*—including *personality*, *character*, *elegance*, and *class*—as the most frequently mentioned factor influencing LH guests' satisfaction. Together, these studies underscore a holistic view of the LHE, where *personalization*, *comfort*, *service quality*, and *distinctiveness* play critical roles in guests' satisfaction and loyalty.

Xie & Shi (2020) build on the attributes of *location*, *history*, and *culture*, to define heritage hotels (HH) as those properties housed within historically significant buildings that aim to provide guests with experiences that encapsulate the historical and cultural essence of their locations. Central to their definition is the concept of differentiation of the hotel through the preservation of its historical and cultural features, coupled with the provision of modern amenities to ensure guests' comfort.

Elshaer et al. (2023) also emphasize the centrality of differentiation, although their focus is on historical narratives and cultural immersion in heritage experiences, highlighting guests' keen interest in engaging with the cultural heritage embedded within these establishments. These authors identify perceived *authenticity* and *value*, as well as *service quality* and *brand image*, as primary factors influencing repeat patronage intentions. Dhewi et al. (2024) suggest *location*, *charm*, *authenticity*, *ambiance*, and *culture* as core attributes of historical heritage.

According to Xie and Shi (2020), there are three HH types: original, simulated, and converted. Original HH maintain their original purpose since establishment and, notwithstanding renovations, preserve their authentic essence. Converted HH include properties that have been repurposed into hotels, such as palaces, castles, manor houses, etc., and simulated HH are specifically designed to replicate a heritage ambiance in modern establishments. However, a fundamental characteristic that is often neglected in HH characterization and classification is the hotel's location and its natural heritage elements.

#### **2.4.2 Luxury Heritage Hotels**

The unified interior design and homogenization of services of many LH lack the capability to give guests memorable experiences. On the other hand, for Khalil and Kozmal (2020) HH are establishments that tourists are able to visit, not only stay in. From this perspective, heritage tourism can be seen as a form of creative tourism, a concept that emerges as a reaction to the standardized nature of tourism (Guerreiro et al., 2019) and the consequent lack of involvement and participation of tourists in available experiences. Heritage plays a pivotal role not only within HH but also in the broader context of tourism. Also according to Guerreiro et al. (2019), culture manifests not only through heritage and traditions but also in contemporary creative expressions, serving as a fundamental asset that distinguishes destinations.

The LHH market niche grows worldwide by providing its guests the atmosphere and motivation to experience the destination's heritage in a creative way during their stay (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). LHH commonly draw luxury travelers fascinated by staying in and exploring heritage significant properties, often serving as noteworthy heritage destinations themselves, thereby generating income and offering direct and indirect employment for their surrounding communities (Xie & Shi, 2020). Moreover, LHH employed individuals often develop emotional bonds with these establishments (Ghaderi et al., 2020), fostering higher levels of *attention to detail* and *service quality*.

LHH ranking can shift overtime due to competition from similar establishments as well as postmodern developments in the hotel industry (Thirumaran et al., 2023). To maintain their position, LHH must therefore engage in continuous place making, i.e., creating and promoting a destination's image through compelling narratives that highlight their unique attributes, engaging visitors emotionally and intellectually, enhancing their experience, and fostering a deeper connection with the destination (Rezaei et al., 2022). This dynamic adaptation not only helps maintaining the hotel's competitive ranking but also ensures that guests receive consistently high-quality experiences. LHH can also enrich local culture by

giving their guests the chance to interact with local communities through hotels' creative activities (Khalil & Kozmal, 2020). By engaging in these activities, guests actively engage in and contribute to immersive activities that enrich their heritage experience, rather than simply receiving them passively. Moreover, engagement allows guests to co-create their unique experiences by exploring different heritage aspects in a personalized and meaningful way. This dynamic and engaging involvement can be better understood through Pine and Gilmore's (1998) seminal model, which outlines two primary realms of how experiences are perceived by guests: participation and interaction. Participation denotes the extent to which guests actively contribute to the creation of the experience, which can vary from passive observation to active involvement. Interaction, on the other hand, refers to the extent of guests' connection with the experience, ranging from zero to one, i.e., from passive observation to full participation in the activities. Together, these realms help explain how LHH can transform their offerings into deeply meaningful experiences, where guests become co-creators of unique heritage journeys. In a luxury context, these activities become premium experiences that blend tangible and intangible luxury and heritage core attributes that are materialized through a process of co-creation, involving hosts, staff, and guests (Harkison, 2018).

## **2.5 The Luxury Heritage Experience**

Literature show trends that emphasize a shift in LH towards unique experiences that offer not just the luxury element, but also a personalized approach to guests' satisfaction (Amatulli et al., 2020; Luna-Cortés et al., 2022). These include, *inter alia*, premium dining experiences, exclusive travel opportunities, and, the broad target of this study, luxury experiences in high-end LHH, or luxury heritage experiences (LHE) which reflect a deeper desire for enrichment and fulfillment.

In a tourism context, an experience is a complex multiphase blend of uniquely subjective elements that influence tourists' emotions and attitudes before, during, and after a visit to a destination (Chen et al., 2020), including the post-experience process of remembering and reflecting upon the trip, positively or negatively (Kim et al., 2012), expressed by online reviews and other forms of feedback. A tourist experience encompassing sensory stimulation, personal engagement, emotional connection, and intellectual enrichment (Schmitt, 1999) seamlessly translates into guests' experiences in high-end LHH, where the tourist, as a guest, seeks an immersive and memorable LHE that aligns with these factors.

During the experience, three key categories of external influences on guests are identified: physical and social elements, on the one hand, and products/services, on the



other (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Physical elements are linked with the spatial and location-based elements of the hotels, namely their physical environment and surroundings. Social elements encompass interactions with staff, other guests, service providers, and even local residents. Products and services, though directly linked to immediate guests' satisfaction, also gain from integration with the destination's heritage. These elements shape guests' experiences throughout various stages of their journey, from anticipation and travel to the destination, on-site activities, and return travel, to the recollection phase, which is the primary focus of this study.

The value that guests derive from their experience is shaped by a combination of situation-specific, economic, and hedonic factors, which are assessed through various experiential interactions (Buehring & O'Mahony, 2019; Walls et al., 2011). These interactions provide insight into how guests evaluate their stays, with their overall perceived experience—and consequently their post-consumption reviews—being influenced by impressions of the *physical environment*, *core services*, *staff interactions*, and the overall *perceived value* of the experience. Similarly, in a study of four high-end 5-star hotels in Portugal, Sousa (2020) finds that guests' satisfaction is primarily driven by the strong performance of intangible elements, such as *emotions*, *senses*, *service*, and *quality*, while dissatisfaction is more closely related to the high *price* associated with the luxury offerings. Together, these studies highlight the interplay between emotional, sensory, and economic factors in shaping both satisfaction and dissatisfaction in LH experiences.

In the context of heritage tourism, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) demonstrate that guests' satisfaction plays a mediating role between different experiential inputs—such as *hedonism*, *novelty*, *local culture*, *refreshment*, *meaningfulness*, *knowledge*, and *involvement*—and significantly affects behavioral intentions, including word of mouth (WOM) and repeat patronage. Complementing this, Chittiprolu et al. (2021) identify common themes discussed by satisfied and dissatisfied LHH guests in online reviews, noting that the same factors—depending on their delivery—can result in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Together, these studies underscore the complexity of the experience, where the interplay between guests' perceptions and degree of satisfaction directly influences core elements—luxury and heritage, in a LHE—as inputs, and behavioral outcomes (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

Creating a memorable experience involves engaging guests' all five senses (Lee et al., 2019). In a LHH context, such an experience can enhance guests' emotional connections, thereby amplifying the positive affect (i.e., positive emotions and feelings that enhance guests' satisfaction) and mitigating the negative affect (i.e., feelings of

displeasure and dissatisfaction, which detract from guest's satisfaction). Notably, a high cognitive effort by guests is associated with lower satisfaction ratings; guests who find it mentally challenging to evaluate their stay might be more likely to leave negative evaluations.

## **2.6 Research Gaps**

As seen in the previous section, LHE research remains limited, presenting an opportunity for more in-depth studies to better understand the themes and dimensions of guests' experiences at LHH and the specific attributes that characterize a LHE. Particularly, research studies focusing on LHE in Portugal are notably lacking.

While some studies, in Portugal and other countries, have applied quantitative content analysis to online reviews, they often focus on small and medium-sized hotels (Chaves et al., 2012) rather than LH or LHH, or examine the nature and predictors of negative guest feedback in a broader hotel context (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2017). Other quantitative research has analyzed the distribution and variations in rating behaviors among guests from different nationalities or language groups (Antonio et al., 2018; Pacheco, 2016) and explored the impact of guest ratings on hotel room rates (Castro & Ferreira, 2018). More recent research has increasingly turned to content analysis of online reviews (Brochado, 2019; Brochado & Brochado, 2019; Brochado et al., 2021; Clara et al., 2022; Padma & Ahn, 2020; Sousa, 2020; Stoleriu et al., 2019). However, apart from Sousa's (2020) study on factors of satisfaction in high-end LH in Portugal, there is a notable research gap in both qualitative and quantitative research that is specifically LHH focused.

The present study aims to address this gap by using content analysis to examine guests' experiences at high-end 5-stars LHH in Portugal, utilizing secondary data from online reviews. The objective is to identify the dominant concepts, resulting themes, and overarching dimensions that characterize such guests' experiences, as portrayed in TripAdvisor reviews and conceptualize the LHE. Furthermore, this study aims to explore how these elements differ, shaped by guests' degree of satisfaction. This analysis is intended to deepen LHE understanding, support strategic decision-making among different stakeholders, and improve delivery of high-end experiences within this market niche in Portugal.

### 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Following the research model and building on the literature review, this chapter establishes the framework that guides the research, integrating a conceptual model of a luxury heritage experience (LHE) and outlining the research propositions that will be assessed. A previous step in developing the model involves redefining natural heritage—and, by extension, heritage itself—within the specific context of luxury heritage hotels (LHH), as well as expanding LHH classification accordingly.

#### 3.1 Natural Heritage

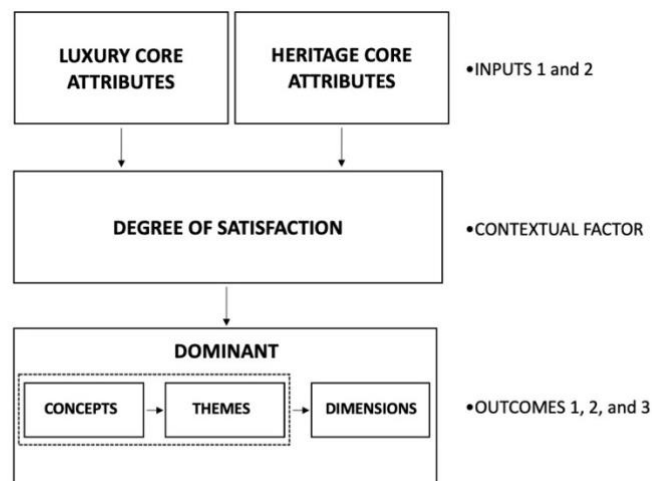
This study adopts a broad approach to heritage by incorporating natural heritage alongside its historical, cultural, and social aspects, a perspective that remains underexplored in LH and LHH studies. Drawing on AHC's (2002) framework, the study expands their definition of natural heritage—encompassing physical and biological formations, geological and physiographical structures, and specific habitats that support native species, also including distinct natural sites or clearly delineated areas that are recognized for their scientific significance, conservation importance, or outstanding natural beauty—to include elements that may exist in their original form without human influence or as environments shaped or modified by human activity.

As seen in section [2.4.2](#), LHH can be categorized as original, converted, or simulated properties (Xie & Shi, 2020). This study proposes a fourth classification type: *evocative luxury heritage hotels*, which refers to recently developed high-end 5-star properties that seamlessly incorporate significant aspects of natural heritage—aligning with the reviewed definition—into their design, service offerings, and ambiance. These hotels evoke a profound sense of place by blending contemporary luxury with heritage attributes that not only capitalize on their location but also blend natural heritage with historical, cultural, and social elements, thus falling under the umbrella of LHH within the scope of this research.

#### 3.2 Conceptual Model of a Luxury Heritage Experience

Building on the theoretical frameworks established by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), the proposed LHE conceptual model explores the relationship between the core attributes of luxury and heritage in high-end LHH, shaped by the degree of guests' satisfaction, and the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions that emerge as the outputs of guests' online reviews. Luxury core elements (input 1) include *style*, *comfort*, *service*, and *indulgence* (Chu et al., 2016; Talbott, 2004). Heritage core elements (input 2) encompass historical, cultural, social (Marghany et al., 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), and natural

heritage (section 3.1). The degree of satisfaction is a contextual factor, i.e., a “moderator” that shapes guests’ perceptions and therefore their post-consumption reviews. It is understood as a lens through which guests interpret the hotel’s core luxury and heritage attributes. This perspective influences the content’s valence and the quality of both the argument and the information (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018) in the reviews, guiding the emergence, in content analysis, of the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions.



**Figure 3.1** – Conceptual model of a luxury heritage experience (LHE).

Own elaboration. Adapted from Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022).

Figure 3.1 (above) illustrates the conceptual model, highlighting the relationship between the inputs, the contextual factor, and the outcomes. The outcomes include the dominant concepts (outcome 1) and themes (outcome 2) that guests discuss in their reviews, reflecting the aspects of their experiences that are most salient. Highlighted by a dotted line, outcomes 1 and 2 are the direct results of the content analysis via Leximancer. The overarching dimensions (outcome 3) are derived from the identified dominant themes. The degree of satisfaction shapes the relationship between the inputs and the outcomes.

### 3.3 Research Propositions

Building upon the research questions, the literature review, and the above conceptual framework, the following research propositions are formulated:

- RP1 – A LHE is multidimensional with multiple dominant themes, encompassed concepts, and overarching dimensions.
- RP2 – The dominant themes, encompassed concepts, and overarching dimensions of the multidimensional LHE differ, depending on guests’ satisfaction levels.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological choices, data collection process, and analytical procedures of the present study, ensuring a rigorous and comprehensive understanding of the research process followed to analyze guests' experiences in high-end luxury heritage hotels (LHH), in Portugal, based on narratives shared online. The adopted methodology is a mix-methods approach for content analysis of secondary data that combines qualitative and quantitative—mostly computer-performed via leximancer—analysis of online reviews on TripAdvisor to examine the main components of the narratives (Krippendorff, 2018), identify their main concepts and dominant themes, categorize the themes under overarching dimensions, and address the research questions and propositions.

TripAdvisor is selected because of its extensive repository of reviews and ratings. Using the platform's bubble rating scale ranging from 1 to 5 (5 = Excellent, 4 = Very good, 3 = Average, 2 = Poor, 1 = Terrible), travelers can rate hotels, restaurants, attractions, and points of interest; ratings are aggregated to provide an overall score for each establishment (Yoo et al., 2016), in half-bubble increments. In a context of luxury hotels (LH), this scale enables structured analysis of online reviews, including quantification and comparison of guests' degree of satisfaction across different properties (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Despite concerns regarding the authenticity of some reviews, TripAdvisor adopts measures to enhance the reliability of its content, such as using advanced algorithms and human moderators to identify and reduce fraudulent submissions, efforts that are reinforced by regular updates to detection methodologies and community guidelines to discourage deceitful practices (Luca & Zervas, 2016). As a result, only a small, residual percentage of reviews on TripAdvisor are estimated to be potentially fraudulent, ensuring that it remains a reliable source of information for travelers and secondary data for researchers (Harris, 2018).

### 4.1 Research Context

The selection criteria shown on Table 4.1 (bellow) are partially based on insights gleaned from two semi-structured interviews with LH professionals in Portugal. These are: a retired LH manager with 35 years of experience in managing large units of international high-end 5-stars LH chains in Portugal (Porto and Lisbon), and a luxury events manager with 15 years of experience in 5-stars high-end LH in Portugal, Spain, and Mozambique (Annex A, section [8.1](#)). Used in previous studies (Bharwani & Mathews, 2023; Eijdenberg et al., 2024; Pereira et al., 2021), semi-structured interviews provide industry-specific knowledge and perspectives that, in this case, inform the development of the selection criteria. By

integrating direct input from sector experts, the present study’s methodology is grounded in practical and current industry standards, enhancing the relevance and applicability of the research findings.

**Table 4.1** – Criteria for hotel selection. Own elaboration (Main source: semi-structured interviews).

Criteria	Description
Classification and TripAdvisor’s Rating	5-stars, high-end luxury, consistent “excellent” rating
Heritage Significance	Distinct historical, cultural, social, or natural heritage characteristics
Location	Prime location, within natural or national parks, facing the ocean or rivers, at or near UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Sites (WHS)
Geographical Distribution	Across different regions of Portugal
Online reviews	At least 1,000 Even distribution of reviews over the years High proportion of detailed narratives Diverse geographical distribution of reviewer Diverse type of travelers

Applying the criteria summarized in Table 4.1 (above), the following hotels are selected: i) Vidago Palace Hotel, located in Vidago, Chaves (hereinafter Vidago Palace), ii) Six Senses Douro Valley; Quinta do Vale Abraão, Lamego (hereinafter Douro Valley); iii) The Yeatman Hotel; Vila Nova de Gaia (hereinafter The Yeatman), iv) Valverde Sintra Palácio de Seteais; Sintra (hereinafter Palácio de Seteais) and v) Reid’s Palace, A Belmond Hotel, Madeira (hereinafter Reid’s Palace). Table 4.2 (below) outlines each hotel's classification and TripAdvisor’s rating.

**Table 4.2** – Selected hotels, their classification and TripAdvisor’s rating. Own elaboration (Source: TripAdvisor).

Hotel	Class	Rating	
Vidago Palace	5 stars	5	Excellent
Douro Valley	5 stars	5	Excellent
The Yeatman	5 stars	4.5	Excellent
Palácio de Seteais	5 stars	4.5	Excellent
Reid’s Palace	5 stars	4.5	Excellent

As of May 31<sup>st</sup> 2024, the total number of reviews available on TripAdvisor for the selected hotels amounts to 9,079, which is the population. Reid’s Palace has 2,713 reviews, accounting for 29.9% of the total. The Yeatman closely follows with 2,658 reviews (29.3%), then Palácio de Seteais with 1,500 (16.5%), Douro Valley with 1,119 (12.3%), and Vidago Palace with 1,089 (12.0%).

The profiles of the selected hotels, each exemplifying a unique combination of high-end luxury and heritage attributes, are described in detail in Annex B (section 8.2), including the hotels’ heritage core attributes and classifications. This description, based on the hotels’ websites, covers specific elements that contribute to each hotel’s classification within the expanded framework herein used. The annex also includes the individual reviewers’ profile.

#### 4.2 Sampling Procedure

The present study’s aggregated sample comprises 2,500 reviews, distributed evenly with 500 reviews per hotel. To accurately reflect the distribution of ratings per hotel, stratified sequential sampling is applied. This technique ensures that the sample mirrors the actual ratings distribution found in TripAdvisor’s database for each hotel, as further detailed in Annex C (section 8.3). The number of reviews selected from each rating category to maintain this balance is outlined in Table 4.3 (below).

**Table 4.3 –** Number of reviews per rating in the hotel’s individual and aggregated samples (2,500 reviews, 500 per hotel). Own elaboration (Source: TripAdvisor; 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024).

<b>Rating Category</b>	Vidago Palace	Douro Valley	The Yeatman	Palácio de Seteais	Reid’s Palace
5	420	433	410	370	418
4	55	44	58	92	52
3	13	16	19	27	19
2	6	4	6	9	6
1	6	3	7	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>

The reviews are selected manually and sequentially for each hotel, starting with the most recent, until the required number of reviews for each rating category is obtained. Each review is checked to ensure it corresponds to a stay of at least one night at the hotel or to a significant heritage experience of the hotel. Additionally, reviews are checked for

consistency in the following aspects. Firstly, the date of the review is compared with the date of the stay's last day to assess the impact on the accuracy and relevance of the feedback, with a maximum delay set at 90 days. Secondly, a minimum length threshold is set at 75 words, to increase the likelihood that the reviews included in the analysis provide sufficient detail and context. Lastly, the sentiment across the review is analyzed to identify overwhelmingly positive or negative outliers in a way that appears inconsistent or implausible based on the content provided. Reviews not meeting these criteria, as well as reviews not pertaining to the hotel per se (e.g., opinions about external factors such as traffic due to roadworks, construction around the hotel, or other external factors), are excluded.

### 4.3 Variables

For each review, the dataset includes the variables shown in Table 4.4 (below) pertaining to the hotel (name), reviews (title, text, language, date, rating, degree of satisfaction), guests (country, gender, travel type, and stay), and data (status).

**Table 4.4** – List of variables in the aggregated and hotel's individual samples and their description (Own elaboration).

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Description</b>
Hotel	Name	Name of the hotel
Reviews	Title	Title of the review
	Text	Text of the review
	Language	Language of the review
	Date	Date of the review; month, year
	Rating	Rating of the review (1 - 5 TripAdvisor's bubble scale)
	Degree of Satisfaction (Computed)	Satisfied (5 + 4), Dissatisfied (1 + 2)
Guests	Country	NA, if not available
	Gender	0=NA, 1=Female, 2=Male
	Travel Mode	Travelling with/as: 0=NA, 1=Family, 2= Couple, 3=Solo, 4=Business, 5=Friends
	Stay	Indicates if the guest stayed at the hotel (Y=Stay, N=No Stay)
Data	Status	(Y=Complete, N=Incomplete)



#### **4.4 Data Preparation for Analysis**

Data are compiled into a single dataset, ensuring consistency in formatting and variable definitions. Following Stoleriu et al. (2019), all reviews are compiled on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, each in a row, which is then converted into a \*.txt file. Non-textual data, duplicates, and irrelevant information are filtered out before processing textual data. These include stopwords—common words that have little to no meaningful contribution to content analysis due to their high frequency and low informational value, for instance conjunctions prepositions, articles, pronouns, and other common words—and terms that correspond to destination labels (e.g., Porto/Oporto, Sintra, Madeira, etc.), are too broad (e.g., staff names, tours, booking agencies, company's names and names of restaurants and bars outside the hotel) are not considered useful in this study. In addition, the number of reviews per rating category is verified to ensure that their distribution per rating and per hotel is according to Table 4.3 (above). Where possible, missing data in the reviews are inferred from other variables.

#### **4.5 Content Analysis**

Content analysis is performed using Leximancer Portal (Version 5.0), which utilizes a Bayesian statistical approach to guide fragmented evidence into clusters of significant information (Brochado et al., 2021). Leximancer autonomously examines a dataset of natural language texts and extracts pertinent data through a coding procedure. This data is identified by the frequency of lexical co-occurrence, utilizing a machine learning algorithm.

Content analysis has been used in previous studies to assess guests' experiences based on narratives shared online, for example on ecotourism (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012), tree houses (Brochado, 2019), glamping (Brochado & Brochado, 2019), and natural World Heritage Sites (Stoleriu et al., 2019). This method is particularly suited to analyzing the richness and subjectivity of online reviews, where guest narratives about their luxury hotel experiences often combine tangible and intangible elements.

The main advantages of using Leximancer are that it identifies the dominant concepts within the text and shows how these connect to each other and cluster into themes, based on their co-occurrence frequency. The software visualizes the information as maps where the identified concepts are clustered into themes (concept maps).

In addition to Leximancer, word cloud visualizations, such as those created using WordArt.com, serve as an accessible preliminary tool to identify the most prominent words in guests' narratives. WordArt.com has been effectively used in various fields, from tourism to social sciences, as seen in the studies by CG and Gowrishankar (2021), Shafi and Jin

(2023), and Triantafyllou et al. (2021). WordArt allows users to create word clouds, i.e., visual representations of the most frequent words—and potential themes—in the dataset. Word clouds offer a simple yet powerful visual representation of word frequency, which provide an initial understanding of the prevalent terms used in guests' reviews, potentially hinting at the dominant themes or concepts to be explored in greater depth with Leximancer.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the overall content analysis conducted on the narratives of guests' experiences on luxury heritage hotels (LHH) shared on TripAdvisor. The results are organized to highlight the main concepts, themes, and dimensions of these experiences as revealed through the analysis of secondary data in online reviews, providing insights on how the degree of satisfaction influences guests' perceptions. The chapter provides a critical examination of the narratives in light of the research questions and propositions, drawing connections between the identified concepts and themes, the overarching dimensions, and the adopted conceptual framework.

### 5.1 Preliminary Data Analysis

#### 5.1.1 Population and Aggregated Sample

The mean number of reviews ( $\mu$ ) in the population, which comprises 9,079 reviews, is 1,728.20, with a standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of 705.18. The resulting coefficient of variation (CV) of 40.80% is on the lower end of high variation ( $CV > 40\%$ ), reflecting noticeable but not extreme differences in guests' experiences engagement levels across the five hotels.

The aggregated sample encompasses 2,500 post-experience reviews, representing approximately 27.5% of the population. It includes 273,578 words (means of 56,715 words per hotel and 109 words per review). Almost two thirds (63.4%) of the reviews are written in English. Translated into English, the remaining 36.6% appear in fourteen other languages: 22.7% in Portuguese, 5.1% in French, 4.1% in Spanish, 1.7% in German, and 2.6% collectively in Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Hebrew, Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Swedish, Danish, and Korean (in descending order of magnitude).

The sampling procedure and the size of the sample result in a time span of several years, from 2013 to 2024. The most recent review in the sample is from May 2024, for each of the hotels. The oldest are January 2013 for Vidago Palace, April 2017 for Douro Valley, March 2017 for The Yeatman, January 2016 for Palácio de Seteais, and July 2016 for Reid's Palace.

Data for the aggregated sample shows that 94.1% of the guests are satisfied (aggregated ratings 5 and 4) and 2.2% are dissatisfied (ratings 2 and 1). Neutral reviews, rated 3 (3.7%), are not considered in the analysis due to their balanced valence. The standard deviations are 1.3% and 0.5% for satisfied and dissatisfied guests, respectively. The corresponding coefficients of variation are 1.3%, and 22.7%, respectively. The high coefficient of variation for dissatisfied guests indicate notable relative variability due to the low mean values, suggesting that even minor differences in dissatisfied ratings across hotels appear pronounced when viewed on a relative scale.

Among satisfied guests, 82.0% rate their experience as 5 (excellent) and 12.1% as 4 (very good). Among dissatisfied guests, 1.2% of the reviews are rated as 2 (poor) and 0.9% as 1 (terrible). Consistent with the stratification of the sample, results for each hotel are shown in Table 5.1, below.

**Table 5.1**– Degree of satisfaction (percentage) per hotel in the aggregated sample. Own elaboration (Source: TripAdvisor).

	<b>Hotels</b>				
<b>Degree of Satisfaction</b>	Vidago Palace	Douro Valley	The Yeatman	Palácio de Seteais	Reid's Palace
Satisfied	95.0%	95.6%	93.6%	92.4%	94.0%
Dissatisfied	2.4%	1.4%	2.6%	2.2%	2.2%

Because the selected hotels have very high rates of guests' approval and the sample is stratified to reflect the distribution of reviews per rating and per hotel, satisfied guests represent an overwhelmingly high proportion of the reviews, also within each sample of individual hotels. This outcome is consistent with the positivity bias observed in consumer behavior (Deng & Ravichandran, 2018), where satisfied customers are more likely to share their positive experiences, particularly in LH with consistently high standards.

Douro Valley has the highest percentage of satisfied guests at 95.6%, making it the most positively reviewed hotel among the five, whereas Palácio de Seteais has the lowest, at 92.4%. However, this is still a very high satisfaction rate, indicating generally positive guest experiences. The percentage of dissatisfied guests is low, ranging from 1.4% (Douro Valley) to 2.6% (The Yeatman).

## **5.2 Frequency Analysis – WordArt**

Prior to performing content analysis with Leximancer, a preliminary analysis of the reviews' titles is performed with WordArt, following the established methodology (Chapter 4). The software visually represents the frequency of words in the sample, with the size of each word indicating how often it appears in the review titles; the larger the word, the more frequently it is mentioned. Key terms representing frequently mentioned words identified by the software are italicized to highlight their role in the analysis and to ensure clarity in discussing the findings.

### **5.2.1 Aggregated Sample**

The most frequent terms in the aggregated sample (Figure 5.1, below) are *wonder*, *excellent*, and *best* (>130 counts), followed by *experience*, *palace*, *beauty*, *perfect*, *view*,

*great*, and *place* (>100), all suggesting highly favorable guests' views. The importance of service and setting is further strengthened by words like *service*, *luxury*, and *fantastic*, which imply that the service quality and overall experience are key aspects that guests notice and appreciate. *Luxury*, along with *palace*, and *top* also underscore the high-end nature of the hotels being reviewed. The high frequency of *experience* suggests that guests perceive their stay as more than just accommodation.



**Figure 5.1** – Word cloud representation of the reviews' titles, along with the top 20 words in the frequency table for the aggregated sample. Own elaboration (Data source: TripAdvisor).

*Beauty*, *view*, *located*, and *place* highlight the significance of the physical and locational attributes of these hotels. Guests are likely influenced by the visual appeal of the properties and their natural heritage attributes. Terms like *dream* and *love* indicate an emotional connection that guests form with their *stay*. Lastly, terms such as *good*, *great*, and *perfect* are more generic, yet their frequency shows that even with varied experiences, guests tend to express their satisfaction in the reviews' titles in broadly positive terms.

An analysis of the full aggregated frequency table (not shown) displays additional words associated with specific amenities and experiences, such as *spa*, *restaurant*, *golf*, and *afternoon-tea*, indicating that some of the luxury and heritage offerings of these hotels play a pivotal role in enhancing guests' experience. Although infrequent (<20 counts), negative terms like *disappointed* and *poor*, as well as *overpriced*, show that while the overall sentiment remains overwhelmingly positive there are grievances, which are consistent with the stratification of the sample.

### 5.2.2 Hotels' Individual Results

Figure 5.2 (below) illustrates word clouds with the most frequently mentioned terms in the reviews' titles across the selected hotels, highlighting unique attributes of each property. All word clouds contain terms like *excellent*, *amazing*, *wonderful*, and *perfect*, which confirm the high levels of guests' satisfaction shown in the aggregated sample. A consistent appearance across the word clouds of all of the hotels, although with different magnitudes, highlight the significance of *experience* in the five establishments. However, each hotel has its own unique set of attributes that guests highlight in their reviews, a detailed description of which is given in Annex D, section 8.4.



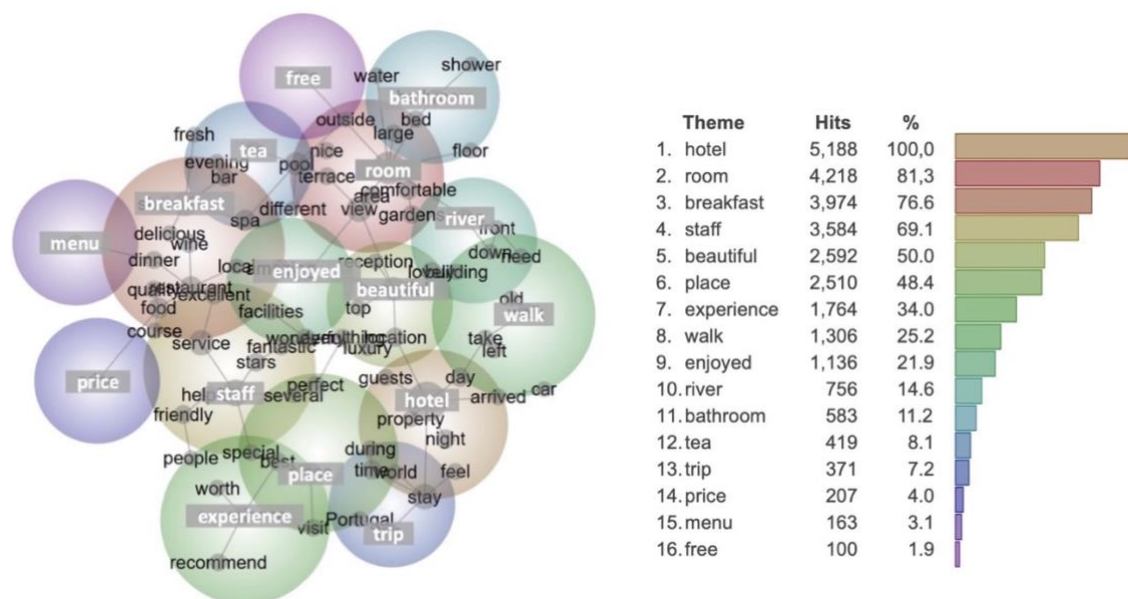
**Figure 5.2** – Word cloud representations of frequently mentioned terms in online reviews' titles in each of the individual samples. Own elaboration (Data source: TripAdvisor).

### 5.3 Content Analysis – Leximancer

To answer the first research question—“What are the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions that characterize guests' luxury heritage experiences (LHE) in high-end luxury heritage hotels (LHH) in Portugal, as described in TripAdvisor's reviews?”—content analysis is performed on the aggregated sample using Leximancer. This analysis is guided by the research proposition that a "LHE is multidimensional with multiple dominant themes, encompassed concepts, and overarching dimensions.”

The software provides three outputs which are used in the analysis: a concept map, a hits chart, and a concepts table. The concept map illustrates how concepts that often appear together in the text form higher-level themes due to their strong mutual associations. The hits chart quantifies the themes and displays the number of hits

(mentions) for each theme, thus showing which themes are dominant across the sample. The concepts table lists all the concepts identified in the text, along with their counts and relevance percentages. The count represents the frequency of each concept's appearance, providing a quantitative measure of its prominence in the dataset. The relevance percentage indicates the importance of each concept relative to the most frequently occurring concept. Figure 5.3 (below) shows a concept map with the dominant concepts identified in the aggregated sample clustered into themes by the software. Throughout this and the remaining sections, key terms representing concepts and themes identified by Leximancer are italicized in the text to highlight their role in the analysis and to ensure clarity in discussing the findings.



**Figure 5.3** – Concept map for the aggregated sample. The hits chart displays the number of hits (mentions) and the relevance score for each theme (%) (Source: Leximancer).

The themes are color-coded based on importance: warm colors like red and orange indicate the most significant themes, while cooler colors such as blue and green represent those of lesser importance. The hits chart on the right side of the figure displays the number of hits for each theme and their percentages. The relevance score of 100% indicates a reference point for determining the relative importance of the subsequent themes.

The close clustering and partial overlapping of themes such as, for example, *breakfast*, *tea*, and *menu* indicates that despite their different magnitudes they are often mentioned together, potentially reflecting a central role in guests' experiences. The

agglomeration visually emphasizes the density and interconnectedness of these themes, suggesting that guests perceive them as closely linked. However, while many themes are tightly clustered, the map also shows related themes (e.g., *price* and *free*) positioned further apart. This is because these themes, despite being conceptually related, do not frequently co-occur in the same context within the dataset. This spatial arrangement suggests that while these themes are related, they are not perceived or discussed in a similar manner by the users in their narratives. This topic is further discussed in Guests' Dissatisfaction (section [5.3.4](#)).

### 5.3.1 Dominant Themes Overview

#### 5.3.1.1 Core, Supporting, and Supplementary Themes

The most frequent themes in the reviews in the aggregated sample, as illustrated in the hits chart (Figure 5.3; above) include *hotel* (5,188 hits; 100% relevance), *room* (4,218; 81.3%), *breakfast* (3,974; 76.6%), *staff* (3,584; 69.1%), *beautiful* (2,592; 50.0%), and *place* (2,510; 48.4%). Together, these themes that constitute 76.4% of all mentions are herein categorized as core themes—the highest priorities for guests.

Additionally, *experience* (1,764 hits; 34.0%), *walk* (1,306; 25.2%), *enjoyed* (1,136; 21.9%), and *river* (756; 14.6%), which account for 17.2% of all mentions, serve as supporting themes that enrich the narrative but are secondary in their impact. Themes mentioned less frequently, totaling 6.4% of mentions—*bathroom* (538 hits; 11.2%), *tea* (419; 8.1%), *trip* (371; 7.15%), *price* (207; 4.0%), *menu* (163; 3.1%), and *free* (100; 1.9%)—are herein considered as supplementary themes. Although less dominant, they still provide relevant insights into more specific guests' concerns.

Overall, Leximancer identifies a total of sixteen dominant themes in the aggregated sample. In the next sections, a detailed analysis of each of these themes is performed, based on the data in the concepts tables (not shown).

### 5.3.2 Individual Themes Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of each of the dominant themes identified by Leximancer, highlighted by excerpt(s) of one illustrative review of one of the hotels in the sample per theme. The themes are subsequently categorized into dominant dimensions in section [5.3.3](#), accompanied by additional excerpts of reviews for each of the hotels, to further elucidate their significance and impact. Selected from the dataset, these examples aim to represent the majority of the concepts identified in the analysis. Although some concepts may not be fully captured by these examples, they still provide a comprehensive overview of the identified dominant themes.



#### 5.3.2.1 *Hotel* (5,188 hits)

This emerges as the most impactful theme in the reviews. Among its relevant concepts, *hotel* (3,292 hits, 100% relevance) is the central concept around which other related concepts are measured. As in the previous section, the relevance score of 100% means that it serves as the benchmark against which the relevance of other concepts within the theme is calculated. The concepts *stay* (1,437, 44%) and *day* (620, 19%) emphasize the temporal elements of the experience, underlining key moments and the duration of stays. *Night* (549, 17%) further elaborates on the temporal elements, while *feel* (331, 10%) adds depth by addressing the stays' sensory and emotional components. Additionally, *arrived* (325, 10%), *guests* (279, 8%), and *property* (241, 7%) contribute to understanding the significance of initial and ongoing impressions, the social dynamics among guests, and the physical environment of the hotel in shaping guests' perceptions. Luxury core elements are intertwined with the sensory and emotional experiences highlighted in reviews, while heritage core elements are reflected in guests' appreciation of the hotel's unique property and its significance.

- A visitor at Vidago Palace shares: “[...] *Absolutely gorgeous hotel. [...] the attention to detail is superb. You arrive at the gate and by the time you have driven to the front steps a member of the team is there waiting. The car is parked and bags are taken straight to the room. [...] We felt like guests of Lord and Lady Grantham at Downtown Abbey. [...]*” (April 2023, rating 5, guest travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.2 *Room* (4,218 hits)

Concepts *room* (2,030 hits; 62% relevance) and *view* (1,163, 35%) indicate that the room and the view from the room are essential for guests. In this context, *pool* (941, 29%) suggests that key amenities, such as a swimming pool, are associated with the room via both their proximity and accessibility. *Comfortable* (504, 15%) highlights the room's comfort, another key factor for guests. *Area* (470, 14%), *nice* (351, 11%), and *large* (236, 7%) emphasize the importance of the room's size, ambiance and style, and general attractiveness. *Outside* (139, 4%) strengthens the relevance of exterior features (e.g., *terrace*) when guests evaluate their rooms. Luxury core elements are evident in guests' emphasis on the room's comfort, size, and attractive ambiance, while heritage core elements are reflected in the appreciation of the view and distinctive exterior features, such as the balcony, that connect the interior room experience with the hotel's unique surroundings and natural heritage attributes.

- A guest at The Yeatman writes in their review: “[...] *Rooms are large and luxurious, and the bed was very comfortable. We were in executive room with a private veranda and green space right outside the room. [...] the view over to Porto was stunning [...].* (October 2022; rating 5; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.3 *Breakfast* (3,974 hits)

Concepts *breakfast* (1107 hits; 34% relevance) and *restaurant* (834, 25%) underline the impact of breakfast on guests’ indulgence and the importance of the dining environment as a whole. *Spa* (744, 23%) suggests a holistic approach to the experience, where wellness and relaxation often come after breakfast, and is also linked to food offerings at the spa. *Food* (692, 21%) highlights the quality and variety of dining options, which is a key aspect of the gastronomic experience. *Excellent* (643, 20%) reflects guests’ high satisfaction levels, while *wine* (523, 16%) and *bar* (403, 12%) point at the significance of wine and beverages in enhancing the food experience. *Dinner* (363, 11%) further suggests that guests often link their breakfast experiences with other meals, highlighting the overall food quality at the hotel. *Quality* (316, 10%) and *delicious* (206, 6%) emphasize guests’ high standards and taste. *Served* (195, 5%) and *evening* (179, 5%) hint at the importance of service and timing in the overall food experience. *Local* (113, 3%) suggests that local ingredients or flavors play a role in enhancing the authenticity and appeal of the dining offerings. Luxury core elements are reflected in the high standards of food quality, variety, and service, while heritage core elements are suggested in the use of local ingredients and flavors.

- A guest at Douro Valley emphasizes: “[...] *the most impressive breakfast spread I’ve ever seen [...] the best meals we had at the resort. Dinners were good but nothing like the approach of breakfast. [...]*” (December 2023; rating 5; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.4 *Staff* (3,548 hits)

Concepts *staff* (1,399 hits; 42% relevance) and *service* (1,246; 38%) underscore the importance of the quality and efficiency of the services provided by the personnel. *Wonderful* (544; 17%) and *fantastic* (305; 9%) illustrate guests’ satisfaction with staff interactions, while *friendly* (522; 16%) emphasizes the personal connection and warmth that enhance the experience. *Stars* (441; 13%) refers mostly to the staff’s performance rating (e.g., “5-stars service”) and *helpful* (331; 10%) highlights their willingness and ability to assist guests. The concept *course* (218; 7%) stems from *golf course* and *food course*, with the majority of these references associated with *staff* interactions, primarily through the reception desk. The expression “of course” has a residual impact on this concept.

Luxury core elements are patent in the exceptional quality and efficiency of service, rated highly by guests, while heritage core elements seem notably absent.

- A stay at Vidago Palace, as recounted by a guest, highlights: “[...] *Beautifully restored old historic palace. Great staff. Beautiful grounds. [...]*” (May 2024; rating 5; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.5 *Beautiful* (3,584 hits)

Central to this theme is *beautiful* as a concept (934 hits; 34% relevance), complemented by *lovely* (611; 19%), emphasizing the hotel’s style. *Location* (513; 16%) highlights the importance of the hotel’s setting and natural heritage, which impacts its overall appeal. Strengthening this theme are concepts like *everything* (313; 10%), which suggests a holistic appreciation of the hotel, and *luxury* (265; 8%). *Reception* (176; 5%) points both to the guests’ welcoming and the hotel’s visually appealing entrance area, while *top* (165; 5%) reinforces high-end quality and excellence. Guests’ appreciation of the hotel’s high-end qualities and visually appealing design emphasizes the luxury core elements, while the unique location and natural surroundings highlight its heritage core attributes. Although *luxury* is less directly referenced than other concepts, it remains a key factor in defining the overall experience, with most mentions of luxury core elements being made indirectly.

- A guest at Palácio de Seteais recalls in their review: “[...] *A fantastic Hotel. A true palace with stunning views and beautiful gardens, integrated into one of the most beautiful villages in Portugal. The classic but comfortable décor is one of the attractions of this hotel. [...]*” (May 2023; rating 5; travelling with friends.)

#### 5.3.2.6 *Place* (2,592 hits)

As a key concept, *place* (633 hits; 19% relevance) highlights the hotel’s location, its setting, and its natural heritage elements. *Time* (619; 19%) reflects the guests’ appreciation for the time spent at the hotel, suggesting that their stay was worthwhile and enjoyable; “stepping back in time” and “travelling through time” are also often mentioned. *Best* (496; 15%) and *perfect* (461; 14%) point to high levels of satisfaction with the hotel’s distinctive location, enhanced by *special* (277; 8%). *Portugal*, the only name-like concept in the consolidated sample (218 hits; 7% relevance), is an obvious reference to the guest’s experience in the country. Additional concepts such as *during* (140; 4%) and *several* (123; 4%) hint at the significance of the duration and multiple facets of the stay. Luxury core elements are conveyed through the high levels of guests’ satisfaction with the hotel’s unique and

exceptional location, while heritage core elements are highlighted by references to the specific significance of the hotel's setting in Portugal, enriching the overall experience.

- A guest at Douro Valley, narrating their visit, notes: “[...] *Gorgeous hotel set in amongst the vineyards of the Douro Valley. [...] fabulous retreat and a great place to relax and recharge. [...]*” (January 2024; rating 5; travelling with friends).

#### 5.3.2.7 *Experience* (1,764 hits)

As the theme's main concept, *experience* (629 hits; 19% relevance) underscores the overall impact and memorability of the guests' experiences at the hotel. *Visit* (423; 13%) highlights the specific occasion(s) when guests stayed at the hotel, hinting at the significance and memories of the visit itself. *Recommend* (498; 15%) suggests that guests often find their experiences to be positive enough to endorse the hotel to others. *Worth* (267; 8%) mostly emphasize the property's perceived value for money. *People* (155; 5%) points to the interactions with *staff* and/or other guests that enrich the overall experience. Luxury core elements are reflected in the perceived value and memorability of the guests' experiences, often seen as worth the expense and worthy of recommendation, while of heritage core elements may be embodied in meaningful interactions, which contribute to a unique and rich stay.

- A guest at The Yeatman, sharing their thoughts, says: “[...] *The arrival check-in was without doubt the best experiences of all 75 countries we have visited. This hotel ranks very highly and provided faultless service. It is visually beautiful and deserves to be savored as much as the (city of) Porto it represents. Everything is [...] decadent. [...]*. (December 2023; rating 5; travelling with family).

#### 5.3.2.8 *Walk* (1,306 hits)

Concepts *walk* (629 hits; 19% relevance) and *take* (423; 13%) indicates guests' frequent mentions to taking a walk as an activity, likely appreciating the hotel's surroundings and natural heritage attributes. Additionally, *need* (498; 15%) hints to the necessity or convenience of walking within the hotel grounds or to neighboring places. *Old* (267; 8%) points mostly to heritage elements of the property. *Car* and *left* (155; 5% each) refer to logistical aspects, such as needing a car in remote locations or leaving the car behind to explore on foot or reach the nearby town center. Luxury core elements do not appear to be directly represented in this theme, while heritage core elements are underscored by

the appreciation of the hotel's natural surroundings, inviting guests to engage with the property's unique setting through activities like walking.

- A stay at Reid's Palace, as described by a guest, emphasizes: “[...] *Wonderful property, the gardens are lovely and a joy to walk around. [...]*” (March 2024; rating 5; travel mode unknown).

#### 5.3.2.9 *Enjoyed* (1,136 hits)

As a key concept, *enjoyed* (521 hits; 16% relevance), strengthened by *amazing* (401; 12%), suggests guests' enjoyment and pleasure during their stay. Additionally, *facilities* (276; 8%) points to the amenities and services provided by the hotel that contribute to guests' enjoyment, such as Spa services, golf courses, direct access to the sea or to local tourist attractions, experiences and recreational activities, and other features that enhance guests' stays. Together, these concepts illustrate a high level of guests' satisfaction, with the facilities and overall experiences at the hotel playing a key role in creating enjoyable and memorable stays. Luxury core elements are highlighted through the variety and quality of amenities and services. Heritage core elements are reflected in the unique experiences and recreational activities connected to the hotel's cultural and natural setting.

- A guest at Vidago Palace recalls: “[...] *Even with the weather being a little cloudier, we were able to stroll through the beautiful gardens and enjoy all the fantastic architecture [...]* *We had several family moments from the Spa to board games. We were able to enjoy it very pleasantly [...]*” (April 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).

#### 5.3.2.10 *River* (756 hits)

As a concept, *river* (257 hits; 8% relevance) indicates frequent mentions of a natural attribute, in this case a river (the Douro), suggesting its importance in enhancing the hotel's natural heritage. *Building* (201; 6%) points to the hotel's architecture and its relation to the river, emphasizing views, or proximity to the water. *Down* (185; 6%) refers to the location of the river in relation to the hotel, the architectural concept of the building, or the experience of walking down to the river. Lastly, *front* (165; 5%) highlights the hotels' frontage and views facing the river, underlining the aesthetic and experiential value of the location. Luxury core elements may be reflected in the hotel's prime frontage and architectural design that maximizes views and access to the river, enhancing the aesthetic and experiential value of the stay. Heritage core elements are evident in the significance of the river as a natural heritage feature.

- A guest at Douro Valley, describing their experience, shares: “[...] *Unbelievable location in the middle of wine country with views of the river. This is the definition of a 5-stars property just wish we had a couple more nights to enjoy. [...]*” (January 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).

#### 5.3.2.11 Bathroom (583 hits)

The main concept *bathroom* (214 hits; 7% relevance) highlights the importance of the bathroom experience to guests’ comfort and satisfaction. The concept *water* (206; 6%) emphasizes the quality and availability of water, also pointing to features such as water pressure and temperature. In the wider *room* context, *water* is also related to in-room availability of mineral water. *Floor* (139; 4%) refers to the design and the local materials of the bathroom floor, contributing to the overall aesthetics and functional appeal. Lastly, *shower* (121; 4%) highlights the significance of the shower experience, emphasizing its size, quality, design, and luxury fixtures. Luxury core elements are evident in the attention to detail in bathroom design, such as high-quality water features, heated floors, and luxury fixtures that enhance guest comfort and satisfaction. Heritage core elements may be subtly reflected in the use of local materials or design elements that align with the hotel’s overall aesthetic and heritage context.

- A guest at Palácio de Seteais, remarks in their review: “[...] *rooms are not very large, but very charming with period furniture and a beautiful bathroom. [...]*” (August 2021; rating 5; travelling with family).

#### 5.3.2.12 Tea (419 hits)

This theme is hotel-specific. As a key concept, *tea* (150 hits; 5% relevance) underscores the central role of afternoon tea service in guests’ experience, reflecting its popularity, both local and among a very large majority of UK guests. The concepts *different* (150 hits; 5%) and *fresh* (134 hits; 4%) emphasize the exclusivity of the experience, as well as the diversity, quality, and freshness of the items served. *Fresh* also highlights ambiance and environment, suggesting a clean, well-maintained, and inviting setting that enhances the overall experience, including the upkeep of facilities like dining areas and gardens. It also reflects innovative or creative elements, such as unique twists on traditional offerings, seasonal items, or distinctive pairings that provide a novel experience for guests. Furthermore, *fresh* relates to health and wellness, with the emphases on options that are organic, locally sourced, or perceived as healthy. Luxury core elements are evident in the

exclusivity and high quality of the afternoon tea service. Heritage core elements are reflected in the celebration of local traditions and the use of locally sourced ingredients.

- A guest at Reid's Palace, in their review, mentions: “[...] *afternoon-tea here as one of the things we must do. It was amazing. [...] Biggest choice was which tea to have? Everything was excellent. Extra sandwiches offered as well as scones if you can manage them. [...]*” (April 2023; rating 4; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.13 Trip (371 hits)

The concept *trip* (210 hits; 6% relevance) highlights the importance of the overall travel experience, as guests often mention their trips as significant and memorable aspects of their stay. *World* (169; 5%) suggests a global perspective, reflecting the diverse, backgrounds of the guests, on the one hand, and the recognition of the hotel's reputation as world-class, on the other. Luxury core elements are reflected in the hotel's recognition as a world-class destination, while heritage core elements are suggested by the memorable aspects of the guests' trips, shaped by the hotel's distinctive heritage context that adds depth and significance to their stay.

- A guest at The Yeatman, in their evaluation, shares: “[...] *A beautiful hotel with spectacular views. [...] Really recommend this hotel for an upmarket trip to stunning Porto. [...]*” (March 2022; rating 5; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.14 Price (207 hits)

This theme centers around *price* (210 hits; 6% relevance) as a single concept, which reflects guests' perceptions of contexts related to value, affordability, and the overall worth of the hotel experience. This theme underscores the importance of guests' satisfaction in shaping their decisions to recommend or return to the hotel. Luxury core elements are highlighted through guests' considerations of the hotel's value and worth, balancing price with the quality of the experience provided. Heritage core elements may be hinted in guests' perceptions of whether the unique cultural, historical, and environmental aspects of the hotel justify its pricing, influencing their likelihood to recommend or revisit.

- A guest at Douro Valley, narrating their experience, shares: “[...] *zen, [...] luxury [...] also a very nice stay in Portugal [...]. Lovely hotel with a hefty price tag.*” (October 2023; rating 4; travelling with family).

#### 5.3.2.15 *Menu* (163 hits)

This theme also centers around a single concept that reflects the significance of the *menu* (163 hits; 5% relevance) in the dining experience. Discussions revolve around the variety, quality, presentation, and serving of the menu offerings. Although residual, the term menu also appears in pillow-menu, thus relating to *room*. Luxury core attributes are evident in the emphasis on the variety, quality, and presentation of the menu offerings, while heritage core attributes may be subtly present in the inclusion of local or traditional dishes, adding heritage depth to the menu.

- A guest at Palácio de Seteais, recounting their experience, writes: *[...] The restaurant has an exclusive selection of local Colares wines that pair perfectly with its tasting menu. [...]* (July 2022; rating 5; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.2.16 *Free* (100 hits)

The concept *free* (100 hits; 3% relevance) indicates guests' mentions of both complimentary offerings and those they believe should be provided for *free*. These mentions underscore the importance of receiving certain amenities without additional charges on guests' satisfaction, which impacts their overall perceived value. In a LHH, luxury core elements may be reflected in the expectation of complimentary amenities, while heritage core elements may be connected to the provision of locally inspired or unique complimentary offerings that add value, thereby enhancing guests' perceptions of the hotel's authenticity.

- A guest at Vidago Palace, sharing their experience, writes: *"[...] We tried the bikes for free! A real treat. I recommend it and it's a way to get to know the land. [...]"* (October 2020; rating 5; travel mode unknown).

### 5.3.3 Overarching Dimensions

The sixteen themes outlined in section [5.3.1](#), which emerge from guests' reviews shaped by the degree of satisfaction, are organized into broader dimensions that help structure the overall analysis. Dimensions are presented in standard font with an uppercase first letter to ensure clear differentiation in the analysis. As was previously noted, themes are consistently italicized and begin with a lowercase letter. This formatting distinction is meticulously maintained throughout the remainder of the dissertation to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation.

The dominant themes identified by Leximancer in the content analysis of the aggregated sample are categorized into five overarching dimensions: Hotel, Journey,



Room, Gastronomy, and Location (Table 5.2, below). Each dimension is derived from a subjective analysis of the dominant themes and reflects different aspects of the LHE, providing additional insight into how the core attributes of luxury and heritage, shaped by the guests' degree of satisfaction, influence their perceptions and therefore their reviews.

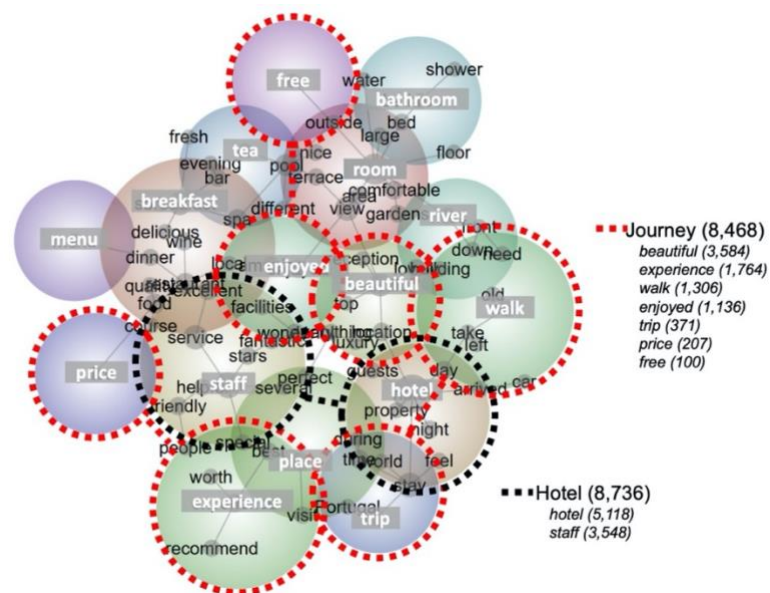
**Table 5.2** – Organization into overarching dimensions of the dominant themes identified in the content analysis of the aggregated sample. In brackets: consolidated number of hits and individual themes' hits. Own elaboration (Source: Leximancer).

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Hotel (8,736)	<i>hotel</i> (5,118), <i>staff</i> (3,548)
Journey (8,468)	<i>beautiful</i> (3,584), <i>experience</i> (1,764), <i>walk</i> (1,306), <i>enjoyed</i> (1,136), <i>trip</i> (371), <i>price</i> (207), <i>free</i> (100)
Room (4,801)	<i>room</i> (4,218), <i>bathroom</i> (583)
Gastronomy (4,556)	<i>breakfast</i> (3,974), <i>tea</i> (419), <i>menu</i> (163)
Location (3,348)	<i>place</i> (2,592), <i>river</i> (756)

Table 5.2 (above) shows the five overarching dimensions into which the dominant themes identified by Leximancer in the content analysis of the aggregated sample are organized. The aggregated number of hits for Hotel is 8,736, which represents 29.2% of all hits, indicating that aspects related to the establishment itself (*hotel, staff*) are central to the LHE. This suggests that the overall environment and the quality of staff interactions are highly significant to the guests' perceptions. Journey, with 8,468 hits (28.3%), encompasses themes *beautiful, experience, walk, enjoyed, trip, price, and free*. and is also highly prominent. This indicates that the experiential aspects of the stay—such as the aesthetic appeal and the activities or journeys associated with the visit—are also key to the LHE.

Figure 5.4 (below) illustrates the two dominant dimensions—Hotel and Journey—both of which play central roles in shaping guests' experiences. These dimensions represent core areas of the guests' narratives, with the visual layout reflecting the prominence and degree of interconnectedness between the various concepts, themes, and dimensions. The dimensions are demarcated by colored dotted circles: Hotel is outlined in black, while Journey is marked in red. Additionally, the figure displays the number of hits for each individual theme and the aggregated hits for each overarching dimension, providing a clearer sense of their relative impact on guest experiences. The dimensions are discussed

in detail in the following sections, accompanied by illustrative excerpts from reviews for each of the hotels to further support the analysis.



**Figure 5.4** – Concept map for the aggregated sample. The colored dotted circles demarcate two dominant core dimensions: Hotel (black) and Journey (red). In brackets: number and aggregated number of hits of each individual theme and dimension. Own elaboration (Source: Leximancer).

### 5.3.3.1 Hotel (8,736 combined hits)

Encompassing the *hotel* and *staff* themes, Hotel is an integral dimension to any guest experience. While the *hotel* theme focuses on the physical environment (*property*), temporal experiences (*stay*, *day*, *night*), and guests' feelings and initial impressions (*feel*, *arrived*, *guests*), *staff* emphasizes the quality of *service* (*wonderful*, *fantastic*, *friendly*, *stars*) and the personal touch (*friendly*, *helpful*) provided by the hotel's personnel. Guests, recalling their stay, highlight this dimension, sharing:

- Vidago Palace – “*Impressive hotel [...] they park your car and continually worry about your well-being. [...]*” (April 2024; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Douro Valley – “[...] warmly welcomed with a cool towel, a glass of Port and herbal tea, and some mixed nuts [...] we were told to ring a bell as a gesture that we have arrived home. All these small personal touches set the tone for what I knew would be a marvelous stay, one that not even the rainy weather could dampen. [...]” (April 2024; rating 4; travelling as couple).

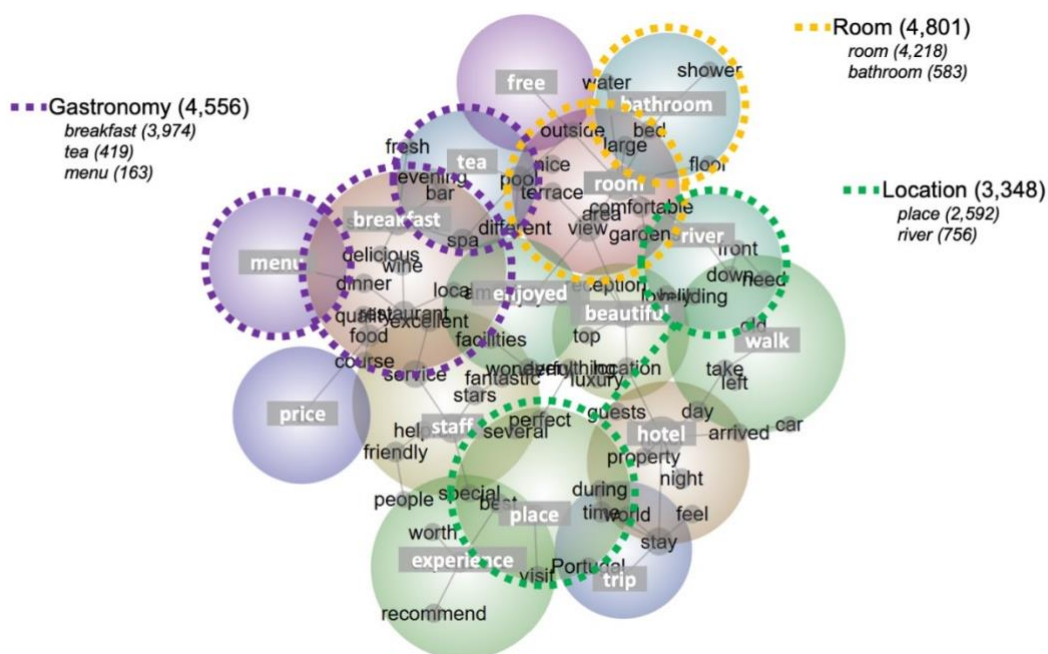
- The Yeatman – *“If you are looking to indulge and be treated like royalty, The Yeatman is the place to stay. [...] From the moment we checked in, we were treated with respect and shown personally around the establishment. [...] The staff are very generous and care about your experience. [...]”* (May 2024; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Palácio de Seteais – *“[...] stands for its reputation. The property is perfectly maintained and the service is impeccable. [...]”* (July 2022; rating 5; travel mode unknown).
- Reid’s Palace – *“Wonderful property [...] the whole place is really well run and staff are always available but not intrusive, no hesitation in recommending a stay here - we would return in a heartbeat. [...]”* (March 2024; rating 5; travel mode unknown).

#### 5.3.3.2 Journey (8,468 combined hits)

Including the themes *beautiful, experience, walk, enjoyed, trip, price, and free* this dimension encapsulates guests’ overall impressions (*beautiful*), experiences (*experience, walk, enjoyed, trip*), worth feelings (*price, free*), and satisfaction (*enjoyed*) levels, covering the entirety of their trip; guests evaluate their stay based on the totality of their experiences and the feelings they derive from their trip and stay at the hotel. Sharing their thoughts, guests write in their reviews:

- Vidago Palace – *“[...] It isn’t the easiest hotel to get to without a rental car (not on a rail line, and about 80 minutes from Porto), but [...] judging by the information on the hotel’s website, and the reviews here and elsewhere, it seemed that it would be worth it. And it was. [...]”* (July 2023; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Douro Valley – *“[...] very beautiful! [...] Every day there are events at the hotel, [...] all very pleasant with music playing to make your stay even more perfect! [...]”* (January 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).
- The Yeatman – *“[...] The sunset, the natural lights leaving the sky and the river being reborn with night lights. The air exudes tranquility and inspires serenity. [...]”* (August 2020; rating 4; travelling as couple).
- Palácio de Seteais – *“[...] one of the best hotel experiences that I’ve had. (The) hotel is a splendid palace, service is exceptional, and the swimming pool is beautiful. Enjoyed every minute there. [...]”* (July 2023; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Reid’s Palace – *“[...] the hotel is full of charm and character. I love swimming in the sea and sunbathing on the rocks [...] There are lots of places to watch the sea and admire the beautiful views. [...] Very decadent and plentiful. We enjoyed sipping cocktails sitting on the terrace. [...]”* (October 2023; rating 4; travelling as couple).

The other three dimensions—Room (4,801 hits), Gastronomy (4,556), and Location (3,348)—shown in Figure 5.5 (below), are discussed in detail in the sections that follow. Room and Gastronomy are outlined by yellow and purple dotted circles, respectively, while Location is marked in green. Representing supporting areas of guests' narratives, these three dimensions reflect a lesser but still considerable and balanced influence, with Room accounting for 16.1% of all hits, Gastronomy 15.2%, and Location 11.2%. The themes contributing to these dimensions provide a nuanced understanding of how different aspects of the LHE are perceived, with Room, Gastronomy, and Location forming central elements that also influence the LHE.



**Figure 5.5** – Concept map for the aggregated sample. The colored dotted circles encompass the three supporting dimensions: Room (orange), Gastronomy (purple), and Location (green). In brackets: number and combined number of hits of each individual theme and dimension. Own elaboration (Source: Leximancer).

5.3.3.3 Room (4,801 combined hits)

While the Hotel dimension highlights the public and communal aspects of the hotel as a whole, Room relates to the guest’s private and personal experience within the rooms, namely the style and comfort of the room, and aspects linked with the rooms. It includes the themes *room* and *bathroom*, suggesting that an overall high-end quality of the room is crucial to the LHE, impacting their overall impression of the hotel. Feedback provided by guests highlight:

- Vidago Palace – “[...] *The whole experience was truly perfect. [...] bedrooms where I had the best 4 nights sleep that I had in ages [...].* (December 2023; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Douro Valley – “[...] *Our room, Quinta Panorama, was amazing with a spacious bedroom, a separate huge living area with floor-to-ceiling windows, a walk-in closet and a huge fantastic bathroom with double sink, separate bathtub and walk-in shower. [...]*” (October 2020; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- The Yeatman – “[...] *This hotel is absolutely wonderful. The rooms are incredibly comfortable (every one having a great view of Porto from a balcony) [...]*” (January 2024; travel mode unknown).
- Palácio de Seteais – “[...] *A location full of history, in Sintra, yet very quiet and private. Great rooms, excellent beds. [...]*” (March 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).
- Reid’s Palace – “[...] *we experienced the Churchill Suite, and it was truly a memorable stay [...] The rooms are fully equipped [...] Bed linen is sumptuous and the nightly turndown service signals attention to detail. There is a pillow menu too [...]*” (January 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).

#### 5.3.3.4 Gastronomy (4,556 combined hits)

Covering the dining offerings of the hotel, including breakfast, menu options, and any food-related experience, this dimension combines the themes *breakfast*, *menu*, and *tea*, reflecting the importance of food and beverage quality and variety in guests' experiences. Guests, sharing their impressions, highlight:

- Vidago Palace – “[...] *We dined at all of the hotel’s facilities [...] and all were excellent. Starting the day with a generous buffet breakfast in the spacious and beautiful Winter Garden room was a treat. [...] And don’t miss dinner at the hotel’s signature restaurant, Salão Nobre, in the lavish ballroom. [...]*” (July 2023; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Douro Valley – “[...] *The nutrient rich food served here is sourced from the property, is perfectly prepared and creatively served at every meal. The menu varied daily. [...]*” (March 2024; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- The Yeatman – “[...] *I recommend the Michelin-starred restaurant (and) the seven-course menu I went to on my last stay here, it was incredible [...]*” (January 2018; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Palácio de Seteais – “[...] *This was a luxurious experience. [...] highly professional service, representative of a real 5-stars hotel. Good breakfast in a beautiful room. [...]*” (September 2021; rating 4; travelling as couple).

- Reid's Palace – *"[...] afternoon tea, which was absolutely lovely, overlooking Funchal Bay. [...] Lots of choice for the tea menu. Sandwiches, scones and cakes were so delightful. Would highly recommend. [...]"* (July 2023; rating 5; travelling as couple).

#### 5.3.3.5 Location (3,348 combined hits)

This dimension covers the hotel's physical location and its natural heritage attributes. It includes the themes *place* and *river* indicating that guests value a picturesque and convenient location that offers memorable views. Guests, reflecting on their visit, write:

- Vidago Palace – *"[...] highly recommend the visit, despite the location being far from services, which is why it stands out for excellent service in a calm and isolated place like Vidago! I recommend! [...]"* (March 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).
- Douro Valley – *"[...] the property is stunning, everything is very beautiful, lots of green space, lots of space on the banks of the Douro river [...]"* (January 2024; rating 5; travelling with family).
- The Yeatman – *"[...] The space with a view over the Douro river is charming. [...]"* (August 2020; rating 5; travelling as couple).
- Palácio de Seteais – *" [...] If you are considering staying overnight in Sintra, look no further [...] location is perfect for walking to most of the sites [...]"* (April 2023; rating 5; travelling with family)
- Reid's Palace – *"[...] Such an iconic location with views across Funchal, the harbor and ocean is hard to beat. [...]"* (December 2023; rating 4; travel mode unknown).

Within the five dimensions, specific attributes are central to the LHE. These include the uniqueness and heritage significance of the Hotel, the comfort and elegance of the Room, and the quality and authenticity of the Gastronomy. The Journey captures the experiential aspects of the stay, highlighting elements such as the aesthetic appreciation of the surroundings, engaging in scenic walks, and the overall enjoyment of the experience. Meanwhile, the Location emphasizes the importance of the surrounding environment, with scenic views and proximity to local landmarks adding further layers of natural and cultural heritage to the LHE.

#### 5.3.4 Guests' Dissatisfaction

Given that the vast majority (94.1%) of the reviews in the aggregated sample represent satisfaction (ratings 4 and 5 combined) and dissatisfaction (ratings 1 and 2) comprise only



### 5.3.4.1 Leximancer's Concepts Table Analysis

The number of concepts and their co-count and likelihood (%) in the concepts table (not shown) is 83. To balance depth of analysis and manageability, a specific metric herein coined *impact score* is developed to effectively measure and analyze the different concepts. Equal to the product co-count times likelihood, the impact score reflects a weighted count that balances the frequency of concept mentions with the strength of their association. Higher impact scores indicate concepts that are both frequently mentioned and strongly associated.

After manually compiling the relevant concepts into the themes identified by Leximancer in the tagged sample (Figure 5.6, above), the impact scores are calculated and used to rank the themes. Table 5.3 (below), shows these rankings organized in descending order of impact score, including the two additional single-concepts themes *price* and *free*—which will be further discussed in the following section—along with the other themes and their associated dimensions.

**Table 5.3** – Dominant themes for dissatisfied guests sorted by impact score, along with the corresponding dimensions. Own elaboration (Source: Leximancer).

Degree of Satisfaction	Theme	Impact Score	Theme	Impact Score	Dimension
Dissatisfied	<i>hotel</i>	0.112	<i>top</i>	0.008	Hotel ( <i>hotel, staff, people, top, fresh</i> )
	<i>room</i>	0.099	<i>food</i>	0.007	Journey ( <i>view, walk, price, free</i> )
	<i>staff</i>	0.032	<i>walk</i>	0.006	Room ( <i>room, shower</i> )
	<i>people</i>	0.023	<i>shower</i>	0.006	Gastronomy ( <i>menu, food</i> )
	<i>price</i>	0.021	<i>place</i>	0.005	Location ( <i>place</i> )
	<i>view</i>	0.020	<i>free</i>	0.005	
	<i>menu</i>	0.013	<i>fresh</i>	0.002	

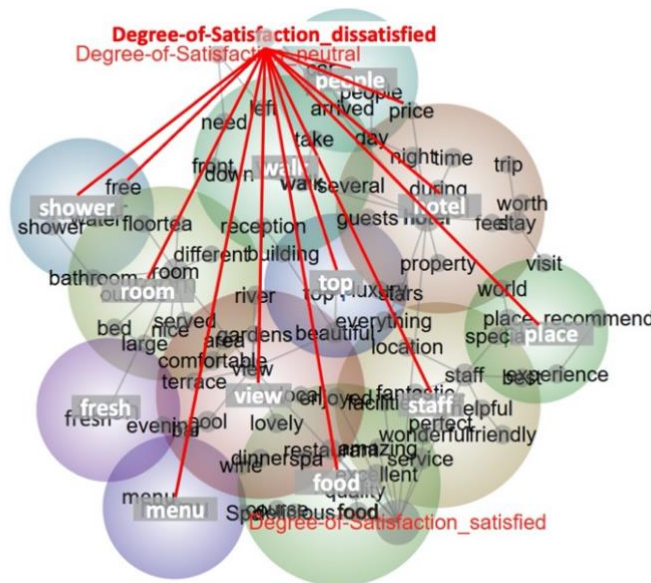
Table 5.3 (above) displays the themes and respective impact scores, with *hotel* and *room* having the highest scores (approximately 0.1), followed by *staff* (~0.03), and *people*, *price* and *view* (~0.02), with *menu* at (~0.01). These scores suggest key areas of concern, particularly in aspects of service and amenities related to rooms and dining. Such high-impact themes point to dissatisfaction with essential elements of the hotel experience, such as the quality of service, staff interactions, accommodation standards, and food quality. Lower-impact themes include *top* (~0.008), *food* (~0.007), *walk* and *shower* (~0.006), *place* and *free* (~0.005) and *fresh* (~0.002). Despite their lesser numerical impact, these themes shed light on more specific issues. Themes like *top* and *food* reflect



niche dissatisfaction possibly related to perceived luxury and dining experience, while *walk* and *shower* hint at problems with physical amenities and facilities. *Place* and *fresh* focus on natural heritage related factors as well as ambiance. Even with lower scores, these themes are insightful into the nuanced ways hotels may be failing to meet guest expectations, therefore leading to feelings of disappointment and frustration, as noted by Tsotsou (2022).

### 5.3.4.2 Manual Analysis

The aggregated sample contains 54 reviews of dissatisfied guests: 12 for Vidago Palace, 7 for Douro Valley, 13 for The Yeatman, 11 for Palácio de Seteais, and 11 for Reid’s Palace (Table 4.4; section 4.3). In this process, the themes identified by Leximancer in the aggregated sample tagged for dissatisfied guests serve as a guiding framework to which the concepts manually found in the reviews by dissatisfied guests are matched. This step also involves interpreting the context in which the concepts appear to reflect the intended meaning behind the guests’ comments as accurately as possible.



**Figure 5.7** – Concept map for the aggregated sample, tagged for the degrees of satisfaction. The red lines, superimposed on the Leximancer computed map, illustrate the manually identified themes in the reviews of negative valence (rated 1 and 2). Own elaboration (Source: Leximancer).

The manual analysis enhances Leximancer’s concept map, ensuring it captures the depth and variety of guests’ experiences shared online, and allowing for a deeper

understanding of how these experiences relate to the overarching themes. The red lines, superimposed on the Leximancer computed map (Figure 5.7; above), illustrate the manually identified themes in the reviews of negative valence (rated 1 and 2). In their reviews, dissatisfied guests frequently point out issues such as perceived lack of quality as a whole (*hotel, place, fresh*), inadequate staff interactions (*staff, people*), services that fall below expectations (*menu, food*), and perceived value for money (*price, free*). Complaints also refer to the rooms (*room, shower*), including nighttime disturbances, among other concerns. Additionally, Journey, including the overall stay experience and daily activities (*walk*), as well as perceived levels of luxury (*top*), further detract from guest perceptions. *View* is an exception, as in an overwhelming majority of reviews of dissatisfied guests corresponds to positive comments.

*Price* and *free* emerge in the manual analysis as being reflective of the guests' degree of satisfaction on whether the *price* paid corresponds to the value received during their stay. Discussions about *price* generally occur in contexts where guests perceive low value or high costs, while *free* is frequently connected with services that guests expect to be included without additional charges, such as Wi-Fi and in-room coffee or water. Although both themes revolve around the financial aspects of the experience, their different contexts explain their negative connotations.

While the large majority of guests generally express satisfaction focusing on positive experiences and enjoyment, the small percentage of dissatisfied guests is more focused, highlighting specific points of contention where expectations are not met. This may be a consequence of the impact of dissatisfaction on guests' ability to appreciate or recall the positive aspects of their stay (Lee et al., 2019).

#### 5.3.4.3 Examples of Reviews of Dissatisfied Guests

In this section, examples of reviews from dissatisfied guests—those who rated their stay as 1 or 2—are provided to illustrate common concerns expressed across the selected LHH. Each example is categorized according to key themes identified in the Leximancer analysis, offering a clearer understanding of the aspects that each example, the themes raised by the guests are added. The themes raised by the guests are noted alongside each example.

##### Vidago Palace

- “[...] *breakfast nothing special for a hotel of this caliber [...]*” (April 2024; rating 1; travelling with family). Themes *food, hotel, and top*.

- “[...] *The hotel has been restored/maintained beautifully. The architecture is great, and the grounds are nicely designed. But it stops there. [...] Staff friendly enough, but certainly not trained to a 5-stars standard. [...]*” (September 2023; rating 2; travelling as a couple). Themes *hotel, place, staff, top*.

#### Douro Valley

- “[...] *the hotel is nice, but the service received is not up to par. [...]*” (July 2023; rating 1; travelling as couple). Themes *hotel, staff*.
- “[...] *This hotel is beautiful, [...] the place is full of young kids, [...] running around screaming and jumping in the pool. [...] We were paying upwards of a thousand euros a night [...]. The room did not disappoint but the overall ambience did, very much. [...]*” (September 2023; rating 2; travelling mode unknown). Themes *hotel, people, price, room, place, fresh*.

#### The Yeatman

- “[...] *this hotel charges prices as high as any hotel in Portugal or even Europe for that matter...yet they allow dance music to be played on the premises making it impossible to get rest. [...]*” (July 2022; rating 1; travelling mode unknown). Themes *hotel, price, place*.
- “[...] *lack of coordination in the service despite all the staff without exception being very friendly. Very weak musical animation. [...]*. (January 2023; rating 2; travelling with family). Themes *hotel, staff*.

#### Palácio de Seteais

- “[...] *Hotel under renovation [...] poor accommodations. Rooms lacked furniture, several of the ballrooms were closed, gardens locked [...]*.” (May 2024; rating 1; travelling with friends). Themes *hotel, room, place*.
- “[...] *We found the staff stiff and unwelcoming and our room not what we expected. [...] location is very inconvenient. You have to walk down difficult walkways to get anywhere from the hotel. The meal was expensive and the food was only average. [...]*.” (October 2023; rating 2; travelling as couple). Themes *staff, room, place, walk, food, price*.

#### Reid's Palace

- “[...] *shower in a hotel that should be 5 stars, simply does not stabilize the water, [...]*” (May 2024; rating 1; traveling as couple). Themes *shower, hotel, top*.

- “[...] sadly we were a bit disappointed. The hotel is beautiful [...] service was appalling. Housekeeping was sometimes good, but sometimes it didn't happen! [...]” (March 2024; rating 2; travelling as a couple). Themes *hotel, staff*.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions of the present study, focusing on the dominant themes identified through the content analysis of TripAdvisor reviews for the selected high-end luxury heritage hotels (LHH) and overarching dimensions of luxury heritage experiences (LHE). In the analysis, the research questions are answered and the corresponding research propositions addressed. Based on the findings, recommendations are availed to various stakeholders to enhance the LHE and address dissatisfaction, even when it appears minimal. Additionally, the chapter discusses the study's contributions to the academic literature on LHE, acknowledges its limitations, and suggests future research directions.

### 6.1 Conclusions

The content analysis of guests' online reviews has identified sixteen dominant themes: *hotel, room, breakfast, staff, beautiful, place, experience, walk, enjoy, river, bathroom, tea, trip, price, menu, and free*. These themes are organized into five key dimensions: Hotel, Journey, Room, Gastronomy, and Location. These findings, along with the detailed discussion in the preceding section, answer the first research question—"What are the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions that characterize guests' LHE in high-end luxury LHH in Portugal, as described in TripAdvisor reviews?" The findings also address the first research proposition, demonstrating that a "LHE is inherently multidimensional, characterized by dominant themes, associated concepts, and overarching dimensions."

The answer to the second research question—"In what ways do the dominant concepts, themes, and dimensions of guests' experiences vary between satisfied and dissatisfied guests, as described in TripAdvisor reviews?"—is also derived from content analysis. Here, the aggregated sample is specifically tagged for dissatisfied guests, allowing for a comparative analysis. This approach addresses the corresponding research proposition, which posits that the dominant LHE themes and dimensions vary according to guests' satisfaction levels.

Findings for dissatisfied guests show fourteen dominant themes that include *hotel, room, staff, people, price, view, menu, top, food, walk, shower, place, free, and fresh*, with *price* and *free* identified in a manual analysis of all the reviews of dissatisfied guests in the dataset. Notably, in most cases of dissatisfaction, *view* corresponds to a positive point raised by guests. Eight themes—*hotel, room, staff, price, menu, walk, place, and free*—are common to both satisfied and dissatisfied guests, suggesting centrality to the overall LHE. This overlap underlines the impact of service delivery on guests' experiences, as

highlighted by Chittiprolu et al. (2021). *Free* vary between approval for perks or disapproval for charges that guests consider irritating. Linked with *price*, *free* emerge in reviews by satisfied guests in topics like lack of availability/quality of free Wi-Fi or annoying charges for in-room coffee or mineral water. Eight other themes—*breakfast*, *beautiful*, *experience*, *enjoy*, *river*, *bathroom*, *tea*, and *trip*—are unique to satisfied guests, indicating elements that contribute to positive experiences and satisfaction.

In contrast, six themes—*people*, *view*, *top*, *food*, *shower*, and *fresh*—are unique to dissatisfied guests, pointing to specific aspects where expectations are unmet or issues arise, thereby driving dissatisfaction. The inclusion of these six dissatisfaction-specific themes reshapes the overarching dimensions by highlighting particular areas where guests' expectations are not met, thereby altering the overall LHE perception.

In conclusion, these findings provide an answer to the second research question, demonstrating how the dominant LHE concepts, themes, and dimensions differ between satisfied and dissatisfied guests. They partly support the research proposition that the dominant LHE concepts, themes, and dimensions vary according to satisfaction levels. However, the differing contexts in which these themes appear reflect varying perceptions, with satisfied guests discussing them positively and dissatisfied guests highlighting them as areas of concern. This suggests that variations in the degree of satisfaction are shaped by the alignment or misalignment between guests' expectations and the actual experiences provided by the hotel.

### **6.1.1 Theoretical Contributions**

The present study's dominant themes and dimensions capture a broad and inclusive range of concepts that resonate with attributes of luxury hotels (LH) established in the literature. *Hotel*, *room*, and *staff* are among the main themes that influence guests' perceptions, as also emphasized by Padma and Ahn (2020). Additionally, the hotel's *style* and its intangible elements of *character*, *class*, and *elegance* (Ríos-Martín et al., 2019) are corroborated by this study's theme *beautiful*, which reflects luxury and heritage core attributes that, while intangible, are crucial to guests' experiences. Furthermore, Ghaderi et al.'s (2020) *attention to detail* and *service quality*, as outcomes of the emotional bonds LHH employees develop with their workplace, are reflected in this study's theme *staff*, particularly through the concepts *service*, *friendly*, and *helpful*. Attention to *perceived value* and its impact on guests' satisfaction and loyalty (Zhang et al., 2020) are further supported by this study's findings, through the themes *price* and *free*.

These findings also align with the broader literature on factors influencing LH guests' experiences, where the value derived by guests is shaped by a combination of situational,

economic, and hedonic factors (Buehring & O'Mahony, 2019; Walls et al., 2011), which correspond to themes identified in this study, such as *hotel*, *room*, *staff*, *price*, and *beautiful*. The overall LHE—and the resulting post-consumption reviews—depend on impressions formed by both tangible elements, such as the physical environment and core services (*hotel*), and intangible elements, such as staff interactions (*staff*) and perceived value (*price*) (Zhang et al., 2020).

In line with these findings, Sousa (2020) highlights the importance of intangible elements, such as *emotions*, *senses*, *service*, and *quality*, in shaping guests' satisfaction, while dissatisfaction is more closely tied to the high *price* of luxury offerings. This suggests that while tangible elements play a role, it is the effective delivery of these intangible aspects that most significantly influences guests' perceptions of value. This study's results complement Sousa's (2020) analysis, where experiential factors beyond core LHH services are emphasized through themes like *beautiful*, *place*, *experience*, *walk*, and *enjoyed*. These findings indicate that guests also derive value from immersive activities beyond the hotel premises, as noted by Khalil and Kozmal (2020), suggesting the importance of a holistic LHE in shaping guests' satisfaction.

### **6.1.2 Stakeholders Implications and Recommendations**

The present study provides a comprehensive framework that integrates both established and novel elements of the LHE. By bringing natural heritage to the forefront and emphasizing its attributes, for example through the dimensions Journey (*beautiful*, *experience*, and *walk*) and Location (*place* and *river*), and by proposing an extension of LHH classification, a nuanced perspective that seems underrepresented in existing literature is introduced.

For hotel management, this highlights the potential of strategically shaping guests' experiences also through a property's unique natural heritage attributes. For example, while some hotels may focus on their riverside location, others might emphasize different natural elements, such as forests, vineyards, or ocean views, depending on their distinct locations. Identifying and promoting these as natural heritage attributes can help differentiate the property and the location's image, through compelling narratives that highlight its unique attributes, engaging visitors emotionally and intellectually, enhancing their experience, and fostering a deeper connection with the destination (Rezaei et al., 2022).

Additionally, other hotel-specific experiences, for example *tea* (Gastronomy), illustrate how unique historical or cultural heritage attributes can further enhance the LHE. Properties with different themes—such as wine in vineyard hotels or water in thermal

hotels—can similarly emphasize their unique heritage attributes. Framing these attributes as “heritage” allows each property to better curate and market distinctive experiences that align with their specific heritage, thereby appealing more directly to a larger target audience.

For tourism boards and policymakers, the present study's findings highlight the importance of incorporating heritage attributes into place making (Rezaei et al., 2022; Thirumaran et al., 2023), destination marketing, and development strategies. By promoting heritage attributes as such, in particular natural heritage, tourism boards can craft compelling narratives that resonate with potential visitors on an emotional and intellectual level. This approach differentiates destinations and fosters a deeper connection between visitors and the destination, ultimately enhancing visitors' satisfaction and promoting repeat patronage. Policymakers can leverage these insights to formulate policies that support the conservation and sustainable development of these heritage elements, ensuring they remain attractive to future generations of tourists.

Although seemingly minor in the present study, guest dissatisfaction remains a crucial factor to consider, particularly as it centers around core elements of the LHE, such as service quality, staff interactions, accommodation standards, dining options, and overall experience. These aspects are vital to shaping a LHE, and even small instances of negative feedback may reveal a disparity between guests' expectations and actual experiences. The concerns raised by guests suggest that key service and operational components, including staff professionalism and responsiveness, comfort and upkeep of rooms, quality of food and beverages, and frustrations over charges for services perceived as inherently complimentary, may not be meeting the standards anticipated by guests in a luxury heritage context.

Moreover, the study shows that themes with a numerically lower impact on satisfaction still provide relevant insights into more subtle aspects of guests' experiences that contribute to dissatisfaction. Issues related to the condition of amenities, ambiance, and specific elements of the guests' journeys suggest there are additional, less evident factors that can detract from the LHE. These findings highlight the need to address both broad and specific areas of guest feedback to adopt a holistic approach to enhancing satisfaction and maintaining competitiveness in the LHH market.

Cost emerges as a notable concern for both satisfied and dissatisfied guests, frequently highlighted in their feedback. *Price* charged by LHH in Portugal is often perceived as exaggerated, particularly when compared to local standards. Some guests even argue that these hotels are expensive relative to broader European benchmarks, suggesting that the cost does not always align with the value of the experience provided.



This perception underscores the importance of aligning pricing strategies with guest expectations and perceived value to maintain competitiveness and appeal in the LHH market.

## **6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

While content analysis of online reviews provides valuable qualitative insights, it also presents limitations. Online reviews may reflect the opinions of a specific subset of hotels' guests, potentially skewing the overall findings. Additionally, online reviews often lack contextual information, such as guest demographics or the specific conditions of their stay, which can limit the generalizability of the results. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating mixed-method approaches that combine content analysis with quantitative data, such as guest surveys or interviews.

The reliance on a single review platform (TripAdvisor) in the present study may limit the diversity of perspectives captured, as the insights derived may not fully reflect the broader range of guests' experiences. Future research could enhance its scope by incorporating data from multiple platforms, offering a more comprehensive view of guest perceptions and experiences.

Additionally, *price* consistently emerges as a key theme in both satisfied and dissatisfied guests' reviews, indicating that it plays a significant role in shaping overall guests' perceptions. While satisfied guests often perceive the high cost as justified by the quality of service, amenities, and unique heritage experience, dissatisfied guests often cite it as a point of contention. This suggests a potential disconnect between the perceived value of the experience and the actual cost, which warrants further investigation. Future studies could explore how cost sensitivity influences guests' satisfaction levels and loyalty, as well as how LHH can better align pricing with guest expectations to mitigate dissatisfaction.

Lastly, the categorization of themes and dimensions in this study, while comprehensive, is subjective. Although the framework developed provides valuable insights into LHE, its interpretive flexibility means that different researchers might arrive at slightly varied interpretations of the data. This potential variability highlights the need for further studies to test and refine the framework, ensuring greater reproducibility and consistency of findings across different contexts and datasets. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating more objective, quantitative measures alongside qualitative insights to enhance the robustness of the analysis.



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## 8 ANNEXES

### 8.1 Annex A – Semi-Structured Interviews

This annex includes a detailed transcription and translation into English of the semi-structured interviews presented in section [4.1](#), conducted in Portuguese and performed during August 2024.

**Semi-Structured Interview A** – Luxury Events Manager with 15 years of experience in 5-stars luxury hotels in Portugal, Spain, and Mozambique.

Interviewer: Your extensive experience in managing events at 5-star luxury hotels, particularly in Portugal and in Mozambique, as well as your work with luxury brands, is invaluable for my research on “A Study of Guests’ Experiences in the Context of Luxury Heritage Hotels in Portugal: Themes and Dimensions in Online Reviews.” Could you start by telling me a bit about your career and how your experience has shaped your understanding of luxury hospitality?

Interviewee: I've been in the luxury events management industry for over 15 years, working exclusively with 5-star hotels in Portugal, Spain, and Mozambique. My career has focused on delivering high-end, highly personalized events and personalized experiences for discerning clients, mostly large-scale corporate functions. Although my experience with heritage hotels is more as a guest than as a manager, I believe I've stayed in one or two of the world's leading hotels in that market niche, and I have developed an appreciation for how luxury and heritage can complement each other.

Interviewer: I'm particularly interested in developing criteria that will help me select the hotels that I'll be working with in my dissertation. My focus is in high-end 5-stars hotels that blend luxury with distinct heritage attributes, in Portugal, even if they are not formally classified as luxury heritage hotels. I don't want specific examples. In fact, I would ask you not to mention specific hotels so this interview is not biased; I want to get to the hotels myself, so to speak. In your experience, how important is a hotel's star rating and luxury classification when clients choose a venue for luxury events, particularly in the context of heritage hotels?

Interviewee: The star rating is key when clients are choosing a venue for luxury events. A 5-star luxury classification, and I mean high-end, really the top of the top, if I may, is often a non-negotiable requirement because it assures clients that the hotel will meet their high expectations for service, amenities, luxury, and overall experience. Now that you mention heritage, I would add that in that context, an heritage character brings an additional layer of appeal. But in my field of work the 5-stars luxury is a must. Clients often

associate 5-star hotels with exclusivity and prestige that can elevate the event. Even if the hotel is steeped in heritage characteristics, the expectation is that the luxury standards are up to par with any modern 5-star property.

Interviewer: What about TripAdvisor ratings?

Interviewee: TripAdvisor ratings, as well as Booking.com's ratings, I can think also of Expedia, play a significant role, especially for international clients who may not be familiar with the local market. A consistent record of "excellent" reviews, preferably all "5," but certainly all above "4.5", reassures the clients that the hotel has a proven track record of delivering outstanding service.

Interviewer: Let me please come back to heritage. Given your focus on events and luxury brands, how would you define the importance of heritage significance in a hotel, particularly when it comes to hosting luxury events?

Interviewee: Again, while my track record isn't in heritage hotels, I must emphasize that, I can say, from experience, that heritage significance adds a unique dimension to luxury events. It's not just about the event itself; it's about creating a luxury experience, that's my main objective, that is also deeply tied to the history and culture of the venue. For example, hosting an event in a palace or a castle, and I have done that more than once, with a rich historical and cultural background can provide a backdrop that, in my opinion, no "modern" hotel, let me emphasize the quotes, can replicate. The historical and cultural elements of the venue can be woven into the event theme, enhancing the experiences, and the overall experience, for the clients, as well as the hotel guests. However, it's crucial that the heritage aspect doesn't compromise luxury. The amenities, service, and technology must still meet the high standards expected of a high-end 5-stars luxury hotel.

Interviewer: Thanks. Let's talk about location. From an events management perspective, how significant is the location of a hotel when planning a luxury event? If possible, please refer also to heritage properties.

Interviewee: Location, location, location! You've certainly heard it enough and may wonder what inspires people to say it three times. In a nutshell, identical hotels can increase or decrease in value due to their specific location. Location is always a key consideration in event planning, and this is even more pronounced when dealing with heritage properties. A prime location can significantly enhance the allure of an event. For instance, a heritage hotel situated in a scenic natural setting—a leading hotel that I would certainly consider a luxury heritage hotel comes to mind; on a cliff, in Madeira, facing the Atlantic Ocean!—can add a dramatic and picturesque element to the event. Additionally, proximity to landmarks or UNESCO World Heritage Sites—another hotel pops on my mind,

in Porto, another one, several actually, in the Douro, in Lisbon, in Alentejo—can be a big selling point, especially for clients who are looking to offer their guests a memorable, culturally rich experience. However, accessibility is also important. While a remote, idyllic location might be appealing, it's essential to ensure that it is still convenient for guests to reach, especially when hosting large-scale events.

Interviewer: Considering your work in different regions of Portugal, also in other countries, how important do you think geographical distribution is for luxury hotels?

Interviewee: If you're thinking about events, geographical distribution can be quite important, especially for clients who are planning multiple events or who have specific regional preferences. In Portugal, for example, I have worked in different regions—from the Douro Valley to the Alentejo, Algarve, and the islands, both Madeira and the Azores. The variety of settings and experiences is large. If I understand the purpose of your question, I can bring a well-distributed portfolio of luxury hotels across different regions for different events, and note that my experience is mostly based on corporate events, several team-building experiences, many of which include overnight stays at the hotel. For instance, a wine-themed corporate trip, for instance, might be best suited to a luxury hotel in the Douro Valley—again, other hotels come to mind!—while a beachside corporate event could find the perfect venue in different places along the coast. Having options across different regions also means that hotels can cater to a wider range of clients, each looking for something unique that ties into the local culture and environment.

Interviewer: Online reviews and ratings are often a topic of interest in hospitality. From your experience with luxury events and luxury hotels, how do you view the impact of online reviews on the perception and selection of luxury heritage hotels?

Interviewee: Online reviews are incredibly influential, especially in the luxury segment. When selecting a venue for a high-profile event, clients do turn to platforms like TripAdvisor and Booking.com to gauge the experiences of previous guests. The number of reviews is important—hotels with a large number of positive reviews tend to be perceived as more reliable and consistent. Detailed reviews are particularly valuable because they provide insight into the specific aspects of the hotel, such as the quality of service during an event or the uniqueness of the heritage elements. Positive feedback about an event hosted at the hotel can be a strong endorsement, reassuring clients that the hotel can deliver the level of excellence they're looking for. Diversity in the background of reviewers—especially geographical and even the type of event—adds credibility and shows that the hotel can cater to a broad and discerning clientele.

Interviewer: Thank you for your insights. Finally, is there anything else you think is critical to consider when selecting luxury heritage hotels for hosting events?

Interviewee: One additional factor I would highlight is the adaptability of the hotel's spaces. For a heritage property to be suitable for luxury events, it must offer flexible event spaces that can accommodate different types of experiences while still preserving the heritage ambiance. Critical to the hotel, and this is experience talking, is the balance between the events' guests and the hotels' guests. I've witnessed many problems with hotel guests' complaining about an event while they're staying at the hotel. Also, the staff's ability to deliver personalized service is crucial—luxury events clients expect a high level of customization and attention to detail, as do the hotel's guests. Lastly, the hotel's ability to collaborate with local vendors and incorporate regional elements into the event can enhance the authenticity and overall experience.

**Semi-Structured Interview B** – Retired luxury hotel manager with 35 years of experience in managing large units of international 5-stars luxury hotels chains in Portugal (Porto and Lisbon).

Interviewer: I'd like to explore your insights on the factors that define guests' experiences in luxury hotels, specifically in the context of Portugal. This is the wide topic of my dissertation. Could you start by telling me about your background and experience in the luxury hospitality industry?

Interviewee: I'm retired now but I've been in the luxury hotels industry for 35 years, with a focus on large international chains hotels. My career was developed in Portugal, where I've managed several large 5-stars luxury hotels of international chains, in Porto and Lisbon.

Interviewer: In your experience, how important is a hotel's star rating and luxury classification when guests choose a luxury hotel?

Interviewee: The star rating is absolutely crucial, certainly in the 5-stars luxury segment. Guests looking for a luxury hotel associate a 5-star rating with a guarantee of exceptional service, amenities, and attention to detail. It sets a baseline expectation. However, beyond the official star rating, guest reviews, particularly on platforms like Booking.com and TripAdvisor, to mention just two of the more prominent, play a significant role. A consistent "excellent" rating on TripAdvisor—and I was fortunate enough to work with hotels in that category, I believe I won't be far from the truth if I say that the hotels that I have managed never had less than 90% excellent ratings—can tip the scale when guests are deciding between multiple luxury options. This consistency reassures guests that they will receive high-end luxury and high-quality service that aligns with the luxury promise of the hotel.

Interviewer: How would you define heritage significance in the context of luxury hotels?

Interviewee: In my opinion, and please bear in mind that this is not my field of specialty, heritage significance may be what sets luxury hotels apart from “standard” [the interviewee gestually emphasizes the quotes], luxury properties. I believe it’s about much more than just a building’s age or history; it has more layers to what the specific hotel actually represents. For example, in my case, I can think of famous guests that stayed at a hotel, such as Heads of Government and State, and celebrities as a layer of the hotel’s heritage. Now, I don’t know if that’s heritage, but hotels that were once palaces, and I have stayed in a few across the world during my career, offer a different kind of luxury.

Interviewer: How different?

Interviewee: I believe these hotels often serve as living museums, where guests can experience the past in a tangible way.

Interviewer: Let’s discuss location. What role does the location of a hotel play in its appeal as a luxury destination?

Interviewee: Location is important for guests but it means different things to different people. I have managed large 5-stars luxury hotels in Porto and Lisbon in, let’s say, very good but “normal” locations [the interviewee again gestually emphasizes the quotes]. A hotel in the city center maybe in a prime location for one guest and a terrible one for another guest. The same goes for a countryside or seaside location.

Interviewer: What about a luxury hotel situated by a river or a lake, in an urban setting, and another within a natural park or UNESCO World Heritage Site?

Interviewee: I see what you mean. Such a location naturally enhances the hotel’s appeal, for some of the guests, maybe less so for others. The same goes for the urban location. Both play a critical role in defining the overall guest experience. Again, location means different things to different people.

Interviewer: Online reviews and ratings are powerful tools for both marketing and as feedback mechanism. What do you think are the key aspects of such reviews that influence the perception of a luxury hotel?

Interviewee: Online reviews are indeed powerful. The number of reviews is a critical factor. I can tell you that the three-digit factor is important, meaning hotels with more than 1,000 reviews. Perhaps this is a psychological level but what I call 1K plus hotels are generally seen as more reliable, as they provide a broad base of guest feedback. Of course, it’s not just about quantity but also the quality of these reviews. A high percentage of “excellent” or “very good” ratings builds trust and sets guest expectations. As a hotel manager, I have always given special attention to detailed narratives [because these are]

particularly valuable as they offer valuable insights into the guest perceptions, which often are very different than what we, hotel managers, think. When guests take the time to write about specific aspects of their stay—whether it's the quality of service in general or specific issues about their stay—they provide us with very powerful tools to, as I often say, correct course. I can tell you that I had many changes implemented after examining online reviews and guest feedback in general. Equally important, if not more, potential guests get a richer, more authentic understanding of what to expect. Additionally, the diversity of the reviewers, in terms of geography, language, and travel type, adds credibility. If a hotel consistently receives positive reviews from a broad spectrum of guests, it suggests that it can meet or exceed the expectations of a diverse clientele.

Interviewer: What about geographic diversity?

Interviewee: You mean geographic diversity of the guests? In my experience, each hotel develops its own patterns of geographic diversity, attracting guests from specific markets. The guests' profiles at the first large 5-stars hotel I managed, in Porto, and that of the following property I managed in Lisbon were quite different. Both belonged to the same international chain. Maybe these are patterns that change with time, influenced by different factors, such as significant marketing campaigns targeting specific regions, shifts in airline routes or availability, global economic conditions, or even high-profile events hosted at the hotel that attract international attention. For instance, in Lisbon I saw a spike in visitors from a particular country when TAP Air Portugal introduced a new direct flight connection from Lisbon. The same happened after a famous foreign travel influencer from the USA featured the hotel in their content.

Interviewer: Thank you for your insights. Finally, is there anything else you think is critical to consider when selecting luxury hotels for analysis?

Interviewee: I would say that it's also necessary, and this is very important today, to consider the hotel's commitment to sustainability and, since your focus is heritage, preservation, I mean heritage preservation. Again, although this is not my case, I have stayed in many hotels and participated in international forums that dealt with both topics. This includes how well the property has maintained its heritage elements, the quality of any restoration work, and the extent to which the hotel incorporates local culture into the guest experience, etc. Sustainability, as I began by saying, is another key factor—guests are increasingly looking for luxury experiences that are also environmentally responsible. A hotel that manages to blend luxury and sustainability can offer a truly unique and compelling experience.

## 8.2 Annex B – Hotels’ Profiles

This annex includes a detailed description of the hotels’ and their reviewers’ characterization, mentioned in section 4.1. The descriptions that follow are based on the information contained in the hotels’ websites.

Inaugurated in 1910 and celebrated as the most luxurious hotel on the Iberian Peninsula at its opening, Vidago Palace<sup>1</sup> is situated in Vidago’s Thermal Park, approximately 15km from Chaves and 30km from the Spanish border. The hotel’s architecture and design reflect the grandeur and elegance of the Belle Époque era, with a majestic facade, opulent interiors, and expansive parkland setting. The hotel was reopened in 2010, 100 years after its inauguration, following extensive renovations directed by renowned architect Álvaro Siza Vieira. It includes a state-of-the-art spa using local mineral waters, and a championship golf course.

Douro Valley,<sup>2</sup> a renovated 19<sup>th</sup> century manor house and farm converted into a luxury hotel in 2015, is nestled in the “Alto Douro Wine Region” UNESCO WHS, known for its vineyard-covered landscapes over the Douro river, in the heart of the Douro Demarcated Wine Region, the oldest in the world. The hotel is particularly noted for its focus on wine and gastronomy, reflecting the region’s rich wine-making heritage.

Inaugurated in 2010, The Yeatman<sup>3</sup> is set in Vila Nova de Gaia, within the “Historic Centre of Porto, Luiz I Bridge, and Monastery of Serra do Pilar” UNESCO WHS. Located in the vicinity of several historic Port Wine cellars, the hotel overlooks the Douro river providing stunning panoramic views of the river and Porto’s historic cityscape. The hotel’s architecture echoes Douro Valley’s vineyards with a structure of cascading terraces. The Yeatman is part of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux collection. Its restaurant’s two Michelin stars further cement its status as a top culinary destination.

A late 18<sup>th</sup> century neoclassical palace that became a property of the Portuguese Crown in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was frequently visited by the royal family, Palácio de Seteais<sup>4</sup> has been a luxury hotel since the 1950s. The palace is located in the “Cultural Landscape of Sintra” UNESCO WHS, known for its romantic 19<sup>th</sup>-century gardens, palaces, and historic estates, and is in the vicinity of the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park. Until January 1<sup>st</sup> 2024, Palácio de Seteais was run by Tivoli, under the designation Hotel Tivoli Palácio de Seteais Sintra.

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<sup>1</sup> [Vidago Palace](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Douro Valley](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Yeatman](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Palácio de Seteais](#)

Inaugurated in 1891 as a luxury hotel, Reid's Palace<sup>5</sup> is positioned on a clifftop facing the Atlantic Ocean, in proximity to the UNESCO WHS "Laurisilva of Madeira" forest. Over the years, it has hosted numerous illustrious guests, including Empress Elizabeth of Austria, Sir Winston Churchill, and George Bernard Shaw. The Michelin star awarded to one of its restaurants further solidifies Reid's Palace's status, also as a premier culinary destination.

Vidago Palace and Reid's Palace are original LHH, as each has upheld its original purpose since inception and retained its genuine character, despite undergoing extensive renovations that guarantee their ranking as high-end 5-stars luxury hotels. Although strikingly different, 19<sup>th</sup> century Douro Valley and 18<sup>th</sup> century Palácio de Seteais are converted LHH as both are historic properties that have been repurposed into hotels (Xie & Shi, 2020).

The Yeatman is herein classified as an evocative LHH, following this study's expansion of Xie and Shi's (2020) classification (section [3.1](#)). Including renovated buildings and newly built wings, The Yeatman incorporates distinct heritage attributes, notably those related to the hotel's location and its integration in the surrounding UNESCO WHS, as well as the inherited institutions, customs, and practices that define the social fabric of the surrounding communities, strongly connected to the surrounding Port Wine cellars and the wine culture of the Douro Valley.

### **Reviewers Profile.**

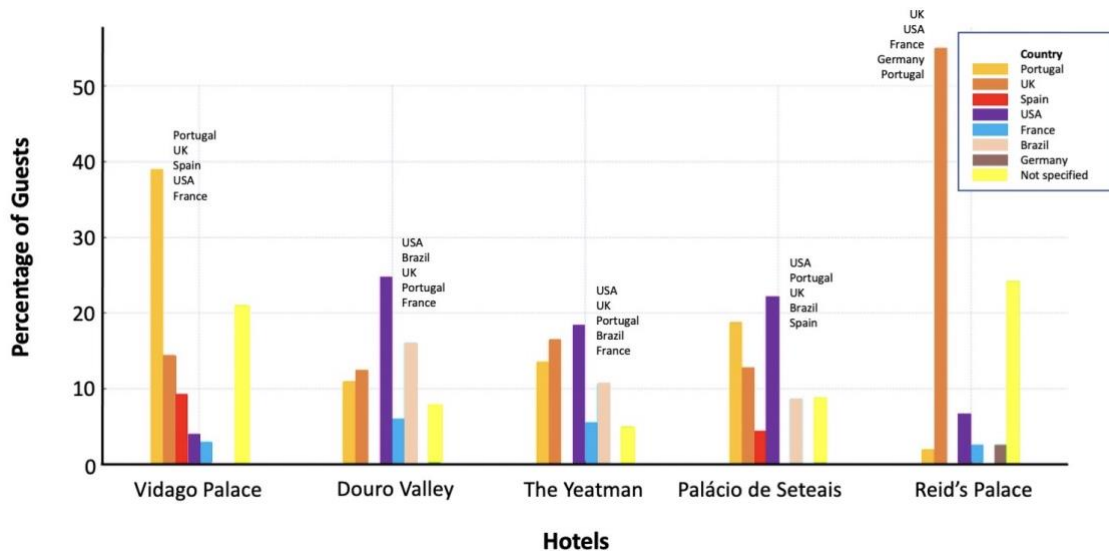
Reviewers come from 59 different countries, with the top 5 being UK (22.2%), Portugal (16.8%), USA (15.2%), Brazil (7.6%), and Spain (4.5%). In 13.4% of the reviews, there is no indication on the guest's country nor is it possible to infer it.

The distribution of reviews per country and per hotel exhibits substantial variation (Figure 8.1; above), highlighting distinct preferences for each hotel. For Vidago Palace the main countries of origin are Portugal, UK, and Spain, while USA, Brazil and UK stand out for Douro Valley, USA, UK, and Portugal for The Yeatman, USA, Portugal, and UK for Palácio de Seteais, and finally UK, USA, and France for Reid's Palace. Despite the varying percentages of non-disclosed countries of origin (5% - 24.2%), which highlight differing levels of anonymity among guests across these hotels, this analysis reveals the diverse international appeal of each hotel.

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<sup>5</sup> [Reid's Palace](#)





**Figure 8.1** – Top five countries of origin for guests at the selected hotels. Own elaboration (Data source: TripAdvisor).

The pronounced dominance of UK guests in Reid’s Palace (55% of the total), with USA in a very distant second place (6.6%), shows the pivotal role of the UK market in shaping the online reputation of this hotel. Vidago Palace also exhibits a pattern of dominance of guests from Portugal (39%), followed by the UK (14.4%). The other hotels exhibit more balanced distributions, all headed by the USA.

The majority of guests (51.3%) travelled as couples, while 15.1% did so with family, 7.2% with friends, 2.6% travelled for business and 2.4% solo. However, in 21.4% of the reviews the travelling mode is not identified. Patterns are similar for each hotel, with varying percentages. The exception is Reid’s Palace, in which more than half (56.8%) of the guests do not disclose how they travel.

### 8.3 Annex C – Reviews Per Hotel and Per Rating in the Population

This annex includes a detailed description of the percentage of reviews per hotel and per rating in the population (9,079 reviews), mentioned in section 4.2.

Table 8.1 (below) presents the distribution of TripAdvisor reviews across the different rating categories (1–5) for the selected hotels in Portugal. The data, representing all 9,079 reviews available as of 31st May 2024, shows that the majority of the reviews for all hotels are in the highest rating categories, with percentages ranging from 74.1% to 86.7% for rating 5, and from 8.8% to 18.3% for rating 4. Lower ratings (1–2) account for smaller proportions, with most hotels having less than 5% of their reviews in these categories. This distribution indicates a generally high level of customer satisfaction across all five hotels,

albeit with some variations in guest ratings. The percentage of reviews in each category and for each hotel is used to determine the required sample size for further analysis.

**Table 8.1** – Percentage of reviews per rating in the population. Own elaboration (Source: TripAdvisor; 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024).

Rating Category	Vidago Palace	Douro Valley	The Yeatman	Palácio de Seteais	Reid's Palace
5	84.0%	86.7%	82.0%	74.1%	83.6%
4	10.9%	8.8%	11.5%	18.3%	10.6%
3	2.7%	2.9%	3.8%	5.3%	3.8%
2	1.3%	0.9%	1.2%	1.9%	1.1%
1	1.1%	0.6%	1.5%	0.5%	0.9%

#### 8.4 Annex D – Word Cloud Analysis

Section [5.2.2](#) includes an overview of an analysis of the word cloud for the reviews' titles in the aggregated sample. In this section, a detailed analysis of the most dominant terms in the review's titles of each of the selected hotels is presented.

- Vidago Palace

Prominent Words: *excellent*, *beauty*, *five-stars*, *palace*, and *experience*.

Guests are particularly impressed by the overall *excellence* and *beauty* of the hotel. The frequent mention of *five-stars* suggests that many guests perceive the hotel as living up to a high standard of luxury. The repeated reference to *palace* (the word, used to describe the property, does not stem from its name, as these references are deleted) and *experience* emphasizes the heritage aspect, indicating that the hotel's grand and heritage atmosphere is a key part of the guests' experience.

- Douro Valley

Prominent Words: *amazing*, *best*, *perfect*, *wonder*, and *experience*.

Reviews highlight the awe-inspiring nature of the *experience*, with *amazing* and *best* frequently mentioned. The word *perfect* further suggests that guests see their stays as fulfilling their expectations, while *wonder* points to the stunning beauty of its natural heritage and unique atmosphere of the region. The emphasis on *experience* indicates that guests value the holistic experience of staying at this location, due to its scenic surroundings and immersive qualities.

- The Yeatman

Prominent Words: *View, Porto, best, great, perfect*

At The Yeatman, the *view* is the dominant feature in guest reviews, due to the hotel's location. The frequent mention of *Porto* indicates that the hotel's location and its connection to the city are crucial aspects of the guest experience. The recurring words *best, great, and perfect* suggest that the guests consider the hotel as meeting or exceeding their high expectations, particularly in relation to its scenic views and possibly its proximity to the cultural and urban amenities of Porto.

- Palácio de Seteais

Prominent Words: *palace, beauty, experience, excellent, royalty*

The term *palace* is the most frequent word in reviews of Palácio de Seteais; this word, used to describe the property, does not stem from its name, as these references are deleted. Guests seem to be drawn to the majestic and historical elements of the property, with *beauty* and *royalty* further emphasizing the regal and luxurious atmosphere. The focus on *experience* and *excellent* indicates that guests are highly satisfied with the quality and overall experience provided by the hotel.

- Reid's Palace

Prominent Words: *wonderful, experience, afternoon-tea, best, and great.*

Reid's Palace appears to deliver a *wonderful* experience, with guests frequently mentioning the hotel's renowned *afternoon-tea*, clearly a signature experience at the hotel that significantly contributes to the overall guest satisfaction. The repetition of positive adjectives such as *best, great, and wonderful* highlights the overall positive sentiment of the guests toward their stay.