



DESTINATION IMAGE AND VISITOR SATISFACTION AT OCNELE MARI SALT MINE

LILIANA MIRIANICI, ANCA RUS, ZLATENCO IEREMICI, ELENA PETȚ, MARIUS-IONUȚ
GORDAN

*University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara, Faculty of Management and
Rural Tourism, Romania*

Abstract: This article deals with the link between perceived destination image and visitor satisfaction in the Ocnele Mari salt mine complex. A survey-based design captures evaluations of functional characteristics and destination image. Findings indicate that perceived distinctiveness—anchored in the underground microclimate and heritage setting—drives satisfaction. The study offers some actionable guidance for experience curation and message framing in industrial-heritage attractions and suggests a compact indicator set for ongoing image tracking.

• Introduction

Destination image is the set of beliefs and evaluations held by visitors about a place. This is a key antecedent of satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Industrial-heritage attractions such as salt mines combine functional attributes (pricing, access, infrastructure, cleanliness, staff) with distinctive experiential cues (microclimate, underground setting) that can shape image formation. This article examines the relationship between perceived destination image and visitor satisfaction at the Ocnele Mari salt mine complex. The working proposition is that perceived distinctiveness anchored in the underground microclimate and heritage setting is a primary driver of satisfaction, while functional attributes condition the strength of this effect. The study contributes a compact, survey-based indicator set suitable for ongoing image tracking and for guiding experience curation and message framing.

• Material and method

A short questionnaire captured: visitation status; source of awareness; likelihood to recommend (1–5); intention to revisit (three options); and agreement on 5-point Likert items covering price fairness, staff courtesy, cleanliness, opening hours, parking, transport accessibility, infrastructure adequacy, atmosphere/landscape, overall experience, and "I would recommend." Data were collected in late October–early November 2025. Analyses are descriptive and associative. We report frequencies and means for visitors and summarize simple rank associations between the atmosphere item (proxy for distinctiveness) and overall experience/recommendation. Non-visitor rows were excluded from analysis.

• Results and discussions

Awareness was dominated by word-of-mouth (family 35%, friends 30%), followed by social media (20%) and other sources (15%). Recommendation intention averaged 4.45/5 (median 5), and 80% reported "certainly yes" to revisiting (another 10% "probably yes"). Perceptions were strongly positive for atmosphere/landscape (85% agree/strongly agree) and overall experience (80% positive). Functional attributes were also favorable but more varied: price fairness 75% positive, staff courtesy 75%, cleanliness 80%, opening hours 75%, parking 75%, transport accessibility 65%, and infrastructure adequacy 70% (15% neutral, 15% negative). A small number of neutral/negative evaluations clustered on accessibility and infrastructure.

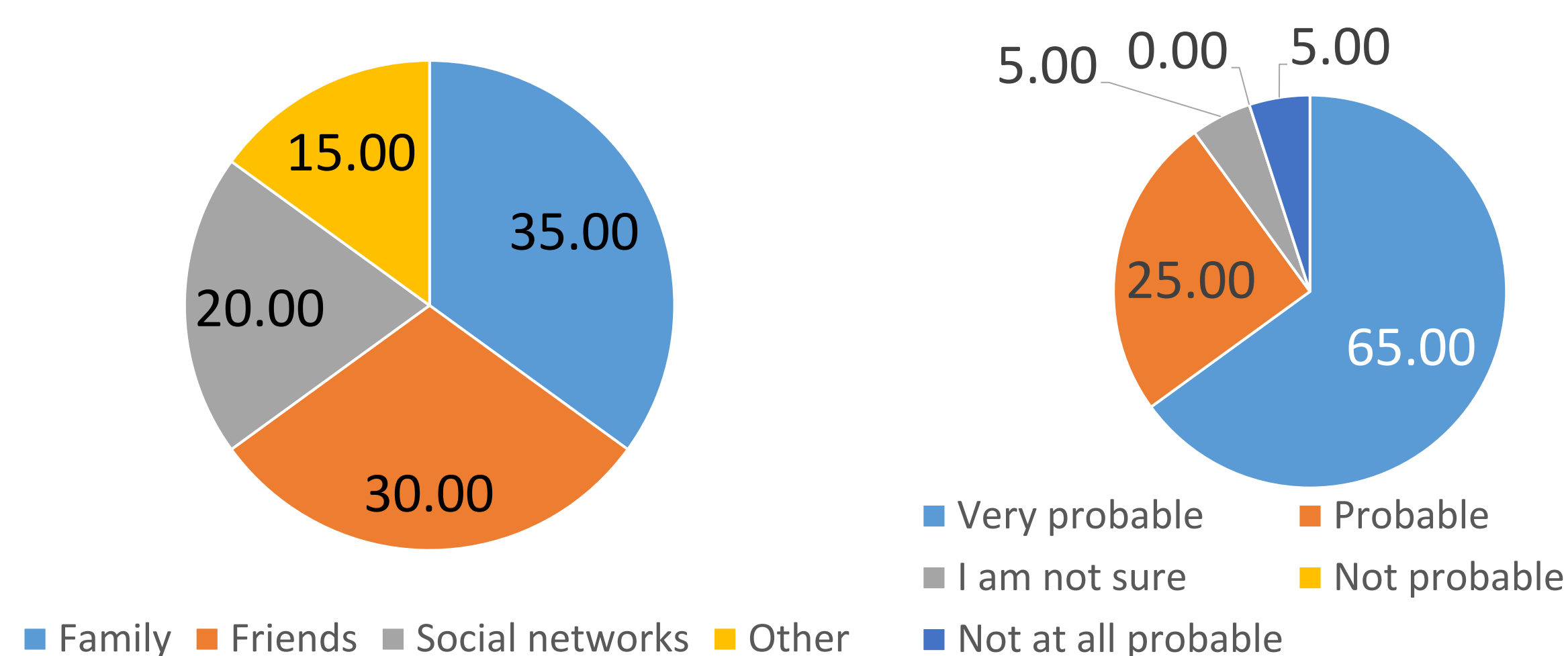


Figure 1: Awareness sources

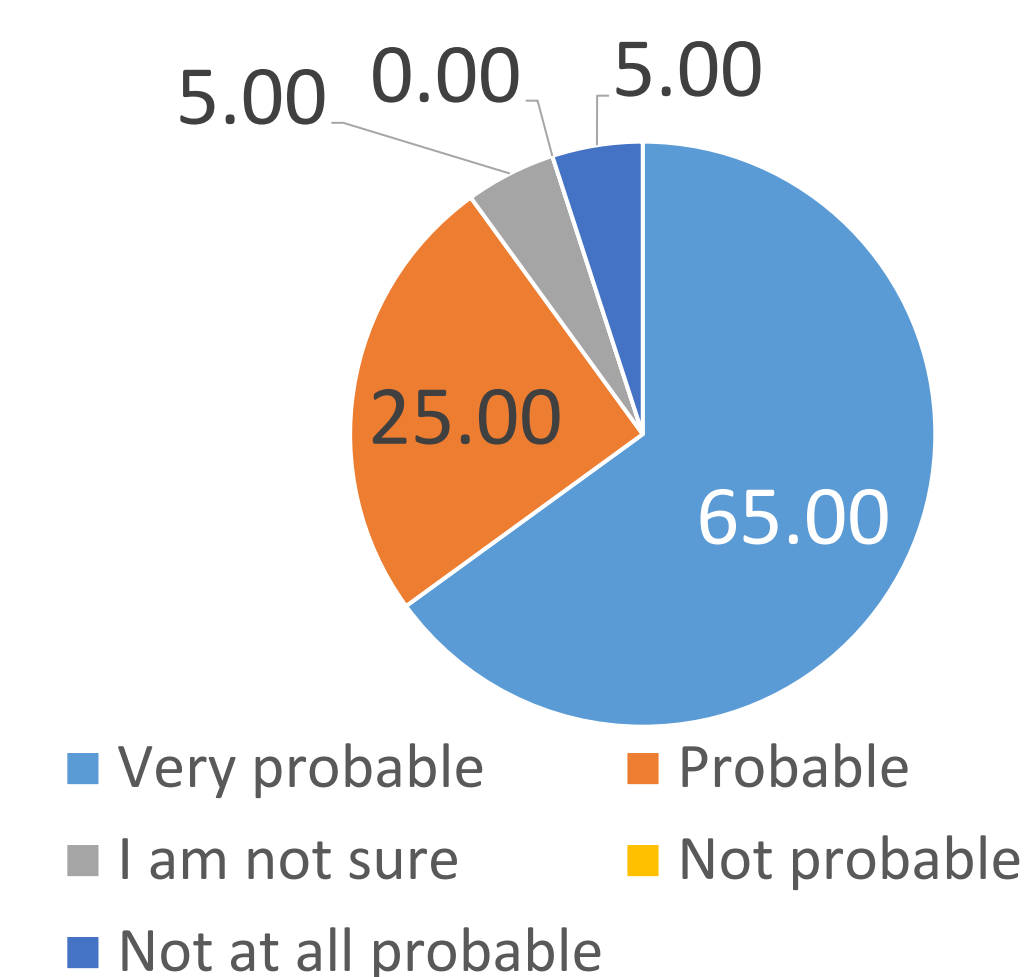


Figure 2: Probability to recommend

• Conclusions

At Ocnele Mari, satisfaction and recommendation are high and closely aligned with the mine's perceived distinctiveness its underground microclimate and heritage ambiance, while functional attributes contribute to, but do not replace, that core appeal. Management implications are: keep distinctiveness salient in on-site interpretation and off-site messaging; maintain cleanliness and staff courtesy at current levels; and address variability in access/infrastructure (transport links, signage, benches/toilets, parking organization)