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To cite this article: Faruk Seyitoğlu & Ozan Atsız (2022): Discovering cities with peer-to-peer local-guided bike tours: tourists' experiences and perceptions, Current Issues in Tourism, DOI: [10.1080/13683500.2022.2120798](https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2022.2120798)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2022.2120798>



Published online: 11 Sep 2022.



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RESEARCH LETTER



# Discovering cities with peer-to-peer local-guided bike tours: tourists' experiences and perceptions

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores tourists' experiences and perceptions of peer-to-peer (P2P) local-guided bike tours using a netnography approach. The content of reviews of tourists regarding P2P local-guided bike tours offered by a sharing economy platform – Withlocals – in different destinations was analysed. The results show that tourists' experiences of P2P local-guided bike tours include discovery, hedonic, safety and comfort, edutainment, local interaction, and memorable aspects. In addition, tourists perceive P2P local-guided bike tours in various ways. Our findings illustrate that P2P local-guided bike tours can be defined as engaging activities that provide multidimensional and rich experiences and help explore a destination. Due to the lack of research on P2P local-guided bike tours and the increasing demand by tourists for these tours, this study fills the gap by exploring tourists' P2P local-guided bike tour experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, although this research will guide scholars and practitioners, future studies could shed more light on the subject.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 May 2022  
Accepted 28 August 2022

## KEYWORDS

Bike tour experience; local P2P guiding; sharing economy; local-guided tour; netnography approach

## 1. Introduction and research background

The activities and tours offered on P2P platforms have spread rapidly worldwide, and several companies (i.e. Airbnb, GetYourGuide, Viator) dominate the sharing economy (SE) platforms by offering tours and different activity experiences to tourists (Pung et al., 2019). These tours and activities are provided mainly by local providers (P2P local guides) or non-professional local guides (Atsız & Seyitoğlu, 2022; Melián-González et al., 2019) and help local communities in terms of reducing unemployment in destinations that offer limited job opportunities (Cifci et al., 2021). They also provide memorable, informative, novel, authentic experiences and local interactions (Pung et al., 2019).

Academic studies of T&H scholars have accompanied the progress of the P2P local guiding. Prior research on P2P local guiding can be classified into three major categories. Two studies in the first category indicate the tour types (i.e. architectural/historical tours, shopping tours, excursions/walks, visits, gastronomy) offered on these platforms (Melián-González et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016). The second category examines tourists' motivations and constraints (i.e. effort and independence expectancy, product scarcity) in P2P tours and activities (Pung et al., 2019). The last category deals with tourists' experiences of shopping tours (Atsız & Seyitoğlu, 2022) and street food tours (Cifci et al., 2021). Scholars have explored various components that identify participants' experiences in such tours. However, since only a few articles on P2P local guided experience exist in the literature, further investigation into other SE platforms is needed (Mody et al., 2021). In addition, the tourist

experience can encompass different symbolic, emotional and hedonic benefits (Chen & Chen, 2010). In this respect, Cetin and Bilgihan (2016) state that proposing a theoretical framework for the tourist experience is challenging; thus, researchers should examine the tourist experience in different activities to form a holistic picture.

Tours listed on SE platforms are various activities that offer a closer interaction with local culture. These platforms allow researchers to revisit the tourist experience within the scope of SE. To date, bike tours have received limited attention in the T&H literature. Existing studies have concentrated on bikers' behavioural characteristics regarding bike tourism (Yang et al., 2021) rather than focusing on the experiential aspect of tourists' bike experiences. Though some studies (i.e. Chiu & Leng, 2017) examine expressive elements of cycling tourists' experiences, the component and dimension perspective of the bike tourism experience was neglected.

Most travellers desire to be active in regular bike tours and improve their physical abilities (Faulks et al., 2008). However, P2P local-guided tours offer different local experiences for travellers since these platforms enable them to interact with locals who know the area and its culture (Cifci et al., 2021). In this vein, bike tours guided by a local have the potential to create unique cultural experiences for travellers.

The T&H literature includes studies on the attributional effects of the value of using bikes on tourists' emotional experiences, satisfaction and destination loyalty (Chen & Huang, 2021), finding ways of promoting bike tourism globally (Chen & Lee, 2017), factors determining cycling experience and frequency (Lee, 2014) and cycling tourists' experience in Singapore (Chiu & Leng, 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have attempted to focus on the experiential side of local-guided bike tours listed on SE platforms. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by examining the dimensions of the P2P local-guided bike tour experiences.

## 2. Methodology

This research examined tourists' experiences and perceptions of P2P local-guided bike tours provided by SE platforms. Accordingly, netnography as a qualitative research approach was adopted. Netnography, acknowledged as an online ethnography, helps researchers collect data more easily and faster without needing to interact with actual individuals (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Several reasons can be provided for choosing netnography for this research. First, it offers individuals' first-hand experiences to researchers. Second, it provides open and flexible data collection. Third, it enables researchers to discover various aspects of a specific group and does not require the validation of a hypothesis. For the present research, we followed the procedures (i.e. planning and entrée, data collection and data analysis) that Kozinets (2010) suggests (see Figure 1).

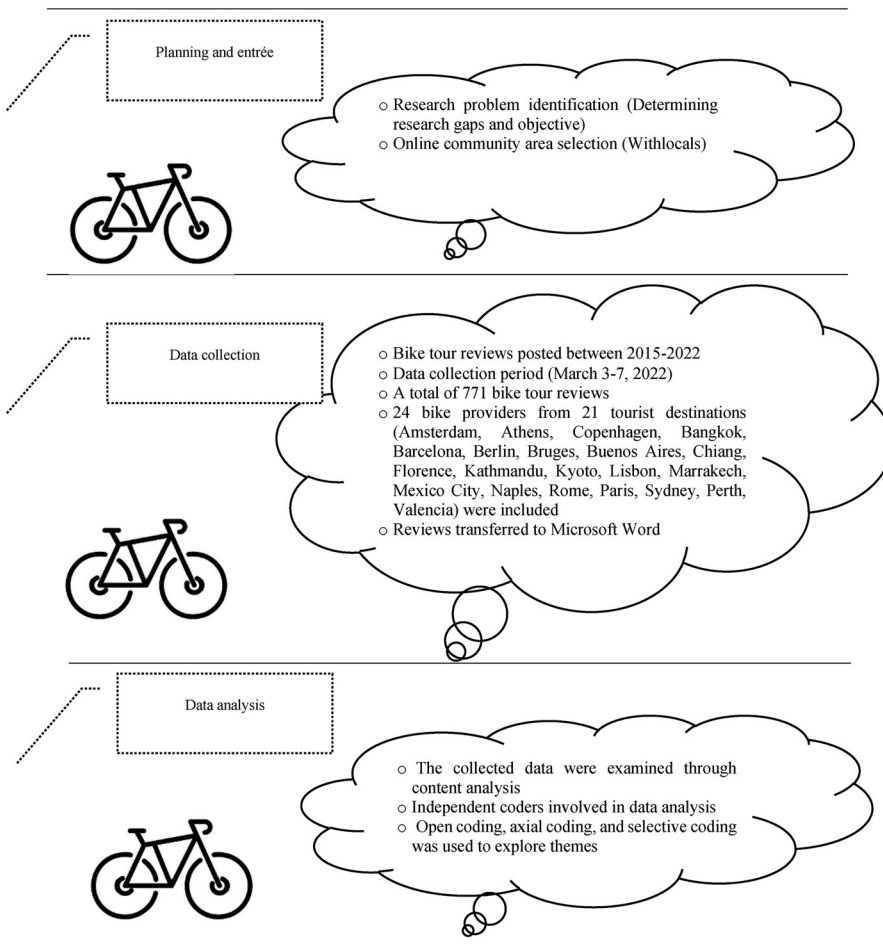
The data were examined through content analysis, primarily used in netnography studies (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019), and content analysis procedures (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) were applied.

## 3. Results and discussion

Figure 2 provides tourists' perceptions of P2P local-guided bike tours organized by a sharing economy platform. Furthermore, tourists' P2P local-guided bike tour experience has a multidimensional structure consisting of discovery, hedonic, safety and comfort, edutainment, local interaction, and memorable dimensions (see Figure 3).

### 3.1. Discovery

The findings demonstrate that P2P local-guided bike tours provide the opportunity to discover unexplored spots of destinations. Tourists purport that thanks to these bike tours, they discovered the most magical corners of cities that are less known. The expressions such as 'lets you see a lot

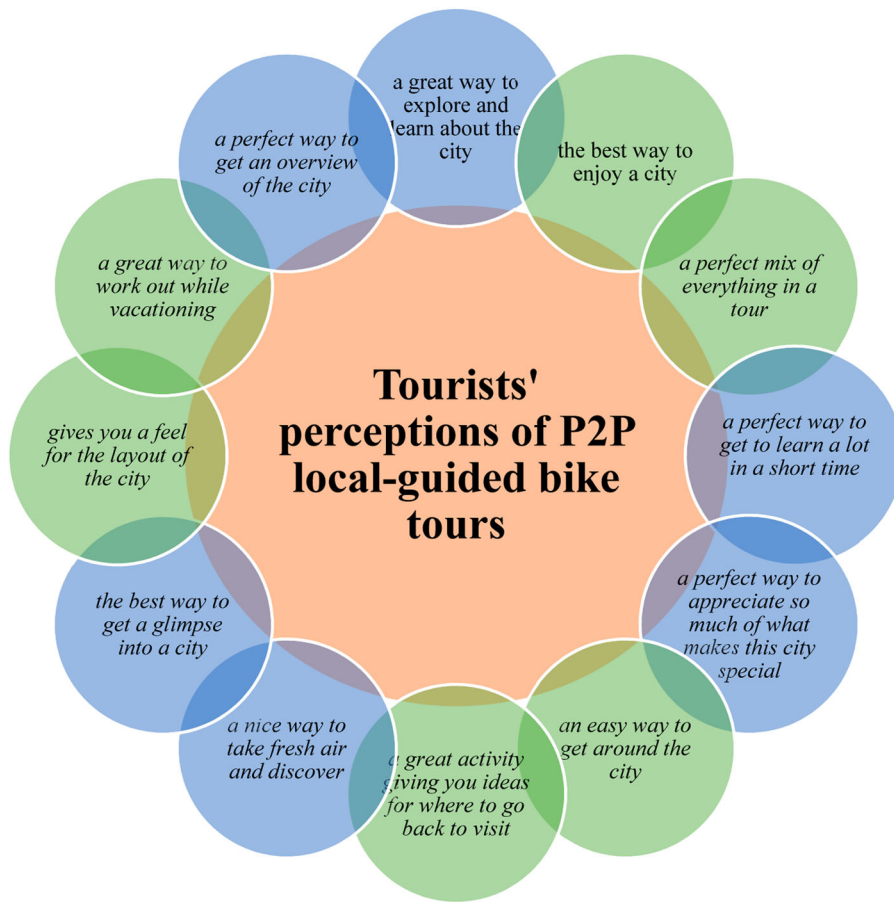


**Figure 1.** Netnography research approach phases.

more than on a walk and provides you with the highlights to come back and explore more later', 'discover some of the interesting spots', and 'the best way to explore the city and surrounding area' can be clues showing the discovery aspect of bike tour experiences. Additionally, the characteristic of bike tours, such as being well organized and well-paced, contributes to the discovery experience of tourists. In this regard, one of the tourists participating local-guided bike tour (T8) indicates that thanks to the tour being well organized and well-paced, they discovered so much of Valencia in just a few hours.

### 3.2. Hedonic

Hedonic experience, referring to the feelings of happiness, intrinsic pleasure, enjoyment, and positive emotional experience (Io, 2016), has empirically been approved to be strong motivation for visiting touristic destinations (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019). Tourists participating in P2P local-guided bike tours described their hedonic experiences as *an amazing bike tour, a fantastic bike ride, a splendid experience, a lovely experience, a very nice and pleasant 3-hour bike tour, an enjoyable experience, a fabulous bike tour, a truly immersive experience, a magnificent experience, and a wonderful experience*. For instance, T19 explains, 'Our trip with the local tour guide was very well organised and pleasant. He is an excellent guide who knows a lot and takes care of a good experience. ... We loved it.' Finally,



**Figure 2.** Tourists' perceptions of P2P local-guided bike tours.

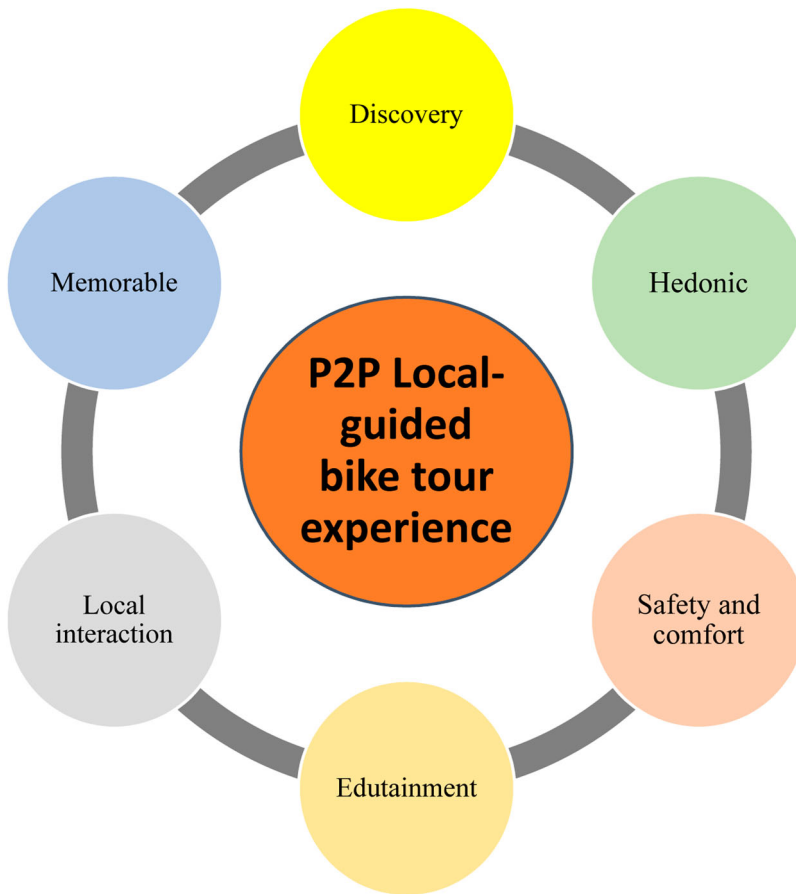
hedonic experience is an indicator of satisfaction because it is related to the pursuit of happiness (Io, 2016).

### **3.3. Safety and comfort**

The safety and comfort aspect of tourism experiences has been considered critical in the satisfaction of 'comfort seeker' tourists who are not taking high risks in destinations (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017). As the P2P local-guided bike tour is an outdoor activity in destinations, for tourists experiencing these tours, it is unsurprising that 'safety and comfort' is among the most significant experience dimensions. The clearness and quality of local guides' instructions, knowing the weather conditions and adjusting the tour accordingly, guides' sensitiveness to tourist safety, feeling safe in dense traffic, bikes quality and comfort, and the safety and convenience of the destination for riding bike are among the features that tourists mentioned related to the safety and comfort dimension.

### **3.4. Edutainment**

The way that experience includes education and entertainment at the same time in tourism and hospitality services is termed edutainment (Luo, 2021). It can enhance the quality of experience by combining two significant experience aspects, which are educational and entertaining experiences at



**Figure 3.** Dimensions of the P2P local-guided bike tour experience of tourists.

destinations (Chirakranont & Sakdiyakorn, 2022). The findings revealed that P2P local-guided bike tour experiences through sharing economy platform offer tourists an educational experience in an entertaining way. Some examples of the expressions showing the edutainment experience of tourists are: 'So informative but mixed with humour and playfulness (T391)', 'not only did we have so much fun we also learnt a lot about the city and its history and culture (T451)', and '... made fun and educational ... (T513).'

### **3.5. Local interaction**

Interaction with local objects or residents is an indispensable experience dimension and a crucial element for developing tourism destinations (Atsız & Seyitoğlu, 2022). Although local interaction is a well-recognised topic in tourism experiences, no empirical knowledge of its role in P2P local-guided bike tour experiences has been found in the literature. However, in this study, local interaction was considered a significant element of the P2P local-guided bike tour experience by tourists participating in these tours. The comments of local interactions through local-guided bike tours were related to local neighbourhoods, the artists of destinations, local artworks such as paintings and graffiti of destinations, local food and drinks, local cafes and restaurants, local architecture, local market, local souvenirs, local life, local celebrations such as weddings and making local friends.

### 3.6. Memorable

The memorable dimension of local-guided bike tours has emerged as an essential component of tourists' experience. The most apparent approves for the memorable theme were *simply extraordinary, a unique and memorable way to see the beautiful city, one of our best memories, good memories that will probably stay forever, and the most unforgettable experience*. Memorable experiences, identified as remembered and recalled experiences, emerge according to individuals' evaluations after events (Kim et al., 2012). Such experiences can help to increase the tourists' revisit intentions upon destinations (Atsız & Seyitoğlu, 2022).

## 4. Conclusion

This research calls attention to P2P local-guided bike tour experiences in sharing economy context and how tourists perceive these tours. The results reveal that P2P local-guided bike tours are acknowledged as engaging activities to explore a destination. Moreover, these tours provide multi-dimensional and rich experiences, including discovery, hedonic, safety and comfort, edutainment, local interaction, and memorable experiences. Considering our findings, P2P local-guided bike tours can be defined as engaging activities that provide multidimensional and rich experiences and help explore a destination.

The world is experiencing a disruptive pandemic, and tourists prefer outdoor activities with rich experiences in the new normal of (post-)viral tourism (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2022). In this vein, P2P local-guided bike tours provided through sharing economy platforms can be valuable attractions for tourists seeking safe and rich content experiences. Eventually, this is the first study to raise the P2P local-guided bike tour experiences and how tourists perceive these tours. Therefore, it will guide scholars and practitioners, while future studies could shed more light on the subject.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

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