

# **Exploring the luxury train experience: A case study of the TranzAlpine train**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation aims to explore the key aspects that define a luxury train experience and assess the opportunities and risks of enhancing its appeal to luxury tourists. The research described here was rooted in a qualitative methodology, within an interpretive paradigm to analyse traveller reviews of 10 luxury trains worldwide from TripAdvisor, along with data from the TranzAlpine's website. Through thematic analysis, the research identified eight main themes that define the luxury train experience: Memories, Service, Food and beverages, Cabin, Excursions, Booking, Onboard amenities, and Travel assurance.

The study conducts an opportunity and risk analysis for incorporating these aspects into the TranzAlpine train service, aiming to transform it into a luxury tourism product. The findings suggest significant opportunities for the TranzAlpine to differentiate itself and attract luxury tourists by enhancing service quality, offering exclusive experiences, ensuring passenger comfort and satisfaction. However, risks such as the need for substantial investment, maintaining high service standards, and managing operational complexities must be carefully navigated.

This dissertation contributes to the literature on luxury train tourism and offers theoretical and practical insights for industry practitioners. In providing a detailed analysis of luxury train travel and its application to the TranzAlpine, the study proposes eight recommendations that could redefine the service, turning it from a scenic journey into a luxurious and memorable travel experience.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This dissertation aims to explore the key aspects that define the luxury train experience and evaluate the opportunities and risks associated with the TranzAlpine potentially embracing these aspects to appeal to luxury tourists. This chapter presents the background to and the significance of the research. It also outlines the objectives and questions of the research, summarises the methodological approach adopted, and concludes with an overall structure of the dissertation. Throughout the research, the intention is to offer insights and strategic recommendations that would potentially transform the TranzAlpine from a scenic journey to a luxurious one, taking into account both the opportunities and risks.

## 1.2 Research background

The concept of luxury train travel has evolved significantly over the last few decades, transitioning from a mere mode of transportation to an experience rich in comfort, exclusivity, and cultural immersion (Thirumaran & Raghav, 2017). This transformation is clearly shown in the rise of luxury train services worldwide – services offering unique travel experiences and combining scenic beauty with lavish amenities (Lee & Chen, 2017). The essence of luxury train travel revolves around both the destinations reached and the journey itself, where travellers seek a blend of history, culture, and comfort (Dogra & Karri, 2020).

Despite the global recognition of luxury trains, such as the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express in Europe or the Maharajas' Express in India, New Zealand's TranzAlpine train has not traditionally been categorised within this luxury segment (100% Pure New Zealand, n.d.b). The TranzAlpine trip, renowned for its scenic beauty, travels across the South Island of New Zealand, offering breath taking views of the Southern Alps and other natural landscapes (100% Pure New Zealand, n.d.c). However, its current

positioning in the market is more of a scenic train trip rather than a luxury experience (Great Journeys NZ, n.d.g).

The luxury train market has been identified as niche and is a growing segment in the tourism industry, attracting a specific clientele that values not only comfort and exclusivity but also the cultural and historical aspects of the journey (Pring, 2019). These aspects are crucial in distinguishing luxury train travel from conventional travel options. The market's expansion is driven by the increasing demand for unique and immersive travel experiences, a trend that has grown among luxury travellers (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022).

In light of this trend, exploring the opportunities and understanding the risks for the TranzAlpine in potentially aligning with luxury market demands present a significant area of interest. By integrating luxury elements, TranzAlpine could redefine its market position, thus attracting luxury tourists seeking premium experiences. This adaptation could include upgrading service quality, enhancing onboard amenities, and enriching other travel experiences to align with the key aspects that characterise luxury train travel (Lee & Chen, 2017). Such adaptations would require evaluating both the opportunities for enhancing its market position and the risks associated with achieving a true luxury offering.

### **1.3 Research aims and questions**

The primary aim of this research was to identify key aspects that contribute to a luxury train experience from a tourist perspective, with an emphasis on the aspects that elevate a train journey from merely scenic to luxurious. Additionally, this study aimed to assess what opportunities and risks the TranzAlpine (currently a scenic train journey in New Zealand) might encounter if it chose to integrate these aspects to enhance its appeal to luxury tourists. While there is considerable research on various aspects of luxury experiences in the tourism industry, there remains a gap in the understanding of these elements specifically in the context of luxury train travel. Therefore, this research

intended to bridge that gap, identify the existing service offerings of TranzAlpine and compare them to the expectations of the luxury train travel market. By analysing the key aspects that define luxury train experiences globally, the research sought to offer practical insights to transform the TranzAlpine train into a luxury train experience. To guide this exploration, the research was centred around two key questions:

1. What are the key aspects of the luxury train experience?
2. What opportunities and risks could the TranzAlpine face if it chose to incorporate these key aspects to attract luxury tourists?

The outcome of this research offers insights into the key aspects of luxury experiences in train travel and proposes how these can be effectively applied to the TranzAlpine train. This benefits the management of TranzAlpine (or similar scenic trains) in planning their service enhancements and contributes to the broader body of knowledge in luxury train tourism. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide valuable directions for future research in the field of luxury train experiences.

#### **1.4 Significance of the research**

The significance of this research extends beyond the context of New Zealand's TranzAlpine train, as it offers insights into the broader luxury train industry. This study explores the possibilities and risks involved in transitioning the TranzAlpine from a scenic to a luxury service, thereby making significant contributions to the field of luxury tourism, a subject of growing interest in academic communities (Kataya, 2021). It highlights the increasing demand among tourists who seek experiences that are not ordinary but extraordinary, indicating significant potential for transforming traditional services to meet these elevated expectations (Iloranta, 2019). The research findings could serve as a blueprint for other train services aiming to enter or enhance their position in the luxury market, a sector that has shown resilience and growth potential even in challenging economic times (Besinovic, 2020). The study's emphasis on customer perspectives in defining luxury experiences provides a customer-centric approach to service enhancement (Turunen, 2017). This aligns with current trends in

tourism research which place a high importance on customer experience when developing products (Kataya, 2021).

By identifying key aspects that attract luxury tourists, the research provides recommendations for enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are crucial for the success of luxury train services. The potential transformation of the TranzAlpine could also stimulate broader economic benefits for the New Zealand tourism sector, demonstrating how traditional services can adapt to changing market demands, as highlighted by Sakovska et al. (2023). Overall, the study not only contributes to the academic literature by filling a gap in luxury train travel research but also provides strategic insights for industry professionals looking to elevate their service in the competitive luxury tourism market.

### **1.5 Research methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology within an interpretative paradigm to explore the subjective aspects of luxury train experiences and assess the opportunities and risks associated with integrating these aspects into New Zealand's TranzAlpine train service. This approach allowed an understanding of luxury tourists' preferences, crucial for addressing the research questions, to be obtained. A key component of the methodology was the use of netnography, an online ethnographic technique, to study online communities and cultures (Kozinets, 2022). The main source of data for this research was the reviews of 10 globally recognised luxury trains found on TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor was selected for its extensive collection of user-generated content, offering authentic insights into the experiences of luxury train travellers (Perinotto et al., 2023). Initially, a total of 4,305 reviews were collected across 10 different luxury trains, representing a broad range of luxury tourist experiences. To manage the large dataset within a limited timeframe, a 10% sampling method was adopted, leading to a focused analysis of 432 reviews. This subset was selected

through random sampling, using a random number generator to eliminate any potential researcher bias (Ma et al., 2016).

The data collected from TripAdvisor reviews were systematically organised and analysed using QSR International's NVivo 12, a software tool designed for qualitative data analysis. NVivo facilitated the thematic analysis of the data, enabling the identification of patterns, codes, and themes emerging from the reviews (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows for a deep exploration of data (Braun & Clarke, 2022), making it an ideal tool for understanding the key aspects of luxury train experiences as perceived by customers. Using NVivo 12 enhanced the reliability and validity of thematic analysis, providing a robust framework for interpreting the qualitative data. The themes derived from this analysis were then utilised to conduct an opportunity and risk analysis, exploring how incorporating these key aspects into the TranzAlpine train's offerings could influence its appeal to luxury tourists and impact its market position.

## **1.6 Dissertation structure**

This dissertation unfolds over five chapters, each serving a specific purpose in the exploration of the luxury train experience and gap analysis of New Zealand's TranzAlpine train. The introductory chapter sets the foundational tone of the research, detailing the background, aims, and research questions that the study seeks to answer. It also highlights the research's significance, provides an overview of the methodological approach that supports the research, and outlines the structural composition of the entire dissertation.

Following the introduction, Chapter Two reviews the literature, presenting the theoretical foundation relevant to the luxury train market. This chapter explores the dynamics of demand and supply in luxury tourism, highlighting the evolving preferences of luxury tourists. It also examines the supply side, including an analysis of luxury transportation, particularly luxury trains, tracing their historical development,

revival, and tangible and intangible aspects. This chapter also includes a focused case study of New Zealand's TranzAlpine train, analysing its place within the broader context of luxury train experiences. Further, it delves into the transition from ordinary to extraordinary in luxury services and assesses the opportunities and risks of luxury positioning. This chapter concludes with a summary identifying gaps in the literature, setting the stage for further investigation.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the methodology, elaborating on the research design and the interpretive paradigm guiding the qualitative approach. It details the netnographic approach utilised, the population and sampling strategies employed, and the rigorous process of data collection. A thorough explanation of the data analysis process using NVivo 12 for thematic analysis is provided, reinforcing the study's credibility. Following the data analysis, the chapter also introduces a comparative analysis, comparing the TranzAlpine train with internationally recognised luxury trains to identify opportunities for enhancement and the potential risks involved in targeting luxury tourists.

Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion, where the key themes identified from the analysis are discussed in depth. This chapter also assesses the opportunities and risks associated with incorporating these findings into the TranzAlpine service offering, providing a strategic overview for enhancing its appeal to luxury tourists.

Finally, Chapter Five concludes the dissertation, summarising the key findings and offering recommendations for enhancing the luxury aspect of the TranzAlpine train. It also highlights the limitations encountered during the study and suggests directions for future research in the domain of luxury train travel, emphasising the need for understanding the opportunities and risks in aligning with luxury tourism expectations.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a comprehensive literature review, exploring the luxury tourism market and focusing on luxury train travel. It navigates the dynamics of demand and supply within the luxury tourism sector, highlighting the evolving preferences and expectations of luxury tourists. The chapter delves into various aspects of luxury transportation, with a particular emphasis on the unique niche of luxury train travel. It extensively covers the historical evolution, current trends, and future potential of luxury trains worldwide. The chapter includes a case study of New Zealand's TranzAlpine train, distinguishing its specific characteristics within the broader context of luxury train experiences. It highlights the opportunities and challenges associated with repositioning services like the TranzAlpine and transitioning from ordinary to extraordinary. This review seeks to identify gaps in the existing literature, particularly focusing on the TranzAlpine train in the context of luxury train tourism to evaluate the potential opportunities and risks it could face if it were to initiate engagement in the luxury segment. The chapter aspires to deepen the understanding of luxury train travel and its implications for similar services, concentrating on how aligning the TranzAlpine with luxury train attributes could present a valuable opportunity.

### **2.2 Luxury tourism market**

The luxury tourism market has experienced significant changes over the past few decades, evolving into a multifaceted industry that caters to a wide range of preferences and expectations (Kataya, 2021). This market is characterised by exclusivity, high quality, and unique experiences (Iloranta, 2021). This segment of the tourism industry not only includes traditional luxury elements, such as opulence and comfort but has also adapted to include personalised and extraordinary experiences that create lasting memories (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022).



The luxury tourism market has shown resilience and adaptability, particularly in response to global economic fluctuations and changing consumer preferences (Dogru et al., 2021). This adaptability is evident in the market's continuous innovation and introduction of exclusive services and experiences, aiming to meet the dynamic demands of luxury tourists (Kataya, 2021). The market's responsiveness highlights the need for a deep understanding of luxury tourist demand and the supply side's role in shaping the luxury tourism experience (Popescu & Olteanu, 2014).

### **2.2.1 Demand**

Demand in the luxury tourism market is shaped by the distinctive preferences, aspirations, and behaviours of luxury tourists (Novotna & Kunc, 2019). These tourists seek not just luxury but also profound connections with the destinations they visit (Popescu & Olteanu, 2014). Their pursuit of exceptional and meaningful journeys creates significant demand for luxury tourism offerings, which include unique, immersive, and personalised experiences (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). Understanding the dynamics of luxury tourism demand is essential for stakeholders in the travel industry (Popescu & Olteanu, 2014). This approach is key to exceeding their expectations and fostering satisfaction and loyalty (Kataya, 2021). This exploration provides insights into how luxury tourism offerings can be tailored to meet and exceed the high standards of this luxury clientele.

#### **2.2.1.1 Luxury tourists**

Luxury tourists are discerning individuals who prioritise high-quality offerings, exceptional services, and outstanding environments in their quest for unique and memorable travel experiences (Iloranta, 2021). These affluent travellers are not merely in pursuit of luxury but also demand authenticity, uniqueness, and personalised services (Chang et al., 2016). Luxury tourists often seek extraordinary experiences that justify the high cost, showing a willingness to invest significantly in experiences that offer quality and prestige (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2023).

The quality of service is paramount for these tourists. They expect attentive, personalised service that caters to their individual needs, ensuring seamless and enjoyable experiences (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). Their preferences also revolve around immersive, culturally rich experiences, as they seek to connect deeply with the local culture and traditions of the destinations they visit (Novotna & Kunc, 2019; Sheldon, 2020). This desire for authentic interactions presents an opportunity for luxury tourism operators to craft experiences that align with the cultural and historical essence of destinations.

Luxury tourists are selective and actively seek out destinations and services that cater to their discerning tastes (Novotna & Kunc, 2019). They value experiences that are not just luxurious but also offer personal growth and emotional connection (Iloranta, 2019). Their investment in luxury travel comes with high expectations for reliability and flexibility, showing little tolerance for disruptions or inflexible policies (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). Understanding these luxury tourists' preferences and expectations also highlights their unique demands from the supply side of the luxury tourism market.

### **2.2.2 Supply**

The supply side of the luxury tourism market includes a diverse range of services and experiences offered by providers to meet the evolving demands of luxury tourists (Conrady, 2020). Understanding this side is crucial, as it reveals how luxury travel providers create and tailor experiences that resonate with the demands of luxury tourists (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). The market acts as a gateway to a broader landscape that includes luxury hotels, high-end services, and exclusive transportation options (Aeberhard et al., 2020).

Luxury hotels and resorts are integral as they offer opulent settings, personalised services, and a range of amenities that foster an atmosphere of indulgence (Harkison et al., 2018b). These establishments typically feature exquisite architecture, lavish

interiors, and exclusive amenities such as spas, private pools, and gourmet dining options, all contributing to an immersive luxury environment (Harkison et al., 2018a).

Beyond accommodation, the supply side also includes a variety of high-end services tailored to the unique desires of luxury tourists. These range from personalised concierge assistance to exquisite culinary experiences led by renowned chefs (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Luxury travel providers continuously innovate to offer distinctive and immersive activities that align with the modern luxury tourist's desire for unique and memorable travel experiences (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022).

Another essential component of the luxury tourism supply side is luxury transportation, which includes private jets, exclusive yachts, and luxury train services (Pring, 2019). These options offer travellers seamless and sophisticated mobility, enhancing the overall journey experience (Kovacic & Milosevic, 2016). Far from being just a means of travel, luxury transportation forms an important part of the luxury travel experience, reflecting its significance in the overall essence of luxury travel (Thirumaran & Raghav, 2017).

#### **2.2.2.1 Luxury transportation**

Luxury transportation is a mode of travel distinguished by exceptional quality, pricing, and a level of uniqueness that is typically accessible only to a select group of passengers who can afford its exclusivity (Kovacic & Milosevic, 2016). According to Gurzki et al. (2019), the democratisation of luxury transportation reflects a growing desire among increasingly sophisticated consumers for more frequent luxury experiences. This sector includes a variety of modes, such as luxury airlines, private jets, yachts, cruise ships, and luxury trains (Pring, 2019).

Cruise lines contribute significantly to luxury tourism, allowing travellers to visit multiple destinations while enjoying luxurious onboard experiences (Manthiou et al., 2017). Luxury cruise ships feature spacious suites, upscale dining, and premium

entertainment, all contributing to exclusivity and comfort throughout the journey (Chua et al., 2015).

Similarly, private jet operators cater to the demand for personalised and convenient travel, allowing luxury tourists to bypass the constraints of commercial airports, and offering a seamless, private flying experience (Klaus & Tarquini-Poli, 2022). With flexible schedules, personalised services, and privacy, it is especially appealing to high-net-worth individuals (Mrad et al., 2022).

Luxury train services represent a unique segment of luxury tourism, providing a nostalgic travel experience that echoes the golden age of rail travel (Lee & Chen, 2017). These trains are more than mere transportation; they are destinations in themselves, offering an immersive glimpse into an era of historical luxury and elegance (Dogra & Karri, 2020). They feature historically inspired carriages and offer onboard entertainment, creating scenic and immersive journeys (Lee & Chen, 2017).

### **2.3 Luxury trains**

Luxury train travel, renowned for its exclusivity, comfort, and opulence, transcends mere transportation, offering an experience steeped in historical charm and modern luxury (Lee & Chen, 2017; Pring, 2019). These trains, characterised by their lavish interiors and world-class amenities, evoke a bygone era of travel, blending nostalgia and romance with the sophistication of contemporary comforts (Dogra & Karri, 2020; Peira et al., 2022).

Increasingly popular among those seeking unique and immersive travel experiences, luxury trains are regarded not just as a means of transport but as destinations in themselves (Dogra & Karri, 2020; Lee & Chen, 2017). These trains journey along scenic routes designed to showcase picturesque views and provide access to iconic landmarks (Lee & Chen, 2017). This approach aligns with the principles of slow tourism, encouraging deep engagement with surroundings and cultural immersion (Sheldon, 2020).

The appeal of these trains is partly due to their emphasis on exclusivity and privacy (Pring, 2019). With limited seating and personalised service, they cater to those who value intimate settings and seek an escape from conventional tourism crowds (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). This exclusive environment, combined with curated itineraries, positions luxury trains as a distinctive and appealing segment in the luxury travel market, attracting affluent travellers in pursuit of extraordinary journeys (Pring, 2019).

### **2.3.1 History of luxury trains**

The history of luxury trains, marked by innovation and opulence, began with George Pullman. In the late 19th century, Pullman introduced luxurious sleeper cars, equipped with comfortable berths and elegant furnishings, that revolutionised train travel, transforming it from mere transportation to an experience of indulgence (Scarlett & Rouleau, 2022). This concept was further developed by George Nagelmaker, who envisioned the train not just as a transport vehicle but as a mode of luxurious indulgence, leading to the creation of trains offering unmatched comfort and refinement (Pring, 2019).

During this era, luxury trains became the exclusive domain of the elite, epitomised by the introduction of the iconic Orient Express in 1883 (Pring, 2019). This train, connecting major European cities, heralded the Golden Age of luxury train travel and was particularly popular among the aristocracy and celebrities (Pring, 2019). It was an era in which luxury trains became a symbol of elegance, with sumptuous interiors, exquisite furnishings, and fine dining (Hudgins, 2019). During this period, in 1923 the Blue Train in South Africa was established, and the luxury British Pullman cars began operating in the United Kingdom in the 1920s (Pring, 2019).

The mid-20th century, however, saw a decline in luxury train travel due to the rise of commercial aviation, offering faster and more convenient travel (Lee & Chen, 2017). Many iconic trains like the Orient Express route and the British Rail Brighton Belle were discontinued, and rail travel shifted towards more economical and practical options

(Peira et al., 2022). This period marked a significant transition in the luxury travel industry, with air travel emerging as the preferred mode for many travellers, leading to a fall in demand and popularity within the luxury train segment (Pring, 2019).

### **2.3.2 Revival of luxury trains**

The late 20th century witnessed a resurgence of interest in rail journeys, combining the nostalgia of traditional travel with contemporary luxury and technological innovation (Pring, 2019). This period saw the reintroduction of the Royal Scotsman in Scotland and the transformation of Canada's Rocky Mountaineer, both exemplifying the blend of rich heritage with modern comforts and amenities (Brown, 2016; Green, 2021).

As the 21st century introduced new travel preferences inclined towards immersive and culturally enriching experiences, luxury trains adapted to meet these evolving expectations (Pring, 2019). They began to offer destination-focused itineraries, cultural interactions, and curated activities, transforming train travel into an all-inclusive luxury experience. Features such as observation cars, onboard bar facilities, and gourmet dining further enhanced their appeal, offering passengers a holistic retreat amidst scenic landscapes (Pring, 2019).

The charm of luxury train journeys, coupled with modern luxury and sophistication, has continued to attract passengers seeking unique and exclusive travel experiences (Hudgins, 2019). Traversing stunning landscapes, these trains offer a sense of escapism and provide journeys that are as captivating as the destinations themselves (Lee & Chen, 2017).

This revival became a global phenomenon, with various countries around the world introducing or reinventing luxury train services (Verma, 2015). Some notable examples include the Rocky Mountaineer in Canada, The Ghan in Australia, and the Maharajas' Express in India, each renowned for immersive experiences and top-tier services (Dogra & Karri, 2020; Lee & Chen, 2017).

The continuous evolution of luxury trains reflects their ability to adapt and thrive in a changing travel landscape. From their opulent beginnings to innovative modern enhancements, luxury trains have consistently redefined the travel experience, offering not just transportation but enchanting voyages that transcend the boundaries of time and space (Dogra & Karri, 2020).

### **2.3.3 Worldwide luxury trains**

The concept of luxury train travel is a global phenomenon, with various countries offering distinct and opulent rail experiences (Aeberhard et al., 2020). Each luxury train service around the world reflects its unique blend of comfort, cultural immersion, and high-quality service, contributing to a diverse understanding of what constitutes luxury in train travel (Lee & Chen, 2017).

For example, The Venice Simplon-Orient-Express which represents the epitome of European rail luxury, connects Venice to Paris and is characterised by its historical opulence, gourmet dining, and scenic views that captivate the essence of European elegance (Pring, 2019). In contrast, Canada's Rocky Mountaineer offers a different perspective with its glass-domed carriages, showcasing the natural beauty of the Canadian Rockies and extending warm hospitality to its passengers (Brown, 2016).

Similarly, The Ghan in Australia provides an expansive journey from Darwin to Adelaide, immersing travellers in Australia's rich history and indigenous culture amidst luxurious amenities (Dolce, 2020). India's Maharajas' Express transcends traditional train travel, connecting passengers to India's cultural heartlands through opulent interiors and enriching itineraries (Dogra & Karri, 2020). The Blue Train in South Africa is another exemplary icon, offering journeys between Pretoria and Cape Town with unparalleled luxury, showcasing the diverse landscapes of Africa (The Blue Train, 2020).

These examples of luxury train services, along with the Belmond British Pullman, Cruise Train Seven Stars in Japan, Palace on Wheels in India, and the Royal

Scotsman in Scotland, collectively illustrate the varied interpretations of luxury in train travel (Pring, 2019). They transcend conventional transportation, offering immersive experiences that blend the allure of travel with exclusivity and luxury (Dileep & Pagliara, 2023). Not every country has a luxury train service; some have scenic train trips – for example, New Zealand’s TranzAlpine train. To enhance the understanding of the distinct characteristics of these train journeys, a comparative table is summarised (see Table 1) with key features, such as travel length, travel time, frequency of travel, and the nature of trips (overnight vs. day trips).

**Table 1** *Comparative Overview of Worldwide Luxury Trains*

Luxury Train	Travel Length	Travel Time	Frequency of Travel	Trip Type	Source
Belmond British Pullman	Varies	4–13 hours	Scheduled departures	Day	(Belmond Ltd., n.d.b)
Cruise Train Seven Stars	3000km	1–3 nights	Weekly	Overnight	(Kyushu Railway Company, n.d.)
Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express	9289km	6–15 nights	Scheduled departures	Overnight	(Golden Eagle Luxury Trains Ltd., n.d.)
Maharajas’ Express	Varies	3–7 nights	Weekly	Overnight	(Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation Ltd, n.d.)
Palace on Wheels	2411km	8 days / 7 nights	Weekly	Overnight	(Palace on Wheels, n.d.)
Rocky Mountaineer	300 – 450km a day	1–13 nights	Twice a week	Day	(Rocky Mountaineer, n.d.a)
The Blue Train	1600km	3 days / 2 nights	Weekly	Overnight	(The Blue Train, n.d.)
The Ghan	2979km	3 days / 2 nights	Weekly	Overnight	(Journey Beyond Rail, n.d.a)



The Royal Scotsman	Varies	2–7 nights	Scheduled departures	Overnight	(Belmond Ltd., n.d.c)
Venice Simplon-Orient-Express	Varies	1–4 nights	Weekly	Overnight	(Belmond Ltd., n.d.d)
TranzAlpine Train	223km	5 hours one way	Daily	Day	(Great Journeys NZ, n.d.h.)

### 2.3.4 TranzAlpine train: A case study

The TranzAlpine train, a highlight of New Zealand’s tourism, offers a unique perspective on train travel (100% Pure New Zealand, n.d.a). Renowned for its route from Christchurch to Greymouth as shown in Figure 1, this journey showcases New Zealand’s diverse topography, including the Canterbury Plains and the Southern Alps (Great Journeys NZ, n.d.h). Passengers are immersed in stunning vistas of snow-capped mountains, lush forests, and pristine rivers, all from the comfort of cosy seating and large windows (100% Pure New Zealand, n.d.c; Great Journeys NZ, n.d.e).

**Figure 1** *TranzAlpine Route Map*



*Note.* Source: Great Journeys NZ (n.d.h)

Unlike conventional luxury trains, the TranzAlpine’s appeal lies in its emphasis on scenic and experiential value rather than traditional luxury amenities (Great Journeys

NZ, n.d.g). This approach offers a different angle to train travel, focusing on the natural beauty and tranquillity of the landscapes traversed, appealing to tourists seeking adventure and relaxation (Great Journeys NZ, n.d.e). The onboard commentary provides additional insights into the regions encountered, enriching passengers' understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's natural environment (Great Journeys NZ, n.d.a).

As a case study, the TranzAlpine train demonstrates how a scenic train journey can successfully attract both international and domestic travellers, carving out its niche in the broader train travel market (Pearce & Sahli, 2007). It highlights the versatility of train travel offerings, showing that the appeal can extend beyond luxury amenities to include the beauty and uniqueness of the journey itself (100% Pure New Zealand, n.d.a). The TranzAlpine exemplifies an alternative model within the train tourism sector, emphasising the experiential richness of New Zealand's landscapes. This case study contributes to understanding the broader context of train travel experiences and the potential for scenic routes to attract a wide range of tourists.

#### **2.4 Luxury train experience**

The luxury train experience is a unique fusion of history, opulence, and exclusive service that caters to discerning travellers (Lee & Chen, 2017). These experiences are not just about transportation but about creating a journey that is as memorable as the destination itself (Thirumaran & Raghav, 2017). Around the world, luxury trains like the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, The Ghan, and the Rocky Mountaineer offer distinct experiences that are deeply rooted in the culture and scenery of their regions (Pring, 2019). These journeys are characterised by fine dining, lavish interiors, and personalised services (Hudgins, 2019). Each journey offers luxury travellers the experience of a unique blend of scenic beauty, cultural immersion, and relaxation in a setting that offers privacy and exclusivity (Lee & Chen, 2017).

### **2.4.1 Evolution of luxury train experience**

Historically, luxury trains were synonymous with lavish interiors and elegant furnishings, offering travellers a heightened sense of comfort and style (Pring, 2019). However, the luxury train experience has evolved from luxurious transportation to an immersive, personalised voyage that engages all the senses (Zhang & Tse, 2018). This concept has now further transformed significantly, shifting towards a focus on holistic and enriching journeys that offer much more than transportation (Maitra et al., 2021).

This transformation is rooted in the growing desire for experiential travel (Osburg et al., 2022). Modern luxury trains are designed to provide passengers with an all-inclusive experience, integrating cultural immersion, scenic marvels, and exceptional services (Lee & Chen, 2017). These services now often include curated sightseeing excursions, onboard workshops, gourmet dining, and interactions with local experts, elevating the journey to a comprehensive experience (Lee & Chen, 2017).

Technological advancements have also played a crucial role in enhancing the luxury train experience (Pring, 2019). The incorporation of high-speed internet connectivity, advanced entertainment systems, and personalised digital services have become integral to modern luxury trains, ensuring passengers enjoy both connectivity and the tranquil solitude unique to train travel (Verma, 2015). As this evolution unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident how the tangible and intangible aspects intertwine to shape the overall luxury train experience, highlighting the importance of each element in delivering a journey that transcends traditional travel.

### **2.4.2 Tangible and intangible aspects of the luxury train experience**

The appeal of luxury train experiences lies in the blend of tangible and intangible aspects that together create an enchanting and transformative journey (Lee & Chen, 2017). These aspects combine to define the essence of luxury train travel, offering a unique mix of comfort, exploration, and cultural immersion (Kumar, 2017).

Tangible aspects include the physical components contributing to the journey's opulence and comfort. Luxurious interiors, exquisite furnishings, and advanced amenities transform train carriages into moving palaces on rails (Pring, 2019). Features like spacious cabins, elegantly designed lounges, and gourmet dining cars contribute to an unparalleled environment of luxury (Pring, 2019). These elements are exemplified by trains like the Andean Explorer, which pampers passengers with opulent decor and innovative Peruvian cuisine (Belmond Ltd., 2023a), and the Maharajas' Express in India, where each carriage is a reflection of royal palaces (Kumar, 2017).

However, the intangible aspects are what truly elevate the luxury train experience (Chen, 2022). These include the emotions, connections, and memories formed during the journey (Peira et al., 2022). Personalised service and attention to detail, provided by dedicated onboard staff, are central to these experiences (Aeberhard et al., 2020). They ensure that every need is met with elegance and care, making passengers feel valued and pampered (Hudgins, 2019; Lee & Chen, 2017). Cultural immersion is also integral, with activities like performances, workshops, and guided tours that engage passengers with local life and history (Aeberhard et al., 2020). This is evident on the Blue Train, where cultural experiences deepen the appreciation for the destinations visited (The Blue Train, 2020).

The interplay of luxurious settings, personalised service, cultural engagement, and a leisurely pace creates a journey that goes beyond ordinary travel (Aeberhard et al., 2020). These luxury train experiences offer a narrative of discovery and indulgence, where passengers are not just observers but active participants in a journey of exploration and luxury.

### **2.4.3 Motivations for luxury train experiences**

The motivations driving tourists towards luxury train travel extend beyond the simple pursuit of opulence; they encompass a variety of factors that highlight the unique appeal of this form of travel (Dogra & Karri, 2020). For instance, luxury tourists are

drawn to luxury train journeys for their ability to offer an unhurried, immersive experience that fosters a deeper connection with the landscapes and cultures encountered (Lee & Chen, 2017). In a world dominated by fast-paced lifestyles, the luxury train experience allows individuals to slow down and savour the voyage, fostering a reconnection with the concept of leisurely exploration (Kosykh et al., 2023).

Another key motivation is the desire for an alternative to traditional travel routines (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). Luxury trains stand out from other modes of transport, for example, air travel, by offering the opportunity to explore multiple destinations within a single journey (Verma, 2015). This characteristic transforms the trip into a multifaceted adventure, heightening the anticipation for each new stop and the experiences that lie ahead (Pring, 2019).

The allure of exclusive, captivating luxury destinations also plays a significant role in the appeal of luxury train travel (Thirumaran & Raghav, 2017). Destinations known for their beauty, cultural significance, and upscale amenities are powerful motivators for those seeking memorable experiences (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017). The desire to explore iconic cities, breathtaking landscapes, and historical sites adds a layer of enchantment to the journey (Lee & Chen, 2017). As Novotna and Kunc (2019) noted, the unique attributes of luxury destinations significantly influence travellers' decision-making, making those attributes a compelling motivation for luxury train travel.

For example, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express offers a voyage through the charming European countryside, connecting iconic cities like Paris and Venice in an experience reminiscent of past elegance (Pring, 2019). Canada's Rocky Mountaineer showcases the majestic Canadian Rockies, offering passengers stunning natural vistas (Brown, 2016). In India, the Palace on Wheels takes travellers through Rajasthan's historical wonders (Kumar, 2017). The motivations behind these luxury train journeys reflect a diverse range of traveller desires, from seeking leisurely exploration in a fast-paced

world to escaping traditional travel routines for transformative adventures (Kosykh et al., 2023).

## **2.5 Ordinary to extraordinary: Transitioning to luxury**

Discussing the journey from ordinary to extraordinary explores the transformative path of brands and services as they evolve from standard offerings to the premium luxury market. This shift extends beyond elevating prices; it requires a rebranding that reshapes the brand's identity, offerings, and customer experience to meet the expectations of the luxury sector (Gurzki et al., 2019). An example of this transformation is the Blue Train of South Africa, which originally served as a goods and passenger train for industries and commerce before repositioning itself as one of the most luxurious train experiences globally (Ahmed et al., 2022). The train underwent extensive refurbishments, introducing lavish suites, gourmet dining experience, and personalised butler services, significantly elevating its appeal to the luxury tourism sector (Ahmed et al., 2022). Similarly, Hermes transitioned from a saddle maker to an iconic luxury handbag brand, representing a shift from functional craftsmanship to a luxury status symbol (Sugimoto & Nagasawa, 2017).

Another example is Burberry, a brand that transformed its image from a British outdoor attire manufacturer to a global luxury fashion icon (Robinson & Hsieh, 2016). Initially known for its practical trench coats designed for the military, Burberry strategically repositioned itself in the luxury segment by incorporating high-fashion designs, innovative marketing, and digital engagement strategies, thus appealing to a high-end consumer base (Olteanu, 2020).

These examples highlight the critical elements of successfully transitioning into the luxury sector, which often requires rethinking of the brand's value proposition, marketing strategies, and customer engagement practices (Nana et al., 2019). In making these moves, these brands have managed to not only redefine their market positioning but also to create a new legacy of exclusivity and prestige (Sugimoto & Nagasawa, 2017).

## **2.6 Opportunities and risks of luxury positioning**

Incorporating luxury positioning into tourism services presents various opportunities and risks that businesses need to consider carefully. Firstly, integrating luxury elements can significantly enhance the brand's value, distinguishing it as a premium offering within the tourism market. Chapman and Dilmeri (2022) argued that luxury offerings can raise a brand's perceived value, thereby attracting discerning travellers seeking exclusive experiences. Moreover, targeting luxury tourists opens access to a high-value market segment characterised by a willingness to spend on uniqueness, authenticity and personalised service, potentially leading to increased revenue per customer (Ioana-Daniela et al., 2018). Additionally, positioning as a luxury service grants access to the growing global luxury tourism market, which is increasingly seeking unique and immersive travel experiences (Santos et al., 2023). Delivering luxury experiences can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, driving repeat business and positive word-of-mouth recommendations, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability and growth of the business (Song & Kim, 2022; Yoo & Park, 2016).

However, transitioning to a luxury service model also entails certain risks that businesses must consider carefully. Firstly, significant upfront investment is required to upgrade facilities and staff training, and make marketing and service enhancements. Filimonau and Magklaropoulou (2020) cautioned that the initial costs associated with this transformation can strain financial resources and require a thorough cost–benefit analysis to ensure financial viability. Additionally, targeting luxury tourists' during transformation has a risk of alienating existing customer segments who may view the service as less accessible or affordable, potentially narrowing the market and impacting visitor numbers (Al-Issa et al., 2024). Furthermore, maintaining consistent luxury standards poses operational challenges, as any lapse in service quality can affect customer satisfaction and brand reputation in the luxury sector (Mabila et al., 2023). Lastly, market demand for luxury experiences may be subject to fluctuations influenced by economic conditions, travel trends, and changing consumer preferences,

necessitating a proactive approach to understanding and adapting to market dynamics (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022).

## **2.7 The gap in knowledge**

This dissertation aims to explore the key aspects that define the luxury train experience, focusing specifically on evaluating the opportunities and risks for New Zealand's TranzAlpine train in integrating these aspects to enhance its appeal to luxury tourists. Scholars such as Lee and Chen (2017) and Pring (2019) have delved deep into luxury train experiences, highlighting their historical evolution and the tangible and intangible elements that make these journeys so appealing to luxury tourists. Thirumaran and Raghav (2017) and Zhang and Tse (2018) focused on the motivations driving luxury tourists towards these extraordinary and luxurious train journeys.

Despite these insights, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific key aspects that define the essence of luxury within these train experiences. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by identifying these key aspects of luxury, thus offering a fresh perspective in the domain of luxury tourism. Moreover, there is a noticeable void in academic literature specifically addressing the potential for scenic trains, like the TranzAlpine, to align with the luxury train market. This research aims to address this gap by identifying the opportunities and risks involved in integrating luxury elements into the TranzAlpine train, thus offering a new perspective on this domain of luxury tourism. This approach not only pertains to the specific case of the TranzAlpine but also serves as a potential model for other scenic train services aiming to elevate their status within the luxury tourism sector.

By analysing the key aspects of luxury train experiences and assessing the potential opportunities and risks for the TranzAlpine, this dissertation seeks to enrich the literature on luxury train travel and provide strategic insights for the train's development as a luxury tourism product. This identified gap in knowledge offers a unique



opportunity for this research to make meaningful contributions, both theoretically and practically, to the field of luxury train travel.

## **2.8 Summary**

This literature review has provided an exploration of the luxury tourism market, with a particular focus on the niche segment of luxury train travel. The chapter highlighted the luxury tourism market by defining its characteristics, exclusivity, high-quality services, and unique experiences. The discussion then shifted to the demand and supply dynamics within this market, emphasising the evolving preferences of luxury tourists who seek authenticity, personalised services, and immersive cultural experiences.

The chapter discussed the supply side, where the focus was directed towards the embodiment of opulence in luxury transportation, and how luxury train travel has evolved, starting from its lavish beginnings to its modern-day resurgence as a symbol of exclusive and culturally rich travel. The review included a global perspective in examining various iconic luxury trains worldwide. These examples established a context for understanding the potential of luxury train travel, including a case study of New Zealand's TranzAlpine train. Although not traditionally a luxury service, the TranzAlpine presents a unique opportunity in this market.

The chapter culminated in a discussion of the luxury train experience, detailing the tangible and intangible aspects that contribute to its allure. It emphasised the importance of not only the physical luxury elements but also the emotional and experiential dimensions that luxury train travel offers. The motivations driving tourists towards these unique journeys were also explored, revealing a desire for more than just luxury but for enriching, slow-paced, and culturally immersive experiences.

Additionally, the examination of the transition from ordinary to extraordinary and the discussion of the opportunities and risks of luxury positioning illuminated the strategic considerations involved in elevating a service from standard to luxury. This analysis of this transition highlighted the potential benefits and challenges of repositioning within

the luxury market, underlining the importance of strategic planning and understanding the luxury consumer.

Furthermore, the identification of a research gap regarding the specific key aspects that define the essence of luxury within these train experiences and the void in academic literature specifically addressing scenic trains, like the TranzAlpine train emphasises the unique contribution this research aims to make in the field of luxury train travel. The following chapter details the research methodology and approach used to explore this gap, paving the way for an understanding of the potential transformation of the TranzAlpine train into a luxury tourism train.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study explores the key aspects of the luxury train experience and examines the opportunities and risks the TranzAlpine train could encounter in adopting these aspects to attract luxury tourists. This chapter outlines the research design, paradigm, and approach guiding this exploration. A netnographic methodological approach is central to the study, providing a comprehensive overview for data collection and analysis, with an emphasis on thematic analysis using NVivo 12 software. The chapter also addresses the importance of validity, reliability, and ethical considerations in handling publicly available online data, ensuring the integrity of the research.

### **3.2 Research design**

The research design is important in shaping this study, and in guiding the selection of methodologies, data collection strategies, and analytical techniques (Chu & Ke, 2017). In exploring the luxury train experience, this study adopts a qualitative approach, ideal for uncovering key aspects that attract luxury tourists (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research offers deep insights into human experiences, which is crucial for understanding the complex nature of luxury tourism (Hillman & Radel, 2018).

Unlike quantitative methods, which rely heavily on numerical data, qualitative research delves into experiences, opinions, and motivations (Bryman, 2016). This is relevant to the research, which seeks to understand the aspects of luxury train travel that go beyond what quantitative statistics can reveal (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). The study identifies the essential aspects that draw luxury tourists to luxury trains and assesses the opportunities and risks involved in integrating these aspects into the TranzAlpine service to attract luxury tourists. The qualitative approach, aligning with an interpretivist paradigm, is crucial (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It enables an exploration of the luxury

train experiences from the passengers' perspectives, as expressed in their comments and reviews.

### **3.2.1 Research paradigm – Interpretivism**

A research paradigm is a conceptual framework that guides researchers in their observation and analysis, forming the foundation for understanding various methodologies and methods (Gannon et al., 2022). The selection of an appropriate research paradigm is critical for effectively navigating and interpreting the complexities of social phenomena (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Among the main paradigms identified by Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson (2017) – positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and interpretivism – this study adopts the interpretive paradigm, which is suited for exploring the luxury train experience. Interpretivism focuses on understanding subjective human experiences and perceptions (Liu et al., 2022), making it an ideal philosophical foundation for this research. This paradigm is relevant to an investigation of the preferences and perceptions of luxury tourists in train travel, as it allows for an exploration of their subjective realities and experiences (Dogra & Karri, 2020; Myers, 2019).

### **3.2.2 Netnographic approach**

Netnographic methodology is a technique that involves the systematic collection and analysis of online content from platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and travel blogs (Kozinets, 2022). For this research, TripAdvisor was chosen for its reliable and transparent review system (Kotur, 2022). Additionally, TranzAlpine-related websites were selected for their direct insights into service offerings, which were essential for understanding the TranzAlpine train. The study followed the steps of netnographic research, including identifying relevant online communities, data collection, coding, analysis, and interpretation of findings (Kozinets, 2020).

Netnography's relevance extends into the domain of the tourism sector, where online assessments of travel experiences provide unfiltered insights from reviewers (Veríssimo & Costa, 2019). This method bypasses the need for individual consent when using data from publicly accessible websites, enabling uninhibited participant interactions (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). Its value lies in reaching individuals who are otherwise difficult to engage due to the exclusive and private nature of luxury travellers, which is significant for understanding luxury train travel (Wu & Pearce, 2014). Netnography is widely applied across various tourism contexts, such as wellness tourism and wine tourism, due to its effectiveness in capturing authentic traveller experiences and perceptions (Kotur, 2022; Mishra & Panda, 2021). This research utilises netnography to delve into the luxury train travel domain, leveraging its ability to gather rich, qualitative insights from online platforms, which are particularly valuable in understanding the experiences and expectations of luxury train travellers.

### **3.3 Population and sampling**

#### **3.3.1 Definition of population**

The term 'population' refers to the entire group of individuals or entities under investigation (Gray, 2022). In the context of this research, it refers to tourists who have experienced luxury train travel and have shared their insights online. This study focuses on tourists who have journeyed on one of the 10 globally recognised luxury trains, chosen for their international acclaim and representation of diverse geographical regions (Rizzo, 2022). These trains are Maharajas' Express of India, the Belmond British Pullman of England, the Cruise Train Seven Stars of Japan, the Palace on Wheels of India, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express of Europe, the Blue Train of South Africa, The Ghan of Australia, the Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express of Russia, the Royal Scotsman of Scotland, and the Rocky Mountaineer of Canada (Kumar, 2023).

Luxury train travel is characterised by several key aspects, such as breathtaking scenic routes, opulent cabins, and exemplary service standards, creating an immersive, high-

quality travel experience (Aeberhard et al., 2020; Pring, 2019). The experiences offered aboard these trains encapsulate the epitome of luxury and comfort, earning them accolades and capturing the imaginations of travellers worldwide (Tarlow, 2014; Verma, 2015). The insights of these luxury train travellers are invaluable for understanding the essence of luxury train travel, which is crucial for this study's aim of assessing the opportunities and risks in enhancing the TranzAlpine train's appeal to luxury tourists. The identification of the unique characteristics and preferences of this niche segment of luxury train travellers paves the way for the subsequent sampling strategy.

### **3.3.2 Sampling strategy**

Sampling in research involves selecting a representative subset from the defined population (Gray, 2022). For this study, the sampling criteria centred around choosing publicly available reviews on reputable travel websites, particularly TripAdvisor, known for its comprehensive travel-related content (Filiari et al., 2021). Several criteria were utilised during the review selection process to ensure a comprehensive and credible dataset (Hennink et al., 2019). These criteria were time frame, purposive sampling, percentage sampling, and random sampling.

#### **3.3.2.1 Time frame**

This criterion covered the publication date of reviews, which was selected to be between July 2017 and July 2023 to ensure relevance and recency (Kim et al., 2018). The choice of this timeframe was influenced by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global tourism industry (Gosling et al., 2021). Travel restrictions led to a significant reduction in travel activity, leading to fewer available reviews from certain periods and expressions of frustration over cancellations (Jacobsen et al., 2023). This study adopted this extensive timeframe, spanning seven years, to ensure thorough coverage.

### **3.3.2.2 Purposive sampling**

To further refine the sample, a purposive sampling method was applied, aligning with the qualitative nature of this study. This method relies on researchers' judgement, facilitating the selection of reviews that directly address the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Rai & Thapa, 2015). This approach enables researchers to identify and include reviews that are particularly relevant to their study's goals, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of their research (Campbell et al., 2020). Thus, in this study, reviews with insufficient content, such as one-word or one-sentence responses, were excluded to ensure that the selected reviews provided substantial information relevant to the research objectives.

### **3.3.2.3 Percentage sampling**

After the purposive selection, the study faced the challenge of managing a large dataset of 4,305 reviews (see Table 2). To address this, a percentage sampling method was applied, in which 10% of the reviews from each luxury train were selected, resulting in 432 reviews for analysis. This method ensured the dataset's richness and diversity while making it more manageable (Bryman, 2016; Rathnayaka & Jayalal, 2021).

### **3.3.2.4 Random sampling**

After reducing the dataset to 10% of the total reviews, a random sampling technique was employed, involving the use of a random number generator to select distinct reviews from this subset for analysis. The use of a random number generator was critical in eliminating any potential researcher bias (Ma et al., 2016). This step maintained the integrity and diversity of the sample and ensured that the analysis reflected a wide range of passenger experiences across the various luxury train services.

**Table 2** Summary of Luxury Train Reviews and Selected Reviews for Analysis

Luxury Train	Destination	TripAdvisor Reviews (July 2017- July 2023)	Selected Reviews (10% of Reviews)
Belmond British Pullman	England	490	49
Cruise Train Seven Stars	Japan	1	1
Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express	Russia	90	9
Maharajas' Express	India	28	3
Palace on Wheels	India	35	4
Rocky Mountaineer	Canada	2481	248
The Blue Train	South Africa	220	22
The Ghan	Australia	639	64
The Royal Scotsman	Scotland	10	1
Venice Simplon-Orient-Express	Europe	311	31
<b>Total</b>		<b>4305</b>	<b>432</b>



### **3.4 Data collection**

#### **3.4.1 Selection of data sources**

The selection of data sources is a critical decision in any research endeavour. For this study, TripAdvisor was chosen as the main data source, as it is recognised for its rich repository of user-generated content, particularly traveller reviews and ratings (Filiari et al., 2021). This extensive database offers valuable resources for tourist behaviours, preferences, and experiences, making it an ideal resource for understanding luxury train travel (Saydam et al., 2022; Soltani-Nejad et al., 2022; Stoleriu et al., 2019; Van der Zee & Bertocchi, 2018). As an open platform, TripAdvisor offers unbiased, first-hand accounts that are essential for a study focusing on the subjective and experiential aspects of luxury train journeys (Marine-Roig, 2017; Nasution et al., 2023).

The reviews on TripAdvisor are significant for this research, as they offer insights into the key aspects of luxury train experiences, directly addressing the first research question. The qualitative information within these reviews is suitable for investigating key aspects, such as service quality, scenic beauty, and overall satisfaction (Garner & Kim, 2022; Marine-Roig, 2017). This strategic selection ensures access to a comprehensive and credible dataset, facilitating in-depth analysis and understanding of luxury train experiences within the research context (Kotur, 2022; Safaaa et al., 2017). The specific procedures used to gather and prepare the data from TripAdvisor for analysis are discussed next.

#### **3.4.2 Data collection process**

The data collection process is a vital component of any research study. The description of the process provides insights into the step-by-step approach, which encompasses identifying online communities, systematically collecting data, coding and analysing it, and interpreting the findings (Kozinets, 2020). For this study, the data collection involved a systematic approach to extracting reviews from TripAdvisor. The first step was accessing the TripAdvisor platform, focusing on the pages dedicated to the 10

selected luxury trains. Each train's review section was thoroughly examined, adhering to the timeframe of July 2017 to July 2023. The reviews were then filtered to include only those written in English, ensuring consistency in language for analysis. In addition, during this process, reviews containing one word or one sentence were removed. This step was undertaken to enhance the overall quality and relevance of the selected data for analysis. After this initial filtering, a 10% sampling strategy was applied to manage the volume of reviews. From each train's reviews, 10% were randomly selected using a random number generator. In total, 432 reviews were collected as data for this study, as detailed in Table 2.

The selected reviews were then compiled into an organised dataset. Following TripAdvisor's guidelines and ethical standards for data use, the reviews were collated into an Excel sheet. This process was done manually to ensure accuracy and to include relevant data like the main review, title, review date and rating, which are crucial for the subsequent thematic analysis. Once compiled, the Excel sheet was uploaded to NVivo 12 software for further analysis. NVivo was chosen for its capabilities in handling large datasets and facilitating efficient thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017), a key component of the study's qualitative approach. This methodical data collection process was crucial in ensuring that the study had a rich and relevant dataset, laying the foundation for an in-depth analysis of the luxury train experience.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The data analysis phase in this study was crucial for extracting meaningful insights from the collected TripAdvisor reviews (Lester et al., 2020). To achieve this, thematic analysis was adopted, a method recognised for its effectiveness in identifying patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method aligned with the research objective of exploring the key aspects that attract luxury tourists to train travel. It systematically categorised recurring themes or patterns within the rich textual content of TripAdvisor reviews (Garner & Kim, 2022), extracting valuable insights about the luxury train experience.

The thematic analysis process was facilitated by using NVivo 12 software. NVivo 12 software offers a systematic and efficient means of organising, coding and analysing large volumes of qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). Its application in this research is justified by its capacity to manage the extensive dataset of luxury train reviews compiled from TripAdvisor. The combination of thematic analysis and NVivo software equipped the study with a comprehensive approach to extracting meaningful insights from the textual data gathered in this research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022), comprises six key phases (see Table 3).

**Table 3** *Thematic Analysis Process*

Phases of Analysis	Description of the Process
Familiarising with Data	Immersing in the data, transcribing, and noting initial ideas
Generating Initial Codes	Systematic coding of relevant data segments
Searching for Themes	Organising codes into potential themes, grouping related data
Reviewing Themes	Checking and refining themes, creating a thematic map
Defining and Naming Themes	Establishing clear definitions and names for each theme
Producing the Report	Finalising the analysis, relating it to the research question

For this study, 432 TripAdvisor reviews of 10 luxury trains, spanning July 2017 to July 2023 were analysed. The initial phase of familiarisation with the data involved a thorough reading of the reviews in NVivo 12 (Sommer et al., 2018). Subsequently, a systematic coding process was undertaken across the different trains to assign

relevant portions of the text to specific codes (Nowell et al., 2017). Notably, saturation was reached after reviewing seven trains, indicating a comprehensive capture of relevant codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

These codes were refined through an iterative process involving manual and electronic methods: writing down codes, creating physical chits for each code, and arranging them to form coherent themes aligned with the research questions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Ultimately, eight themes were identified: Memories, Service, Food and beverages, Cabin, Excursions, Booking, Onboard amenities, and Travel assurance. These themes were not only reflective of the luxury train experience but also crucial in understanding what aspects can be incorporated into the TranzAlpine train operation to attract luxury tourists. The themes directly addressed the research questions, providing a nuanced understanding of luxury train travellers' expectations and experiences, following the principles of Braun and Clarke (2022). This detailed, systematic approach to thematic analysis using NVivo enabled a comprehensive understanding of the luxury train experience, providing valuable insights for this research.

### **3.6 Validity and reliability**

Ensuring the validity and reliability of research findings is crucial for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the study (Gharib et al., 2019). Following the definition of Ahmed and Ishtiaq (2021), in this research, validity refers to the extent to which the findings accurately represent the luxury train experience and their relevance to the TranzAlpine train. To enhance validity, a rigorous thematic analysis methodology, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), was employed. This involved systematic data coding, categorisation, and theme development, providing a robust framework for interpreting complex qualitative data accurately (Nowell et al., 2017).

Reliability, which relates to the consistency and replicability of the research process and findings, was a key focus of this study (Wright et al., 2021). The use of NVivo software contributed significantly to enhancing the reliability of this study. NVivo offered

systematic and consistent data organisation and coding, ensuring a repeatable analysis process (Kraiwanit et al., 2023). Additionally, the coding process was validated by my supervisor, Associate Professor Tracy Harkison, who reviewed the themes and codes in NVivo, adding an extra layer of reliability to the analysis. To ensure reliability, the research process was conducted with full transparency, detailing each step taken to identify themes and codes (Wright et al., 2021). This transparency not only upholds the integrity of the study but also allows for the possibility of replication by other researchers, enabling them to verify the consistency of the findings (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016).

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Integrity and ethical conduct are fundamental aspects of the research process, especially when dealing with publicly accessible online data (Cilliers & Viljoen, 2021). This study involves data collection from TripAdvisor, where users have voluntarily shared their experiences (Nasution et al., 2023). Given that the data is already in the public domain and does not entail direct interaction with research participants, formal ethical approval is not required (Roberts, 2015). However, ethical principles are rigorously observed to ensure the rights and privacy of the reviewers are respected.

To safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the reviewers, all data was anonymised during the analysis (Roberts, 2015). This involves removing any personally identifiable information, such as names and contact details, to prevent the disclosure of the reviewers' identities (Sugiura et al., 2017). Additionally, the references were appropriately cited following academic referencing standards, thereby acknowledging the original authors and maintaining academic integrity (American Psychological Association, 2023). By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the research not only respects individual rights but also aligns with the principles of integrity and respect in handling publicly available online data sources (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2022).

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter has provided a detailed outline of the methodology employed in this study, which aimed to explore the key aspects of luxury train experiences and assess the opportunities and risks of incorporating these aspects into the TranzAlpine train to attract luxury tourists. Adhering to an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative research framework, the study adopted a netnographic approach to analyse data from TripAdvisor. This approach was crucial in capturing the experiences of luxury train travellers. A thorough process, involving purposive, percentage, and random sampling strategies, was implemented to ensure a representative and rich dataset. The thematic analysis, facilitated by NVivo 12 software, allowed for a systematic examination of the data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

The study also maintained strict ethical standards, respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the data sources. The methodologies and approaches detailed here set the foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion, aimed at comprehensively understanding the luxury train travel experience in general and offering recommendations to enhance the TranzAlpine operation. Overall, this chapter has established a robust framework for investigating luxury train travel, setting the stage for insightful findings and discussions in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the luxury train experience, derived from findings obtained from reviews of 10 luxury trains. The analysis identified eight key themes that define this unique travel experience, as perceived by passengers. These themes are Memories, Service, Food and beverages, Cabin, Excursions, Booking, Onboard amenities, and Travel assurance. The chapter delves into each theme in detail, exploring the aspects that luxury tourists value most and how these aspects contribute to the overall appeal of luxury train travel. The four most prominent themes are Memories, Service, Food and beverages, and Cabin. This chapter concludes with an opportunity and risk analysis, assessing the potential for the TranzAlpine to integrate these key aspects.

### 4.2 Key themes influencing the luxury train experience

The analysis of traveller reviews from TripAdvisor revealed eight key themes that form the essence of the luxury train experience. As shown in Table 4, these themes represent the aspects most valued by luxury tourists.

**Table 4** *Themes Influencing Luxury Train Experience*

Themes	Count	Percentage	Ranking
Memories	791	25%	1
Service	664	21%	2
Food and beverages	532	17%	3
Cabin	458	14%	4

Excursions	271	8%	5
Booking	210	7%	6
Onboard amenities	156	5%	7
Travel assurance	84	3%	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>3166</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The analysis highlights that ‘Memories’ emerged as the most prominent theme, accounting for 25% of mentions in the reviews, representing a substantial portion of the total. This is closely followed by ‘Service’, which comprised 21% of mentions, and ‘Food and beverages’ at 17%. The themes of ‘Cabin’ at 14%, ‘Excursions’ at 8%, and ‘Booking’ at 7% also contributed notably to the comments, each playing an important role in shaping the luxury train journey’s appeal.

The themes ‘Onboard amenities’ and ‘Travel assurance’, accounting for 5% and 3% of mentions respectively, were less frequently referenced in traveller reviews, indicating a more limited influence on the luxury train experience, as reflected in their lower rankings. This analysis aligns with the study’s focus on identifying the key aspects of the luxury train experience and assessing the opportunities and risks for the TranzAlpine in incorporating these aspects into the service offerings to attract luxury tourists.

### **4.3 Memories**

‘Memories’ emerged as the most significant theme of the luxury train experience, accounting for 25% of mentions in the analysis of selected reviews. This theme includes passengers’ reflections on the unique and unforgettable experiences they



encountered during their journeys. Luxury trains like the Rocky Mountaineer and Venice Simplon-Orient-Express are cited in approximately 300 reviews for their exceptional ability to create lasting and cherished memories, which are integral to the luxury experience. Several key aspects of this theme emerged, as follows.

Firstly, an unforgettable and comfortable welcome experience is a key aspect, setting the stage for a memorable journey. This is highlighted by a Rocky Mountaineer passenger's experience, demonstrating the importance of initial moments in creating lasting impressions:

*"From the moment I was boarding the train, the unforgettable and amazing experience became non-stop. It made my whole journey full of comfort and happiness!" (Reviewer 3)*

Secondly, the scenic beauty encountered during the journey significantly contributes to the creation of lasting memories. This is exemplified by the experience of a traveller on the Rocky Mountaineer from Vancouver to Banff, who emphasised the role of stunning landscapes in enriching their journey:

*"Just a perfect two days from Vancouver to Banff with the most amazing scenery ..., but this is definitely the best way to experience an unforgettable journey." (Reviewer 37)*

Thirdly, luxury train journeys are often chosen as locations to celebrate special occasions, which adds to the significance of the memories created. An example of this was highlighted by a passenger on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express who celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary onboard, underscoring the role of luxury train travel in marking significant life milestones:

*"We were on the train for our 25th wedding anniversary- and it certainly made it a memorable trip." (Reviewer 2)*

Lastly, the end of the journey often leaves a lasting emotional imprint on passengers. This sentiment was expressed by a traveller on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, who shared their hesitation to end the journey, reflecting on the deep emotional connections and sense of attachment formed during the trip:

*"We didn't want to leave! Thank you for the amazing memories!" (Reviewer 4)*

The findings show that memories formed during luxury train journeys are not merely about physical travel but emotional and experiential journeys. These memories, as seen through the passengers' reviews, become a key aspect of the overall luxury train experience. As highlighted by Bosangit et al. (2015), such experiences can forge deep emotional connections, turning a journey into a series of memorable stories. Luxury train operators should therefore focus on these aspects of the journey, understanding that each moment has the potential to become a cherished memory. This aligns with Kim's (2018) perspective on the importance of memorable tourism experiences in shaping a destination or service's brand and customer loyalty. By crafting journeys that deeply connect with passengers, luxury train travel can elevate an ordinary trip into an extraordinary experience filled with memorable moments (Lee & Chen, 2017).

#### **4.4 Service**

'Service' in luxury train travel emerged as another vital theme, with 21% of total mentions, emphasising its crucial role in defining the luxury train experience. Reviews from passengers who have embarked on journeys with different luxury trains, such as the Maharajas' Express, Rocky Mountaineer, and Belmond British Pullman, consistently highlighted the exceptional service that elevates their train ride from ordinary to extraordinary. Several key aspects of this theme emerged, as follows.

Firstly, staff performance stands out as the key aspect of exceptional service, with 61 reviews specifically commending the onboard staff's attentiveness, politeness, and expertise. An example is a Belmond British Pullman passenger who lauded the service, emphasising that luxury train services consistently meet such high standards:

*"Call outs for the Zena cabin attendants James & Katrina who made the journey so enjoyable. Their politeness, attentiveness to detail and humour made the ride such a pleasurable experience." (Reviewer 1)*

Secondly, exceptional attention and care offered by staff are significant aspects of luxury service. This is exemplified by a passenger's experience on the Maharajas' Express, highlighting the staff's dedication to ensuring comfort and satisfaction:

*"The service on board is second to none, and they really can't do enough for you." (Reviewer 2)*

Additionally, the friendliness and meticulous attention to detail of staff significantly enhances the quality of service. This sentiment was reflected by a Rocky Mountaineer passenger who appreciated the commitment of the attendants in delivering a remarkable experience, thereby making the luxury train journey both memorable and delightful:

*"The onboard service was exceptional, the attendants were so knowledgeable, personable, and professional." (Reviewer 10)*

Lastly, the consistency of service quality is also a crucial aspect. Although most reviews are positive about the service, there were instances where the service quality fell short of expectations. For instance, a passenger on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express remarked on inconsistencies in service quality, emphasising the importance of consistently high standards in service to fulfil passengers' expectations:

*"Unfriendly (or perhaps unhappy) staff." (Reviewer 8)*

The findings show that exceptional service quality is integral to the luxury train experience, aligning with research that has emphasised the significance of service in luxury tourism (Harkison, 2022; Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). It also aligns with the work of Harkison (2022), who emphasised the significance of high-quality, personalised service in luxury tourism settings. The reviews also clearly illustrate how interactions with staff, their attentiveness, and the personalisation of service significantly enhance the overall experience. This focus on excellence in service meets the expectations of luxury tourists who seek comfort and meaningful and personal experiences (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that, as in any service industry, there can be variations in service quality, and recognising these variations is vital for understanding every aspect of passenger experiences and expectations (Benitez & Medina, 2022; Eboli et al., 2018; Korfiatis et al., 2019). Instances where passengers perceived staff as less friendly serve as reminders of the importance of maintaining consistently high service standards. To attract luxury tourists, luxury train operators can learn from these findings by prioritising staff training and service excellence, ensuring that every passenger consistently encounters exceptional service (Engeset et al., 2016).

#### **4.5 Food and beverages**

'Food and beverages' in luxury train travel emerged as the third most important theme, accounting for 17% of total mentions, highlighting its significant role in enhancing the overall experience. Culinary experiences in luxury tourism go beyond basic nourishment; they are central to crafting the overall ambience and elegance of the journey. Reviews from passengers who embarked on luxurious train journeys, including the Belmond British Pullman, The Ghan, and the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, unveil the significance of exceptional dining experiences, emphasising that these experiences are as vital as the journey itself. These dining experiences offer a sensory indulgence that seamlessly complements the scenic beauty and opulence of the travel. Several key aspects come to the forefront of this theme.

Firstly, gourmet excellence is essential in luxury train travel. Passengers aboard the Belmond British Pullman have high expectations of culinary quality, as illustrated by one passenger's praise, highlighting the importance of gourmet cuisine:

*"The food was sensational and was of a standard in terms of flavour and presentation seen in a Michelin star restaurant." (Reviewer 1)*

Secondly, the ambience of the dining car is just as critical aspect of the experience as others. A Rocky Mountaineer traveller's description emphasised the significance of a luxurious setting in enhancing the dining experience, contributing to the overall charm of the journey:

*"Breakfasts and lunches ... in the dining car complete with linen table cloths and impeccably prepared and presented meals." (Reviewer 8)*

In addition, the bar experience contributes significantly to the overall enjoyment, providing not only refreshments but also a unique and leisurely ambience, as recalled by a Venice Simplon-Orient-Express passenger:

*"The car with the bar and piano was very full. We were lucky to get seating and enjoyed singing along with the piano player while enjoying cocktails and appetisers." (Reviewer 5)*

However, criticisms were also noted, with a guest on the Belmond British Pullman expressing dissatisfaction with the food's presentation and variety. Similarly, a traveller on The Ghan critiqued the dining ambience and food quality, particularly in the Platinum club lounge<sup>1</sup> and dining carriage, underscoring the need for maintaining high standards in both service and environment:

*"Again disappointed with the food. No garnish ... The cheese course was very disappointing ... No crackers ... We felt cheated." (Reviewer 2)*

*"The Platinum club lounge and dining carriage was quite small with no atmosphere also a bit dated and cheap furnishings ... The food was very disappointing for the money you paid." (Reviewer 3).*

The findings illustrate that, in luxury train travel, the culinary journey, inclusive of both gourmet dining and the bar experience, is as integral as the physical journey itself. The expectation of gourmet dining, highlighted in luxury tourism literature (Chen & Peng, 2018; Panchapakesan et al., 2021), is evident in passenger testimonials. High-quality food, comparable to Michelin-star standards, and a luxurious dining ambience resonate with luxury travellers (Batat, 2020). Additionally, the bar experience, creating a social and enjoyable ambience, is a fundamental aspect of the journey, enhancing the overall leisure experience (Hudgins, 2019).

However, critiques regarding the consistency of food presentation, variety, and ambience in dining and bar areas are noteworthy. This aligns with the findings of Abdullah et al. (2022), which suggested that any shortcomings in these areas can

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Platinum Club Lounge' on The Ghan train is an exclusive lounge and dining area for Platinum Service guests. It is designed to offer a premium experience with luxurious seating, an exclusive menu, and high-end service (Journey Beyond Rail, n.d.b).

significantly impact the overall perception of luxury and satisfaction. Therefore, for luxury train operators, excelling in both culinary offerings and the bar experience is not merely an added value, but a fundamental aspect of the luxury experience.

#### **4.6 Cabin**

'Cabin' in luxury train travel emerged as the fourth theme of the luxury train experience, with 14% of total mentions, reflecting that it is integral to the overall luxury and comfort of the journey. The cabin serves as a personal retreat that encapsulates the essence of luxury train travel, combining aesthetics, comfort, and personal space. This was evidenced in reviews from passengers on prestigious trains, like the Belmond British Pullman and the Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express. Key aspects of the cabin experience include the following.

Firstly, the design and décor of the cabin are crucial in creating a luxurious ambience. This aspect is highlighted by a passenger's remarks about the Belmond British Pullman, which noted the cabin's capacity to evoke nostalgia and luxury, emphasising the significance of aesthetics:

*"The train and carriages are beautiful and take you back to how train travel used to be." (Reviewer 8)*

Secondly, the variety and quality of in-cabin amenities are key aspects of the 'Cabin' theme. A Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express passenger appreciated the range of thoughtful amenities in their cabin, highlighting their significant contribution to the luxury experience:

*"The ensuite bathroom was more than adequate. They provided slippers, shampoo, earplugs, gowns etc!" (Reviewer 4)*

Furthermore, the comfort of the seating within the cabins is a significant aspect. Passengers on the Rocky Mountaineer, for example, praised the seating, highlighting the importance of physical comfort in luxury travel:

*"The seats are leather, electrically operated and very comfortable, an important consideration seeing as you are going to be sitting in them for 16 hours over 2 days!" (Reviewer 5)*

Lastly, the challenges concerning cabin size and comfort are also an important aspect of the cabin theme in luxury train travel. This aspect primarily addresses critiques about the cabins' dimensions and the level of comfort they provide. For instance, passengers on The Ghan expressed concerns, particularly regarding the Gold Class cabins. Although the Gold Class cabins represent a premium offering with superior service and amenities, their limited size was noted as a challenge. This situation underscores the difficulty in achieving a balance between luxury features and spatial constraints:

*"The difference in cabin size will make a huge difference to your experience. Gold Class cabins are really small and near claustrophobic." (Reviewer 5)*

The findings reveal that cabins in luxury trains are not merely functional spaces but key elements that define the journey's luxury experience. The discussion of the cabin experience in luxury train travel aligns with several perspectives on luxury tourism, where personalisation and attention to detail are paramount (Aeberhard et al., 2020; Kataya, 2021; Popescu & Olteanu, 2014). The role of cabin decor and ambience contribute significantly to the nostalgic and luxurious feel, resonating with passengers seeking an escape into a bygone era of travel (Aeberhard et al., 2020; Pring, 2019). Additionally, the focus on cabin size and comfort aligns with the work of Iloranta (2019), who highlighted the importance of personal space and privacy in luxury settings.

However, as noted in the critiques, maintaining high standards in cabin design, space, and amenities to meet the sophisticated expectations of luxury tourists is important. Meeting these expectations could ensure the perceived value and satisfaction of the luxury train experience is maintained, as indicated in the work of Dogra and Karri (2020) and Lee and Chen (2017). These insights suggest that luxury train operators must find a delicate balance between the luxury decor and the practical, comfortable cabin spaces that are essential for passenger satisfaction. This would ensure that each cabin is not just a place of travel, but a sanctuary of luxury and relaxation.

## 4.7 Excursions

'Excursions' in luxury train travel, accounting for 8% of total mentions, stand out as the fifth theme of the luxury train experience. Excursions offer passengers a deeper exploration and connection with their destinations, extending the luxury experience beyond the confines of the train. Reviews from various luxury trains like the Belmond British Pullman and the Rocky Mountaineer highlighted the significance of excursions in enhancing the travel experience. Several key aspects emerged as integral to this theme.

Firstly, the aspect of engaging and enriching excursions stands out prominently. A passenger on the Belmond British Pullman described their positive experience with the guided tours, emphasising the value of well-organised and immersive excursions in enriching the luxury travel experience:

*"When we arrived at the Chesterfield Train Station we were greeted by local guides and seamlessly transferred to motor coaches for the transfer to Chatsworth. Our local guide pointed out the local highlights and set the stage for our visit to Chatsworth. We had a little over two hours at Chatsworth and enjoyed every moment! Be prepared for the wonderful gift shops - they have unique, quality souvenirs and we bought some fun gifts for our loved ones and ourselves!" (Reviewer 2)*

Secondly, the quality of accommodation during offboard stays is a crucial aspect, reflecting the expectation of a smooth transition in luxury from the train to the hotels where passengers stay. A guest on the Rocky Mountaineer, which offers the 'GoldLeaf' service,<sup>2</sup> praised this aspect, emphasising the significance of consistent, high-quality accommodation that complemented the overall luxury of their journey:

*"We did the Gold Leaf with the top-end hotel upgrades, so included the Fairmont Lake Louise and Fairmont Banff hotels—HIGHLY RECOMMENDED." (Reviewer 3)*

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<sup>2</sup> The 'GoldLeaf' service provided by the Rocky Mountaineer includes luxury amenities onboard and superior hotel accommodation, exemplifying a high-end service that extends the luxury experience beyond the train journey (Rocky Mountaineer, n.d.b).



Thirdly, the calibre of tour guides significantly impacts the excursion experience. Guides who are knowledgeable and engaging significantly enhance the educational and cultural dimensions of the excursions. This was exemplified by a traveller on the Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express, who praised the exceptional guidance they received, emphasising the role of tour guides in elevating excursions into enriching and memorable experiences:

*"The whole trip was superbly guided by Tatiana, she made the journey very special." (Reviewer 2)*

However, consistency in offboard services and accommodation is also an essential aspect that requires attention in luxury train travel. Critiques concerning the quality of these services emphasise their significance. A review from a Rocky Mountaineer passenger, for instance, highlighted a notable discrepancy in the standard of luxury expected, especially concerning the 'GoldLeaf' service known for its premium amenities and accommodation. The passenger's dissatisfaction with their hotel stay underlines the need to maintain high standards across all facets of the excursion, ensuring a consistently luxurious experience throughout:

*"Sadly our hotel the Coast was appalling, not up to gold leaf standard!" (Reviewer 2)*

The findings indicate that excursions in luxury train travel are more than just additional activities; they are integral to shaping a luxury experience. This theme aligns with the broader perspectives of luxury tourism, where the focus is not only on the primary service but also on enriching the overall experience through additional offerings. As Aeberhard et al. (2020) suggested, luxury tourism increasingly involves creating holistic experiences beyond the core service. Similarly, the importance of well-organised and immersive excursions, as noted in passenger reviews, resonates with the findings of Lopes and Dredge (2018), who emphasised the significance of engaging and culturally enriching activities in travel. The inclusion of high-quality accommodation and expert guides, as reported by the passengers of luxury trains like the Rocky Mountaineer, highlights this approach, echoing the sentiments of Cetinkaya and Oter (2016) and

Padma and Ahn (2020) on the expectation of seamless luxury in every aspect of the journey.

However, the critiques regarding inconsistencies in offboard services highlight an area for improvement. The luxury travel market, as indicated by Lee and Chen (2017), is evolving to encompass every facet of the journey, including offboard experiences. Thus, maintaining a consistent standard of luxury in accommodation and excursions is crucial for meeting the high expectations of luxury tourists. As Iloranta and Komppula (2022) noted, luxury tourists seek cohesive and faultless experiences, where every detail contributes to the overall perception of luxury. This necessitates a meticulous approach by luxury train operators in ensuring that offboard experiences, from accommodation to the calibre of tour guides, match the luxury and attention to detail offered onboard. By achieving this consistency, luxury train operators can truly deliver a holistic luxury experience that meets the sophisticated demands of their clientele.

#### **4.8 Booking**

'Booking' in luxury train travel, constituting 7% of total mentions, is highlighted as the sixth theme that shapes the initial perception and overall satisfaction of the luxury train experience. The booking process serves as the first touchpoint between the customer and the service, setting the tone and expectations for the journey. Reviews from the Belmond British Pullman, Rocky Mountaineer, and other luxury trains shed light on the complexities and expectations surrounding the booking experience. Several key aspects emerge that shape this theme.

Firstly, the impact of arrangements during the booking process is a notable aspect. This is evident from a Belmond British Pullman passenger's review, highlighting the importance of aligning the booking process with personal preferences and expectations being met right from the start of the booking process:

*"As we were a late booking, we had a seat where we were sitting side by side rather than opposite each other which was a shame so when we book again,*

*we will make sure we request a table where we can sit opposite each other."*  
(Reviewer 1)

Secondly, the balance between pricing and value perception is a crucial aspect of the booking process. This was underscored by a Rocky Mountaineer traveller who reflected on the cost versus value of the service, highlighting the need for luxury train services to align their pricing with the perceived value, ensuring customers feel the experience is worth the investment:

*"One of the questions many people ask, is it worth the cost? Yes, it is expensive, but for a once in a lifetime trip arguably just about worth it."*  
(Reviewer 7)

Thirdly, the presence of booking challenges, including unclear information, inflexibility, and refund issues, is an aspect that raises crucial concerns about the essence of luxury travel. A Rocky Mountaineer passenger's review brought attention to these issues. Such situations, where passengers are financially impacted by inflexible policies, clash with the fundamental principles of luxury travel that indicate it should offer a stress-free experience. This highlights the need to implement transparent and customer-friendly policies aligning with the expectation that luxury should equate to peace of mind including in financial transactions:

*"Our trip from Jasper to Vancouver was cancelled by the company with less than 24 hours' notice... Rocky Mountaineer refused to refund our money because their Terms state they can change the itinerary with no notice!!!!"*  
(Reviewer 1)

Lastly, clear and effective communication during the booking process is an essential aspect. A Venice Simplon-Orient-Express customer highlighted the importance of communication, noting its significant impact on the overall booking experience and customer satisfaction. Effective communication is key to ensuring passengers are well-informed and their needs are acknowledged, thereby contributing to a smoother and more satisfying experience overall:

*"Aside from the booking process, which was problematic and a frustrating lack of communication, the actual trip was beyond all our expectations."* (Reviewer 1)

The findings show that the booking process in luxury train travel is not just a transactional phase but a pivotal part of the luxury experience, establishing the first impression and shaping expectations for the journey. This aligns with the insights of Cunha (2019), who emphasised the importance of every customer touchpoint in luxury tourism, including the booking experience. A seamless and customer-focused booking process can significantly enhance the perception of luxury and set a positive tone for the forthcoming journey (Chaichi et al., 2023).

However, challenges in the booking process, such as inflexibility and unclear information, can detract from the luxury experience. As highlighted in the critiques, luxury tourists expect a booking process that is transparent, flexible, and accommodating, reflecting the overall quality of the luxury service. This necessitates a more customer-centric approach, focusing on transparent policies and effective communication, as suggested by Andersen et al. (2023). This would not only enhance the initial impression but also set a positive tone for the ensuing luxury journey, which is crucial for maintaining high customer satisfaction and repeat business (Martinez-Gonzalez & Alvarez-Albelo, 2021). Therefore, luxury train operators must prioritise refining their booking procedures to align them with the high standards of luxury tourism, enhancing the overall customer experience and setting the stage for a memorable luxury journey.

#### **4.9 Onboard amenities**

'Onboard amenities' in luxury train travel, accounting for only 5% of total mentions, emerged as the second least influential theme in regard to enhancing the passenger experience. Despite its ranking, these amenities, which include audio commentary, observation decks, lounge experiences, and entertainment, transform the train journey from a mere mode of transportation into a richly immersive and luxurious experience. Luxury trains such as the Rocky Mountaineer, The Ghan and The Belmond British Pullman are exemplary in their provision of these amenities, enhancing the comfort,

engagement, and enjoyment of their passengers. Several key aspects emerged from this theme.

Firstly, engaging and informative commentary stands out as a key aspect of the 'Onboard amenities.' This is exemplified by a passenger's experience with the Rocky Mountaineer's 'SilverLeaf' service,<sup>3</sup> which illustrates how knowledgeable commentary can significantly enhance the travel experience:

*"Big shoutouts to Kristi, Sarah and Nook who looked after us in Silverleaf! They were so attentive to everyone's needs and had great stories about the history of the railway and communities along the way." (Reviewer 6)*

Secondly, unique viewing opportunities, especially through observation decks, are another vital aspect of this theme. These are particularly emphasised in the GoldLeaf service (features bi-level glass-dome coaches, exclusive dining, and an outdoor viewing platform) on the Rocky Mountaineer, which offers a premium experience compared to the SilverLeaf service. This difference underlines the significance of immersive viewing experiences, enabling passengers to fully appreciate the scenic beauty of their journey:

*"Goldleaf is 100% worth it for the additional viewing opportunities, large viewing platform." (Reviewer 16)*

Thirdly, lounge experiences for social interaction are significantly important. On trains such as The Ghan, lounge areas create essential social spaces for interaction and relaxation. A traveller's reflection on their experience emphasised the significance of these areas in facilitating social engagement, an essential part of the luxury travel experience:

*"Spending time in the lounge carriage was where we met and socialised with other passengers which was all part of the experience." (Reviewer 3)*

Fourthly, the inclusion of onboard entertainment, like live music and performances, significantly enhances the journey's enjoyment. A Belmond British Pullman passenger

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<sup>3</sup> The 'SilverLeaf' service by the Rocky Mountaineer offers single-level glass-dome coaches, panoramic views, comfortable seating, and attentive service, providing an immersive travel experience through the scenic routes (Rocky Mountaineer, n.d.c).

described their experience, emphasising how such entertainment added delight to the trip:

*"Onboard entertainment includes singers, magicians and bagpipe players, it really was money well spent and worth every penny." (Reviewer 3)*

Lastly, the integration of modern technological amenities, such as Wi-Fi, is becoming an increasingly significant aspect of the luxury train experience. In today's connected world, passengers often expect such conveniences even in traditionally luxurious settings where disconnecting might be presumed. This need is highlighted by a Ghan passenger's comment, pointing out a significant gap in meeting current technological expectations. The lack of Wi-Fi, now often deemed essential, indicates a key area for improvement in luxury train services:

*"Absolutely no commentary during the three days of where we were, things of interest or temperature etc, as there is no internet service it would be wonderful to know what's going on or at least have some TV screen up with updated information like you get when flying." (Reviewer 1)*

The findings highlight that 'Onboard amenities' is a theme of the luxury train experience, enhancing the overall journey's comfort, engagement and enjoyment. This observation aligns with the research of Harkison et al. (2018a), who emphasised the importance of unique and engaging experiences in luxury settings. The appreciation for detailed and informative commentary, the allure of observation decks, and the comfort of lounge spaces reflect a desire for an enriched travel experience. This resonates with Padma and Ahn's (2020) findings on luxury travellers' expectations, which emphasise the significance of exceptional service and tailored experiences in defining luxury travel.

However, critique regarding the lack of Wi-Fi technology indicates an evolving expectation among luxury travellers for connectivity, even in traditionally disconnected settings. This reflects the findings of Shin and Jeong (2022) on the growing demand for technological integration in luxury travel. Therefore, to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, luxury train operators must maintain high standards in traditional amenities

and adapt to modern technological advancements, ensuring a luxury experience that meets the expectations of today's sophisticated travellers.

#### **4.10 Travel assurance**

The final theme of this analysis, 'Travel assurance', accounting for only 3% of total mentions, emerges as critical yet often underappreciated in a luxury train experience. Despite being less frequently mentioned compared to other themes, it plays a vital role in shaping passengers' overall satisfaction and confidence in their travel experience. It includes the reliability of travel schedules, health and safety measures, adaptability to unforeseen circumstances, and passenger comfort. These factors collectively shape the trust and security passengers feel during their journey. Several key aspects have emerged from this theme.

Firstly, effectively managing delays and rerouting is crucial. This aspect is essential for maintaining passenger trust, as delays can significantly impact the travel experience. A Rocky Mountaineer passenger emphasised the importance of efficiently handling delays and changes in plans:

*"The two nights we got off the train there was a long delay and arrived at 9pm and later both nights. On the way into Vancouver, we stopped for two hours waiting for freight trains! We were told arrival was between 6&7pm and made dinner plans with friends at 8. We got to our hotel at 10:15." (Reviewer 3)*

Secondly, the implementation of consistent health and safety measures, especially during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic, is vital. A passenger on The Ghan emphasised the importance of clear and consistent health and safety protocols, which are essential for ensuring passenger well-being:

*"Since booking to travel on The Ghan they changed their COVID protocols meaning that what I thought would be a safe journey turned into a COVID unsafe journey. At no point at check in was I asked for vaccination status or any COVID questions to identify if I was a risk. There was no RAT test required. If you change and or relax your COVID rules for boarding your journeys passengers who booked with confidence prior to these changes need to be aware prior to boarding that you are no longer taking COVID safe precautions to protect passengers and staff. Had I realised that your journey was so lacking in COVID safety, I would not have travelled." (Reviewer 2)*

Thirdly, adaptability to unforeseen circumstances, such as changing weather conditions, is another key aspect that is crucial for maintaining service quality and meeting passenger expectations. For instance, passengers on The Ghan faced disappointment due to the cancellation of excursions caused by unseasonal heavy rains, emphasising the need for flexible itineraries and effective contingency planning:

*"The most disappointing aspect of the trip for us and many other people onboard train was the cancellation of the full-day excursion to Coober Pedy due to unseasonal heavy rains... What they can do is rethink the pace of the excursions, upgrade the cabins and ensure that off train catering is consistent with that onboard the train." (Reviewer 1)*

Lastly, addressing passenger comfort and well-being, including concerns like motion sickness, is crucial for an enjoyable journey. Passengers on luxury trains such as the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express and the Blue Train have expressed the need for attention to these details:

*"I wish someone would have told me to bring my motion sickness patch." (Reviewer 3)*

*"I even had to sit up for a while as I started to get motion sickness - not something I ever get in a car. The beds were hard and I woke up with back ache after I finally got a couple of hours of sleep." (Reviewer 1)*

The findings reveal that Travel assurance is vital in luxury train travel, influencing passenger satisfaction and trust. The effective management of delays, consistent health and safety protocols, flexible response to unforeseen events, and ensuring passenger comfort are key to delivering a superior travel experience. Eboli and Mazzulla (2015) emphasised the importance of service reliability and passenger safety in train travel, aligning with the need for effective delay management and health and safety measures. Furthermore, adaptability to unforeseen circumstances, such as changes in weather conditions, is crucial for maintaining service quality, as noted by Becken and Wilson (2016). Addressing physical comfort issues like motion sickness is also essential, resonating with findings by Kang (2020) on the importance of personal well-being in luxury travel. For luxury train operators, these insights highlight the need



to strengthen travel assurance measures, thereby enhancing passenger trust and satisfaction, and securing their position in the luxury train travel market.

#### 4.11 Opportunity and risk analysis for the TranzAlpine train

This section provides a detailed analysis of the opportunities and risks for the TranzAlpine train, focusing on the potential implications of incorporating the themes of luxury train travel to attract luxury tourists. The analysis aims to assess the strategic opportunities the TranzAlpine has in the luxury tourism market, while also considering the potential challenges it may face in this transition (see Table 5).

**Table 5** *Opportunity and Risk Analysis*

Themes	Opportunity	Risk
Memories	Enhanced branding through unforgettable experiences.	High expectations may lead to disappointment if not met.
Service	Differentiation through exceptional service quality.	Training and maintaining a high level of service can be costly.
Food and Beverages	Increased attractiveness with gourmet dining experiences.	Managing the complexities of onboard gourmet service.
Cabin	Improved passenger satisfaction with luxurious accommodation.	Limited space and investment required for cabin upgrades.
Excursions	Strengthened destination appeal and enriched travel experiences.	Dependency on external partners and weather conditions.
Booking	Streamlined booking experience enhancing customer satisfaction.	Complexities in pricing and providing flexible booking options.
Onboard Amenities	Enhanced travel experience with unique onboard features.	Balancing traditional luxury with modern technological needs.
Travel Assurance	Increased trust through reliable and safe travel experiences.	Handling unforeseen events and ensuring consistent quality.

Incorporating luxury aspects into the TranzAlpine train service offers both opportunities and risks, each intertwined with the other, showcasing the complex nature of making strategic moves in the luxury travel sector.

The opportunity to create unforgettable memories could enhance the branding of the TranzAlpine, making it a preferred choice among luxury tourists looking for unique travel experiences. This approach aligns with Kutlu and Ayyildiz (2021), who highlighted the significance of destination image in enhancing memorable tourism experiences and its impact on revisit intentions. However, Pine and Gilmore (2019) cautioned that such investments may not directly correlate with revenue, especially if expectations are not met, posing a risk of misalignment between investment and returns.

Similarly, the pursuit of exceptional service quality, as highlighted by Ngo and Nguyen (2016), can serve as a major differentiator, potentially elevating the TranzAlpine above its competitors. Yet, the substantial and ongoing investment required for training and maintaining such a high level of service quality introduces financial considerations and operational complexities (Murray & Holmes, 2021).

The introduction of gourmet dining experiences, aimed at attracting foodie tourists and increasing the train's appeal, also involves navigating the challenges and complexities of providing onboard gourmet services, which demand considerable expertise and resources (Hudgins, 2019).

The effort to upgrade cabins to luxurious standards can significantly improve passenger satisfaction and their willingness to pay a premium for the experience (Ioana-Daniela et al., 2018), but faces constraints related to significant investment requirements and spatial limitations, which might restrict the extent of possible enhancements (Chang et al., 2021).

The provision of well-curated excursions, enhancing the destination's appeal and offering deeper cultural and scenic engagement, is subject to the unpredictability of weather conditions and dependency on external partners, posing risks to the consistency of the travel experience (Becken & Wilson, 2016; Lopes & Dredge, 2018).

Furthermore, while a seamless booking experience can enhance customer satisfaction and contribute to positive word-of-mouth and repeat bookings (Wu & Law, 2019), the complexities involved in pricing, flexible booking options, and ensuring transparency may complicate the booking process (Xue et al., 2020).

Unique onboard amenities, such as bars and lounge cars, although enriching the travel experience (Padma & Ahn, 2020), require balancing modern technological amenities with the preservation of traditional luxury elements, introducing operational challenges (Shin & Jeong, 2022).

Finally, providing a reliable and safe travel experience is crucial for building trust among luxury tourists, yet managing unforeseen events, such as delays, and ensuring consistent quality across all journey aspects can be challenging (Aeberhard et al., 2020).

This comprehensive analysis highlights the need for strategic planning, continual quality improvement, and careful management of customer expectations. By adopting an approach that considers both the opportunities and risks associated with integrating the key aspects into the TranzAlpine train service, the initiative can navigate the complexities of the luxury travel market successfully. This analysis serves as a roadmap for recommendations which are discussed in the next chapter, which could guide the TranzAlpine train in catering to the luxury tourism market.

#### **4.12 Summary**

This chapter has explored the luxury train experience through a detailed analysis of TripAdvisor reviews, aligning these insights with the literature. The study has identified

and discussed eight key themes that influence the luxury train experience: Memories, Service, Food and beverages, Cabin, Excursions, Booking, Onboard amenities, and Travel assurance. Each theme highlights a distinct aspect of luxury train travel, from the creation of unforgettable memories to the assurance of safety and comfort.

The opportunity and risk analysis conducted for the TranzAlpine offers a comprehensive overview of potential strategic opportunities and challenges in integrating these key aspects to attract luxury tourists. This analysis not only underlines TranzAlpine's current strengths in catering to luxury tourists but also illuminates areas requiring strategic enhancements. The chapter has increased the understanding of important aspects of the luxury train experience, offering strategic directions for boosting TranzAlpine's appeal in the luxury market, and paving the way for its transformation into a premium luxury train travel experience. The next chapter gives an overview of the dissertation and discusses its limitations, recommendations and areas for future research.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This dissertation set out to explore the key aspects that define the luxury train experience and to evaluate the opportunities and risks associated with the TranzAlpine potentially integrating these aspects to appeal to luxury tourists. This final chapter summarises the main findings, addressing the research questions by detailing the key aspects that contribute to the luxury train experience and assessing the opportunities and challenges for the TranzAlpine. It highlights the implications for the luxury train sector and offers recommendations for enhancing the TranzAlpine's appeal to luxury tourists, based on identified opportunities and risks. Finally, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of this study and proposes directions for future research in the field of luxury train travel.

### **5.2 Answering the research question**

This study aimed to identify the key aspects that define the luxury train experience and assess the opportunities and risks associated with the TranzAlpine potentially incorporating these aspects to appeal to luxury tourists. Utilising a qualitative methodology and a thematic analysis of TripAdvisor reviews, eight major themes were identified as central to the luxury train experience: Memories, Service, Food and beverages, Cabin, Excursions, Booking, Onboard amenities, and Travel assurance. Each of these themes encompasses several key aspects critical to defining the luxury train experience.

The first theme, 'Memories', emerged as the most influential, highlighting the creation of unforgettable, emotionally resonant experiences. Key aspects of this theme include the scenic beauty of the journey, special welcome experiences, and the emotional impact of the trips, especially when tied to special occasions. This theme underlines

the importance of designing journeys that are comfortable and rich in storytelling and emotional engagement.

The second theme, 'Service', highlighted the critical role of staff performance, attentiveness, and personalisation. Key aspects here include the consistency of high-quality service, the staff's ability to personalise experiences, and their attentiveness to passenger needs. However, instances of service inconsistency remind luxury train operators of the importance of maintaining high service standards.

The third theme, 'Food and beverages', focused on the significance of culinary experiences, going beyond mere nourishment to add to the journey's elegance and ambience. Key aspects of this theme are the quality and presentation of gourmet cuisine, the dining car's ambience, and the overall dining experience. However, criticisms regarding food variety and presentation indicate the need for consistent excellence in this area.

The fourth theme, 'Cabin', underscored the importance of design, decor, and amenities in creating a luxurious personal space. Comfortable seating, elegant furnishings, and thoughtful cabin amenities are key aspects that define this theme. However, critiques regarding cabin size and comfort level highlight the challenges of balancing luxury features with practical considerations.

The fifth theme, 'Excursions' was identified as key to extending the luxury experience beyond the train. Engaging tours, high-quality accommodation during stays, and the expertise of tour guides are crucial aspects of this theme. However, critiques about the quality of offboard services underscore the need for consistent luxury standards throughout the journey.

The sixth theme, 'Booking', was a critical initial touchpoint, shaping early perceptions and overall satisfaction. Transparency, flexibility, and alignment of pricing with perceived value are key aspects here.

The seventh theme, 'Onboard amenities', such as engaging commentary, unique viewing opportunities, lounge experiences, and entertainment, was found to significantly enhance the journey's comfort and enjoyment. However, the absence of modern amenities like Wi-Fi in some cases pointed to a gap in meeting evolving passenger expectations.

Lastly, 'Travel assurance' emerged as the least influential theme but it emphasised the importance of reliability, health and safety measures, and comfort in shaping passengers' trust. Key aspects include effective management of delays and ensuring passenger comfort and well-being throughout the journey.

Incorporating these key aspects into the TranzAlpine train offers the opportunity to transform it into a premier luxury tourism product, appealing to a niche market seeking unique, high-end travel experiences. This strategic shift presents the chance to: enhance brand differentiation; elevate passenger experiences through exceptional service, gourmet dining, and luxurious amenities; and, consequently, attract a more affluent clientele. However, this transition poses risks, including significant financial investment, maintaining consistent high-quality standards, and aligning luxury enhancements with the existing scenic charm of the TranzAlpine. Balancing these opportunities and risks is crucial for the successful integration of these aspects without compromising the train's core identity.

### **5.3 Implications**

This study has explored the aspects that contribute to the luxury train experience, and how the TranzAlpine train experience could be enhanced to attract luxury tourists. This study has both practical and theoretical implications. Theoretically, this research contributes to the broader knowledge of luxury tourism experiences. It highlights the importance of various aspects, such as service quality, memorable experiences, and cabin comfort in defining luxury in the train travel sector. This aligns with Pine and Gilmore's (2011) experience economy theory, emphasising the transformation of

services into memorable experiences. Additionally, the focus on service quality and personalised care resonates with Iloranta and Komppula's (2022) insights on luxury tourism, which stressed luxury as the result of quality interactions and personalised experiences. The emphasis on cabin aesthetics and comfort in luxury train travel, as highlighted by Hallow (2017), underscores the importance of such elements in creating an immersive and high-quality travel experience.

Practically, the dissertation offers actionable insights for the management of the TranzAlpine train and other similar scenic train services worldwide that aim to attract luxury tourists. The research highlights the importance of investing in high-quality service and exclusive onboard amenities to enhance the overall luxury experience. For instance, introducing luxurious cabins, gourmet dining options, and personalised services can significantly elevate the appeal of scenic train services in the luxury market. The study also highlights the need to create memorable welcome experiences and engaging excursions, which can differentiate luxury train services in a competitive tourism sector. Additionally, the findings suggest that focusing on details, such as cabin comfort, including spacious seating and panoramic windows, can greatly enhance the customer's experience, contributing to overall satisfaction and customer loyalty. These implications offer a better understanding of luxury train experiences and provide valid recommendations for enhancing passengers' experiences in luxury train travel.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the key aspects identified in the study, several enhancements for the TranzAlpine train are proposed to elevate its appeal in the luxury tourism market. The recommendations aim to leverage the opportunities identified while addressing potential risks, ensuring that the TranzAlpine can successfully transition towards a luxury offering that appeals to high-end tourists. The recommendations are summarised in Table 6.



**Table 6** *Recommendations for Enhancing the TranzAlpine Train's Luxury Appeal*

Category	Recommendation	Opportunity	Risk
Overnight service	Introduce overnight journeys with luxury sleeping accommodation.	Offers a unique experience that can set the TranzAlpine apart in the luxury tourism market.	Carefully design and test sleeping accommodation to ensure comfort and privacy, managing additional operational costs.
Luxurious cabins	Introduce new carriages with luxurious fittings, including private cabins.	Improves passenger comfort, appealing to those seeking a luxurious travel experience.	Balance the costs of upgrades with anticipated revenue increases, ensuring modifications meet luxury expectations.
Service excellence	Train staff to deliver exceptional, personalised service.	Elevates the customer experience, enhancing the train's reputation and passenger satisfaction.	Continuously invest in staff training and maintain high service standards to justify the potentially higher operational costs.
Gourmet dining experiences	Offer premium dining options that highlight local cuisine and ingredients.	Enhances the onboard experience and can attract culinary enthusiasts.	Regularly update menus and manage supply chains to maintain quality while controlling costs.
Exclusive excursions	Curate unique, high-quality off-train experiences.	Provides immersive local experiences, making the journey more memorable and appealing.	Coordinate with reliable partners and manage scheduling to ensure consistency and quality of experiences.
Enhanced booking experience	Simplify and enrich the booking process with more customisation options.	Improves customer satisfaction from the first touchpoint and can increase bookings.	Invest in technology and training to manage a more complex booking system efficiently and securely.
Modern amenities	Upgrade onboard amenities, including high-speed Wi-Fi, entertainment options, and wellness facilities.	Meets modern luxury travellers' expectations for connectivity, entertainment, and	Integrate modern amenities carefully to maintain the train's ambience and manage additional

		relaxation.	costs.
Flexible travel policies	Offer flexible booking and cancellation policies.	Encourages reservations by reducing the perceived risk of booking.	Clearly communicate policies to avoid misunderstandings and ensure policies are financially sustainable.

These recommendations aim to strategically enhance the overall appeal of the TranzAlpine train, focusing on creating a luxurious and memorable experience that caters to the needs and expectations of today’s luxury travellers. While the introduction of an overnight service offers a significant opportunity for differentiation, the recommendations also cover a wide range of enhancements that can improve service excellence, accommodation comfort, dining experiences, excursion quality, booking processes, onboard amenities, health and safety standards, and travel flexibility. Balancing these enhancements with careful risk management is key to successfully attracting and satisfying luxury tourists.

### 5.5 Limitations of the research

This study, while providing insights into the luxury train experience, acknowledges several limitations that may have influenced the findings. First and foremost, the reliance on TripAdvisor reviews for data collection introduces a significant limitation. Not all passengers are inclined to post reviews, with a tendency for younger generations, who are more internet-savvy individuals, to share their experiences online. This bias excludes a wide range of perspectives, particularly from older passengers who might be less inclined to engage in online review platforms. Additionally, reviews are often written days or weeks after the trip, which could affect the recollection and depiction of their journey, leading to either overly positive or negative reflections depending on the passage of time. Another notable limitation is the uneven distribution of reviews across the selected luxury trains. The study revealed a disparity in review

numbers, with trains, for example, the Royal Scotsman in Scotland and Maharajas' Express in India having considerably fewer reviews compared to the Rocky Mountaineer in Canada (see Table 1). This uneven distribution might have led to an overrepresentation of experiences from certain trains or regions, impacting the balance and breadth of the findings.

Furthermore, due to time constraints, the study involved a sampling strategy of extracting 10% of the total number of reviews. While necessary for practicality and data manageability, this approach limits the variety and richness of the data, potentially overlooking diverse experiences that could have added depth to the analysis. Lastly, due to a scarcity of journal articles or academic literature specifically addressing the TranzAlpine train, the study relied on information from TranzAlpine's official website for the case study. This approach, while providing some insights, may not capture the full scope, complexity, and nuances of the actual travel experience, leading to a partial and narrower understanding of its offerings. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this research was based on data from only ten luxury trains and did not include a broader range of luxury train experiences that might exist globally. This geographic focus, while providing insights into the selected trains, may have limited the findings' applicability and possibly overlooked unique aspects of luxury train travel that could be present in other regions or services not covered in this study.

## **5.6 Suggestions for future research**

Building on the findings and limitations of this study, several opportunities can be identified for future research to further explore the luxury train experience. Firstly, there is scope for primary data collection through direct interviews or surveys with passengers from a broader age range and demographic backgrounds. This approach would not only address the limitation of relying solely on online reviews, which tend to be biased towards younger, internet-savvy individuals, but would also provide richer, qualitative insights into passengers' experiences. Secondly, future research could focus on conducting comparative studies of luxury train experiences across different

countries and cultures to provide a more global perspective. This approach would not only aid in understanding how geographical and cultural factors influence the luxury train experience but also in exploring how luxury train travel adapts to and reflects local customs, traditions, and passenger preferences in various regions.

Thirdly, future research could also focus on longitudinal studies, examining how luxury train experiences and passenger expectations evolve. This would provide insights into changing trends and the long-term impact of service enhancements or modifications in the luxury train sector. Lastly, considering the rapid advancements in technology and changing customer expectations, future research could explore the impact of emerging technologies and digital trends on the luxury train travel experience. Investigating how digital innovations can enhance the customer experience or how online platforms influence customer perceptions and decision-making would be particularly valuable in the context of evolving luxury travel trends. These suggested areas for future research would not only help in addressing the gaps identified in this study but also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the luxury train travel sector, offering valuable insights for both academic researchers and industry practitioners.

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