

The Psychology of Luxury: How Hospitality Spaces Influence Guest Perception

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Abstract

Luxury in hospitality is not merely defined by expensive materials or visuals but an experience shaped by space, perception, emotions and sensory engagements. Hospitality in interiors provide exclusivity, value, quality and comfort to the guests while interacting to the environment. The study examines how luxury is understood and represented through material, visuals, finishes while the design influences the psychological perception of luxury focusing onto experience that shape a guest's response to a premium space that create the feeling of comfort, belonging, exclusivity, calmness and other emotions. The methodology follows a qualitative and experiential approach based on direct field observation during Ranthambore visit. Ranthambore—the space of interconnected experiences from arrival to departure. The landscape, history and culture associated with the fort, not just experiencing the richness but the influence created to emotional connection created. Investigating to the strong perception of luxury into emotions and memories through qualities like personal experience, atmosphere, comfort, memory and emotional connections and not material richness alone. Ultimately, the understanding luxury in hospitality not by just seeing but as something that gets experience and remembered through the relationship built between the guests, space and character of Ranthambore.

Keywords: Guest perception, Hospitality design, Interior design, Luxury, Psychology, Spatial experience

1. Introduction

Luxury in hospitality is increasingly understood as an experience shaped by space, perception, emotion and sensory engagement rather than only expensive materials or visual richness. Psychology is important to this understanding because guests do not experience luxury through what they see; they interpret space through perception, emotion, memory and sensory response. Spatial planning, privacy, circulation, lighting, materiality, ambience and movement influence feelings of comfort, exclusivity, belonging and perceived value. A visually luxurious space may still fail to create emotional connection or a memorable experience if these psychology needs are not supported. Ranthambore provides a relevant context, where hospitality extends beyond interiors into landscape, wildlife, culture and heritage. These interconnected experiences allow the study to explore how place, memory, environment and spatial qualities together influence the psychological perception of luxury. In this context, luxury is considered not only as a visual or material quality, but

as a psychological experience created through the relationship between the guest and the space.

1.1.Aim

The primary aim of the study is to analyze how spatial, sensory and emotional qualities within hospitality environments influence the psychological perception of luxury, with particular reference to comfort, exclusivity, emotional connection, memory and perceived value from guest experience in Ranthambore.

1.2.Objective

The objective of this research is to study how circulation, privacy, scale, zoning and spatial sequencing influence perceived luxury within hospitality environments. Building upon this, we understand the role of materials, textures, lighting, colour, furniture, craftsmanship and detailing in shaping guest responses, alongside how sensory factors like sound, calmness and exclusivity. The research seeks to analyze unique landscape, culture and heritage contribute to memory, emotional

connection and values by comparing the experience of luxury across different hospitality zones. Ultimately, working towards concluding how spatial and sensory experience defines contemporary hospitality luxury beyond material richness.

1.3.Need of Study

Hospitality interiors are often evaluated visible indicators such as expensive materials, decorative detailing and high-end amenities. Yet a visually rich environment does not create comfort, privacy or emotional connection. As a psychological reading of luxury is useful for interior designers because it shifts attention from material cost alone towards how space is perceived, used and remembered. This approach can help designers create spaces that support emotional well-being, meaningful experiences and stronger connections between guests and place, while also providing a clearer design basis for evaluating luxury beyond appearance.

1.4.Scope and Limitations

Scope: The study focuses on how interior and spatial qualities influence the psychological perception of luxury in hospitality spaces. It examines spatial sequencing, circulation, privacy, materiality, lighting, sensory experience, landscape and atmosphere. The primary case study is based on Ranthambore hospitality experience, supported by selected secondary case studies and relevant literature.

Limitations: The study is based primarily on qualitative observations and personal field experience from Ranthambore visit. The findings are specific to the selected hospitality setting and cannot represent all luxury hotels. Limited time, and number of guest responses may restrict the depth and generalization of the findings.

2. Research Methodology

The research adapts a qualitative and experiential approach to understand how hospitality spaces influence the perception and experience of luxury. The methodology combines literature study, field observation, photographic documentation, spatial analysis and case studies. The approach follows the fieldwork-oriented methodology of the reference paper, which uses qualitative case study methods, observations, photographs and sketches to

understand the relationship between people and built environment.

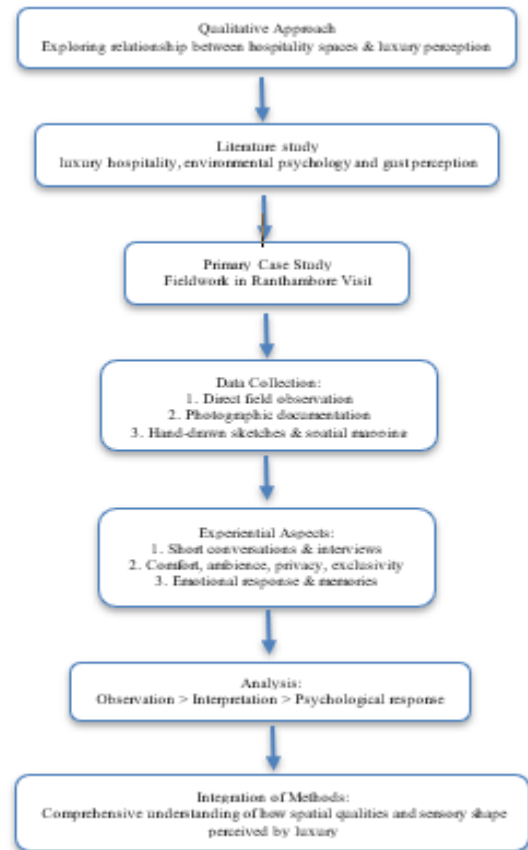


Figure 1 Research methodology, Source-Author

3. Literature Review

Luxury in hospitality has traditionally been associated with exclusivity, high-quality materials, visual richness and superior services. Recent researches treat luxury as an experience shaped by emotional, sensory, social and spatial factors. Varsha Jain et al. (2023), through a systematic review of 314 studies, identify consumer experience and services quality as major areas within luxury hospitality research and identify Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory among frequently used theoretical lenses. Anita Manfreda et al. (2022) describes luxury accommodation as an emotional, multidimensional and process driven experience. Their meta-ethnographic synthesis examined sixteen qualitative empirical accounts representing 13 studies published between 2005 and 2020. The studies highlight the interaction between guests, hosts and the physical and

sensorial environment, influenced by personal and situational factors. The authors also identify congruence, cultural and collaboration as characteristics of luxury accommodation experience. Charles Spence (2022) extends this understanding through environmental psychology and multisensory hotel design. The review describes that the visual design is only one part of the guest experience; sound, smell, touch, temperature, taste and interactions with nature can also affect perception. He also discusses an analysis of more than 2.5 million guest reviews from 5683 hotels across 20 major tourist destinations in which noise, elevators and smells were among the most common complaints. This indicates the importance of non-visual sensory conditions in shaping hotel experience and perception. Buehring and O'Mahony (2019) examine memorable guest experience in luxury hotels and identify value-generating factors associated with memorable stays. Their study identified 40 value generating factors from hotel host data with the guest identifying a future "19 factors". These were grouped into five constructs, high lighting sensory generators, authenticity and destination specific culture as contribution to memorable luxury experiences[1 – 10].

3.1. Research Gap

The literature establishes strong relationships between luxury hospitality, experience, sensory perception, emotion and memory. However, much of the research remains positioned with hospitality management, consumer behavior and service studies. The direct translation of these concepts into interior spatial qualities is comparatively less explicit. This study therefore uses an interior designer's perspective to connect spatial sequencing, circulation, privacy, materiality, lighting, sensory conditions, landscape and atmosphere with the psychological perception of luxury. The fieldwork is important within this gap because it allows luxury to be examined as a lived sequence rather than as an abstract list of hotel attributes. The Ranthambore case also introduces the role of place- landscape, wildlife, heritage and regional character can become part of the guest's emotional understanding of luxury[11].

3.2. Research Question

How do spatial, sensory and environmental qualities in hospitality spaces influence guest's psychological perception of luxury, particularly in terms of comfort, exclusivity, emotional connection and memory?

4. Case Studies

4.1. Primary Case Study – Ranthambore Sterling Bagh Resort: Site Visit, Photographs, Drawings, Observations

The primary case study is based on the hospitality resort visited during the Ranthambore educational trip. The study focuses on understanding luxury through direct experience and observation of the built environment. The resort is studied as a continuous guest journey, beginning from entrance and moving through the landscape, pathways, reception, restaurant and activity areas, guest rooms, pool, outdoor spaces and spa. During the site visit, photographs, sketches and spatial observations were used to document the character of the resort. Particular attention was given to circulation, spatial sequencing, thresholds, privacy, materiality, lighting, furniture, landscape, sensory qualities and atmosphere.

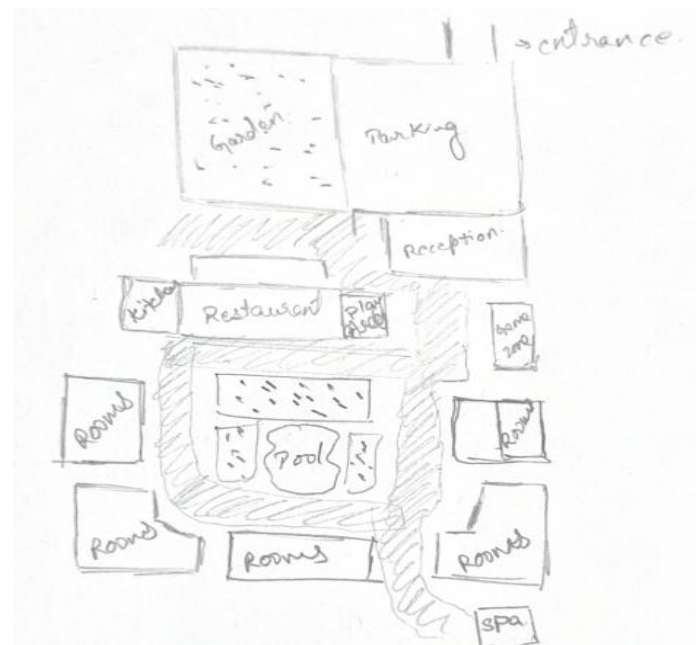


Figure 2 Space Mapping, Source-Author

4.1.1. Arrival and Landscape

The approach to the property is not treated as a single

doorway event. Landscape paths, hedges shrubs and controlled views create a gradual transition from movement to arrival. This produces anticipation and allows the guest to read the property progressively. The repeated use of greenery also softens the boundary between built and natural spaces[12].



Figure 3 Landscape arrival, Source-Author

4.1.2. Threshold and Circulation

Arched openings, steps, framed views and changes in paving create small moments of transitions. These elements slow down movement and provide visual between zones. Psychologically, such sequencing can make the journey feel curated rather than purely functional[13].



Figure 4 Arched threshold and layered planting,

Source-Author



Figure 5 Reception interior, Source-Author



Figure 6 Restaurant / Dining, Source-Author

4.1.3. Public to Private Transition

The resort experience moves from more social areas towards guest rooms and spa spaces. This graduation is important because perceived luxury is associated not just with visual richness but also with the ability to choose between social interaction and retreat[14].



Figure 7 Guest Room, Source-Author

The case study does not consider these elements individually. Instead, it examines how they work together to influence the guest's psychological response. For example, landscape pathways and gradual transitions can create anticipation, while changes in scale, lighting and materiality can establish different levels of comfort, intimacy and exclusivity. The primary case study therefore helps connect what is observed in the space with how the space may be perceived and experienced emotionally, forming the main field-based knowledge for the research[15].

5. Case Studies

5.1.Secondary Case Study –Six Senses Fort Barwara, Rajasthan

Six Senses Fort Barwara was selected as the secondary case study because it offers a close contextual comparison with the Ranthambore primary case while presenting a different model of luxury based on heritage conversations. It demonstrates how heritage, spatial experience, landscape and contemporary hospitality within 14th century fort. Located approximately 30 minutes from Ranthambore National Park, the property has been converted into a 48-suite luxury resort, with two original palaces and two temples retained within the fort complex. This makes it particularly useful for examining how cultural identity, historic setting and spatial experience can influence the psychological perception of luxury. The interiors reinterpret the historic character of Rajasthan through a contemporary Rajasthani design while incorporating modern technology, and many spaces maintain connections to the surrounding landscape through terraces and views. These qualities allow comparison with the primary case in terms of spatial sequencing, privacy, materiality, landscape, cultural identity and emotional experience. From the perspective of this research, the important aspect is not simply the visual grandeur of the fort but how the setting contributes to the perception of luxury. The historic structure creates a sense of authenticity and identity, while private spaces, controlled views, wellness facilities, gardens and personalized experiences create comfort, exclusivity and retreat. The property also integrates

endemic planting water features and views towards the lake and temple, strengthening the relationship between hospitality and place. As shown in Table 1 Case study Analysis, Source-Author.

Table 1 Case study Analysis, Source-Author

Design Aspect	Relevance to research
Heritage & Identity	Creates authenticity and emotional connection
Spatial Sequencing	Movement through fort, courtyards and private spaces creates anticipation
Privacy	Private suites and terraces support exclusivity
Materiality	Contemporary Rajasthani interiors connect luxury with regional character
Landscape	Views, gardens and water connect the guest to place
Wellness	Spa and restoration spaces contribute to emotional comfort
Memory	Historic architecture creates a distinctive and memorable experience

6. Result And Discussion

6.1.Result

The study indicates that the perception of luxury is influence by a combination of spatial, sensory, emotional and contextual factors rather than by material richness. Field observations from Ranthambore resort showed that spatial sequencing, landscaped pathways, privacy, lighting, materiality and connection with nature strongly contributed to the overall guest experience. The comparative study further showed that both the Ranthambore resort and Six Senses Fort Barwara use landscape, cultural identity, controlled movement and spatial transitions to create distinctive experiences. The findings can be summarized through four key factors:

- Spatial sequencing- creates anticipation and a sense of discovery.
- Privacy and Transition- supports comfort and exclusivity.

- Sensory atmosphere- influences relaxation and emotional response.
- Connection to place- strengthens authenticity and memorability.
- These observations suggest that luxury is experienced as a journey through space, rather than as a single visual impression.

6.2.Discussion

The finding supports existing research that describes luxury hospitality as an emotional, multi-dimensional and process driven experience. The observations from Ranthambore further suggest that interior design plays an important role in shaping this experience through the arrangement of space, sensory conditions and connection with the surrounding environment. The comparison also indicates that place-specific design strengthens the perception of luxury. Rather than relying only on expensive finishes, the use of landscape, local character, natural materials and meaningful transitions can create a stronger sense of authenticity and emotional connection. This is consistent with research identifying sensory experience, authenticity and destination-specific culture as contributors to memorable luxury experiences. Therefore, the study suggests that effective luxury hospitality design should focus on how a guest moves, feels, senses and remembers a space.

6.3.Recommendations

The findings suggest that luxury hospitality design should be approached as an experience-led design process where spatial qualities are planned according to how guests move, perceive and remember a place.

- Design for spatial sequencing- use thresholds, framed views, landscape and gradual transitions to create anticipation and a clear sense of arrival
- Layer sensory qualities- combine lighting, material texture, sound, temperature, planting and natural elements to create a comfortable and immersive atmosphere.
- Strengthen place identity- integrate regional materials, craft, landscape and cultural references in a contemporary manner so that luxury feels authentic rather than purely decorative.

- Balance social and private spaces- provide clear choices between interaction, activity and retreat to support comfort and perceived exclusivity.
- Design for memory- identify key moments in the guest journey, arrival, dining room, landscape and wellness giving them spatial character so the experience remains memorable.

Conclusion

This study explored how hospitality spaces influence the psychological perception of luxury through spatial, sensory and emotional experiences. The findings indicate that luxury is not defined only by how guests move through a space, experience privacy, respond to sensory qualities, connect with nature and remember the place. The Ranthambore case demonstrated the role of spatial sequencing, landscape, materiality and atmosphere, while the comparative case showed how heritage and cultural identity can strengthen authenticity and emotional connection. This study therefore suggests that luxury hospitality design should focus on creating a meaningful spatial journey rather than only a visually luxurious environment.

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