

CHANGES IN SENORIAL EXPERIENCES ON KHAOSAN ROAD

THE PERCEPTION OF THE SAME STREET BY
DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS

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**EXPLORING
CHANGES IN
EMOTIONAL
PERCEPTIONS
FOLLOWING
MAJOR URBAN
TRANSFORMATIONS**

ABSTRACT

Khaosan Road in Bangkok has transformed a lot over the past years. From a quiet local marketstreet to a busy tourist hotspot only become more and more busy. This thesis explores how these transformations have effected the sensory and emotional experiences of locals and tourists through looking at individual stories through surveys (Kenny, 2014), newspapers, images and academic papers. The research shows 5 major timeframes: Before tourism (before 1992), the rise of backpackers (1992–2010), peak tourism (2010–2020), COVID-19 (2020–2021), and post-cannabis legalization (after 2023). The study shows how the sensory experience is different due to background, memory and social positioning.

Findings show that tourists generally love the street's chaotic atmosphere and its multisensory overload. Locals of older generations often experience these same elements as negative because of there memories of how the street used to be. Younger generations have less memories of the street and thereby tent to like the street more.

By comparing emotional experiences over time, this research shows the importance of recognizing urban spaces as complex environments that can evoke different reactions for different people. Ultimately, Khaosan Road serves as a casestudy for understanding how quickly changing urban places can impact the emotional and sensory feelings of those who visit them.

INTRODUCTION

Khaosan Road in Bangkok is a backpacker street that has undergone many transformations. The road has a history dating back to the 1800s and has undergone significant changes in both layout and function (Shaw, 2018). Today it is known for its vibrant atmosphere and appeal to backpackers. With more than 10.000 visitors daily (Musigakama, 2019, p. 82), it is a melting pot of sounds, movements and impressions where anything seems possible (Montip, 2009, p. 9). From my own experience, however, I know that not everyone is optimistic about the street. Talking to one of the vendors, he told me that he suffers from constant ringing in his ears caused by the loud noise, but that he feels he has no choice but to endure it. He recalled that the music used to be much quieter. Now, however, he said that bars compete to be the loudest and most attention-grabbing in order to attract as many backpackers as possible.

The abundance of sensory stimuli on the street, together with the series of transformations, is the starting point for this research. This thesis aims to provide insight into the complex relationship between physical change, emotions, sensory experiences, and the perception of Khaosan Road.

The focus lies on how the street, with its many sensory dimensions, can influence and has influenced the experiences of individuals. This is explored through multiple sources, in line with the research methodology of Kenny (2014, p. 5), who, in his study on sensory perceptions, paid close attention to sensory references in individuals' open narratives. Similarly, this thesis aims to trace sensory experiences over time through an open-ended approach. It is important to take into account the experiences of both tourists and locals in order to create a comprehensive picture of how experiences may differ due to varying cultures and life stories (Cowan & Steward, 2007, p. 2). The main research question is:

“How have the sensory experiences of both tourists and locals on Khao San Road in Bangkok changed as a result of the transformations since 1892 to the present day?”

The findings of this research can contribute to a better understanding of complex, rapidly transforming spaces and how these can exert different influences depending on the individual. It helps to recognize that an urban space is never designed for just one group and that it can have varying impacts not only on different people but also at different moments in time.

To arrive at this answer, the structure is built as follows. First, the literature on emotional perceptions of urban spaces is explored, and the significance of Khao San Road as a case study is demonstrated. Next, the historical context of Khao San Road is outlined, analyzing its various functions and physical layout over time by looking at primary sources like newspapers and academic research papers. Transformations of the street will be mapped and divided into timeframes, with a focus on sensory features. Images will be shown of the transformations to help understand how the transformations have had a significant impact on the street.

This is followed by a deep dive into the emotional experiences of both residents and tourists during the estimated timeframes. With the information gained from a survey, news articles, academic papers, books and image analysis, the results are presented in a comparative way, translating the information to the sensory experience. The information will be analysed to discover whether/why visitors of the street experience different sensorial spatial stories (Kenny, 2014, p. 10) although they are in the same place.

Finally, the findings will be analysed comparatively to assess the impact of the physical and functional changes on the emotional dynamics. By combining stories, emotions and scientific analysis, this thesis aims to offer a new and refreshing perspective on how Khaosan Road is perceived over time.

To execute this, these sub-questions are asked:

1. How can a urban space be emotionally perceived by different individuals?
2. What significant shifts have occurred in the street's primary functions and purposes?
3. What major physical changes have occurred in the layout of Khao San Road over time?
4. How have these changes impacted the emotional experiences of vendors and local residents?
5. How have these changes influenced the emotional perceptions of tourists?

1. SENSORY EXPERIENCE

1.1 The definition of and influences on sensory experiences

Sensory = connected with the physical senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

Experience = the process of getting knowledge or skill from doing, seeing, or feeling things (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

This makes it clear that experience does not only arise from touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight. It also arises from feeling things (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Senses are stimuli that can be interpreted differently, depending on “...*the philosophical, linguistic and cultural systems through which they are produced and represented*” (Cowan & Steward, 2007, p. 2).

The interpretation of senses is thus not objective, but embedded in certain narratives. The book ‘The Feel of the City’ states that “*Geometric lines drawn by urban planners become meaningful elements of people’s lives as they are incorporated into what he calls ‘spatial stories’: the narratives through which individuals relate their experiences and define their identities*” (Kenny, 2014, p. 10). From this, we can conclude that experiences are individual. The memories a person has built up throughout their life determine how they perceive a place (Chang, 2014, p. 10). Kenny (2014) conducted research based on case studies Like Kenny (2014), other case studies have been conducted on sensory perception in modern Western cities, such as those by Cowan & Steward (2007) and Chang (2020). Many of these casestudies focus on Western cities, but sensory experience differs across philosophical, linguistic, and cultural systems (Cowan & Steward, 2007, p. 2).

The same researchmethod as used by Kenny (2014) will be conducted. He used a wide range of testimonies and sources, including surveys, journalistic investigations, commemorative books, novels, and poetry. He focused on various target groups while also including individual opinions in his research.

Kenny (2014, p. 204) and Cowan & Steward (2007, p. 1) also state that senses interact with and complement each other. As such, one cannot be considered in isolation from the others. Therefore, this study will examine all the senses in the analysis of Khao San Road, including the interplay between them.

1.2 Sensory experiences in the urban context

Because sensory experiences are not static concepts but develop over time (Chang, 2020, p. 5), the analysis of sensory experience in an urban environment must focus on a specific period rather than a single moment. Memories and interpretations evolve over time (Chang, 2014, p. 10). An analysis based on a single moment would overlook the layered of experiences. Therefore, this research examines the sensory experiences on Khaosan Road through its various transformations.

Cowan and Steward (2007), through a number of case studies, describe how senses in western cities were crucial to urban life. In contrast, casestudies in the late 19th and 20th centuries experienced increased cultural control and subversion through the regulation of sensory input. By eliminating sensorial elements, social control was exercised. Kenny (2014, p. 3) talks about how the absence of senses could have a negative impact on the experience. With Khaosan Road having a lot of senses the question rises if there could also be too much stimuli.

1.3 - Conclusion

In conclusion the way of experiencing a space is can differ due to different factors. Senses, individual narratives and culture are all factors that can change the experience. In this paper individuals are questioned and academic research is done about the sensory experience on Khaosan Road. The outcome would be how individuals can experience a space differently.

The studies relating to sensoral experience in an urban space are largely focused on Western countries, where there are many laws and restrictions. For this study, the focus is specifically on Thailand. A country that has undergone significant growth in a short period and has experienced strong social and financial changes over the past 100 year (LePoer, 1989). The research specifically examines a street where, when you walk through it, there seem to be no rules —everything is possible, and anything goes (Luo, 2014, p. 40).

2. KHAOSAN ROAD IN THE SENSORIAL CONTEXT

Khao San Road is a good example of rapid changing urban environment with a rich sensory character (Luo, 2014, p. 41).

Originally a market street serving to locals, its transformation into a backpacker hub has disrupted its original sensory landscape (Huang, 2019, p. 16). This makes it a street visited by a large group of users. The street's shift from routine rhythms of daily commerce to highly dynamic and unpredictable nightlife rhythms (Chang, 2020), could result in contrasting emotional experiences for those different user groups. Furthermore, such a wide variety on sensory stimuli could result in more memorable experiences Kenny (2014, p. 3). This research will investigate whether this occurs in a positive or negative manner.

Kenny (2014, p. 3) states that commentators often shape their interpretations of modern cities by evoking vivid sensorial impressions. This suggests that experiences involving strong sensory stimuli are more likely to be remembered. He also notes that fewer restrictions can be experienced as positive (Kenny, 2014, p. 203). Khaosan Road is a street with few restrictions and an abundance of sensory stimuli (Luo, 2014, p. 40).

Howard (2005) and Chen (2005) have done research about the perceptions of the street. However, this research was conducted during a specific timeframe. As Chang (2020, p. 5) emphasizes, memories—and thus sensory experiences—evolve over time, so a research covering a large period of time should also be conducted.

The study on the sensory experience will just like the study of Kenny (2014) be based on different sources with an eye on individual perspectives as well to show how everyone can perceive a space differently, without steering individuals in a specific direction.

A survey will be conducted with questions based determined from information out of sources from Fink (1995), Howard (2005), Chen (2005), Cowan & Steward (2007), Chang (2020), Kenny (2014) and Wunderlich (2008).

3. HISTORICAL FUNCTIONS OF KHAO SAN ROAD

3.1 Khao San Road as a local street

Khao San Road is part of the Banglamphu district, an area known for its temples and markets. In 1892, the street consisted of small alleys where merchants ran small shops. The southern side was dominated by large houses belonging to the nobility (Askew, 1993). At that time, rice was the main trade source in the street (Huang, 2019, p. 16).

From the 1930s onward, the number of restaurants on Khao San Road began to increase. This was likely a response to the growing population in the area. More eateries were added and tailor shops also became a distinctive feature of the street during this period. Around this time, Khao San Road was described as an ordinary local street with places such as pharmacies, doctor's offices, and a barbershop (Askew, 1993, p. 27). The residential houses were mostly made of wood or old brickwork. Figure 1 shows the spatial planning around this time (Askew, 1993, p. 12) and figure 2 shows the image of the street around this time (Thammasat University, n.d.)

Figure 1

Khaosan Road area in the year 1931



Note. From The Banglamphu District: A Portrait of Change of Inner Bangkok , by M. Askew, 2016, p. 12

Figure 2

Khaosan Road as a ricemarket



Note. From Kittiwat Xuto, by Thammasat University, n.d.

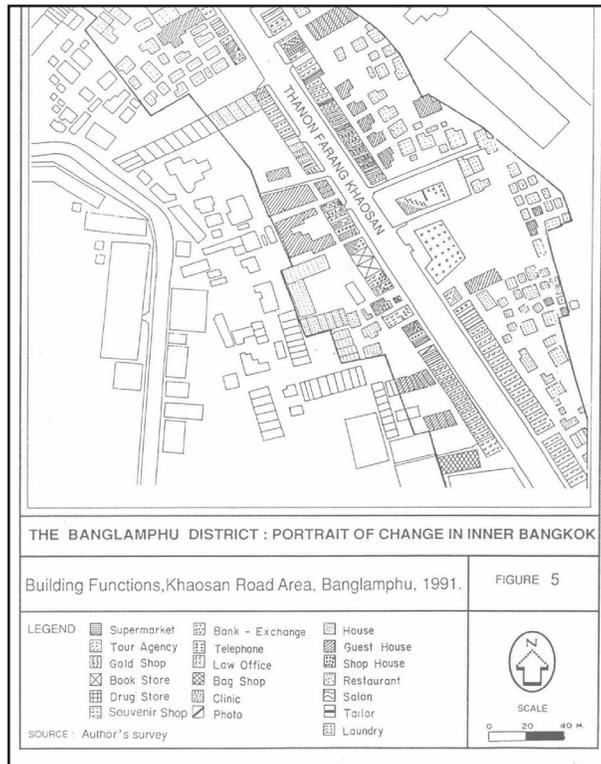
After World War II, the wooden row houses were replaced with even more commercial buildings, now made of stone. Despite these changes, the street retained its neighborhood character (Askew, 1993).

3.2 - Khao San Road as a tourist street

From 1980 onward, Khao San Road changed significantly. The first guesthouses began to appear on Khao San Road. This marked the beginning of tourism and a major transformation. Local residents left their homes due to increasing noise, caused by traffic and the presence of young tourists (Askew, 1993). Soon, Khaosan Road became known by Bangkokians as the ‘white’ street. Figure 3 (Askew, 1993, p. 28) and 4 (อรรถวานิช, 2006) show how it became a young backpacker street offering all the services required such as travel services, tailoring, and a wide variety of international food (Askew, 1993, p. 26).

Figure 3

Khaosan Road area in the year 1991



Note. From The Banglamphu District: A Portrait of Change of Inner Bangkok , by M. Askew, 2016, p. 28

Figure 4

Khaosan Road becoming a tourist street



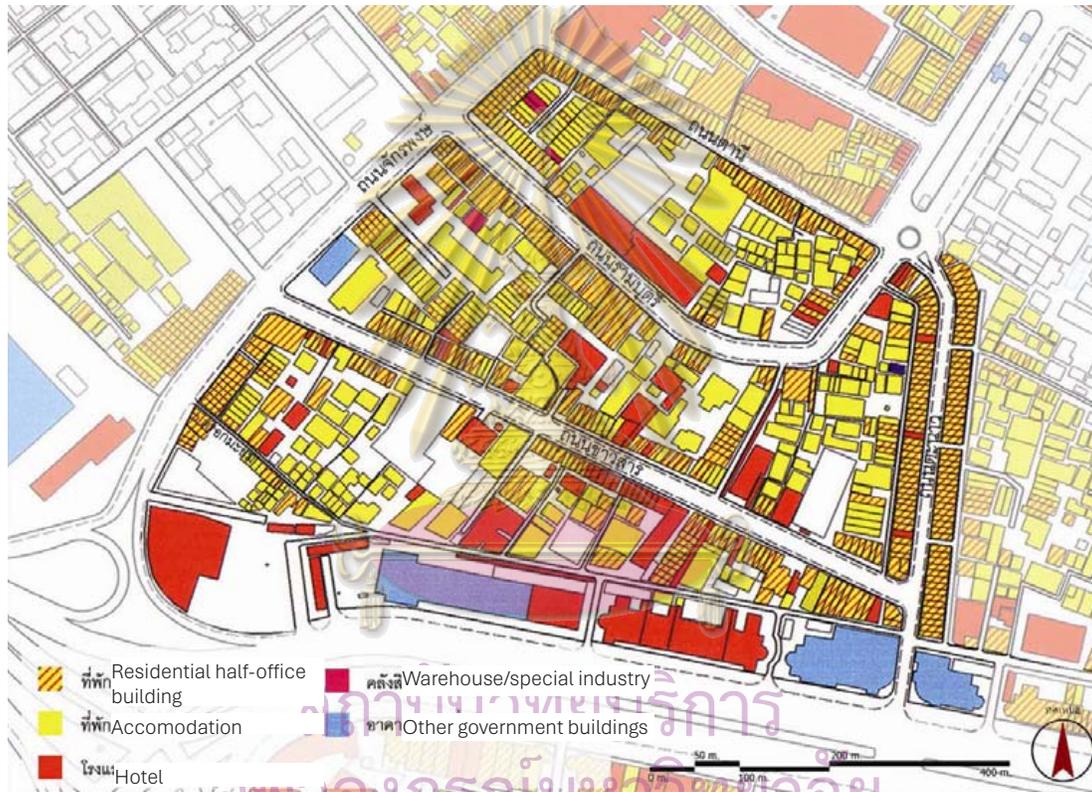
Note. From แนวคิดในการอนุรักษ์บนพื้นที่ฐานการเปลี่ยนแปลงองค์ประกอบกายภาพเมือง by อรรถวานิช, 2006, p.

According to Shaw (2018), the reason Khao San Road became a backpacker hub was the 200th anniversary of the Rattanakosin Kingdom (the current Kingdom of Thailand). During this celebration, Khao San Road welcomed a large number of tourists from around the world. By 1992, Khao San Road had completely transformed into a tourist attraction.

From 2002-2006, the term “walking street” was introduced, serving as a tourism promotion strategy in Thailand’s National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002–2006). During this period, specific time regulations were also implemented: between 5:00 PM and 2:00 AM, vendors were allowed to use the street for sales. Both the number of vendors and tourists increased, turning Khao San Road into an intense and expansive commercial area. In figure 5 (อรรถวานิช, 2006, p. 34) the functions within the street are shown. A lot more functions were added compared to before.

Figure 5

Khao San Road area in the year 2006



Note. Adapted from แนวคิดในการอนุรักษ์บนพื้นฐานการเปลี่ยนแปลงองค์ประกอบกายภาพเมือง by อรรถวานิช, 2006, p. 34

In the 2010s, both young tourists and locals visited Khao San Road, partying together (Thairath, 2014). From 2014 onwards, laughing gas became an increasingly popular phenomenon (Thairath, 2014b).

In 2017, a plan was implemented to ban daytime street vending, making the street quieter (Thairath, 2017). It affected Thai tourism, as the number of visitors dropped by 50%. Thairath (2018) quoted “The charm of chaos with order is what tourists want.” This describes how order turned out not to be the solution. Many believe that this restructuring is an attempt to imitate foreign countries.” (Thairath, 2018). Moreover, the figures 6 (Thairath 2020) and 7 (Thairath 2020b) show how the street underwent a major visual transformation between early 2020 and June 2020 in an effort to further organize the area.

Figure 6

Khaosan Road, February 2020



Note. From 48 million to improve Khao San Road, to be completed by May, aiming to further develop Wang Lang area , by Thairath, 2020

Figure 7

Khaosan Road, June 2020



Note. From 44.5 million to improve Khao San Road, almost 100 % complete, expected to open as usual on August 1st, by Thairath, 2020b

Covid was happening around this period as well. The street became empty, no smells or loud noises, no people. It affected a lot of locals who would normally sell their goods to tourists.

Later on in that year people started partying again but with the measurements to limit entry and exit at the beginning and end of the road. Those who have received 2-3 doses of the vaccine will have a stamp on their arm to allow entry as shown in figure 8 (Thairath, 2021b).

Figure 8

Khaosan Road, November 2021



Note. From Behind-the-scenes footage of a viral clip on Khaosan Road of over 4,000 tourists, fearing a new cluster, by Thairath, 2021b

After Khaosan Road fully reopened for tourism, a news article from Thairath (2023) reported that the noise level on Khaosan Road needed to be reduced. However, there are no clear indications that the noise level has actually decreased.

It was the 9th of June when the Ministry of Public Health announced the removal of cannabis from the list of narcotics, making cannabis legal. (Thairath, 2023b). All of a sudden Khao San road had a new image shown in figure 9 (Thairath, 2021b). Everywhere in the street, green lights show up. A total of 14 weedshops were opened within the 300 m long street. The vibe got different, the smells, the look. A lot changed (Thairath, 2021b)

Figure 9

Khaosan Road, August, 2023



Note. From Cannabis Road? Khao San Today: Foreign Perspectives and Problems Awaiting Resolution by Thairath, 2021b

In the current situation, residents, vendors, tourists, and government officials are all involved in managing the street. The public space serves different functions throughout the day. There are four types of shops on the street: permanent stores, semi-mobile shops, mobile shops, and mobile shops on wheels (Shaw, 2018). This means that the sensory experience has not only changed throughout the development of the street but also varies over the course of the day.

Conclusion

The street can be divided in 5 timeframes:

- Before it become a tourist street (before 1992)
- The street became a tourist street (1992-2010)
- The amount of tourists grew rapidly (2010-2020)
- COVID (2020-2021)
- After the legalisation of cannabis (after 2023)

4. EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF LOCALS

4.1 - The Ricestreet, before 1980

In the past, it was a rice trading street where Chinese merchants operated small shops such as drugstores, barber shops, and even a doctor's surgery. Older residents recall that it was once a quiet street, a street of their own. Now, they are no longer happy with what the street has become (Askew, 1993, p. 27).

The sensory environment at that time likely consisted of the smells of rising dust as illustrated in figure 2 (Thammasat University, n.d.), rice (Huang, 2019, p. 16), and other local goods. As Askew (1993, p. 16) noted, the street was experienced as quiet in those days. The tastes of the street were probably based on these local products.

4.2 - The Rise of Tourism, a Major Turning Point in 1992

The street was increasingly taken over by tourists. As a result, many Thais converted their homes into guesthouses or left the area to live elsewhere. Reasons for leaving the street stemmed from the rise in noise and traffic (Askew, 1993, p. 26). From that point on, most Bangkokians kept their distance from the street (Askew, 1993, p. 27), although some continued to work on Khaosan Road. However, even those who worked there reported being disturbed by the noise coming from the music on the street (Pruksanubal, 2006, p. 5). The sensory stimulus of sound was therefore perceived negatively by nearly all locals.

Rojpalakorn (2006, p. 4) referred to the Bangkokians who stayed on Khaosan Road for financial reasons as "benefit-seekers." This suggests a divided perception of the street among locals. When individuals earn income from the street, their overall perception tends to be more positive. This is related to the creation of personal narratives over time (Kenny, 2014 p. 10). Other members of the population found it difficult to anticipate and adapt to the presence of tourists, as illustrated in the quote from Teo & Leong (2006, p. 121) *"Too many of the other restaurants take too much effort in dolling themselves up for the farang eye."*

How locals came to be in conflict with one another is also evident in the struggles between street vendors (Shaw, 2018, p. 266). Since 2002, vendors were only allowed to set up their carts between 5 p.m. and 2 a.m., which often led to competition for space. Mobile shop owners sometimes positioned themselves in front of permanent shops (Shaw, 2018, p. 262), resulting in conflicts. These tensions may have contributed to a more negative perception of sensory stimuli, such as the street's crowdedness, due to the vendors' already negative mindset.

Furthermore it is described how the food on the street was adapted to suit Western backpackers and how restaurant names were written in European scripts (Teo & Leong 2006, p. 121). Both taste and visual appearance were affected by the rise of tourism. As a result, the sensory experience of the street changed dramatically. Not every (asian) local was a fan of tourists because of that. They portrayed tourists as follows: *“I shall stay in the cheapest guesthouse. . . I shall drink local beer. . . because it is cheapest. “I get it for less than the local”. I shall not leave Khao Sarn [sic] Road without having my hair colored, dreadlocked, corn-rolled, or shaved off.”* Teo and Leong (2006, p. 119). This illustrates the growing gap between how tourists experienced the street and how locals perceived it and thus tourists stayed away from Khaosan Road.

Khaosan Road did continued to be visited for recreational purposes by young Thais (Howard, 2005, p. 368). They enjoyed the international atmosphere and described their main activity as people-watching while having a beer or a ‘banana pancake’. Because the place felt so new to them, they even began to perceive it as a holiday destination (Howard, 2005, p. 370).

In conclusion, there were divided opinions on how the street was experienced. While young tourists came to relax and enjoy appetizing and visually stimulating encounters, this was not appreciated by the older residents of the street. Interestingly, young Thai people were able to relax in an environment with a high level of noise, whereas the older residents could not appreciate the same olfactory experience.

This highlights how sensory experiences can differ greatly within the same culture due to the personal narrative that each individual brings with them (Kenny, 2014, p. 10). The contrast between perceiving the street as a home intruded by tourists (Agarwal, 2018, p. 148) and seeing it as a holiday destination (Howard, 2005, p. 370) significantly influences how sensory stimuli are interpreted.

4.3 - 2010-2020, growth of tourism

With the increasingly demanding work environment caused by the rise in tourism, some Thai vendors worked from early morning until late at night (Howard 2005, p. 371), which at times led to fatigue and headaches. This may be an indirect factor influencing their sensory perceptions of the street.

Musigakama (2019, p. 88) highlights that by 2019, most elderly residents had left the area. This suggests that they no longer had a positive sensory experience on the street. Only businessmen remained, primarily focused on generating profit. However, even they reported negative effects such as long working hours and constant noise (Musigakama, 2019). Still, the drive to earn money is considered most important, and thus tourist demand becomes a key factor in their willingness to endure loud noise and extended hours.

Tourist demands have been a major force of change on the street since the beginning of tourism. Tourists sought cheap accommodations, restaurants, and bars, leading to a complete transformation in the street’s sensory stimuli.

One could say that because tourists are seeking for positive sensory experiences (food, drinks, chaos, smells, etc.), the locals now lack of those positive sensory experiences. That's because what they relate to as good smells, tastes, sounds, etc. have now disappeared. That leads back to the theory of Cowan & Steward (2007, p. 2): Senses are stimuli that can be interpreted differently, depending on "...the philosophical, linguistic and cultural systems through which they are produced and represented".

Another factor influencing why some locals had a different experience when visiting the street was cultural shock (Agarwal, 2018, p. 149), which arose from a distorted image of tourists shaped by television. As a result, expectations of tourists were unrealistically high, leading to disappointment and bitterness (Agarwal, 2018, p. 149). This may have caused a shift in the overall perception of the street, leading locals to interpret sensory stimuli in a more negative way.

4.4 - After 2021, COVID & cannabis

COVID-19 took a heavy toll on the local population. As all bars and restaurants were forced to close, many locals were left without income (Thairath, 2020c). As a result, the silence during this period was not experienced as a positive factor.

In an effort to attract more tourists to Thailand after the pandemic, cannabis was legalized. The legalization of cannabis in 2023 introduced a new sensory dimension to the street, with the strong smell of marijuana now being a prominent feature. A quote from a local reflects concerns about this change: *"When talking about Khao San, what I used to know was that it was a street food street and delicious food. But it seems that now the space and image have been taken by marijuana shops. Or in the future, it may become a dangerous place that we have to warn our children not to come."* (Thairath, 2023)

4.5 - Conclusion and general analysis

The evolution of the street over time, in combination with the changing sensory experiences of locals, illustrates how Khaosan Road gradually shifted from a positive to a negative experience. This was primarily due to the rapid and intense changes within a short period. It points to a loss of collective memory caused by constant transformation (Chang, 2005, p. 5). Since locals do not experience the street as a snapshot in time but rather live through its ongoing transformations, many of the spatial stories they created have disappeared, leaving few recognizable markers of their past (Kenny, 2014). As a result, sensory stimuli have generally been interpreted as negative experiences. Among younger locals, however, this was less evident. For them, the street holds less emotional weight, allowing them to interpret sensory stimuli in a more neutral and unbiased way.

5. EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF TOURISTS

5.1 - The Ricestreet, before 1980

The survey contains limited information about tourists' perceptions of the street during the period before it became a tourist destination. However, based on previously discussed historical context, it can be assumed that locals experienced fewer sensory stimuli at that time compared to later periods. According to the survey (see Appendix 1 for all survey results), the street is perceived as calm and peaceful. Silence is also mentioned upon seeing the photo from that time. Fewer stimuli are therefore most likely considered peaceful and calming by tourists.

5.2 - The Rise of Tourism, a Major Turning Point in 1992

The street was transformed into a "backpacker's paradise" (Teo & Leong, 2006, p. 118). Everything a tourist could possibly desire was available, from a McDonald's to specific types of clothing and jewelry (Teo & Leong, 2006, p. 118). Mentioned in the survey was the eye-opening effect for tourists to arrive at a place where they could taste "local" food and drinks (Teo & Leong, 2006, p. 121) and thereby gain new experiences of other cultures (Howard, 2005). The survey emphasizes that the area was very crowded at that time. One tourist remarked: *"Khao San road was the first place I ever visited as a backpacker in the mid 90s. It was eye opening for meeting people from all over the world who had similar interests. I was inspired to learn Thai and now Thailand is a big part of my life 30 years later."*

This illustrates the positive impact the street had on tourists during this period. However, while some survey respondents appreciated the presence of so many backpackers, others saw this as a downside to the street (Howard, 2005). The reason for this was that it no longer felt like a truly Thai place, but increasingly served as a street catering to Western backpackers. This shows the complexity of sensory experiences as every individual experienced the street differently.

Howard (2005, p. 366) also conducted research on tourist satisfaction on the street in 2005. The most appreciated aspects were (just like the survey) the atmosphere, the people (Thais and other travelers), services, and low prices (Howard, 2005, p. 367). Nightlife was mentioned less frequently in his study, which implies that it was not a major factor in tourist satisfaction. Factors that were less appreciated included noise, other tourists, tuk-tuk drivers, smell, and air pollution. Looking at the overall satisfaction, 70% of respondents were satisfied, 21% were neutral, and 7% were dissatisfied.

The reason tourists started to go to Khaosanroad is described as a opportunity to meet local people, relax in a pleasant environment, try local food, and make new friends with similar interests (Chen, 2005, p. 28). Montip (2009, p. 42) shows that a large number of participants chose accommodation on Khao San Road because of the many entertainment venues.

It can be concluded that tourists were drawn to the street in order to experience as much as possible—in other words, to engage with a wide range of sensory stimuli. As a result, the chaos was often perceived as something positive. This conclusion is supported by the survey.

However, there were also negative sensory perceptions. A few American tourists found the street too crowded with peddlers and dirty (Rojpalakorn, 2006, p. 42).

5.3 - 2010-2020, growth of tourism

Even during this period, tourists indicated that they viewed the variety of options on the street as something positive (Batra, 2019, p.41). Furthermore, they stated that tasting a different cuisine was a primary reason for visiting the street (Batra, 2019, p. 50). Whereas Howard (2005, p.367) noted that nightlife was not yet a major draw, Batra (2019, p. 50) argues that backpackers did, in fact, enjoy participating in parties and nightclub activities.

This may suggest that noise was seen as a less disturbing factor during this time and was generally experienced in a positive way. In the survey, differing opinions emerged from tourists who visited the street in this period. Some perceived the loud sounds associated with the chaotic atmosphere as a positive aspect, while for others, this sensory factor had a negative impact. This suggests that perceptions of the street vary greatly between individuals (Kenny, 2014, p.10).

Batra's (2019, p. 50) study concluded that backpackers especially viewed the food, drinks, partying, and the new form of nightlife with friends as stimulating experiences. Taste, smell, sound, and sight played the most important roles in this.

It is possible that, in this later phase, tourists were more consciously aware that Khaosan Road was a party destination and therefore came primarily for the nightlife. The survey confirms this, as respondents mostly mentioned bars and clubs during this period. Nonetheless, massage parlors and small shops were still mentioned to some extent in the surveys, which mainly points to a tactile experience.

In conclusion, backpackers came seeking a memorable experience (Batra, 2019)—and they found one. Experiences mentioned include seeing naked people, drinking cocktail buckets, trying a scorpion, and using laughing gas. All of these activities added an extra dimension to the sensory experience. Opinions on these experiences, however, remain divided

5.4 - After 2021, COVID & cannabis

The sensory experience changed significantly during the COVID period. Everything was shut down, which left the streets empty. The number of people who visited Khaosan Road in 2020 was limited compared to the following years.

The low number of visitors, due to closed bars and restaurants, and a survey response noting that it was very quiet during this time, all point to a significantly reduced level of sensory stimuli on the street. Survey respondents had mixed reactions to the photo from this period. Many mentioned that the street appeared clean and empty. While some viewed this as a disadvantage, others described it as “peaceful.” Why many people experienced the street as peaceful is probably due to the calmness and simplicity due to the lack of sensory input.

Around 2020, bollards were installed in an effort to restore order. Survey responses to this change indicated that the street no longer felt welcoming and that it had lost its character due to this transformation. Sight, therefore, plays a crucial role in the sensory experience of this street and can significantly alter perceptions of Khaosan Road.

In 2023, cannabis was legalized. This introduced new smells as well as a different visual appearance on the street. Four responses in the survey commented on the cannabis logo shown in the photo, which clearly claims a visible presence on Khaosan Road. One response highlighted how the atmosphere had completely changed following the legalization of cannabis, while another noted a decrease in the social aspect. Nevertheless, people who visited the street in this year were generally more positive about Khaosan Road. The addition of this new activity may have introduced a new dimension of sensory stimuli, which appears to have had a positive impact.

5.5 - conclusion and general analysis

In conclusion, Western backpackers are primarily in search of stimulation in order to gain new experiences. The chaotic nature of simultaneous sensory stimuli was generally perceived as positive. However, excessive loud noise was increasingly mentioned as a negative factor over the years and throughout the various transformations of the street.

Negative sensory perceptions related to smell were mostly associated with bars and outdoor areas, and less so with massage parlors and hostels. The visual aspects—such as the chaotic appearance, cleanliness, and crowds—were seen as positive stimuli in almost every location. Noise, on the other hand, was mainly experienced as a problem in bars and at food stalls, likely due to its interference with social interaction. Food and drink were never mentioned as negative aspects and can therefore be identified as consistently positive stimuli in the street according to tourists.

6. CONCLUSION

It is made clear that human experience does not arise solely from the five senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight—it also emerges through emotional responses and the act of “feeling” something on a deeper level (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). While sensory inputs serve as stimuli, the way they are perceived and interpreted can differ greatly from person to person (Cowan & Steward, 2007, p. 2). These differences, are shown in how various groups have experienced Khao San Road over time.

Originally a local rice market, Khao San Road underwent a dramatic transformation into a vibrant tourist destination. Since this shift, the street has seen a constant stream of changes, including the rise of tourist-oriented attractions and, more recently, the legalization of cannabis. These transformations significantly altered not only the street’s visual and auditory landscape but also how it was emotionally and sensorially experienced by locals and tourists alike.

Tourists that had visited the street multiple times, often recognized similarities across visits. Many however reported a decline in their experience over time. Those who had first visited before 2010 were less likely to view the changes as improvements, mainly due to the increasing levels of noise. On the other hand, more recent visitors identified the legalization of cannabis as a major sensory change. While opinions on this development varied, a common sentiment among tourists was their appreciation of the “chaotic” atmosphere—an environment saturated with sensory stimuli that many found exciting.

Locals however, described Khao San Road as once being quiet and familiar, especially before the 1980s. As tourism took over, the street’s transformation brought noise, unfamiliar food tastes, and a more westernized appearance, all of which were generally perceived negatively by the local community. Locals who financially gained from tourism were less likely to report negative sensory experiences than those who felt left out or displaced. Another important factor was age, younger locals were more likely to feel positive about the street, seeing it as a lively and entertaining place comparable to a holiday destination.

The sensory experiences among tourists were mixed. Negative experiences were usually related to loud noise or unpleasant smells, while positive ones were often linked to the flavorful food and the dynamic and colourful visuals of the street. Interestingly, some backpackers noted in the survey that “nothing really stood out”, supporting Cowan & Steward’s (2007) theory that an overload of sensory stimuli can lead to a dulling or numbing of the senses.

The areas that were most often remembered, consisted of bars, streets, and food stalls. These are all places where a high concentration of sensory stimuli occurred. A photo analysis involving tourists, revealed that historical images of Khao San Road conveyed a sense of peace and personal connection, particularly for locals who remembered the area from before it became centered around tourism.

As the street became both more crowded and noisier, both tourists and locals began to report more negative experiences. The legalization of cannabis may have been attraction to some tourists but it further alienated many locals. Ultimately, while many first time tourists after 2023 had a positive impression of Khao San Road, returning visitors were more likely to view it as deteriorated.

To conclude, the findings demonstrate that sensory experience is both complex and dynamic. It is heavily shaped by historical context and the personal backgrounds of individuals. The results reveal a clear distinction between a deteriorated sensory perception among returning visitors and a more positive sensory perception among those visiting for the first or second time

7 FURTHER RESEARCH

In the future, the case study of Khao San Road could be compared with other backpacker streets. A comparative analysis would allow for the identification of which elements contribute positively or negatively to a street's transformation.

Additionally, this research could be expanded by including interviews with street vendors and local residents. A larger group of participants would also increase the accuracy and depth of the results.

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APPENDIX I - Survey Questions

A survey has been sent out to tourists who have visited Thailand. The questions in this survey are based on various academic papers and their research questions and are designed in such a way that the survey can also be sent to locals in the future. The survey consists of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions are useful for obtaining unexpected answers (Fink, 1995, p. 32). This allows for surprising insights into the perception of the street—insights that could not have been anticipated beforehand. However, open-ended questions are difficult to compare and interpret. They are mainly used for analyzing individuals (Fink, 1995, p. 32), which is important in understanding how each person may interpret a place differently.

Closed-ended questions have also been included because not all respondents are able or willing to express themselves during the survey (Fink, 1995, p. 32). This increases the likelihood of gaining more respondents. The research did not steer participants in a specific direction but instead paid close attention to expressions such as “unhealthy noise, odours and smoke,” the “deafening rumbles,” and the “unbearable din” to uncover sensory perceptions (Kenny, 2014, p. 89). This methodology will be applied in this research to keep the answers as open and surprising as possible (Fink, 1995, p. 32).

Furthermore, closed-ended questions are easier to analyze statistically. For this reason, a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions was incorporated into the survey. Answers to open-ended questions are often linked to a closed-ended question to allow for better comparative analysis.

Fink (1995, pp. 14–15) provides an example of a 35-question survey that was considered too time-consuming. Therefore, the survey was shortened to 25 questions. Based on this, the current survey consists of 22 questions, 11 of which are optional in order to increase the number of respondents

What country are you from?

This question clarifies whether the respondent is a local or a tourist. This helps determine whether the emotional perception of a place differs between target groups. Answers can thereby be categorized accordingly (Fink, 1995, p. 41).

How old are you?

This allows us to determine whether young people may be more tolerant of the loud noise and many stimuli in the street. Answers can thereby be categorized accordingly (Fink, 1995, p. 41).

How often have you visited Khao San Road?

This helps to find out whether people found it worthwhile to visit the street multiple times. This is a question that has not been asked before in this context. Howard (2005) poses many questions regarding the reasons for visiting, but does not consider the long term or how perceptions may change over time.

In which year(s) did you visit the street? (multiple answers possible)

This can help establish the relationship between a certain time period and the emotional perception during that time. Howard (2005, p.1) discusses how backpacker enclaves, such as Khao San Road, evolve and change. By asking for the year of the visit, it becomes possible to analyze whether the respondent experienced the street during a specific phase of its development and whether this influenced their perception. Howard (2005) and Chen (2005) collected data during a specific time period. This shows that research on this destination is often time-bound and that results may change over time. Fink (1995, p. 21) emphasizes the importance of using timeframes that are relevant to the core of the question.

For this reason, the multiple-choice answers are based on time periods that differ significantly from each other. Cowan & Steward (2007, p. 2) note that urban experiences and perceptions can shift as the city itself changes. By linking this question to sensory experiences, it becomes possible to map how the transformations of Khao San Road have affected visitors' perceptions.

If you visited the street in multiple years, did your experience improve or worsen? (optional)

Has the experience improved or worsened due to continuous transformations? Chang (2020, p.1) argues that continuity in the urban landscape can degrade its aesthetic quality, which affects how the street is experienced. Rapid transformations over a short period can lead to a loss of public memory. In this context, radical transformations are often viewed negatively (Chang, 2020, p. 1). This question aims to test whether tourists—who do not continuously live through these changes—perceive it in the same way.

Please explain why (optional)

Can provide more insight into what factors made the experience improve or worsen. By adding this open question, answers can be provided about how individuals can interpret transformations differently (Kenny, 2014, p. 204)

Why did you decide to return or not to return to Khao San Road? (optional)

Cowan & Steward (2007) illustrated in their case studies of Brussels and Montreal that changes to a place can alter its appeal. This question helps to determine which aspects tourists consider positive or negative in the long term.

Can you recall an experience on Khao San Road that stood out to you?

This can lead to varied stories that can be linked to sensory experiences. The question does not steer the respondent in a specific direction. The goal is to gather insights that go beyond general opinions or static data—insights that are surprising (Fink, 1995, p. 32). The responses specifically address what made certain experiences memorable. This allows for an investigation into which sensory factors left the strongest impressions. The question is mainly based on individual experiences. Kenny (2014, pp. 15–16) explains how visual, olfactory, auditory, and tactile experiences arise from more intense interactions between individuals and space. Therefore, it is important to ask open-ended, individual questions and then filter the answers for their connection to sensory aspects (Kenny, 2014, p. 3).

How would you rate this experience?

A follow-up question can reveal whether this sensory experience was perceived as positive or negative. By using standardized answer formats, it becomes easier to group, compare, and analyze responses (Fink, 1995, p. 32).

Where did this experience take place? (multiple answers possible)

This shows which location was most important or frequently visited. It provides specific context to the memories. The specific context can strongly influence sensory experiences and perceptions (Kenny, 2014, p. 5). By asking this as a multiple-choice question, experiences can be linked to a particular context (Fink, 1995, p. 1-22).

Why do you remember this experience? (multiple answers possible)

By asking about the “why” behind a memory, the individual and subjective dimension of the experience on Khao San Road is revealed. This results in an analysis of the interaction between the body (with its memories and personal interests) and the urban environment. Kenny (2014, p.203) emphasized that he saw modernity primarily as a resistance to rationalist constraints. Therefore, individuals may experience a street with fewer restrictions—compared to their home environment—as overwhelmingly positive. However, it is also possible for this to be experienced negatively. Bodily behavior and the messages it communicates are largely shaped by society and culture, and are dependent on time and place (Kenny, 2005, p. 203). This question can help determine which factors people prioritize—such as past memories, emotions, or new experiences.

Picture analysis

This allows us to examine what people find important, what stands out to them first, and what they prefer to see. These open-ended questions enable the collection of spontaneous, immediate responses from participants to a visual stimulus (Fink, 1995, p. 32). Are other sensory stimuli immediately associated with these visual prompts through memories triggered by the photos? Fink (1995, p. 21) highlights the importance of using relevant time periods. The photos are linked to the same time periods as question 4a. Chang (2014) included several illustrations in his research on how continuity can diminish the quality of the urban landscape. These photos also indicate how Khao San Road has changed over the years.

Picture 1

The street before it became a tourist street. The question is whether locals are more enthusiastic about this.

Picture 2

The street at one of its busiest moments. This contrasts with the previous photo. Is this appreciated or not?

Picture 3

During the COVID-19 period. The street is empty and gives a completely different perception. This can help determine whether people prefer a quiet, empty street or a chaotic, busy one.

Picture 4

After the legalization of weed. A McDonald's sign is also visible. This shows how the street has become increasingly Westernized over time. The goal is to find out whether this creates a different vibe.

Picture 5

A photo of the street during the daytime and from a slightly earlier time. The street is less Westernized here, and during the day, it is much quieter. This may lead to a different perception of the street.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5

What did you like the least about the street? (multiple answers possible)

This reveals which stimuli are not appreciated. Howard (2005) addressed this topic, but focused more on the general emotional experience. By asking this question, the answers can hopefully be narrowed down to sensory experiences. Kenny (2014) discusses negative aspects such as bad smells, noise, or discomfort. These elements contribute to the feeling of an environment. Identifying these undesirable experiences can help uncover and understand the subjective dimensions of an urban sensory experience.

What did you like the most about the street? (multiple answers possible)

The same applies here as in the previous question, but this one focuses on the positive aspects of the street. Together, these two questions can provide a comprehensive picture of the diverse individual experiences within the street.

Which places do you remember the most? (multiple answers possible)

Indicates which locations may have the greatest influence on the emotional experience. By grouping this question with the reason why the place is remembered, sensory experiences and perceptions can be linked to specific locations. This allows the location aspect to be isolated, leaving only individual interpretation. In this way, it becomes possible to map how experiences within the same area can still differ from one another (Kenny, 2014, p. 203). By linking this question to the periods during which Khao San Road was visited, the social and cultural aspects remain as variables.

Please explain why (optional)

Shows the experience divided per location, as explained in the question above.

How did you walk through the street? (multiple answers possible)

This question can help establish a connection between walking patterns and an individual's sensory experience. "Walking is an elemental way of perceiving urban places" (Wunderlich, 2008, p. 128). It aids in connecting certain behaviors to the sensory experience.

Describe in a few sentences the feeling you had while walking through the street. Why did you feel this way?

This can be translated into sensory experiences and may reveal whether those experiences changed while walking through the street. It is an open-ended question intended to bring out private subjectivity (Kenny, 2014, p. 19).

What is the craziest thing you have seen or done on Khao San Road?

This question reveals the most extreme experiences, which can be linked to the various stimuli present on the street. Kenny (2014, p. 3) states that commentators shape their readings of modern cities by evoking vivid sensorial impressions. This suggests that experiences involving strong sensory stimuli are more likely to be remembered. This question, therefore, can reveal subjective overloads on sensory experiences.

How much would you recommend Khao San Road?

Provides a clear conclusion on whether people had a positive or negative experience in the street.

APPENDIX II - Survey results

There are 22 responses from tourists that have visited Khao San Road. Underneath are the answers per question. The open answers are not grouped but kept individual. That's because it's highlighted how the experience of individuals can be different (Kenny, 2005, p. 203).

1. What country are you from?

Amount	Answer
15	The Netherlands
3	England
1	Australia
1	Canada
1	Sweden
1	United states of America

Most of the responses come from the Netherlands, but various countries were approached in order to survey as diverse a target group as possible. There are no responses from locals. To obtain local respondents, more time will need to be allocated to the research in the future.

2. How old are you?

Amount	Answer
1	19
2	20
1	21
4	23
6	25
1	26
2	27
2	28
1	33
1	49
1	50

The surveyed age group has a wide range. These ages will be linked to other questions in order to draw a conclusion about the influence of age on sensory experiences.

3. How often have you visited Khao San Road?

Amount	Answer
10	1 time
7	2 times
1	3-5 times
4	5+ times

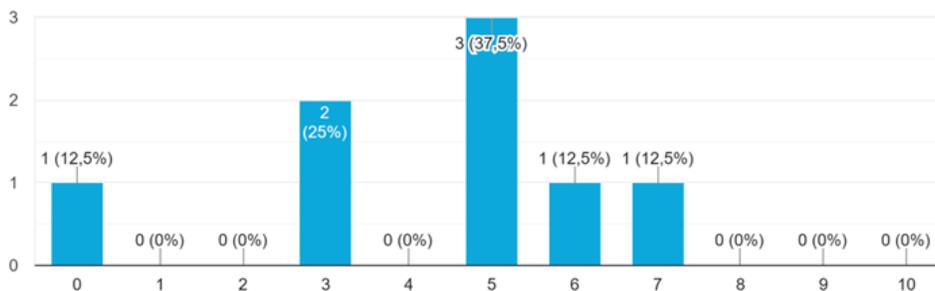
The street has been visited a varied number of times. This means that the sensory experience can be examined in relation to the continuity of urban transformations.

4a. In which year(s) did you visit the street? (multiple answers possible)

Amount	Answer
0	Before 1992 (still a locals street)
3	1992-2010
1	2010-2015
3	2015-2020
4	2020-2021 (during COVID-19)
6	2022-2023
16	After 2023 (legalization of cannabis)

The street has been visited at least once during almost every defined time period by the respondents. This allows for the changes in perception over these time periods to be identified. Furthermore, the experience can be linked to specific time periods in order to determine the overall improvements or deteriorations in sensory experience.

4b. If you visited the street in multiple years, did your experience improve or worsen? (optional)



Overall, the experience is generally perceived in a similar way. However, there are more outliers indicating a worsened experience. Still, opinions remain fairly divided. It can at least be concluded that rapid transformations over shorter periods do not necessarily have a negative impact on experiences. Tourists do not live continuously through the transformations, which may result in a lesser impact on the loss of collective memory.

4c. Please explain why (optional)

Improve	year(s) of visit	Worsen	year(s) of visit	Stayed the same	year(s) of visit
(7) During COVID, it was really quiet. After that it became more lively. But after the legalization of weed the vibe changed and the street became less social	2020-2021	(3) The legalization of marijuana had a negative impact on the socialization in the street between backpacker's	2022-2023	(5) No real difference	before 2010
	2022-2023		after 2023		2020-2021
	after 2023				
I couldn't comment, as was too drunk the first time too drunk what it was like!	After 2023	(3) Just got so much louder. It's always been crowded which is fine with me	before 2010	(5) I think the road can be chaos but that's why so many people are attracted to it. It's a unique experience that you won't find anywhere else. I think the things on offer (clubs, food, drugs, drinks) have been similar every time I've been.	2022-2023
			2015-2020		after 2023
			after 2023		
(6) -	after 2023				

The reason the experience has worsened is due to the change in function, and with that, the sensory experience. The rise of marijuana and the increase in noise are perceived negatively. The chaos (translated into the amount of sensory stimuli) is seen as a positive aspect. The decrease in crowds and stimuli is viewed as a negative aspect.

Tourists who visited the street before 2010 do not see the transformations as an improvement. This is mainly due to the increase in noise. Tourists who have only visited the street more recently notice little difference. The only change highlighted by two individuals is the legalization of cannabis. The social factor has declined as a result of this transformation.

4d. Why did you decide to return or not to return to Khao San Road? (optional)

Return	year(s) of visit	Not return	year(s) of visit
Return because it is a cheap fun and social street where you have everything. It is a great place to meet other travelers.	2020-2021	It was fun, a bit loud. But I'm not big on the nightlife so I didn't really see the need to return	2022-2023
	2022-2023		after 2023
	after 2023		
It is still a great way to meet other backpackers and meet locals	2022-2023	It's too far away, too tourist heavy, better places to go.	before 2021
	after 2023		2020-2021
I just end up there	2020-2021	We zijn niet terug gegaan omdat er veel mooiere plekken zijn in Bangkok	after 2023
	after 2023		
People watching, nightlife, excitement and to take photos.	2022-2023	It's not as convenient to SkyTrain and other public transport.	before 2010
	after 2023		2015-2020
			after 2023
My boyfriend had never been and wanted to visit as it is a well known place to go	after 2023	Very loud	after 2023
It's not that fun party place anyway. But nearby there is some very cheap food.	after 2023	It's too far away	2022-2023

The enthusiasm to return to Khao San Road is divided. Reasons to return include the social aspect, the atmosphere, and the variety of amenities. Reasons not to return are the noise, the image, and accessibility. The people who have mostly returned are those who visited the street in more recent years. This suggests that individuals who have experienced the street over a longer period of time have developed a more negative perception of it.

5a. Can you recall an experience on Khao San Road that stood out to you? (Also included: question 5b, 5c, 5d)

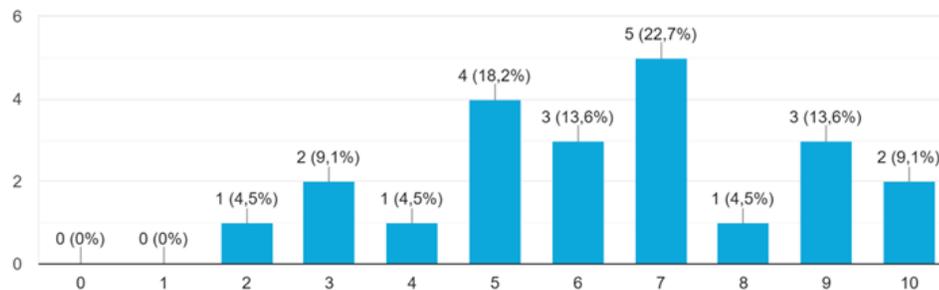
years visited	Rate and experience (5a, 5b)	Place (5c)	Why do you remember this experience (5d)
	unsatisfactory		
2015-2020	(2) A lot of people trying to force you to get inside their bar/store	On the street	It was overwhelming
	(3) Lot of people taking drugs at night	A bar, on the street	It was overwhelming
2015-2020	(3) -	Massage place	It reminded me of a past experience
after 2023	(3) A lot of drunk tourists, some getting into fights	A bar	It was unnecessary and ruining other peoples experience
after 2023	(4) Very crowded road full with people trying to sell you the weirdest stuff. Especially to try to scam tourists it feel like.	On the street	It was overwhelming, It reminded me of a past experience
2015-2020	(5) Nothing really stood out, i found it overhyped, not much to do and kind of dead during the day	On the street	It was a new kind of experience
2022-2023, after 2023	(5) When asked about the loud music a local employee working in a bar told me that he had constant tinnitus because of the loud music, this was quite shocking and sad to hear	A bar	It showed that working conditions at Khao San Road were not great
Before 2010, 2020-2021	(5) There was a ska band playing at Brick Bar	A bar	It was nice to see a subgenre like ska
after 2023	(5) Prices were expensive and sellers constantly bothered you. I speak some Thai so luckily was able to tell them I wasn't interested but new ones kept showing up.	A bar, On the street, Food stall	It was overwhelming

Negative experiences arose from loud noise, witnessing physical violence, and being harassed by street vendors. Most respondents found this overwhelming. This can be translated into an overload of sensory stimuli—namely sound, touch, and sight (Kenny, 2014, pp. 15–16). Due to these stimuli, one can lose a sense of clarity, causing the street to feel like one big blur. This is supported by Cowan & Steward (2007, p.) who refer to Simmel’s argument that an excess of sensory stimuli can lead to the dulling of the senses. This is reflected in the response: “Nothing really stood out,…”

	Satisfactory		
years visited	Rate and experience (5a, 5b)	Place (5c)	Why do you remember this experience (5d)
before 2010, 2015-2020, after 2023	(10) Khao San road was the first place I ever visited as a backpacker in the mid 90s. It was eye opening for meeting people from all over the world who had similar interests. I was inspired to learn Thai and now Thailand is a big part of my life 30 years later.	On the street	It was a new kind of experience, It was overwhelming
after 2023	(10) Everything is crazy	A bar, Massage place	It was a new kind of experience
after 2023	(9) A lot of weird food	On the street	It was a new kind of experience
2022-2023	(9) The street vendors walking around	A bar, On the street, Food stall	It was a new kind of experience, It was overwhelming
2020-2021, 2022-2023, after 2023	(9) Doing laughing gas and drinking cocktail buckets. Crazy but fun	A bar	It was a new kind of feeling, It was a new kind of experience, It was overwhelming
2022-2023, after 2023	(8) New years countdown, that was fun. Never had a warm new years eve	On the street	It was a new kind of experience
2020-2021	(7) So loud, and busy even when nothing else in the country was	A bar, On the street	It was overwhelming
after 2023	(7) It was very loud	On the street, Food stall	It was overwhelming
after 2023	(7) SO many people selling stuff	A bar, On the street, Food stall	It was overwhelming
2022-2023	(7) All the different foods and people (lady-boys)	A bar, On the street	It was a new kind of experience, It was overwhelming
after 2023	(7) Extremely busy, but fun	A bar, On the street	It was a new kind of experience
after 2023	(6) A lot of people. A lot of tourists. Mostly young backpackers. Cheap food. Not the best party place. Kinda cliché	A bar, On the street	It reminded me of a past experience, Basically just a street with beer booze and food.
2022 - 2023, after 2023	(6) A crocodile on a stick, lots of balloons, some creepy men.	Outside in the road	It was a new kind of feeling, It was a new kind of experience, At times overwhelming but I was with friends so I felt safe.
after 2023	(6) The amount of different people	A bar, On the street, Food stall	It was overwhelming

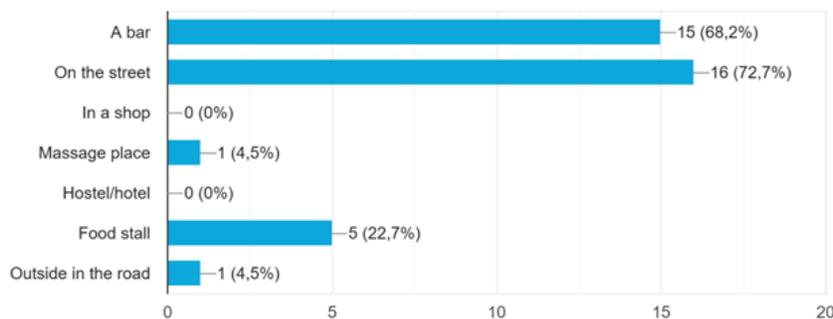
Positive experiences arose from new encounters, such as drinking cocktails from buckets, trying new types of food, doing laughing gas, seeing ladyboys, and crocodiles on a stick. These experiences are mainly linked to the senses of taste and sight. Sound is also experienced as something positive here. This confirms Kenny's theory (2014, p. 203) that the way sensory stimuli are perceived varies from person to person. The overwhelming feeling that came with these stimuli is experienced as positive by some and negative by others. The overwhelming nature of all these stimuli shows that sensory experiences are part of a whole and that sensory stimuli cannot be studied in isolation (Kenny, 2014, p. 204).

5b. How would you rate this experience?



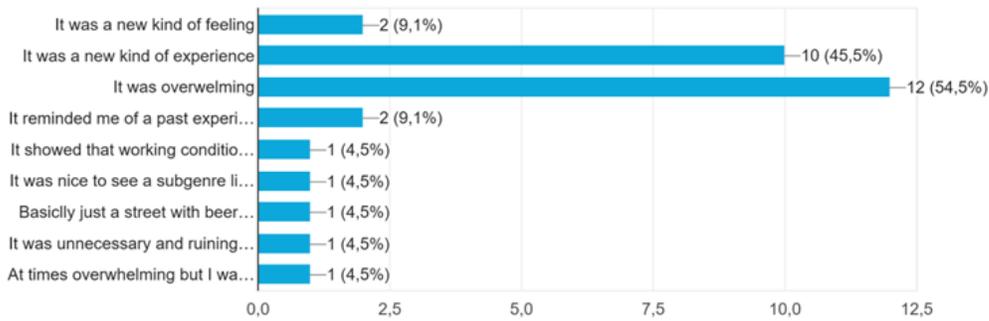
Overall, the experiences on Khao San Road are generally perceived as positive. This implies that the overdose of sensory stimuli has a satisfying effect on most individuals.

5c. Where did this experience take place? (multiple answers possible)



Most of these experiences took place in a bar, on the street, or at a food stall. These are the places with the highest concentration of sensory stimuli: the taste and smell of exotic food, the music, the feeling of a cold drink, and the sight of all the surrounding chaos—such as street vendors passing by every five minutes to sell all kinds of strange new products.

5d. Why do you remember this experience? (multiple answers possible)



The reason these sensory experiences have such a memorable impact is mainly linked to the novelty of the experience. The combination of all these stimuli creates something many have never encountered before. This also makes it overwhelming—an experience some people enjoy, while others find it off-putting.

6. Picture analysis

6a. Picture 1 - before it was a touriststreet



Connected to a feeling	Connected to functional features	Connected to a memory/something known	Connected to physical features
Peacefull, local	Traditional	Old films	The amount of cars
More peacefull	Different venders on to sell produce.	Looks like a regular street from a while back. So, old	The balconies
Rustig	Different venders on to sell produce.	Quiet	Lots of room to walk around
Calm	Historic, traditional and people going to work.	Looks like any other street	Blurry, could be anywhere
Beautiful	Trade	Normal street or road	Wide
Calm		A regular busy street	Low rise
Calm		Maybe more poverty	Very empty street
		Authenticity	
		Quiet road	

In the photo analysis, it becomes clear from the reactions to the first photo—taken before it became a tourist street—that the simplicity of the street’s layout makes more details stand out. The balconies, the function, the horse-drawn carriages are all singular elements that are mentioned. The purpose is also more evident when the image radiates more tranquility. There is talk of people going to work and local trading. One could conclude that more simplicity leads to better clarity. In terms of feeling, people mention calmness, tranquility, and peace. Furthermore, it shows that people want to associate a certain image with something they know. Backpackers experience places based on a representation of the world as a series of differences from home (Teo & Leong, 2006, p. 113). This is confirmed by Chang (2005, p.), where in the photo series it becomes clear how layers of history allow people to identify with a location.

6b. Picture 2 - after it became a tourist street



Connected to a feeling	Connected to functional features	Connected to a memory/ something known	Connected to fysical features
Very busy, overwhelming	tourist hotspot	Blade runner 2049 (a memory of same visual features)	A lot of colours, a lot of things to do. Also a lot of signs
Chaotic but intriguing	(over)tourism	Salesmen trying to win you in	Beautiful
Any bright lights, not a fan. Can't see the people properly. This is too crowded for me	tourist hotspot	Busyness, a street you need to have been when you go to Bangkok	Lots of colours. Also a lot of signs
Loud, overwhelming,		Noise!	Any bright lights
Overwhelmed		Busy, chaotic and loud.	
Overwhelmed		NYC	
To busy		China or a massive city	
Hectic and busy		Lots of things to do	
Energy and fun			
Busy and lively			
Chaotic but intriguing			
Insanely busy			
Loud, overwhelming,			

These responses also emphasize how important memories are in forming a particular image or perception of a situation (Teo & Leong, 2006, p. 113). It's notable that the person who relates it to NYC is from the USA. This also confirms the earlier theory mentioned in Appendix 1. A visual image can trigger a memory, which in turn may lead to other sensory stimuli—such as sound—emerging as thoughts.

There is noticeably less discussion about the physical details compared to the first photo. This may support the earlier theory that an overload of stimuli can make the street feel like one big blur (Cowan & Steward, 2007, p.). The overwhelming feeling takes precedence. Some find this intriguing. Additionally, there is clearly more talk about emotion, which could be due to the abundance of visible stimuli. Finally, it is evident that this street is now intended for tourists, and whereas the first photo seemed to depict a space for locals, that no longer seems to be the case.

6c. Picture 3 - The COVID-period



Connected to a feeling	Connected to functional features	Connected to a memory/ something known	Connected to fysical features
More overview, doesn't look inviting due to the amount of poles	Thai massage	A more recent picture but it seems like the same place as the black/white picture? Changed quite a bit.	Quite empty, more overview, doesn't look inviting due to the amount of poles
One big no no, it takes out the charakter and charmes of the place	Normale weg in bangkok	Khaosan road during the day	Clean
Seems less thriving. It is more calm		A clean, generic street in a town / city	Clean
A peaceful street		Disney World	Structured
Calm street		Change from the past	Order over functionality
Peace		Quiet	Organised
Calm		Looks like a European street	Clean
Calm			Quite empty
Terrible			Empty
Safe			

In this photo, it seems that several people don't even recognize the street as Khaosan Road. It is described as an ordinary street in a neighborhood or city. The calmness is immediately noticed. Some find this "peaceful," while others consider it "terrible." The newly placed poles also stand out and have a negative impact on the tourists. The change compared to the previous photo is striking.

6d. Picture 4 - After the legalization of cannabis



Connected to a feeling	Connected to functional features	Connected to a memory/ something known	Connected to physical features
Chaotic	Tourism enablement	Germany	Weed city. A lot of flags from all nationalities, mcdonalds sign. commercial
Its cute	Tourist city	Khaosan road	It's been raining
This looks like place i'd like to visit to see and maybe try some things	Tourist attraction, also food.	Just a random semi busy street	
The perfect condition	Street food	History and novelty	
Cozy, calm street	Tourism		
Appealing to tourists... weed, Chang. Big, bright signs	Weed shops around every corner		
Looks fun	Cannabis		
Busy	For tourists		
	Diverse		

This image also confirms that visuals can be linked to other senses, and that senses are therefore not isolated elements (Kenny, 2014, p. 204). For instance, people mention street food (even though it is not visible in the image) and Chang beer. Furthermore, many immediately notice that cannabis has made its entrance here. This suggests that it has indeed been a significant change. However, it is not specified whether this change is experienced as positive or negative.

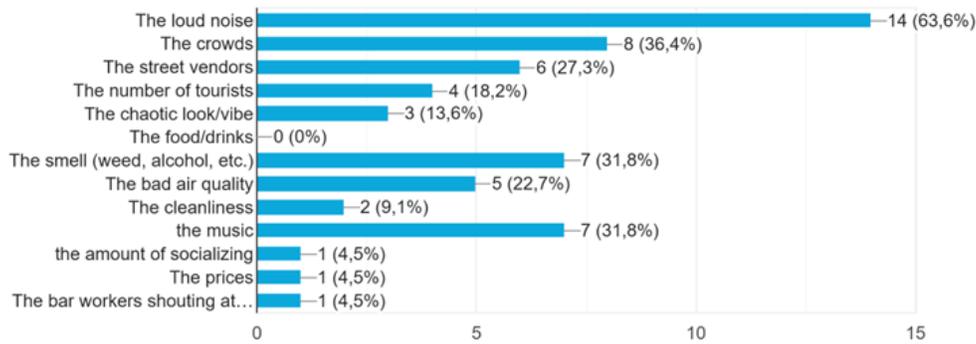
6e. Picture 5 - The street in it's normal habitat by day



Connected to a feeling	Connected to functional features	Connected to a memory/ something known	Connected to fysical features
More peacefull	Fine for tourists	Quiet	7/Even
Chaotic	Touristic	Early morning Khao San Road	Lots of shops but few people
Also cute	For tourists	No rules	
Cozy, calm street	A Thai market place	Koh Chang (Thai Island)	
Looks warm and nice to go for a walk in this weather. But the street doesn't feel very welcome	Lots of shops but few people. Quiet bars in that sense.	Vacation markets	
Inviting	A warm touristi place	Lots of vendors	
Connection	Vacation markets		
Also very busy			
Very busy			

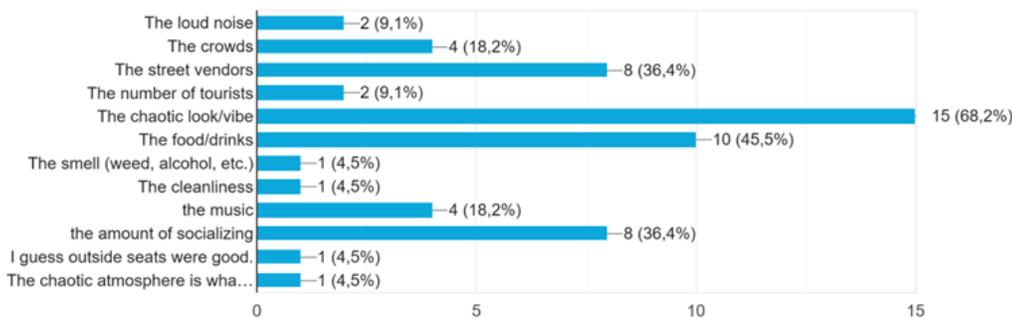
This is Khaosan Road during the day. Most responses indicate a warm, pleasant feeling. It also shows how individual opinions can vary greatly—one person experiences the street as calm, while another finds it very busy. In this photo, there is less discussion about physical features and more focus on the feeling and purpose of the street. This could be because there is so much to see that the details stand out less.

7a. What did you like the least about the street? (multiple answers possible)



This suggests that the loud noise is a common complaint among tourists. The crowd, the number of street vendors, the smell of alcohol and cannabis, and the music are also seen as drawbacks. This indicates that there is a limit to how much sensory stimulation people can handle.

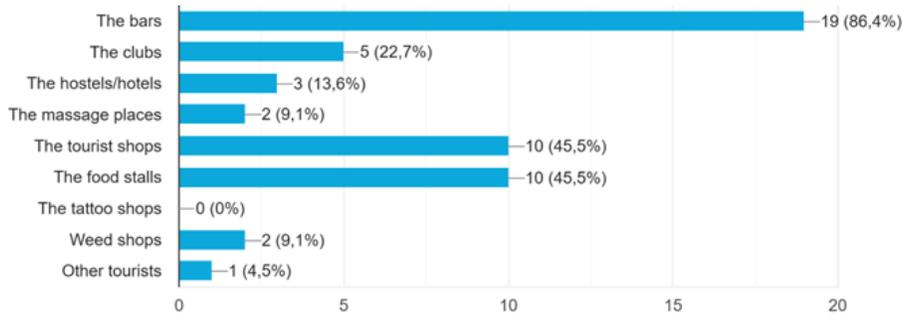
9b. Which places do you remember the most? (multiple answers possible)



The image of the street is experienced as positive, along with the social aspect. The street vendors have both a negative and positive impact on the emotional experience. The tactile experience is also one of the main reasons to visit the street.

It can be concluded that the sensory stimuli of hearing and smelling have a negative influence on the experience of the street. Seeing and tasting play a positive role in the experience. Nevertheless, the chaotic atmosphere — which is a positive aspect of the street in the eyes of tourists — is not the same without the stimuli of hearing and smelling.

10a. Which places do you remember the most?



10b. Please explain why

Place re-remembered most	Reason	Loud noise	Crowds	Street vendors	Number of tourists	Chaotic look/vibe	Food/drinks	The smell	The bad air quality	The cleanliness	The music	The socializing	The prices	Different
The bars	Was only there to socialize and drink	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red				Green		
	The bar was fun, they had scorpion (I didn't try, should next time)	Red				Green								
	Place I met the most new people	Red	Green	Green	Green			Red						
	So any to choose fro and the people inside were great to socialize with	Red					Green				Red	Green		
	That's what we came for	Red				Green		Red			Red			
	I went to bars and clubs so that's what I remember				Red						Red			Green *
	First time experiencw with buckets redbull vodka, tourist from all over the world in 1 bar	Green		Green		Red			Red	Red				
	The staff from the shops often come out to the street to speak to you.		Green	Green		Green	Green	Red	Red		Green	Red		
The clubs	Was only there to socialize and drink	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red				Green		
	The clubs represent memories and fun nights out				Red	Green					Green	Green		Red **
	I went to bars and clubs so that's what I remember				Red						Red			Green *
	The staff from the shops often come out to the street to speak to you.		Green	Green		Green	Green	Red	Red		Green	Red		
The hos-tels/hotels	We spent a lot of time in hostels and meeting people there.				Red	Green					Green	Green		Red **
The mas-sage places	Massages were calm.				Red	Green					Green	Green		Red **
	Very nice girls	Green				Green		Green		Green	Red			

Place	Reason	Loud noise	Crowds	Street vendors	Number of tourists	Chaotic look/vibe	Food/drinks	The smell	The bad air quality	The cleanliness	The music	The socializing	The prices	Different
The tourist shops	That's what we came for	Red				Green		Red			Red			
	The staff from the shops often come out to the street to speak to you.		Green	Green		Green	Green	Red	Red		Green	Red		
The food stalls	The deep fried spiders and mini crocodiles on the grill still have a place in my memory	Red	Red	Red		Green								
	That's what we came for	Red				Green		Red			Red			
	The staff from the shops often come out to the street to speak to you.		Green	Green		Green	Green	Red	Red		Green	Red		

* Outside seats were good

** The bar workers shouting at you to visit their bar

It can be concluded that, when it comes to bars, almost everyone finds the noise level too high. However, many see socializing here as a positive aspect. The negative experience of the loud noise may be due to the difficulty of understanding each other while socializing. Music is also generally perceived as a disadvantage, which could also be related to the loud volume. Smell is a negative factor for many as well.

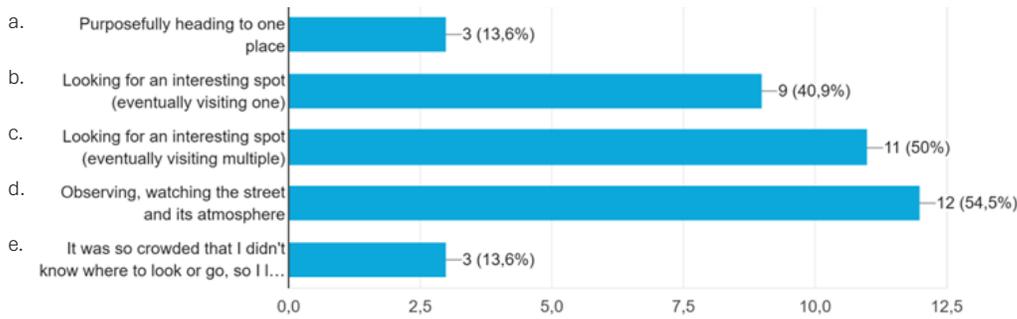
In clubs, almost everyone views the chaotic atmosphere as a positive element. Sound plays a less negative role here, possibly because loud music is already expected beforehand. Here too, smell is experienced as a negative element.

At hostels/hotels and massage places, the responses are mixed, as with tourist shops. However, the chaotic atmosphere is appreciated by everyone in these places. Smell is marked as a negative factor by many. Notably, people who mainly visited food stalls also found smell to be an unpleasant factor.

When looking at the colors green (liked most) and red (liked least), it becomes clear that there is considerable variation among individuals, and that many reactions to sensory stimuli are not dependent on the location.

Finally, the reason many people remember a place is often linked to pre-planned activities, meeting people, and new tactile experiences.

11a. How did you walk through the street? (multiple answers possible)



11b. Describe in a few sentences the feeling you had while walking through the street. Why did you feel this way?

The feeling	a	b	c	d	e
A lot was happening, a lot of street vendors talking to you, a lot of different stores, food-stands, etc. So much to chose from that I could've stayed there forever. Only the loud noises were annoying. They went up every hour as well. Besides that a lot of Thai woman sold tarantulas, snakes and scorpions. It was interesting to see but they didn't have to show them so close to me (afraid of spiders)	x	x	x		
It felt very hectic. I did not immediately know where to look since there was so much happening. The vibe however was always good. And after sitting down it did not feel too hectic anymore	x	x	x		
I really enjoyed		x			
Judgemental I guess, it was far from my first time in Thailand and the prices were outragous for a not high-class area. I was with some friends who hadn't been to Thailand and they kept saying things were so cheap. I was laughing and having a good time cause of that.		x			
Overwhelmed but feeling it was part of the whole experience		x		x	
At first overwhelmed, but after you walk through the street I noticed it had kinda a system. It felt a bit grimy and dirty which i didnt like at all.		x		x	
It sort of feels like the street was set up there for a reason, to be chaotic and attract tourists but before and after you leave the street it returns to normal Bangkok scenes.		x		x	
Extremely busy and loud		x	x	x	
Fish in a barrel, there were a lot of people. A bit overwhelmed, a lot of people and loud music			x		
Overwhelmed by the amount of people			x		
Felt like it was a tourist trap because it looked and felt like a tourist trap			x		
Wowwww, so cool and impressive this kind of street			x	x	
Overwhelmed with options, but happy because i had a local guide			x	x	
Like it was still as loud and overwhelming as the first time. Same vibe different day. Just a rotation of tourist and a few locals			x	x	

The feeling	a	b	c	d	e
busy and overwhelming but still a vibe					x
Overwhelmed. So many people in one place that you couldn't place more than two steps at a time. All the street vendors looking at you hungrily to invite you in.					x
I want to go back to my hostel. I don't feel safe here					x

People who walked purposefully toward a destination were still overwhelmed by the amount of sensory stimuli such as noise, dirtiness, and the number of people, which eventually led them to continue searching for other places. Those who were more aimlessly looking for a spot also reported feeling overstimulated, but said it was part of the experience.

Three out of the 22 people indicated that they ultimately didn't visit anything due to the sensory overload. Other reasons included being harassed by street vendors, feeling unsafe, and the crowding, which made it very difficult to move through the street.

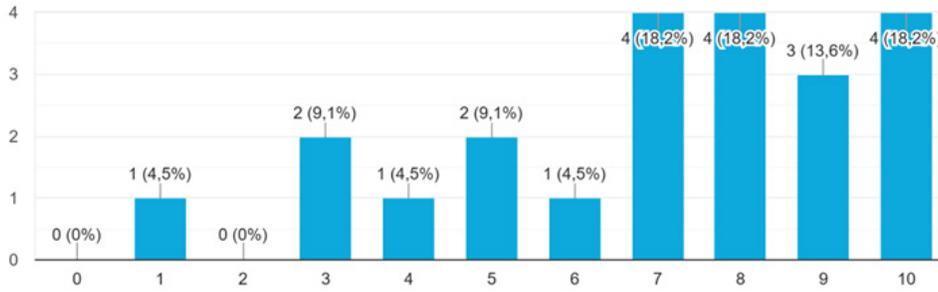
Many tourists mentioned that it is truly a street for tourists. They recognized that this is not a street for locals.

12. What is the craziest thing you have seen or done on Khao San Road?

Their 'ping pong show' boards. Not into that	Opgezetten krokodillen die je kan eten	Let's not elaborate on that
Didn't see anything crazy	I saw people eating crocodiles and scorpion and other unidentifiable foods	Accidentally found a very lgbtq bar and barely made it out with my clothes still on
I don't think anything too crazy. Same kind of stuff. Drunk tourist, heated arguments, vendors with fake crocodiles on the stalls, people trying to get you into their bars.	Eh, wasn't there long. Seen probably just fried scorpions. Done was climb through a pitch black alley to reach another area. Couldn't see a thing. Oh and I wore heels the whole time. That was a bad idea.	Spiders to eat
Laughing gas, and eating insects	Naked people	An alligator food stall.
People taking drugs side the road	Deep fried spiders	Eat a scorpion, drank three buckets full of cocktail
Eating a grilled scorpion	Ate a scorpion	

Kenny's theory (2014, p. 3) shows that experiences involving strong sensory stimuli are more likely to be remembered. This is confirmed by the answers to this question. Many tourists recall something they tasted, felt, or saw.

13. How much would you recommend Khao San Road?



Rate	Amount	Amount of people visited during timeframe						
		before 1992	1992-2010	2010-2015	2015-2020	2020-2021	2022-2023	After 2023
0	-							
1	1		1			1		
2	-							
3	2							2
4	1		1		2			1
5	2				1			1
6	1						1	
7	4				1		1	3
8	4						1	4
9	3						1	3
10	4					3	2	2

Notably, earlier questions revealed mixed opinions about the street. However, when looking at how strongly a place is recommended, the responses are largely positive. In general, people who visited the street in recent years are more positive than those who had also visited it in the past. It can be concluded that, according to them, the street has deteriorated. Tourists who have only visited the street in recent years have less to compare it to and tend to be more enthusiastic about it. This shows that the way the street is interpreted depends heavily on previous experiences there.