



Instituto de Geografia  
e Ordenamento do Território  
UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA



Universidade de Lisboa

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Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril

**Beyond Sightseeing: Exploring Multisensory Tourism in Blindfolded Experiences  
in Lisbon**

**André Filipe Barata Pereira**

Dissertação de Mestrado orientada pelo

Doutor Daniel André Fernandes Paiva

e Professora Doutora Ana Cláudia dos Santos Gonçalves

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“Life is about how far we’re moved, not how far we’ve travelled.”

*Unknown*

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## RESUMO

O turismo representa mais do que uma simples experiência visual, sendo também corporal e sensorial. Nos últimos anos, o uso de estímulos sensoriais tornou-se uma estratégia fundamental no turismo, uma vez que as experiências turísticas são reconhecidas como multissensoriais. No entanto, a maioria das experiências turísticas continua a focar-se na visão e na audição. O turismo de olhos vendados, por outro lado, desafia as percepções dos visitantes ao potenciar uma conexão mais profunda com outros sentidos, como o olfato, a audição, o paladar, o tato e a propriocepção.

A literatura sugere que o correto estímulo dos sentidos é essencial para transmitir a história, a cultura e a atratividade de um destino e, quando associada à comunicação e ao marketing territorial, a estimulação sensorial representa uma ponte entre destinos e visitantes. A integração de experiências ricas em estímulos sensoriais no turismo não só melhora as experiências e percepções do lugar, mas também contribui para o bem-estar dos habitantes e proporciona benefícios económicos para a comunidade. Com os turistas contemporâneos a procurarem cada vez mais experiências personalizadas, transformadoras e únicas, o turismo experiencial e sensorial emerge como uma resposta promissora.

O estímulo sensorial revela-se uma ferramenta poderosa para moldar memórias sociais, fomentar um sentido de pertença a um lugar e gerar conexões pessoais e emocionais com os destinos turísticos, sendo estas conexões cruciais para compreender a relação complexa entre as pessoas e os lugares. Reconhecendo a sua influência nas percepções, comportamentos e no sucesso geral do turismo, as experiências sensoriais requerem uma exploração mais profunda, particularmente dentro do campo do turismo experiencial, sensorial e académico.

Esta dissertação pretende explorar estímulos sensoriais alternativos, focando-se no turismo multissensorial, nas atividades de olhos vendados, nas experiências memoráveis e na sua ligação com o desenvolvimento de um sentido de lugar. Apesar de a investigação contemporânea abordar estes conceitos de forma isolada, continua a existir uma lacuna notória na exploração de como o turismo sensorial, especificamente através de experiências memoráveis de olhos vendados, impacta o desenvolvimento de um sentido de lugar nos visitantes. Este estudo pretende preencher essa lacuna, explorando de forma mais aprofundada como a remoção deliberada de um sentido no turismo pode enriquecer as atividades experienciais, moldando a forma como os turistas se conectam, recordam e se envolvem emocionalmente com os destinos, influenciando assim o seu sentido de lugar.

Neste contexto, esta dissertação visa explorar de que forma as experiências sensoriais de olhos vendados afetam as experiências turísticas, e compreender como esta privação da visão influencia o sentido de lugar e a percepção do destino urbano por parte dos participantes. Deste modo, este trabalho investiga o impacto transformador das experiências de turismo multissensorial, com um foco particular na remoção deliberada da percepção visual em destinos urbanos. Além disso, esta investigação pretende explorar a interconexão entre experiências memoráveis e o sentido de lugar em ambientes urbanos, com foco particular na cidade de Lisboa, em Portugal.

Esta investigação está metodologicamente estruturada em três partes. Inicia-se com uma revisão de literatura abrangente, abordando temas relacionados com o turismo multissensorial, experiências de olhos vendados, atividades turísticas memoráveis e o conceito de sentido de lugar. De seguida, uma análise de estudo de caso permite uma compreensão mais alargada das experiências “Sensory Lisbon” e “Dining in The Dark”, assim como das empresas por detrás destas, a *Lisbon Walker* e a *Fever*. Por fim, uma investigação empírica é desenvolvida através de entrevistas semiestruturadas aprofundadas para examinar como estes eventos sensoriais são conduzidos e para avaliar o seu impacto nos turistas, tanto a partir da perspetiva dos produtores como dos participantes.

A investigação empírica envolve entrevistas semiestruturadas aprofundadas: 11 entrevistas com criativos envolvidos na produção, design e acompanhamento aquando da experiência “Sensory Lisbon” no bairro histórico de Alfama, em Lisboa, e outras 11 entrevistas com visitantes da experiência “Dining in The Dark”, realizadas em diversos estabelecimentos de restauração em Lisboa. Todas as entrevistas, realizadas entre 2 de fevereiro e 21 de março de 2024, foram gravadas, transcritas e sujeitas a análise de discurso, para captar as perceções, experiências e ideias-chave dos entrevistados. Estes dados qualitativos foram, em seguida, sistematicamente codificados e analisados através de uma comparação cruzada para identificar temas comuns, diferenças e padrões emergentes nas respostas. No caso da primeira experiência, esta análise visou facilitar uma compreensão mais profunda sobre o impacto potencial destas experiências do ponto de vista dos profissionais que as conceberam e testemunham os seus efeitos em primeira mão. No caso da segunda experiência, visou compreender como estes eventos específicos podem ressoar com e impactar os participantes, moldando os encontros turísticos gerais, as respostas sensoriais dos participantes e a sua perceção de Lisboa.

Este estudo argumenta que as experiências de olhos vendados servem como uma chave estratégica no campo inovador do turismo sensorial. Uma das descobertas mais significativas destaca o papel fundamental que o turismo sensorial desempenha ao conectar experiências memoráveis com o conceito de lugar. Ao remover intencionalmente os estímulos visuais, estas iniciativas desafiam a noção convencional da visão como o sentido dominante no turismo, ampliando e intensificando outras perceções sensoriais para criar encontros únicos e memoráveis. Implementar com sucesso abordagens diferenciadoras como esta oferece resposta aos desejos desafiantes dos turistas e oferece aos participantes uma perspetiva incomparável dos destinos visitados através dos seus sentidos.

O sucesso das experiências turísticas está estreitamente ligado ao marketing sensorial eficaz e a abordagens temáticas estratégicas. Adaptar técnicas de promoção ajustadas às preferências distintas dos consumidores não só permite que as marcas e os destinos se diferenciem, mas também molda as perspetivas e desejos dos visitantes. Experiências de olhos vendados, como a “Sensory Lisbon”, podem moldar as perceções dos destinos urbanos, oferecendo mais significado e um maior apego ao lugar. Como revelam as entrevistas com os participantes de “Dining in The Dark”, estas questões estão alinhadas com as motivações dos visitantes, destacando o apelo destas experiências devido à exploração multissensorial e à interação social que proporcionam. Estes encontros perturbam as formas usuais de experienciar um destino turístico,

oferecendo uma nova perspetiva sensorial da cidade e construindo memórias duradouras. Em última análise, as experiências multissensoriais transformam significativamente as visitas guiadas e as atividades gastronómicas, sublinhando o carácter imersivo e distintivo das empresas e destinos.

Em conclusão, as experiências de olhos vendados destacam-se como uma forma não convencional de turismo, oferecendo uma viagem imersiva e transformadora. Ao restringir intencionalmente a visão, esta exploração dos sentidos intensifica as perceções, emoções e comportamentos individuais em ambientes urbanos, e estas experiências evidenciam a riqueza e a diversidade dos encontros multissensoriais no panorama turístico.

A ligação entre estes encontros sensoriais e a formação de memórias desempenha um papel importante na criação de impressões duradouras e no fomento de um profundo sentido de lugar nos visitantes. A compreensão deste sentido de lugar como uma construção multidimensional é essencial para os destinos, uma vez que permite a construção de uma imagem de marca positiva e possibilita a diferenciação num panorama turístico competitivo. Eventos memoráveis como “Sensory Lisbon” e “Dining in The Dark” influenciam o sentido de lugar dos participantes, ajustando ou fortalecendo a sua perceção de um destino. Para além do ato de caminhar ou comer, estas experiências moldam escolhas e influenciam o comportamento do consumidor. Da mesma forma, destacam não só a capacidade multissensorial dos destinos, mas também a sua resposta à crescente procura por experiências imersivas e impactantes por parte dos visitantes.

Embora Lisboa (e Portugal) ainda careçam de uma oferta consistente de experiências sensoriais, os estudos de caso indicam que existe um reconhecimento da importância destas atividades para aumentar a atratividade turística e a satisfação geral dos visitantes. Para proporcionar experiências memoráveis e distintas, e para destacar as características únicas de Portugal como destino multissensorial, as empresas de turismo devem priorizar o planeamento e a execução cuidadosa destas atividades.

Por fim, ao explorar o papel do turismo de olhos vendados na criação de experiências autênticas e memoráveis, esta dissertação não só contribui para a compreensão do turismo sensorial, como também revela os mecanismos estratégicos e os efeitos dos estímulos multissensoriais, fundamentais para melhorar o sentido de lugar dos visitantes e a competitividade dos destinos. Ao abordar a escassez de investigação sobre o turismo de olhos vendados, especialmente em Lisboa, e ao conectar experiências turísticas memoráveis ao sentido de lugar, este estudo oferece um passo para preencher uma lacuna académica. Além disso, a investigação fornece *insights* práticos para destinos turísticos e empresas interessadas em experiências sensoriais, oferecendo orientação para as partes interessadas no setor.

**Palavras-chave:** *Turismo Multissensorial; Experiências de Olhos Vendados; Sentido de Lugar; Experiências Memoráveis; Turismo Experiencial.*

## ABSTRACT

The use of sensory stimuli is a key tourism strategy, as tourism experiences are increasingly recognized as multisensorial. Blindfolded tourism enhances visitors' engagement with other senses, influencing the perceptions of tourists. This dissertation explores alternative sensory engagements, focusing on multisensory tourism, blindfolded activities, memorable experiences, and the sense of place. There remains a noticeable research gap in connecting multisensory blindfolded tourism and visitors' sense of place. This dissertation aims to explore how blindfolded sensory experiences impact tourism experiences, and understand how this sensory deprivation influences participants' sense of place and perception of the urban destination. The investigation includes a comprehensive literature review on multisensory tourism, blindfolded experiences, memorable tourism activities and the sense of place. Then, a case study analysis explores the "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in The Dark" experiences and their companies *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever*. The study applies in-depth semi-structured interviews, including 11 interviews with creatives from "Sensory Lisbon", and 11 interviews with visitors from "Dining in the Dark", focusing on understanding the impact of these experiences on tourism encounters and overall perceptions. The findings highlight the role of sensory tourism in connecting memorable experiences to the sense of place. By removing visual cues, these initiatives challenge conventional tourism, enhancing other sensory perceptions and creating unique encounters. This approach responds to visitors' evolving desires and deepens their sensory and emotional engagement with destinations, ultimately influencing their perceptions, behaviors and memories. Although Lisbon currently lacks a variety of sensory experiences, stakeholders recognize their importance in enhancing tourism appeal and visitor satisfaction. By investigating blindfolded encounters, this dissertation contributes to understanding multisensory tourism and its impact on visitors and destinations, offering practical insights for stakeholders aiming to enrich tourists' sense of place and overall satisfaction.

**Key-words:** *Multisensory Tourism; Blindfolded Experiences; Sense of Place; Memorable Experiences; Experiential Tourism.*

## i. Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	3
<b>RESUMO</b> .....	4
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	7
<b>i. Table of Contents</b> .....	8
<b>ii. List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	10
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	11
<b>2. Multisensory Tourism and Blindfolded Experiences</b> .....	15
2.1. Experiential Tourism: A Paradigm Shift.....	15
2.2. Multisensory Encounters in Tourism: A Conceptual Discussion.....	17
2.2.1. <i>The Role of the Senses in Tourism</i> .....	18
2.2.2. <i>Atmosphere and Multisensory Integration</i> .....	20
2.2.3. <i>Sensory Marketing in Tourism</i> .....	21
2.2.4. <i>Conclusion</i> .....	22
2.3. Blindfolded Tourism: An Innovative Approach.....	23
<b>3. Sense of place and Memorable Experiences</b> .....	27
3.1. Memorable Experiences and Multisensory Tourism Destinations.....	27
3.2. People and Destinations: Understanding Sense of place.....	30
3.3. Memorable Experiences and Sense of place: Connecting Concepts.....	34
<b>4. Methodology</b> .....	37
4.1. Objective.....	37
4.2. Case study rationale.....	37
4.3. Data collection methods.....	38
4.3.1. <i>Exploratory Interviews, Sample Characterization, and Recruitment</i> .....	38
4.3.1.1. <i>The “Sensory Lisbon” experience</i> .....	39
4.3.1.2. <i>The “Dining in The Dark” experience</i> .....	39
4.4. Data Analysis.....	40
<b>5. Lisbon's Blindfolded Experiences</b> .....	42
5.1. Multisensory Tourism in Lisbon.....	42
5.1.1. <i>The “Sensory Lisbon” Experience</i> .....	42
5.1.2. <i>The “Dining in The Dark” Experience</i> .....	46
5.2. Thematic Analysis: Communication, Senses, Memories, and Places.....	50
5.2.1. <i>“Sensory Lisbon”: Impact of the Blindfolded Tour</i> .....	50
5.2.1.1. <i>Communication</i> .....	50
5.2.1.2. <i>The senses</i> .....	51

5.2.1.3.	<i>Memories and Sense of Place</i> .....	53
5.2.1.4.	<i>Experience improvement</i> .....	55
5.2.1.5.	<i>Future considerations</i> .....	56
5.2.2.	<i>"Dining in The Dark": Assessing the Blindfolded Culinary Experience</i> .....	56
5.2.2.1.	<i>Communication</i> .....	56
5.2.2.2.	<i>The senses</i> .....	57
5.2.2.3.	<i>Memories and Sense of Place</i> .....	59
5.2.2.4.	<i>Experience improvement</i> .....	62
5.2.2.5.	<i>Future considerations</i> .....	63
<b>6.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Appendixes</b> .....	<b>77</b>

## ii. List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1- Lisbon Walker company logo. Source: TripAdvisor.....	42
Figure 2 - Sensory Lisbon's guided tours, in Alfama. Sources: Lisbon Walker & The Globe and Mail.....	43
Figure 3 - "Sensory Lisbon" experience tour path, in Alfama, provided and signaled by the team members. Provided by the Lisbon Walker members.....	44
Figure 4 - Communication strategies used for the "Sensory Lisbon" experience. Source: Lisbon Walker's Twitter.....	46
Figure 5 - Fever company logo. Source: LinkedIn.....	46
Figure 6 – “Dining in The Dark” experiences. Source: Fever.....	48
Figure 7 - Communication strategies used for the "Dining in The Dark " experience. Source: Fever's Instagram.....	49
Figure 8 - Communication strategies used for the "Dining in The Dark " experience. Source: Fever's website.....	49
Figure 9 - Word cloud displaying participants' perception of Lisbon. Source: Created by the author using WordItOut.....	60
Appendix 1 – Connection table illustrating the alignment between each “Sensory Lisbon” interview question and a corresponding empiric sub-objective. Developed by the researcher.....	77
Appendix 2 - Connection table illustrating the alignment between each “Dining in The Dark” interview question and a corresponding empiric sub-objective. Developed by the researcher.....	78
Appendix 3 - Script for the "Dining in The Dark" interviews. Developed by the author.....	79
Appendix 4 - Script for the "Sensory Lisbon" interviews. Developed by the author.....	80
Appendix 5 - Declaration of informed consent (part 1). Developed by the author.....	81
Appendix 6 - Declaration of informed consent (part 2). Developed by the author.....	82

## 1. Introduction

Recognized for its significant influence on how tourists perceive and engage with destinations, sight has traditionally been a central focus in tourism studies and experiences (Urry, 1992; Pan and Ryan, 2009; Hultén, 2011; Henshaw et al., 2016). However, this visual-centric approach, which Urry (1992) termed “the gaze”, has been increasingly questioned by contemporary literature, which reveals the limitations of this perspective and calls for a more comprehensive approach (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Agapito et al., 2012; van Hoven, 2012; Edensor, 2018; Meacci and Liberatore, 2018; Agapito, 2020; Kah et al., 2020). In fact, tourism encompasses more than mere visual experiences, tourism experiences are corporeal and multisensory (Pan and Ryan, 2009; van Hoven, 2012). For this reason, the elicitation of sensory stimuli has been an emerging strategy in the tourism industry in recent years, with numerous studies underlining its importance (Pink, 2009; Henshaw et al., 2016; Mateiro, 2018; Imamović et al., 2022). Building on these critiques, this dissertation explores the multisensory tourism field, exploring how multisensory experiences can enhance overall tourism activities, mold visitor’s perceptions and develop stronger emotional bonds with destinations.

Sensory tourism is considered an experiential approach that strategically fosters emotional bonds, allowing destinations and brands to interact with visitors in a more personalized way (Duarte, 2017; Agapito, 2020; Kah et al., 2020). Consequently, sensory tourism not only motivates visitation and improves engagement, but also differentiates destinations, thereby influencing tourists’ perceptions, desires, and attitudes (Kubartz, 2014; Rahman et al., 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2023). Tourism experiences have been traditionally focused on sight and hearing (Urry, 1992; Caletrío, 2019; Kah et al., 2020). However, research implies that tourism should be “broadly considered as multi sensual in practice and experience” (Edensor, 2018, p. 913). Based on the pivotal role of this multisensory engagement, blindfolded tourism activities should be further analyzed by researchers, as these experiences offer a unique perspective on how sensory stimulation can curate more immersive and resonant relationships between visitors and destinations.

Blindfolded tourism, or “ceciturism”, as Shetty (2022) entitles it, is associated with the creation of events and experiences where participants have their eyes covered. This deliberate absence of vision challenges their perceptions and enhances their other senses, namely smell, hearing, taste, touch and proprioception (Tremblay, 2008; Taylor, 2009; Shetty, 2022). Literature points to the correct elicitation of the senses as key to transmitting a destination’s history, culture, attractiveness and safety. When combined with destination marketing and communication, sensorification represents the bridge between destinations and visitors (Agapito et al., 2012; Mateiro, 2018). Therefore, the senses play a pivotal role in creating a sense of place and shaping desires, not only intermediating the emotional bond between visitors and destinations (Duarte, 2017), but also generating a wider range of memories and highlighting the very identity of the place, distinguishing it from other destinations (Hultén, 2011; Henshaw et al., 2016; Agapito, 2022).

Despite contemporary research highlighting the importance of bodily engagement in creating memorable positive encounters (Imamović et al., 2022), there remains a

noticeable research gap in connecting sensory tourism and blindfolded experiences to the concept of place. Aligning with Doreen Massey's (2005) perspective on the inseparability of "place" and "space", this dissertation acknowledges "place" as a synthesis of physical attributes and human elements, such as embodied experiences, feelings, emotions, and meanings. These factors shape meaningful locations and contribute to a more immersive and personal sense of place (Cresswell, 2004; McCabe, 2009; Henshaw, 2013; Edensor et al., 2020).

Substantial research has addressed but not connected these concepts in tourism, such as the exploration of the multisensory approach by Horng and Hsu (2021), Imamović et al. (2020), Agapito (2022) and Rodrigues et al. (2023); blindfolded tourism examined by Edensor and Falconer (2015), Renault et al. (2018), Everingham et al. (2021), and Shetty (2022); and works towards the understanding of sense of place by Pred (1983), Marschall (2012), Kim et al. (2022) and Hosany et al.'s (2022). Therefore, this link between multisensoriality, blindfolded tourism and sense of place requires further exploration. The interplay between these concepts is pivotal for a deeper understanding on how multisensory stimuli influences visitors' emotional bonds with destinations, shape their perception of urban environments, and ultimately enhance their overall tourism experience and sense of place.

From this perspective, this dissertation aims to explore how blindfolded sensory experiences impact tourism experiences, and understand how this sensory deprivation influences participants' sense of place and perception of the urban destination. In this sense, this work investigates the transformative impact of multisensory tourism experiences, with a particular focus on the deliberate removal of visual perception in urban destinations (blindfolded experiential tourism). Additionally, this research intends on exploring the interconnection between memorable experiences and the sense of place in urban settings, with a specific emphasis on the city of Lisbon, in Portugal. To achieve these goals, two distinctive sensory experiences are examined: "Sensory Lisbon", offered by *Lisbon Walker*, and "Dining in The Dark", provided by *Fever*. Applying a case study methodology, we seek to uncover how the removal of sight influences tourism experiences, how companies adapt their communication and activities in response to this circumstance, and to examine the implications and consequences of these sensory-based projects. The dissertation addresses several sub-objectives, including:

***Theoretical-Conceptual Sub-objectives:***

1. To analyze and cross-reference the existing literature on sensory tourism, multisensory experiences, blindfolded tourism, memorable tourism activities and sense of place.
2. To identify the academic gap in what concerns tourist experiences involving blindfolded experiential events and the gap between the concepts of sense of place and memorable experiences in the context of sensory urban tourism.

### ***Empirical Sub-objectives:***

1. To explore how companies develop their communication strategies for these experiential events, and to gain practical insights into the specific techniques used to stimulate the senses during blindfolded experiences.
2. To understand the impact of the deliberate removal of sight on multisensory tourism experiences, namely how the absence of sight influences tourists' other senses and their overall sensory experience.
3. To identify how multisensory experiences influence participants' memories and create lasting impressions.
4. To understand how the absence of sight impacts tourists' overall impressions and perceptions of Lisbon, in order to assess whether there is a connection between sensory tourism, including blindfolded experiences, and the concept of place.

Methodologically, this investigation is divided into three parts. It begins with a comprehensive literature review focusing on themes related to multisensory tourism, blindfolded experiences, memorable tourism activities and, among others, the concept of sense of place. Following this, a case study analysis enables an extended comprehension of the "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in The Dark" experiences, as well as their respective companies, *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever*. Lastly, through in-depth semi-structured interviews, an empirical investigation examines how these sensory events are conducted and, from the perspective of both producers and participants, assesses how impactful they are for tourists in Lisbon.

The empirical investigation involves in-depth semi-structured interviews: 11 interviews with creatives involved in the production, design, and guiding members of the "Sensory Lisbon" experience in Lisbon's historical Alfama neighborhood, and 11 other interviews with visitors from the "Dining in the Dark" experience, conducted in diverse restaurant establishments in Lisbon. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and subjected to discourse analysis to document and interpret interviewees' perceptions, experiences, and key-insights. The data was then coded and analyzed using a qualitative approach, employing a systematic process of cross-comparison to identify commonalities, differences, and emerging patterns among the responses.

The main argument of this study posits that blindfolded experiences serve as a strategic key on the innovative sensory tourism realm. These initiatives challenge the conventional notion of sight as the dominant tourism sense by deliberately removing it, thus enhancing and amplifying other sensory perceptions, resulting in memorable encounters that promote a distinct sense of place. Embracing and successfully implementing such a differentiating approach serves as an answer to tourists' evolving desires and provides participants with an unparalleled perspective of the visited destinations through their senses.

This dissertation is divided into three main sections.

The first two segments – chapter 2, "Multisensory Tourism and Blindfolded Experiences" and chapter 3, "Sense of place and Memorable Experiences" – provided a comprehensive literature review that aims to connect the main themes of this investigation. Chapter 2 and its subchapters introduce experiential tourism and

multisensory encounters, addressing the role of the human senses, atmosphere and sensory marketing as key elements that influence visitors' overall satisfaction. The chapter also explores blindfolded tourism, establishing it as the central theme of the dissertation. Chapter 3, along with its subchapters, explores the concept of memorable experiences, of place, and sense of place, while examining the interconnection between the concepts within the broader tourism landscape.

The empirical side of the methodology is detailed in chapter 4, which outlines how the investigation was conducted. This chapter includes the dissertation's objectives, the rationale behind the case study approaches, data collection methods for exploratory interviews, and the procedures for data analysis.

The fifth and final chapter, entitled "Lisbon's Blindfolded Experiences", presents an in-depth analysis of the companies that develop these sensory experiences, the experiences themselves, and other comparable global examples. This chapter aims to fully understand the foundation of these activities, and what distinguishes them from other tourism encounters. Furthermore, this chapter studies the interviews, drawing results from it. The analysis is divided into six thematic categories: communication, the senses, memories, sense of place, experience improvement and future considerations. By comparing similar and contrasting viewpoints among the responses, the chapter identifies emerging patterns and enables the development of conclusions. It reflects on the interconnected concepts analyzed and, through the case studies, illuminates the significant impact of blindfolded tourism on visitors' sensory experiences and their perception of Lisbon.

## 2. Multisensory Tourism and Blindfolded Experiences

This chapter presents an overview of the concept of multisensory tourism, emphasizing its emotional and affective dimensions, which is the central theme of this dissertation. It highlights the evolving landscape of multisensory tourism experiences, and it is structured into three sections. The first section focuses on experiential tourism, drawing attention to the dynamic shifts unfolding in various fields, such as the experience economy and experiential tourism, and elucidates how these transitions are reshaping the way tourism is offered. The second section explores the significance of multisensory encounters in tourism, examining the role of the senses, the concept of atmosphere and how it impacts tourists, and the significance of sensory marketing. The third section addresses blindfolded experiences, presenting this form of experiential activity as an innovative approach to tourism. It provides examples of global practices, formulating a bridge that not only connects these examples to the case studies of this project, but also interrelating the discussion with concepts such as memorable tourism experiences and sense of place. Each section is designed to deepen the comprehension of sensory encounters and their distinct influence in the tourism industry.

### 2.1. Experiential Tourism: A Paradigm Shift

The concept of the experience economy marks a significant shift in economic, marketing, and tourism paradigms, and it is described as the transition from a "service-oriented to an experience-oriented economy" (Carvalho, 2022, p. 1). It symbolizes a shift from an exclusive focus on providing goods and services towards carefully curating memorable experiences, and this economic framework emphasizes the importance of the creation and offer of personal tourism experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Boswijk et al., 2006; Andersson, 2007; Carvalho, 2022). This paradigm shift therefore symbolizes a larger focus on experiences, "beyond the consumption of goods and services" (Carvalho et al., 2023, p. 131).

As Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 97) emphasize, experiences are distinct from "prior economic offerings", since "commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable". The authors also note that, as consumers increasingly seek meaningful encounters, "more and more businesses are responding by explicitly designing and promoting them" (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 97). In this transition, experiences have emerged as the next step in the progression of economic value, surpassing traditional economic offerings, particularly as "services increasingly become commoditized" (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 98).

Boswijk et al. (2006, p. 2) further highlight that the primary focus "needs to be the individual's personal experience", which underscores the importance of understanding consumers' desires and motives when crafting impactful experiences. The role of individual needs in determining the perceived value of an experience is further highlighted by Andersson (2007, p. 57), defending that this perceived value may vary over time, and between consumers, and even "depending on the needs of the consumer", being either derived from basic, social, or intellectual experiences. The emergence of the experience economy therefore signifies a fundamental shift, where businesses increasingly focus on staging memorable experiences for consumers, with

the intent of answering their increasingly demanding desires. Understanding this important transition from traditional economic offerings to experiences lays the foundation for exploring its implications for experiential tourism, where the focus shifts towards crafting unique and immersive tourism encounters that resonate with travelers on a personal level.

Deemed as “the core of travel”, experiences are considered a “central element of life for today’s consumer” (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1467). Meacci and Liberatore (2018, p. 7) define tourism experiences as “the triggered stimulation of the senses”, and today’s tourists seek encounters that can be described as multisensory, profound, genuine, as well as “enjoyable, memorable and engaging” (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1467).

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), consumer experiences can be divided into two dimensions. The first dimension is associated to “customer participation”, where visitors have no influence in the experiences, and are merely “observers or listeners”, whereas the second corresponds to the “environmental relationship” that connects tourists with experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 101). Depending on where experiences “fall along the spectra of the two dimensions” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 102), these authors then sort them through four realms, namely entertainment, education, esthetic, and escapism (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Carvalho, 2022). Such categories are associated with distinct levels of customer participation and immersion within the experience.

The realm of entertainment experiences is characterized by a passive engagement and absorption of the environment by the customer, including examples as “watching television or attending a concert” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 101). Educational encounters involve a more active participation, but individuals are still detached, considered “more outside the event than immersed in the action” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 101), which is the case with attending classes or learning how to golf. Birdwatching or walking through an art museum are examples of esthetic experiences, combining a more active – but still minimal – involvement and greater immersion, having “little or no effect in the event (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 101). Lastly, escapist experiences (or escapism) are associated with a full immersion and participation in the activities, such as “acting in a play and playing in an orchestra” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 101; Carvalho, 2022). These categories allow a better understanding of the diverse nature of consumer experiences, alternating from a mere passive observation to a deep active participation and immersion.

Experiences have greater impact on individuals than material possessions, fostering deeper engagement and leaving lasting impressions on their memories, which can lead to increased satisfaction and greater emotional resonance. For this reason, Binkhorst and den Dekker (2009, p. 312) argue that consumer experiences can “touch people better”. Besides this, customers’ active participation and greater interaction in tourism destinations (the mentioned shift from absorption to immersion) can affect experiences and create more positive encounters (Carvalho, 2022).

Just as the experience economy represents a broader shift in value creation and consumption, a similar transformation is occurring within the tourism industry. This shift from more traditional forms of tourism (such as sightseeing tours and beach resort vacations) to experiential tourism (like immersive cultural experiences and blindfolded dinners) signifies a greater focus towards unique experiences that cater directly to

tourists' wants and needs through a holistic standpoint, enabling companies and destinations to stand out amidst competition and gain "competitive advantage" (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1467). Additionally, it provides an opportunity to directly influence their "emotional, intellectual, physical or spiritual engagement" (Carvalho et al., 2023, p. 131), which in turn leads to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty, establishing and improving long-term relationships and even memorability (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; Carvalho, 2022; Monteiro et al., 2023).

Experiential tourism therefore emphasizes consumers' emotional values over functional attributes (Agapito, 2022). In this case, as Meacci and Liberatore (2018, p. 9) underscore:

"Although the experience is usually treated as a product or object, it is crucial to recognize that the experience is a process of consumption where an event, the real object, became an experience."

The evolving nature of tourists' desires and preferences requires new approaches and innovative ways of crafting and offering these interactions. An experiential involvement, therefore, emerges as a promising response to this demand.

In conclusion, providing "extraordinary experiences has become a strategic goal in the tourism industry" (Meacci and Liberatore, 2018, p. 7). As a response, the experiential approach is presented as a distinctive and potential tool, greatly molding consumers' interaction with the environment (Carvalho, 2022; Hosany et al., 2022). Understanding tourists' evolving desires and effectively crafting experiences that are unique and immersive enables destinations to "survive in the ever more competitive future" (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009, p. 312) and foster enduring bonds, loyalty, and recallable moments, developing a distinct and important paradigm shift in the tourism industry.

The subsequent section intends to address, within the framework of this experiential paradigm, the exploration of the human senses as a means to offer unique experiences and memorable encounters in the context of tourism experiences.

## 2.2. Multisensory Encounters in Tourism: A Conceptual Discussion

This section delves into the profound impact of the sensory stimuli on tourism experiences and describes the transition from a predominantly visual-centric perspective to a holistic and multisensory approach in tourism studies. It explores how the integration of the senses contributes to the experience of places, shaping visitors' behaviors and attitudes. Besides underscoring the limitations of an ocular-centric viewpoint, this section emphasizes the need for a more inclusive approach to sensescape, recognizing the equal importance of all senses in creating immersive and memorable tourism encounters.

### *2.2.1. The Role of the Senses in Tourism*

The human senses encompass sensory systems involved in human perception, forming “the foundation of how individuals interact with their surroundings”, as Agapito (2020, p. 2) mentions. Senses such as vision, sound, touch, taste and smell serve as intermediaries in collecting external information, allowing the formation of human perception and the attribution of meaning to worldly interactions (Agapito, 2022; Kim and Fesenmaier, 2015). Representing “the key in overall satisfaction of tourists on pre visit, during visit and post visit” (Rahman et al., 2015, p. 310), according to cognitive psychology, the senses enable the interpretation of external stimuli in multiple forms, transforming them into sensations that influence visitors’ behaviors and attitudes (Agapito, 2020).

Recognized as the foundation of individuals' interaction with their environment, these sensory systems profoundly influence experiences, particularly in tourism, mediating sensation, perception, and memory processes within (un)familiar settings (Agapito, 2022; Hultén, 2011; Rahman et al., 2015). Each of the senses is associated with specific characteristics that are crucial for the development of memorable tourism experiences.

Sight is heavily represented in tourism studies and experiences (Urry, 1992; Pan and Ryan, 2009; Hultén, 2011; Henshaw et al., 2016), being said to profoundly shape how individuals perceive and engage with the world, driving recognition and emotional responses (Agapito, 2022). Visually derived information, if positive, can foster emotional bonds, being directly associated with either positive destination memories or with the damage of the locale’s image and identity (Kah et al., 2020). Although traditional tourism literature is characterized by a predominance of vision, contemporary works critique this privileging of “the gaze”, as Urry (1992) describes it (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Agapito et al., 2012; van Hoven, 2012; Edensor, 2018; Meacci and Liberatore, 2018; Kah et al., 2020). These works emphasize the vast limitations of ocular-centric perspectives (Agapito, 2020) and highlight the necessity for a more inclusive multisensory approach, stressing that the other senses are at least equally important. Therefore, it has been argued that sensory perception is holistic, and tourism itself is inherently multisensory (Edensor, 2018).

On the other hand, often unheeded, the auditory dimension contributes to the multisensory nature of tourism experiences as sound holds direct implications on tourists’ “memory and place identity” (Kah et al., 2020, p. 5; Jiang et al., 2020). Whether composed of natural sounds or music, soundscapes have the power to engrave distinct impressions, influence behaviors and evoke emotions such as joy and serenity, enriching tourists' perceptions and memories of a destination (Jiang, 2020). Natural environmental sounds accompany tourists throughout their trips, forming a constant stimuli in tourism experiences (Jiang, 2020). Music is also considered a strong trigger capable of influencing individuals’ mood and emotional state, inducing emotional pleasure and “pleasing and arousing qualities” (North and Hargreaves, 1997, p. 51; Jiang, 2020). Overall, by understanding and integrating the auditory dimension, destinations can craft distinctive and immersive atmospheres that resonate with visitors, enhancing their overall satisfaction and sense of place (Jiang, 2020; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022).

Another underrepresented sense in tourism studies, the haptic sense, is crucial in shaping tourists’ attachment to a destination. This sense is closely connected with

“intimate and subjective emotions” and “place attachment” (Agapito, 2022, p. 86). Tactile experiences, from feeling the fabric of a regional product to touching the wall-stones of a church – or, as Kah et al. (2020) exemplify, sunbathing beach leisure to immersion in natural hot springs –, profoundly contribute to shaping travelers' perceptions. Engaging the haptic sense influences visitor's sense of identity and belonging, ultimately enhancing their overall experience and connections to a destination (Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2023).

The proprioceptive sense, also referred to as “the sixth sense” (McGee, 2018, p. 572), is commonly used as a synonym for “kinesthesia” (Taylor, 2009). However, as argued by Everingham et al. (2021, p. 73), the first concept relates to the “sense of bodily position”, whereas the second entails “the sense of movement”. Unlike the traditional five senses that provide information about the external environment, proprioception concerns “what the body itself is doing”, being thus linked to body awareness (Taylor, 2009; Agapito et al., 2012; Damasio, 2023). This awareness relies on sensory inputs (proprioceptors) from muscles, tendons, ligaments, and skin (Montero, 2006; Proske and Gandevia, 2012; Renault et al., 2018), which enable individuals to detect “joint motion and limb position when their eyes are closed” (McGee, 2018, p. 571). Interacting with other sensory systems, proprioception therefore aids in spatial orientation and in the perception of movement in the surrounding environment, facilitating the process of locating “external objects relative to the body” (Taylor, 2009, p. 1143).

In addition, “thermal sensation”, as first entitled by Auliciems (1981), represents “the physiological responses of the human body to thermal states” (Lenzholzer et al., 2018, p. 232), and is particularly relevant in visual deprived tourism experiences. According to Liu et al. (2018), numerous factors can affect thermal comfort. For tourists, climate and weather conditions represent two of the most crucial aspects (Lin and Matzarakis, 2011), given that adverse conditions “may create uncomfortable thermal sensations”, negatively impacting visitors' experiences in a tourism destination (Vasilikou and Nikolopoulou, 2019, p. 277). Lin and Matzarakis (2011, p. 492) underline that “human thermal perceptions are closely related to success in the tourism sector”, as these factors significantly affect tourism activities and events, and shape visitors' comfort, perceptions, emotional responses and overall satisfaction (Lin and Matzarakis, 2011; Jensen et al., 2015; Hai and Feng, 2018; Vasilikou and Nikolopoulou, 2019). Therefore, understanding thermal sensation and integrating it into the design of “thermally comfortable urban spaces” not only enhances a destination's appeal but also facilitates the development of immersive and unique multisensory experiences (Lenzholzer et al., 2018). Similar to other senses, thermal perception influences future decisions through memories, as “the thermal environment experienced by subjects in the past can influence their current thermal perception” (Lai et al., 2020, p. 15). Ultimately, this concept may foster deeper emotional connections and a stronger sense of place (Lin and Matzarakis, 2011; Jensen et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2020).

Gaining more and more relevance in urban sensory marketing, smell, in turn, holds considerable potential in “helping to build the destination identity” (Kah et al., 2020, p. 6), influencing perceptions, and subtly guiding consumer actions or, as Henshaw et al. (2016, p. 156) highlight, “manipulating consumer behavior”. The olfactory sense forms a deep connection with memory (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Henshaw, 2013;), being suggested as “the most powerful to recover individuals' memories” (Agapito., 2022, p. 82). It can

shape a place's ambiance and craft a distinct sensory visitor experience (Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022). Urban environments, specifically, are characterized by unique scents, pleasant and unpleasant, which can evoke strong memories and intertwine past experiences with contemporary moments (Henshaw, 2013).

Taste also emerges as a significant sense in constructing the individual perception of the surrounding environment, extending beyond flavors to encompass multisensory aspects from aroma to texture, influencing visitors' emotions and memories (Agapito, 2022). Gastronomy, for example, is considered essential in a traveler's experience. As Carvalho et al. (2023, p. 129) mention, "tourists seek authentic and engaging experiences in destinations", and culinary experiences allow them to have a personalized role, an "active participation, interaction with people and local resources" (Carvalho et al., 2023, p. 129). This close contact with communities represents a cultural bridge, providing insights into the local culture and routines, and portraying a destination's identity, history, and social fabric (Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Carvalho et al., 2023). Exploring a territory through these immersive encounters is crucial for tourists' satisfaction and "emotional and cognitive engagement" (Carvalho et al., 2023, p. 129), as it fosters "experience memorability" and "loyalty among tourists" (Carvalho, 2022, p. 40). This not only increases revisit intention, but also presents a strategic tool in differentiating a tourism destination and shaping its image (Agapito, 2020; 2022). Unique dining experiences, such as blindfolded dining experiences – as will be shown further in this study – emphasize non-visual senses, creating unique and memorable social contexts and stimulating diverse sensory experiences (Agapito, 2022).

Despite their importance as single stimuli, several authors stress that "all the senses [are] equally important" (Meacci and Liberatore, 2018, p. 8), and that there is not only a need to embrace these encounters as "integrated elements rather than individual stimuli" (Agapito, 2020, p. 1), but also to address these tourism experiences as corporeal and multisensory, through an inclusive approach (Urry, 1992; Pan and Ryan, 2009; van Hoven, 2012; Edensor, 2018; Caletrío, 2019; Jiang, 2020; Kah et al., 2020; Imamović et al., 2022). In this line of thought, Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 103) argue that "the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be". Thus, literature on the multisensory dimension of tourism experiences reveals that these holistic tourism cues foster emotional bonds, enable personalized interactions between destinations and visitors, and enrich the overall experiential quality (Duarte, 2017; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2020, 2022).

### *2.2.2. Atmosphere and Multisensory Integration*

In tourism, another crucial concept in optimizing tourism multisensory activities and in shaping the overall visitor experience is "atmosphere" (Edensor, 2007; Brochado et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021; Steadman et al., 2021; Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2023).

Considered fundamental in each experience, atmosphere is described by Goulding (2023, p. 1) as "an indefinable feeling or a sense of place that evokes an emotional response beyond the five senses". It is further supported that, encompassing "the spirit" of a destination, it involves an interrelation of feelings and emotions drafted to influence

“consumers’ decision making”, as well as their perceptions, memories, and overall satisfaction (Wang et al., 2021, p. 160; Steadman et al., 2021). As Edensor (2007, p. 207) notes, the “surfaces, textures, temperatures, atmospheres, smells, sounds” and other sensory features of a destination guide individuals’ behaviors. This is extended by Jensen et al. (2015, p. 64), who stated these multisensory experiences encourage visitors toward “specific courses of action”, underscoring the atmosphere’s substantial role in molding tourists’ experiences and decision-making processes.

A destination’s atmosphere sets “the emotional tones of places, providing a foundation for immersive and deeply engaged experiences” (Paiva, 2023, p. 2). It can evoke specific feelings on individuals, associating positive connections and molding the perception of a destination. Additionally, it emerges from the combination of different sensory stimuli of a place and a singular, subjective perception that is unique to everyone experiencing it, which emphasizes that atmosphere is a multisensory concept. Thus, acknowledging and constructing atmospheres becomes crucial in the tourism context, as it enables multisensory experiences, establishes memorable tourism experiences and fosters a profound sense of place (Brochado et al., 2019; Steadman et al., 2021; Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2023; Goulding, 2023; Paiva, 2023).

Sensory tourism is, therefore, a critical topic to be addressed in the present dissertation, being considered as an “opportunity to create immersive travel experiences that engage all senses” (Tremblay, 2008), surpassing the previously mentioned visual-centric approach (Tremblay, 2008; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022). By engaging as much senses as possible, it is referred as an “experiential approach” by Kah et al. (2020, p. 2), as it intends to create emotionally resonant encounters and unique engagements, which not only enhance on-site experiences, but also foster customer loyalty and drive positive post-visit memories and intentions (Agapito et al., 2012; Imamović et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2023).

### *2.2.3. Sensory Marketing in Tourism*

Tourists nowadays search for experiences that can be described as “extraordinary and memorable” (Agapito, 2022, p. 63), “distinctive and different” (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005, p. 72), pleasurable and enriching, and value multisensory, immersive encounters, being “more likely to prioritize experiences over material possessions” (Rodrigues et al., 2023, p. 184), all of which aligns with the focus on sensory tourism, standing as a powerful answer to those desires.

Although the experiential aspect itself represents a significant influence on these visitors, it is also necessary to consider the marketing strategies employed to promote these encounters, brands and even tourism destinations. Sensorial marketing presents itself as “a complement to traditional marketing” and communication, as it focuses on “creating sensations through the senses”, interacting with consumers “in a more personalized way” (Duarte, 2017). Comprehending tourists’ desires facilitates the development of personalized activities and impactful experiences. As tourism spaces and organizations recognize the profound impact of sensory elements on visitors’ perceptions and memories of a destination, it is clear the need to incorporate multisensory-focused

contents into their promotional strategies (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Agapito et al., 2014; Imamović et al., 2022). Sensory marketing, focusing on shaping brand image through strategies engaging the senses, emerges as a powerful instrument that not only “triggers positive tourists’ emotions”, but also a “destination’s long-term memory (...), destination loyalty (...), and overall positive destination experience” (Imamović et al., 2020, p. 116). Indeed, Agapito (2022, p. 28) implies that sensory tourism and experiential marketing “consider aspects such as the search for positive, rewarding, and memorable experiences focused on emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational values” and, to provide tourists with answers to their evolving needs, destinations and organizations ought to develop “conditions that allow individuals to be involved in a more positive and immersive way”.

Amid globalization, urban environments compete for distinctiveness, and sensory tourism consequently allows destinations to shape visitors’ emotional connections, satisfaction, and create a specific and strategic memory and sense of place (Agapito, 2022; Imamović et al., 2020; 2022). This “sensory attractiveness of places”, as Imamović et al. (2022, p. 22) describe it, is “an important aspect in the management of tourist destinations”.

In modern tourism, the triumph of a tourism destination does not merely depend upon its visual landscape. Rather, it depends upon a strategy of attraction accompanied by a “systematic approach based on stimuli for all the senses” (Meacci and Liberatore, 2018, p. 7). This sensory dimension not only shapes the characteristics of a destination but also acts as a powerful tool to identify the unique attributes of a place within experiential frameworks (Agapito et al., 2014; Kim and Fesenmaier, 2015; Kah et al., 2020).

Travelers engage with places through their senses; therefore, brands and destinations alike benefit from unique activities and “long-lasting relationships” (Kah et al., 2020, p. 4). Addressing multisensory cues and effectively stimulating the senses strategically generates bonds that allow these territories to interact with visitors in a more personalized way (Duarte, 2017; Agapito, 2020; Kah et al., 2020), “to create more meaningful tourism experiences” (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2015, p. 3) and deepen connections that profoundly impact visitors (Agapito et al., 2012, 2014; Rahman et al., 2015; Imamović et al., 2020).

#### *2.2.4. Conclusion*

In conclusion, the exploration of the five human senses reveals their significant influence on tourism experiences, individual perceptions, emotions, and behaviors within urban environments (Henshaw et al., 2016; Agapito, 2022). The shift from an ocular-centric approach to a multisensory perspective has been deeply influencing tourism experiences (Tremblay, 2008; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022). As these territories acknowledge the important role of multisensory-focused elements in shaping visitors’ memories, its integration into promotional strategies and experiences becomes pivotal (Imamović et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022). This section therefore establishes a foundation to understand the transformative potential of sensory tourism in creating distinctive and meaningful connections between visitors and destinations, engaging all senses to foster positive post-visit memories and longer-lasting connections with places.

Building upon the multisensory exploration, the following section will examine a specific form of experiential and sensory tourism, called blindfolded tourism. It intends to unravel the innovative dimensions of blindfolded experiences, providing a deeper understanding of this practically unexplored experiential approach, and how sensory engagement can extend beyond vision.

### 2.3. Blindfolded Tourism: An Innovative Approach

After comprehending the implications arising from experiential and sensory encounters, the focus of this section revolves around a prominent concept: blindfolded tourism. Within the realm of tourism experiences, blindfolded tourism emerges as a distinctive and often overlooked domain. This dissertation seeks to address this gap by emphasizing its untapped potential and possibilities, aiming to demonstrate the value it can bring to the tourism industry as a distinctive and influential tool.

Tourism literature, as previously mentioned, has focused mainly on “visual impressions” until recently, although recent research tends to highlight “the role of the human body in forming positive experiences” (Imamović et al., 2022, p. 2). Visual information is said to play a “crucial role in gathering product information” (Wansink et al., 2012, p. 209). Despite this fact, it is unquestionable that the other sensescapes can equally provide relevant information about the environment that surrounds us (Urry, 1992; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Pan and Ryan, 2009; van Hoven, 2012; Duarte, 2017; Edensor, 2018; Caletrío, 2019; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Imamović et al., 2022). This notion, combined with the overwhelming abundance of visual stimuli in the present-day context, creates an opportunity to explore other senses through tourism experiences that subtract vision entirely. Within the tourism industry, there is a growing recognition of experiences that involve the integration of sensory elements. However, within the realms of experiential tourism and sensory encounters, there is a niche that requires more academic and practical investigation: the domain of blindfolded experiences.

Blindfolded tourism – or “ceciturism”, as Bures (2005) and Shetty (2022) entitle it – is considered an unconventional approach to tourism. It is associated with the “development of blindfolded activities and tours that challenge perception and heighten other senses” (Tremblay, 2008), as the absence of one sense (in this case, sight) will thereby stimulate the others (Shetty, 2022). Blindfolded tourism promoters often emphasize that, by removing visual cues and distractions, the other senses become heightened, and the sensory experience is enhanced, as “smells, textures and sounds all become more intense” (Abigail’s Kitchen, n.d.; Dutta, n.d.).

In these immersive encounters, participants intentionally cover their eyes and partake in diverse activities, of which there is a growing number of examples. For instance, the *EarFilm* phenomenon consists of experiencing movies through audio with blindfolds, as Karaduman (2022) richly describes. Other examples include blindfolded culinary encounters where individuals sample food without seeing it. The case of tourists who take part in blindfolded guided tours can also be mentioned, as they are guided through verbal instructions and storytelling “through the visited areas, as opposed to traditional sightseeing” (Shetty, 2022).

Proprioception assumes an important involvement in the realm of blindfolded tourism, providing differentiated sensory-rich experiences. When sight is removed, the enhanced awareness of bodily position and movement driven from these receptors enables individuals to perceive and navigate their surroundings (Montero, 2006; Proske and Gandevia, 2012; McGee, 2018; Renault et al., 2018; Everingham et al., 2021), which becomes indispensable in experiential activities. This deliberate absence of visual input not only enhances proprioceptive acuity, but also generates a deeper level of immersion, thereby cultivating more memorable and impactful experiences for participants (Taylor, 2009). Edensor and Falconer (2015, p. 614) emphasize that focusing “on tactility, texture, sound, taste and aroma reveals how the non-visual qualities of space are so frequently eclipsed or dulled by the primacy of the visual”.

According to Petkova et al. (2012, p. 1), blindfolding individuals leads to “the structural and functional reorganization of brain regions that support other sensory areas that mediate the integration of information across these modalities”. This sensory deprivation is followed by biological responses, resulting in a sensory compensation, defined by Pieniak et al. (2022, p. 79) as “the increased sensitivity of the intact senses”, and further detailed by Ricatti et al. (2023, p. 2251) as a “compensatory plasticity of the visual brain areas in the processing of non-visual information”. In addition to this prompted compensation of the other senses, this physiological reaction is also marked by a heightened focus, described as an “increased acuity of the intact modalities” (Pieniak et al., 2022, p. 72) and enhanced imagination, all of which contribute to the creation of unique and memorable experiences.

Blindfolded experiences, particularly in culinary contexts, have become highly sought after and widely adopted among tourism stakeholders and companies. The visual appearance of foods influences people’s perception and satisfaction (Wansink et al., 2012), since the “visual flavor” is instrumental for “physiological, emotional, and cognitive responses to food” (Renner et al., 2016, p. 145).

As Edensor and Falconer (2015, p. 614) argue, deliberately removing sight foregrounds “how the non-visual qualities of space are so frequently eclipsed or dulled by the habitual mobilization of the visual”. Therefore, it automatically introduces a distinctive factor to these experiences, deepening “the appreciation of space through tactile, proprioceptive, textural, sonic and olfactory senses” (Edensor and Falconer, 2015, p. 614), which become more memorable. For this reason, there has been a substantial growth of brands and companies offering experiences that enable consumers to “reconnect with food” through blindfolded encounters (Teka, n.d.).

Several brands have embraced the concept of dining experiences conducted in total darkness as their primary commercial focus. *Dans Le Noir*, created in 2006 and located all over the world, including Europe, Oceania, and Africa, stands out as an example. Ranked among the 10 most original restaurants in the world, it is acclaimed for providing “a unique sensory and human experience” in “pitch darkness”, prompting customers to “re-evaluate the perception of taste while reclaiming the senses” (Dans Le Noir, n.d.; Edensor and Falconer, 2015). Similarly, the *Opaque* restaurant in Santa Monica (California), offers fully dark and immersive dining experiences designed to create “memories that will last a lifetime” (Opaque Dark Dining, n.d.; Santa Monica, n.d.). The *BlackOut* restaurant, voted “Best Restaurant in Las Vegas” and “Top Things to Do in LA”,

goes a step further by having staff members use night-vision goggles to allow visitors to, as they say, “see Vegas in a whole new light” (Dine Blackout, n.d.; OpenTable, n.d.).

Other companies, through blindfolds or complete darkness, aim to foster a stronger connection between sighted and visually impaired individuals. The *Blind Café*, based in Texas, Washington, and Colorado, employs visually impaired individuals, and aims to provide a “social impact dinner & music” (The Blind Cafe, n.d.). The *Dialogo Nel Buiu*, established in Italy in 2005, not only provides tasting in the dark experiences, but also offers theatre and different blindfolded workshops (Dialogo Nel Buio, n.d.; Dialogue SE, n.d.). These experiences allow customers to rediscover themselves through other senses and experiment new ways of perceiving their reality. By employing visually impaired people, they go beyond the individual impact, and serve also educational purposes, as they intend to demonstrate the different struggles people with this kind of impairment go through on a day-to-day basis.

There are also examples where the core offer of the brand or company is precisely blindfolded experiences. *Abigail’s Kitchen*, operating since 2019, offers a self-proclaimed “unforgettable ride” through “the only blindfolded dinners” in New York (Abigail’s Kitchen, n.d.). *Dining in the Dark KL*, considered the “The very first of its kind in Malaysia”, promises a “one-of-a-kind” experience with blindfolded games and dining for its customers (Dining in the Dark KL, n.d.). *Chefin*, an Australian private chef platform, introduces the “Blindfolded Dinner” experience, defending it as more than an experience, but a journey “that transcends ordinary dining”, challenging and heightening customers’ senses through a “unique sensory adventure” (Chefin, n.d.). Lastly, there is also the “Dining in The Dark Experience”, designed by the company *Fever*, which will be studied more in depth in this dissertation. This global event takes place in multiple cities and restaurants, creating a blind experience with a “secret sensorial three-course menu” that allows the exploration of “the full potential of your taste buds in a uniquely entertaining atmosphere” (Dade, 2023; Fever, n.d.-c).

In addition to the previous examples, the phenomenon of blindfolded guided tours presents an opportunity for individuals to navigate both familiar and unfamiliar locations without the visual input (Gambour, 2014). As identified by Joel Henry (WorldWideWords, n.d.), these tours challenge visitors’ conventional ways of experiencing and perceiving urban spaces, encouraging an alternative approach to sensing places and enhancing tourists’ receptiveness to their surroundings. Notably, these experiences occur mostly in urban settings, encompassing a variety of mainly urban locations, as Shetty (2022) points out.

An example of this phenomenon is the “Do You See What I Mean?” experience, that takes place in various Canadian cities, such as Vancouver and Montreal. Designed and adapted specifically for each territory and its characteristics, these tours, as detailed by two different participating journalists – namely Bynoe (2013) and Lederman (2013) – can transcend conventional perceptions and offer a distinctive journey to a completely new place. Both articles underscore the heightened sensory engagement associated, from the haptic elements (such as feeling the pavement under their feet), olfactory (with, for example, the intense aroma of coffee) and to the auditory stimuli (including conversations, construction sounds and music). As Bynoe (2013) points out, “on your walk you will start to feel this city” and be left with a “heightened appreciation for your senses”. Similar initiatives have been orchestrated by Vladimir Vaskevich to allow people

to understand and feel Yekaterinburg, a Russian city, from his perspective. He created a project called “The Blind Leading The Blindfolded Through Yekaterinburg” and, being visually impaired, he guides tourists as they experience this territory “through touch, sound, smell, and taste” (Bowdler, 2019). Lastly, *Lisbon Walker*, a Portuguese company, offers the “Sensory Lisbon” tour, which is a combination of the previous two approaches. Similar to “Dining in The Dark”, this experience will be studied more in depth in this dissertation, and it represents a project created in 2008 that not only raises awareness about the challenges faced by the visually impaired, but it also provides a distinct form of perceiving the Alfama neighborhood and feel its singular characteristics (Lisbon Walker, n.d.-a; Tornelo, 2008).

One aspect that all the above-mentioned encounters have in common (either involving blindfolded tours or distinctive dining experiences) is that, besides the capacity to impact individually, these sensory engagements also have larger social influences. Numerous entities, from companies and restaurants to tour guides, assert that these engagements serve as venues to meet and discover other people, and to enable or enhance meaningful human connections (Chefin, n.d.; Dans Le Noir, n.d.; Dine Blackout, n.d.).

Recognizing and understanding the role of the human body in creating positive experiences, in a world that highly consumes and focuses on visual stimuli, has become imperative, and it emphasizes the need for alternative sensory engagements (Little Black Book, 2019; Imamović et al., 2022).

In conclusion, blindfolded experiences emerge not only as an unconventional form of tourism but as a transformative and immersive journey (Taylor, 2009; Wansink et al., 2012; Renner et al., 2016). By deliberately restricting visual cues, this approach accentuates other senses, intensifying perceptions, and these experiences demonstrate the richness and diversity of multisensory encounters in the tourism landscape (Renault et al., 2018; Everingham et al., 2021; Shetty, 2022).

This section has unveiled the unique opportunities offered by blindfolded experiences, from heightened sensory perceptions to a deeper understanding of challenges faced by visually impaired individuals. Despite this knowledge, the academic literature on blindfolded tourism remains sparse, particularly regarding how these experiences contribute to the development of a sense of place. This gap reveals a need to further explore the connection between memorable multisensory activities and place perception. A deeper understanding of the effects of sensory deprivation can help exploring experiential tourism and shape how tourists connect with and remember destinations, thereby influencing their sense of place. Building upon the principles elucidated in the study of experiential, sensory, and blindfolded tourism, the forthcoming chapter therefore intends to connect these concepts to new topics, namely memorable tourism experiences and the creation of a sense of place, aiming to bind these notions together.

### 3. Sense of place and Memorable Experiences

Tourism activities, when effectively developed, possess the capacity to shape visitors' perceptions and create memorable encounters. These remembrances, in turn, have positive impacts on individuals in the post-visit stage (Marschall, 2012; Kim et al., 2022), and serve as powerful tools in molding their perception of tourism destinations and their overall sense of place (Edensor and Falconer, 2015).

The present section is dedicated to understanding the nature of memorable experiences within tourism destinations, and to examine their consequential effects. Through an exploration of literature and empirical investigation, this chapter aims to explore the intricate relationship between memorable tourism experiences and the sense of place, and to shed light on how sensory-rich encounters, such as blindfolded experiences, can potentially affect and influence individuals' perceptions of destinations and their development of a sense of place.

#### 3.1. Memorable Experiences and Multisensory Tourism Destinations

The act of recalling memories holds fundamental significance, as emphasized by Kim et al. (2022, p. 1209), who point out that “remembering events is an essential human process”. Consequently, travel experiences require distinctive and remarkable qualities to ensure enduring and meaningful recollections.

After visiting destinations, experiences transition into memories characterized by a combination of sensory elements, emotional contents, and narratives. As Marschall (2012, p. 325) implies, these memories play a pivotal role in shaping the very “construction of the tourism landscape itself” (Larsen, 2007; Agapito et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). Deliberately curated to provide positive and impactful encounters, memorable tourism experiences have the capacity to “leave a permanent imprint on memory”, as asserted by Agapito et al. (2017, p. 110). Scholars and stakeholders increasingly attribute relevance to memorable experiences, acknowledging them as an “important factor in tourism” (Marschall, 2012, p. 346) and a “crucial factor in choosing a destination” (Marschall, 2012, p. 321).

Memories therefore stand out as one of the most impactful key aspects in the experiential tourism industry, encompassing “generic, sensory, and affective elements” (Kim et al., 2022, p. 1308). These elements not only influence visitors' “revisit intention” but the chances of recommending the destination through “word-of-mouth” (Kim et al., 2022, p. 1308), which has the potential to attract more visitors to the place. Moreover, memories facilitate the prediction of consumer behavior, with Agapito et al. (2017, p. 108) suggesting that “remembered experiences may be better predictors of future behavior than the experiences reported *in loco*”. They can mold individuals' decision-making processes, affecting destination choices and post-trip decisions. Whether generating avoidance due to negative past experiences or inspiring the revisit of the same destinations and partaking in similar positive activities, memories shape future actions profoundly (Tung and Ritchie, 2011; Prayag et al., 2013; Marschall, 2014; Kim and Chen, 2019; Wood, 2020). This underscores memories' pivotal role in strengthening destination loyalty by fostering emotional connections and positive associations with visited

destinations, which develops a sense of attachment to the places (Marschall, 2012; Agapito et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2017; Kim and Chen, 2019, 2022). As Wood (2020, p. 1348) acknowledges, memories can be regarded as “the most valuable commodity” to be offered, and its understanding, by offering meaningful experiences for tourists, shapes how they perceive destinations, and allows these territories to develop their identity, entering “a more competitive marketplace” (Kim et al., 2022, p. 1308) and standing out among competitors (Marschall, 2012; Kah et al., 2020).

Both tourism and memory creation are, to a certain extent, dependent on factors such as media, representation, audience, and consumption (Marschall, 2012). Given that “tourists seek pleasurable and memorable experiences through the consumption of their vacation” (Prayag et al., 2013, p. 119), this symbolic relationship creates an opportunity for the development of sensory tourism marketing and the development of distinct experiences (Agapito et al., 2017). Marketing strategies in this context aim to associate tourist experiences with positive and lasting memories by strategically “appealing to the senses” (Agapito et al., 2017, p. 110). This approach seeks to preserve strong emotions that persist in future recollections, ensuring that destinations stand out in the market and that tourism memories themselves are enriched and preserved for a longer period (Agapito et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). In fact, as Marschall (2012, p. 323) indicates, the influence of memory can be one of “the most aggressive advertisement” in shaping people's travel choices.

The understanding of how to create memorable tourism experiences resonates with the end of the twentieth century, when Pine and Gilmore (1998) scrutinized that designing such experiences required, at least, a five-stage plan that indicated the necessity to (1) theme the experience, (2) harmonize impressions with positive cues, (3) eliminate negative cues, (4) mix in memorabilia and lastly (5) engage all senses. Besides, memorable tourism experiences, as described by Kim et al. (2012, p. 13), must be “positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred”, and this quality has led to an increasing prioritization of these experiences by pleasure-seeking tourists and industry stakeholders. In the case of the latter, this is due to their significant influence not only in the immediate travel experience, but also in future travel decisions and even in shaping new preferences. Marschall (2012, p. 324) notices this by observing that a tourist can connect positive memories to a destination characterized by “sub-standard amenities”, but enriched by offering “memorable human interactions”, which will allow these individuals to form distinctive impressions of the destination (Kah et al., 2020).

In response to these considerations, scholars, stakeholders, and destination managers are increasingly investing efforts towards understanding and creating compelling and memorable experiences that aim for impact and memorability, leaving lasting impressions on tourists (Kim and Chen, 2019, Kim et al., 2022; Larsen, 2007). Intertwining memory and tourism experiences has numerous benefits, among which are the extended comprehension of tourists' future revisit intentions and “individuals' recall of tourism experiences of personal relevance” (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1468). Additionally, it contributes to the sensation of a “subjective well-being”, ultimately fostering a deeper sense of place towards the destination and establishing a differentiation between said destinations (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1468).

Sensory experiences significantly impact individuals' memories, especially in the tourism context (Verbeek and van Campen, 2013; Agapito et al., 2017; Sumartojo, 2019; Kim et

al., 2022). As Stevenson (2014, p. 335) observes, remembering “can be seen as an embodied, multi-sensory phenomenon” inseparable from activities such as walking or talking. Numerous studies emphasize the powerful effects of smell and taste as triggers for memory recall, noting that these senses are “more emotional and more evocative than those elicited by images or sounds” (Verbeek and van Campen, 2013, p. 145) and play a significant role “in the making of places and evocation of emplaced memory” (Stevenson, 2014, p. 342). Additionally, food also stands as key in triggering memories, evoking experiences associated with past culinary experiences (Stevenson, 2014; Horng and Hsu, 2021).

Several authors highlight the importance of the senses in the construction and elicitation of tourism recollections, underlining that “the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 104). In tourism events and activities, multisensory engagement is essential, as the senses are responsible for collecting external stimuli crucial for “individual perception, memory, and behavior” (Agapito et al., 2017, p. 109). This “multisensoriality”, as Agapito et al. (2017, p. 110) term it, directly impacts feelings, moods, and other emotions, and leaves impressions that can imprint on memory (Verbeek and van Campen, 2013; Agapito et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). Integrating the senses serves as a powerful tool in curating experiences that endure in participants’ minds, impact their perceptions of the destinations, and directly influence “how we attune to our spatial environments” (Sumartojo, 2019, p. 34). Consequently, sensory impressions create richer encounters that enhance a destination’s attractiveness and competitiveness, while also fostering tourists’ positive memories, sense of place, and loyalty towards places (Agapito et al., 2017).

Within tourism experiences, dining activities are established as a constant component when exploring destinations, noticeably contributing to the formulation of memorable tourism experiences. Dining goes beyond the physical act of eating, it stands as a sensory-rich multifaceted experience, making it ideal for exploring the bond between memorable tourism experiences and sense of place. These encounters, as defended by Horng and Hsu (2021, p. 1), serve as a response to the fact that “modern customers demand both satisfaction and a memorable experience”. Dining experiences encompass not only the culinary aspects, but also promote the senses and other important stimuli, such as the overall surrounding atmosphere, local culture and traditions, offering opportunities to develop positive lasting impressions, generate personal and emotional connections, and curate an authentic sense of place.

Horng and Hsu (2021, p. 2) advocate that “an esthetic experience consists of information that is accumulated during interactions between subjects and objects”, emphasizing the need for stakeholders to consider, apart from food, important aspects such as the space’s atmosphere, service quality and even other guests. This implies that heightening sensory engagement and developing esthetic stimuli not only “affects customers’ pleasantness” but also facilitates a “more holistic esthetic experience”. Moreover, these characteristics empower the shift from ordinary dining encounters to memorable experiences, shaping individuals’ perceptions, leaving lasting memories of destinations, and influencing “response behaviors” and future travel decisions (Horng and Hsu, 2021).

A comprehensive dining environment, from the food to the service quality, can contribute to tourists’ satisfaction, perception, and loyalty towards both the establishment and the destination, thereby fostering a deeper sense of place (Hosany et al., 2022). Moreover,

as mentioned, focusing on multisensory and holistic experiences serves to respond to tourists' evolving desires, positively resonating with them. This focus on multisensory and holistic experiences equips dining establishments with effective responses to the evolving desires of tourists, positively resonating with them. Therefore, it is possible to underscore the pivotal role of dining experiences in curating memorable tourism encounters and even developing a deeper sense of place for travelers, which underscores the multisensory capacity of the destination and emphasizes the growing necessity of immersive and impactful experiences that prevail within consumers for longer periods of time (Horng and Hsu, 2021).

In conclusion, the intricate link between tourism experiences and memory formation plays a pivotal role in crafting lasting impressions and nurturing a profound sense of place for travelers. When narrowing the focus of this study to more specific sensory activities, similar dynamics can be observed in the context of experiential dining. Beyond the act of eating, these experiences shape destination choices and influence consumer behavior. Likewise, they not only highlight the multisensory capacity of destinations, but also their response to the increasing demand for immersive and impactful experiences among consumers. Within a competitive landscape, tourism destinations and organizations recognize the value of sensory and affective memories. The combination of these memories with media, representation and consumption not only enhances visitors' present experiences but also lingers with more meaning over time, which in turn creates a stronger sense of place and contributes to a destination's competitiveness. Ultimately, these memorable tourism experiences can mold place impressions and to (re)define a destination's identity.

### 3.2. People and Destinations: Understanding Sense of place

Understanding consumer behavior is highly important for maintaining competitiveness in the tourism activity. In line with this perspective, it is equally essential to grasp "the relationship between these people and places" (D'órey et al., 2019, p. 2). This section intends to explore the formation of the sense of place and relate it with previously mentioned concepts, namely experiential and sensory tourism, as well as blindfolded and memorable experiences.

There is an "inexorable link" between places and identity, as McCabe (2009, p. 233) describes. The essence of these places transcends their mere physical attributes, being also (and mainly) defined by "human creations" and embodied experiences which will, in turn, contribute to molding "social identity and the meanings of everyday and social life" (McCabe, 2009, p. 232). Destinations can be transformed and evolve "to create a uniqueness of place specific to that one area" (Henshaw, 2013, p. 200). This process leads to the development of a distinct, exclusive, and personal sense of place, characterized by unique sociocultural attributes which will, ultimately, enable a compelling factor in attracting tourists (Stedman, 2003; Henshaw, 2013; Duarte Alonso et al., 2020; Faraji et al., 2021).

The interpretations of "place" and "space" vary significantly between different authors, disciplines and even within the geographical domain. Nonetheless, this dissertation

aligns with Doreen Massey's (2005) approach, who argues that the two concepts are inseparable, as there is no purely geometric territory detached of emotion or sentiment.

Cresswell (2004, p. 7) states that "space is a more abstract concept than place" and places, besides "sites of history and identity in the city", are "spaces which people have made meaningful". According to this definition of a meaningful location, the author therefore suggests that places represent spaces to which individuals have attributed feelings and emotional significances. Edensor et al. (2020, p. 109) further contribute to this understanding by stating that places are "networked, manifesting both conditions of a site, as well as relationships within and across that site", which corroborates Massey's (2005, p. 9) notion which states that places, being "the product of interrelations", are spaces to which people are emotionally connected to (Cresswell, 2004). Massey (2005) accentuates that space should not be regarded merely as points on a map but as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far". Consequently, places must be perceived as a combination of these stories, and an articulation "within the wider power-geometries of space" (Massey, 2005, p. 130), thereby underscoring the interconnection of both concepts.

These perspectives underscore the intrinsic relation between place and space, reinforcing Doreen Massey's notion of the inseparable link between the two concepts. Understanding this multidimensional approach facilitates a deeper comprehension of the sense of place, acknowledging that the physical location itself cannot be dissociated from visitors' emotions and feelings driven from experiences.

Tourism studies focus on understanding the phenomenon of sense of place by recognizing and exploring the emotional connections that become essential to a destination (Jarratt et al., 2018). This interconnection between places and individuals encompasses emotional attachment and attributed meaning, and the understanding of sense of place is deemed essential to support destinations in developing visitor attachments to a place, therefore becoming a crucial factor in contemporary tourism (D'órey et al., 2019; Jarratt et al., 2018; Stedman, 2003; Tan et al., 2018).

Numerous authors have tried to best articulate what the concept truly represents. Drawing upon literature on the meaning of the sense of place, we can identify six distinct yet interconnected conceptions. These include holistic and multidimensional perspectives, individual interpretations of the sense of place, its emotional and affective dimensions, often intertwined with concepts of place attachment, definitions that underscore the sense of place as significant within the context of tourism, as well as its conceptualization as a social construct, alongside representational or identity-related aspects.

In general terms, the sense of place has been depicted as an "inclusive concept that arguably includes all things important to people" (Li et al., 2023, p. 2), and an "umbrella concept" that englobes others (Shamai, 1991; Duarte Alonso et al., 2020; Csurgó and Smith, 2022). D'órey et al. (2019) and Tang et al. (2021) describe it as a "multidimensional construct", and this multidimensionality and holistic landscape underscores place-specific emotions and the behavioral commitments that shape human-place connections (Csurgó and Smith, 2022; Zhou et al., 2021). Furthermore, Stedman (2003, p. 671) introduced four integral components to understand the sense of place, which include environmental traits (encompassing "the characteristics of the

environment”), interactions (“human uses of the environment”), social meanings (or “constructed meanings”), and perceptions (encapsulating “place attachment” and “affection, satisfaction or identity in relation to the surrounding spaces”) (D’órey et al., 2019, p. 1).

Regarding the conceptualization of the sense of place as an individual experience, Pratiwi et al. (2023, p. 301) identify it as “the sensation that people experience in a place”, allowing individuals to discern differences between territories and to capture specific perceptions and feelings towards places. Gustafson (2001, p. 9) states that “places often have highly personal meanings”. These meanings, specific to each individual, originate a perceived sense of place and, according to Chik and Leung (2024, p. 1), reflect “people’s socially constructed identities” and a place’s political environment, varying according to individual experiences, identities, values, interests and knowledge (van Eijck and Roth, 2010). Understanding and molding these perceptions facilitates stronger emotional bonds and memories and, through immersive tourism interactions, makes people feel like they are part of this environment (Schultz, 2000; Schroeder, 2007; Masterson et al., 2019), ultimately influencing desires and decisions. The sense of place is thus distinct for each visitor and, as they “conceptualize places divergently”, understanding these dynamics and considering “places from the perspective of their ‘users’” (Gustafson, 2001, p. 6), therefore enhances a destination’s uniqueness and competitiveness, influences people’s connection to the surrounding environment, and generates memories that linger (Gustafson, 2001; van Eijck and Roth, 2010; Chik and Leung, 2024).

Many authors highlight the emotional and affective dimensions at play, often intertwined with concepts of place attachment, corroborating the idea articulated by D’órey et al. (2019, p. 2) that asserts the essential role of sense of place in “transforming a geographical locality” into an appreciated and valued “tourist destination” (Campelo et al., 2014; Roult et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2018; Jarratt et al., 2018; Westerholt et al., 2022). In addition, sense of place is regarded as an integral component in tourism. Azizi and Shekari (2018, p. 548) underline it as a pathway to “explore visitors’ attitudes or behaviors or to study residents’ attitudes towards tourism development or participation in tourism activities”. In the same line of thought, it is considered a “vehicle for the comprehension of the attitudes of individuals concerning their environment”, representing an evolution of the “psychological perceptions” arising from visitor’s expectations and experiences during tourism activities or in specific territories (D’órey et al., 2019, p. 1).

Campelo et al. (2014) illustrate the sense of place as an ongoing social process, best suited to analyze the relationship between people and places, encapsulating human experiences, emotions, and interactions with and within the spaces they explore (Azizi and Shekari, 2018; D’órey et al., 2019; Li et al., 2023). The sense of place is thus defended as a social construct, underscoring its more profound social meaning, serving as a way to understand attitudes towards destinations, influenced by perception of the ambiance itself (Csurgó and Smith, 2022; Tang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021).

Lastly, with multiple authors adding depth to Stedman’s four-component framework, the sense of place can be seen in a representational or identity sense. Influenced by environmental psychology and shaped by subjective and emotional interactions, the concept comprises a combination of symbolic meanings and beliefs (place identity),

emotional bonds and connections (place attachment), and functional links individuals establish with places perceived as meaningful (place dependence) (Azizi and Shekari, 2018; Zhou et al., 2021; Csurgó and Smith, 2022; Westerholt et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023).

The sense of place englobes therefore all the previous descriptions, emerging as a concept that combines multiple dimensions, from symbolic meanings to emotional connections and functional ties developed between individuals and with places. Additionally, it encapsulates psychological perceptions and each experience outcome from tourism activities, serving also as a facilitating element not only in the exploration of the correlation between visitors and their surroundings, but also in the development of place branding and marketing strategies (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005; Campelo et al., 2014; Jarratt et al., 2018; Faraji et al., 2021). It is crucial for destinations and stakeholders to build a positive brand image, to stand out amidst competition and to attract both visitors and garner investment. This image is projected through a destination's atmosphere, ambiance, physical characteristics, and other attributes that contribute to the place's essence, combining it all into its sense of place (Stedman, 2003; Campelo et al., 2014; Jarratt et al., 2018; Faraji et al., 2021). Campelo et al. (2014, p. 154) assert that "a destination is both a geographical place and a metaphysical space determined by a network of meanings and values that are attached to it". Tang et al. (2021, p. 144) further affirm this idea by adding that the "sense of place and its dimensions are not only shaped by the physical environment, but they are felt in space where individuals inhabit, have experiences and interact with". Tourism marketing and communication, combined with sensory experiences, hold an important role in enabling "destinations to create their own unique identity and to differentiate themselves" (Jarratt et al., 2018, p. 1). For instance, incorporating local offerings such as "food and drink, arts and crafts", as studied by Haven-Tang and Jones (2005, p. 83), enables active visitor involvement, creating a unique visitation experience and adding significant value to it.

The integration of sensory-rich experiences in tourism has the potential to shape place experiences, enhance place perceptions and impact inhabitants' well-being by leveraging "the distinctive social and cultural characteristics of a destination" while also providing "economic benefits to the local community" (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005, p. 69). Hence, the stimulation of the senses becomes part of individuals' social memories, fostering an important sense of belonging within a place (Henshaw, 2013). This notion, illustrated by the earlier culinary examples, underlines the importance of emotional connections and personal experiences in tourism destinations, which play a crucial part in studying the complex relationship between people and places. Acknowledged for their influence on perceptions, behaviors, and the overall success of tourism sensory strategies, such interactions merit a more profound analysis within the experiential tourism and academic sensory field.

In conclusion, there is an intricate relationship between people and destinations, emphasizing the formation of a sense of place. Places transcend their physical attributes due to human psychological creations and embodied experiences that contribute to its identity. Understanding the sense of place as a multidimensional construct is essential for destinations, as it enables the construction of a positive brand image and differentiation in a competitive tourism landscape.

The next section explores the uncommon intersection between memorable tourism experiences and sense of place. Notably, this combination has remained largely uncharted in the academic realm. However, this dissertation intends to shine light on this overlooked dimension, recognizing it represents a unique relationship that promises new perspectives, offering strategic and practical contributions to industry stakeholders, and enriching tourism experiences.

### 3.3. Memorable Experiences and Sense of place: Connecting Concepts

The connection between memorable tourism experiences and sense of place has been relatively unexplored in tourism research. This section aims to examine the relationship between the two concepts, specifically within the multisensory tourism landscape. It explores how their intersection can mold tourists' perceptions of destinations and lay the foundation for applying these notions to empirical research. The goal is ultimately to understand the potential impact of multisensory blindfolded events in fostering a deeper, more meaningful, and memorable sense of place.

Drawing upon the literature review, it is possible to acknowledge that, in fact, contemporary tourists are increasingly seeking unique, personalized and transformative tourism encounters, to which experiential and sensory types of tourism emerge as promising responses. In this domain, the unexplored territory of blindfolded experiences stands as an appealing instrument. In its uniqueness, it can not only develop a distinctive tourism niche but also create positive memories. These memories, linked to unique experiences, extend to the setting where they took place, forging a sense of place characterized by inimitable emotions and, once again, positive recollections.

As established before, the pursuit of memorable tourism experiences is progressively gaining importance, transcending the conventional sightseeing desires (Hosany et al., 2022). This valuable outcome is characterized by its multidimensional nature, incorporating sensory and affective elements. These encounters thus foster a sense of well-being, deeper connections between individuals and places, leave a lasting impact on travelers and influencing their perceptions and decisions (Marschall, 2012; Agapito et al., 2017; Wood, 2020; Hosany et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022). Blindfolded experiences, for instance, challenge conventional tourism through the deliberate removal of the visual component, by fostering deeper emotional connections with the surrounding environment, which significantly marks the overall travel experience. Memories forged from these experiential encounters influence the destination identity and, if successfully executed, contribute to improving its' competitiveness (Wood, 2020). Positive memorable tourism experiences encompass multisensory factors, emotional resonance, and adapted marketing and communication strategies. In essence, it intends to capture the destinations sense of place and allowing it to resonate with visitors, enabling the formation of the tourism landscape itself.

In parallel, developing a sense of place involves intertwining a unique spatial identity (with both physical and cultural elements, tangible and intangible characteristics) and visitors' emotions, impactful encounters, and attributed meanings given to places (Stedman, 2003; D'órey et al., 2019). This process integrates multiple other notions, including place identity, place attachment and place dependence, and these dimensions

collectively contribute to understanding the complex link between places and identity (Stedman, 2003; McCabe, 2009; Azizi and Shekari, 2018; Li et al., 2023). Forging a sense of place requires the combination of the before-mentioned threads, emphasizing the preservation of a destination's unique identity. This will, in turn, enhance the factors that differentiate it from competition, ultimately providing authentic and positive tourism experiences.

The nexus between memorable tourism experiences and sense of place stands as a paradigm shift of the tourism industry itself. As elucidated in previous sections, pivotal concepts such as experiential tourism, sensory tourism, and blindfolded tourism incorporate elements that contribute to tailoring memorable experiences. The development of these sensory-rich encounters (exemplified by culinary experiences or walking tours) highlights a destination's uniqueness, forms distinct sociocultural memories, evokes place-specific positive emotions and, ultimately, fosters an exclusive and personal sense of place (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Henshaw, 2013; Renner et al., 2016; Agapito et al., 2017; Agapito, 2022; Hosany et al., 2022). Both concepts focus on tailoring positive and enduring impacts that must be remembered after the visit or activity. Intertwining memorable tourism experiences and sense of place not only allows tourism destinations to gain a competitive edge but also facilitates in understanding and anticipating behaviors. Additionally, memories created in these territories facilitate the development of emotional attachments and attributed meanings given to a place, as well as enduring connections and shaping loyalty towards places (Marschall, 2012; Hosany et al., 2022). In the tourism communication domain, destinations increasingly understand that effective and sensory-driven marketing strategies enhance much more than the brand image. These strategies influence visitor's decision-making processes, mold their perceptions of a place, and assist in the development of a positive sense of place. As a result, the employment of these sensory communication approaches stands as a powerful tool that not only influences visitors' pre-visit choices and immediate encounters, but also, and most importantly, cements the attractive characteristics and overall perception of the destination (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005; Jarratt et al., 2018).

Academic literature underscores the significance of on-site engagement and the formation of memories as fundamental components of the sense of place (Pred, 1983; McCunn and Gifford, 2018). Through immersive contact with and in specific spaces, individuals cultivate a more personal sense of attachment, anchored in their constructed memories. This connection to memorable tourism experiences suggests that a strong sense of place is more easily developed in locations where memorable events have taken place, which leads tourists to "recall more physical features that make it [the place] meaningful and memorable" (McCunn and Gifford, 2018, p. 215), thereby influencing their perception of these destinations. Moreover, emotionally meaningful experiences also enhance individuals' ability to recall each destination's contextual information since, as Legen et al. (2012, p. 1169) advocate, perception, orientation, attention, memory, and emotion are key dimensions identified as "constitutive for sense of place and place identity". For Pred (1983, p. 49), place transcends the mere definition of an object, and can be defined as a "center of meanings, intentions, or felt values; a focus of emotional or sentimental attachment; a locality of felt significance". Edensor and Falconer (2015, p. 611) further explore this definition, stating that "the meaning and feeling of place is continually reconstituted by the social engagements that occur". The authors argue that, through tourists' search for authenticity and cultural enrichment, a link is formed between

their sense of place and their sense of taste. Moreover, sensory encounters involving darkness, such as blindfolded activities, will therefore “challenge habitual affective and sensual dispositions and assumptions”, thereby altering visitors’ perceptions of destinations (Edensor and Falconer, 2015, p. 614). Through these features, and through “familiarity and the accumulation of memories” (Pred, 1983, p. 49), the transition from space into place is formulated, shaping the individual’s personal and unique sense of place connected to a tourism destination (Pred, 1983; Edensor and Falconer, 2015). In essence, this interplay between emotion, memorable tourism experiences, and the formation of sense of place symbolizes a powerful and transformative paradigm shift within experiential tourism, solidifying its capacity to mold tourists’ perceptions of destinations.

In this competitive landscape, impactful tourism experiences not only generate experiences that endure in tourists’ memories beyond the immediate visit, but also allow the destinations to generate a distinguishable niche among competitors. By recognizing the opportunities that arise from connecting the emotional and sensory aspects of tourism with blindfolded experiences, these places craft singular and unforgettable encounters, capable of addressing modern visitors’ wants and needs, and contributing to the preservation and enhancement of these places’ identity. Lastly, memorable tourism experiences enable the development of lifelong memories which, in turn, have a pivotal influence in the creation of individuals’ sense of place and attachment toward destinations.

The next section will present the empirical study of this dissertation, which explored specific case studies and practical applications. Firstly, there will be an examination of the two companies that produce blindfolded experiential sensory activities in Lisbon, *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever*, with a primary focus on a better understanding of the experiences they offer (“Sensory Lisbon” and “Dining in The Dark”, respectively). Secondly, the study’s methodology, which included a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews, is presented. This approach intends not only to grasp the strategic and practical outcomes driven from the interconnectedness of the main concepts discussed before, but also to provide answers to the specific objectives delineated in the study.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Objective

This dissertation presents an empirical investigation of the blindfolded experiences "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in the Dark", focusing on understanding the companies responsible for their development, and the essence of the experiences, providing an important overview of the chosen case studies. It draws upon a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews concerning two different groups: the production and design teams and tour guides (in the *Sensory Lisbon* case study) and, secondly, the visitors themselves (for *Dining in The Dark*). This empirical exploration intends to explore how blindfolded sensory experiences impact tourism experiences, and understand how this sensory deprivation influences participants' sense of place and perception of the urban destinations in which they take place, in this case Lisbon. By addressing these goals, the study aims to further expand the comprehension of multisensory tourism and its potential impact on visitors and destination perception.

### 4.2. Case study rationale

The selection of Lisbon as the research's geographical backdrop implies practical and strategic considerations. Lisbon's status as a popular tourism capital, that enjoys recognition for its multicultural and diverse environment (Daly et al., 2021; Meireles, 2023; Leandro, 2024; Barbedo, 2024), makes it a strategic case for the study of multisensory tourism and sense of place. The city contains a rich cultural heritage and welcoming status, and this setting is strategic to explore the effects of innovative multisensory experiences on visitors' perceptions of the urban landscape and on the overall sense of place and connections with the city.

This dissertation explores two case studies: "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in the Dark". "Sensory Lisbon" takes place in Lisbon's historical Alfama neighborhood and consists of walking tours in which visitors are blindfolded, relying entirely on their remaining senses to navigate and experience the surrounding atmosphere. "Dining in the Dark" corresponds to a series of dining events across diverse restaurant establishments in Lisbon<sup>1</sup> where, like the first case-study, participants wear blindfolds to enhance their sensory awareness and to experience food through the other senses. This multiple case approach was chosen because these two experiences are unique and specialized within the broader domain of multisensory experiences in Lisbon. Due to the scarcity of blindfolded tourism experiences in this geographical context, the experiences that these companies provide offer valuable insights, as they are unique subjects that allow further investigation on this innovative niche and approach.

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<sup>1</sup> For this study, due to the research timeline, two restaurants that held these experiences were considered, namely the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant* and the *Gulden Draak Beer House*.

### 4.3. Data collection methods

This research involves primary data collection through interviews with tourism professionals and tourists participating in these experiences. These discussions offer expert and personal perspectives, providing insights into the sensory perceptions and visitor impacts. First, two exploratory interviews were conducted, with producers from the two companies, which intended to expand the knowledge on the companies and the sensory experiences they design. The second phase included the conduction of a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with two distinct sample groups. The first included production, design, and tour guide members of "Sensory Lisbon". The second included participants of "Dining in the Dark", and both aimed to obtain distinct perspectives about the impact of the encounters at hand. The qualitative analysis of the interviews allowed drawing conclusions that directly address the study's primary objective: to explore how blindfolded sensory encounters impact tourism experiences, and understand how this sensory deprivation influences participant's sense of place and perception of the urban destination.

#### 4.3.1. *Exploratory Interviews, Sample Characterization, and Recruitment*

The empirical investigation began with two exploratory interviews. These were undertaken with José Varandas and Inês Machado, members of the "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in the Dark" experiences, respectively. The first interviews took place on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and then on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, and they meant to provide structured insights on both events, allowing a deeper understanding of the companies that produce them (*Lisbon Walker* and *Fever*, respectively) and their activities. This is further explored in sub-sections 4.5.1. and 4.5.2. These interviews were open conversations with a merely directional script (Appendixes 3 and 4) that focused on the evolution, objectives, communication, marketing strategies applied, partnerships, and achieved outcomes of the companies. This information allowed an understanding of what could be asked and discussed on the next set of interviews, which directed the focus on the impact of these encounters, rather on their development. The second set of interviews was conducted over a three-month period (from January to March 2024), and involved two different samples, one for each case-study.

The study therefore includes 11 interviews with creatives and 11 with visitors, ensuring a comprehensive sample and a diverse range of participants, without imposing specific criteria such as gender, age, or nationality. The recruitment strategy focused on individuals who had, at some point, direct contact with the studied events, and aimed to reach out and interview willing participants, relying on contacts provided by the companies and the visitors/tourists themselves.

#### 4.3.1.1. *The “Sensory Lisbon” experience*

Following the first discussion with one of the creators of “Sensory Lisbon”, the snowball sampling technique was implemented, with its founder facilitating connections with other team members involved in the experience, whether in production, design, or tour guiding.

The discussions for “Sensory Lisbon” involved a total of 11 interviewees, including its two founders and nine tour guides, among which were two experience producers and designers, granting a total of six male and five female volunteers. At the time of the interviews, their ages ranged from 39 to 51 years old. The majority (90%) were Portuguese, with one person of German nationality. Nine participants lived in the Greater Lisbon region, one person in the Alentejo region, and only one resided outside Portuguese territory, in Dili (East Timor).

As explained before, the study comprised two phases for each experience. For “Sensory Lisbon”, the first phase of the study involved an initial discussion with a founder of the blindfolded experience, which provided valuable insights into the objectives behind its creation and application. The second phase focused on 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews with team members involved in the activity. Conducted between February 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, the in-depth semi-structured interviews aimed to facilitate a deeper insight into the potential impact of these experiences from the perspectives of professionals who conceived them and witness their first-hand effects. For both the production teams and staff members, as seen in Appendix 3, the scripts addressed these sensory experiences’ objectives and strategies employed when designing and marketing them. Moreover, the interview script covered possible techniques applied to prioritize and stimulate the senses, as well as their impact on visitor perceptions and overall tourist experiences. A deeper exploration intended to unravel memorable moments that impacted visitors, if (and how) Lisbon is represented in these blindfolded encounters, and its influence on visitors’ perception and overall sense of place in Lisbon. The emphasis was on collecting valuable information derived from their professional outlook and interactions with visitors during the experiences.

#### 4.3.1.2. *The “Dining in The Dark” experience*

On the other hand, participants of the “Dining in The Dark” experience were recruited by the researcher at the site of two of these experiences: the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant* (January 25<sup>th</sup>) and the *Gulden Draak Beer House* (February 28<sup>th</sup>)<sup>2</sup>. In these events, the researcher invited the visitors of the experience to participate in the study’s interview, collected visitors’ contacts, and scheduled the interviews.

On the “Dining in The Dark” case study, 11 interviews were conducted with volunteers who participated in the gastronomic experience, comprising 60% women and 40% men. Their ages ranged from 29 to 53 years old, with an average age of 36 years old. The majority (90%) were Portuguese visitors, with only one individual of foreign nationality

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<sup>2</sup> These were the two restaurants chosen for the study because, during the period for interviews (between January and March), these were the only two establishments where the “Dining in the Dark” experience took place, and where participants were willing to give their statement.

(Brazilian). At the time of the interviews, all participants resided in Portugal, with the majority located in the NUTS II Great Lisbon region (45%), approximately 25% living in the Oeste (West) and Tagus Valley region, two individuals in Centre region and one in the Algarve region.

Among these visitors, four attended the first event held at the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant*, while six were present in the second activity organized by Fever, in the *Gulden Draak Beer House*. These interviews took place between February 15<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024, and aimed to understand how these specific events shape overall tourism encounters, participants' sensory responses, and their perception of Lisbon. Through first-hand perspectives, they aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how these blindfolded encounters may resonate with and impact participants. These interviews with participants addressed the motivations that compelled them to undertake these experiential activities, and their detailed emotional and sensory responses during the sensory deprivation event. The analysis sought to determine whether the blindfolded experiences effectively capture Lisbon's essence, and if it influenced visitors' perception of the city, contributed (or not) to their sense of place and formed (or not) positive and lasting memories.

For both "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in The Dark", the script questions were elaborated based on the main objectives and empirical sub-objectives outlined in Chapter 1 – Introduction. The script aims to further understand the impact of blindfolded experiences on tourists and tourism destinations, with a primary focus on exploring the implications of these multisensory activities. Additionally, the script aims to address the empirical sub-objectives, as is detailed in Appendixes 1 and 2, by organizing them into distinct themes: communication strategies, sensory dynamics, memory formation, creation of a sense of place, experience evaluation, and insights into the potential future of these experiential events. Applying this methodology ensured a comprehensive approach to understand these unique experiential activities and their significance within the tourism landscape.

#### 4.4. Data Analysis

All participants were presented with an informed consent form (Appendixes 5 and 6), which they signed before the interviews took place. In these consent forms, it was established that the researcher had permission to record, transcribe and quote the discussions, while ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. To respect this anonymity, each volunteer was assigned a letter (I, for Interviewee) and a number, ranging from 1 to 22, in the order in which the interviews were conducted. For instance, I1 refers the first interviewee, whose interview took place on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, while I22 stands for the last volunteer, with whom the interview took place on March 21<sup>st</sup>. These codes (from I1 to I22) are used in quotes and references in the following chapter. Furthermore, volunteers I1, I5, I6, I7, I10 and I11 were associated with the "Dining in The Dark" experience held at the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant* on January 25<sup>th</sup>. Interviewees I2, I3, I4, I8 and I9 attended the same event at the *Gulden Draak Beer House*, on February 28<sup>th</sup>. Lastly, participants from I12 to I22 were involved in the "Sensory Lisbon" experience.

The interview data was processed and analyzed using a grounded approach to document interviewees' perspectives, experiences, and key insights. Recorded interviews were fully transcribed to text. Interview narratives were then read and coded according to emerging topics of discussion. Afterwards, a systematic process of cross-comparison was applied to identify commonalities, differences, and emerging patterns among the responses. This thorough examination of interview transcripts has facilitated the identification of recurring concepts and themes, allowing a categorization of responses and, by analyzing how participants' experiences align or diverge, made it possible to draw conclusions and generate insights regarding the research questions.

Having dedicated the earlier chapters to a comprehensive literature review of the primary concepts and having outlined the methodology processes employed in this dissertation, chapter 5 ("Lisbon's Blindfolded Experiences") transitions toward a more empirical stance of the investigation. This chapter focuses on the companies *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever*, and the experiences they provide: "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in The Dark", respectively. It also presents and analyzes the in-depth semi-structured interviews with producers, team members and participants to deeper understand these multisensory experiences implemented in Lisbon. The aim is to gain a deeper comprehension of these blindfolded experiences, identifying its strengths and challenges, drawing valuable insights for enhancing these immersive tourism events, and suggesting directions for future academic research and practical developments.

## 5. Lisbon's Blindfolded Experiences

### 5.1. Multisensory Tourism in Lisbon

This chapter presents the findings of this dissertation's empirical study. It begins with an examination of the companies *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever*, facilitating a comprehensive overview of the designed experiences. Following this, the findings from the interviews are presented, along with the conclusions drawn from them, and their connection to the literature review.

#### 5.1.1. The "Sensory Lisbon" Experience

*Lisbon Walker* (fig.1) is a Portuguese company established in 2005 by Rita Macedo, José Antunes and José Varandas, in response to the fast development of the tourism industry in Portugal and, more specifically, in Lisbon. Recognizing that, despite tourism growth, there was an underdeveloped landscape of walking tours in Lisbon, *Lisbon Walker* curated and implemented multiple events in this destination, which now amount to over 30 thematic tours (Lisbon Walker, n.d.-a).



Figure 1- Lisbon Walker company logo. Source: TripAdvisor.

The aim of the company is to bring out Lisbon's character and unique personality, its "stunning location and historic significance", as well as its "remarkable aesthetics" (Visit Lisboa, n.d.). Their emblematic routes have a knowledgeable and historical character, much like their tour guides, aiming to present a structured, rigorous, informative and cultural perspective of the location's cultural past and providing distinct opportunities to know Lisbon and the Alfama neighborhood from different perspectives (Lisbon Walker, n.d.-a; Visit Portugal, n.d.).

One of these tours is entitled "Sensory Lisbon" ("Lisboa Sensorial" in Portuguese), and it was first implemented in 2008. The concept revolves around discovering Lisbon, specifically the old Alfama district, blindfolded. In these tour walks, participants are steered by a blind tour guide, who helps with the new perception and augmentation of the senses, and a guide who provides "the historical contextualization of the route" (Tornelo, 2008; Expresso, 2022). Inside the "heart of the capital" (Time Out Lisbon, 2018), visitors are immersed in different sensory references, and the blindfolds allow them to become familiar with the territory (fig.2). With heightened senses, it is possible

to explore the numerous existing sensory codes, from the smell of food to the sound of traffic and distant conversations, from narrow streets to touching flora and tasting the traditional gastronomy, and all these aspects generate a potentially memorable experience that may influence visitors' perception of Lisbon (Lisbon Walker, n.d.-b). The extent of this influence will be further examined in Section 5.2.



Figure 2 - Sensory Lisbon's guided tours, in Alfama. Sources: Lisbon Walker & The Globe and Mail.

Since 2008, the project respects two main objectives: offering a unique sensory journey through the deliberate absence of sight, building “a new knowledge of space by stimulating the senses of smell, touch, taste and hearing” (Tornelo, 2008); and, as visitors explore the world of the visually impaired, it inclusively promotes a positive perspective on blindness, “not in a crippling sense but in a positive and stimulating effect” (Lisbon Walker, n.d.-b).

However, it is important to reiterate that this is an experiential activity, not necessarily integrated in the inclusive tourism category. In a meeting with José Varandas (one of the founding members of *Lisbon Walker* and “Sensory Lisbon”), José himself distinguishes this aspect by stating:

“What we sell today is an experience for people who are obviously not blind. There are people who make these appointments and say it's because they have someone in the family who is blind, and therefore they want to gain this sensitivity. I (José) normally say that it's enough just to have feelings. (...) This won't, in any way, give the perception of what a day is in the life of a blind person, nor the associated challenge. This is meant for the person to indeed understand that they have other senses, and that all the others also have great importance.”<sup>3</sup>

José Varandas, December 12, 2023

<sup>3</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English by the author of the dissertation, as are all the following citations in this study.

In this light, it is an experience crafted by the members of *Lisbon Walker*, the Cabracega agency (an experience design studio led by Hugo Tornado, Pedro Alegria and Rita Gonzalez) and different organizations such as *APPA* (Alfama's Association of Patrimony and Population) and *ACAPO* (a Portuguese association that caters for the blind). Despite this fact, "Sensory Lisbon" does not represent a form of inclusive tourism, since these walking tours are not designed especially for the visually impaired, but of experiential tourism, since the aim is to provide a distinct product with an original concept focused on the sensory experiences (Tornado, 2008).

The designated route (fig.3), as Varandas mentions (December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023), is intended to "promote this idea of exploring the other senses". The tour usually starts in Rua dos Remédios, and normally ends an hour later in the Alfura Alley (Beco da Alfura), where the final challenge takes place: visitors are asked to remove their blindfolds and, through memory, to retrace the route to the starting point, recalling all the stimuli they received before. Throughout the walk, the idea is to evoke as many senses as possible. Varandas further reports that participants are therefore asked, for example, to stretch their arms and touch the narrow walls of the Alfama streets and alleys (to gain a different spatial dimension and notion of the space), to feel the trees and flowers, to smell and taste the local gastronomy (through foods with distinct odors, textures and flavors, identifying different ingredients), and not only to listen to the tour guides (leading their way or talking about Lisbon's history), but also to pay attention to the surrounding everyday soundscapes, such as traffic, birds, people walking by, and music. All of this can be adapted and carefully drafted according to the public's desires, scaling and adapting the walk and the stops according to what the visitors intend.

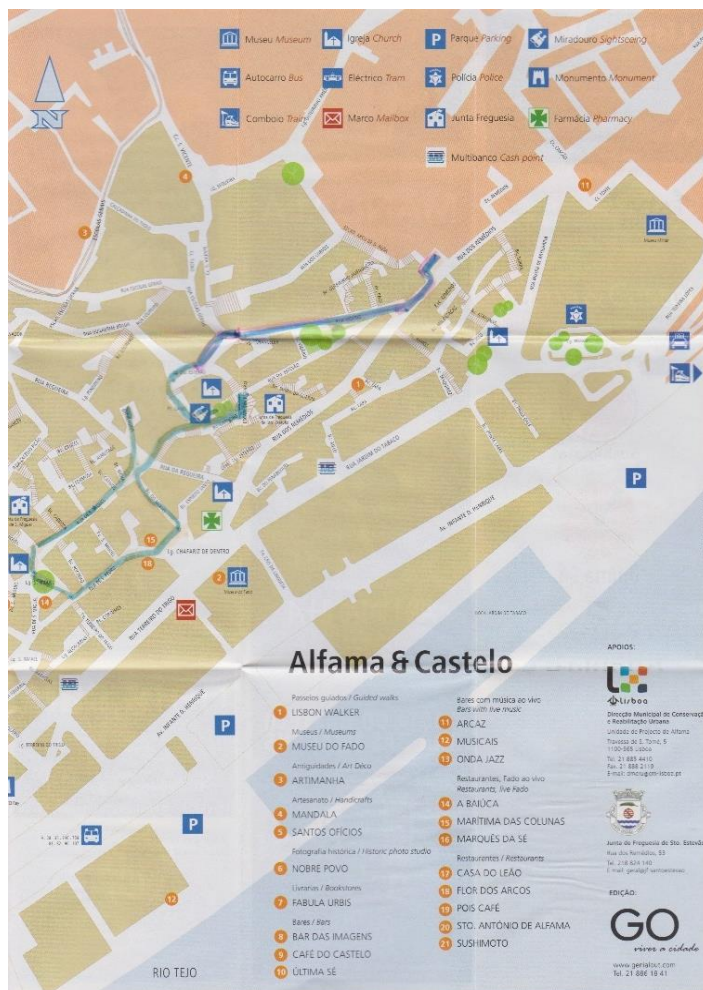


Figure 3 - "Sensory Lisbon" experience tour path, in Alfama, provided and signaled by the team members. Provided by the Lisbon Walker members.

In terms of the main audience for this singular experience, José Varandas reveals that, being a “different product”, it “naturally has a very special demand”. The participants are not individuals who necessarily want or like walking tours, but tourists who value the historical knowledge that the company offers and the experiential side of it. He mentions that it is not a massified public, but tourists normally come from the United States of America (USA), with a solid financial capability and high educational backgrounds. Besides this, the *Lisbon Walker’s* team member specifies that it is an audience normally connected with the creative industry, from music to writing. He says that visitors are usually “people with a creative job and look at this tour as a different kind of experience” (Varandas, December 12, 2023).

Communication is a very important matter in the tourism industry and in promoting its experiences. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *Lisbon Walker* took a step back concerning “Sensory Lisbon” and its marketing, because “to communicate you have to know what you want to communicate” (Varandas, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023). Despite this, they acknowledged the importance of social media in selling their brand and this particular experience. In 2018, *TimeOut Lisbon* posted an article called “Top 10 Things to do in Alfama”, where “Sensory Lisbon” was mentioned, and the impact in sales was very noticeable amongst the team, who reported immediate growth in terms of public demand. Therefore, they recognize the impact of the media, and are starting to develop multiple advertising campaigns such as a marketing strategy to attract a bigger audience. Their communication techniques (fig. 4, 5 and 6), implemented through their original website and social media (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) and partnerships (like *TimeOut*, *TripAdvisor*, *Turismo de Lisboa*), revolve around “a more capable communication” and a bigger sensory marketing plan (Varandas, December 12, 2023; Lisbon Walker, n.d.-b).

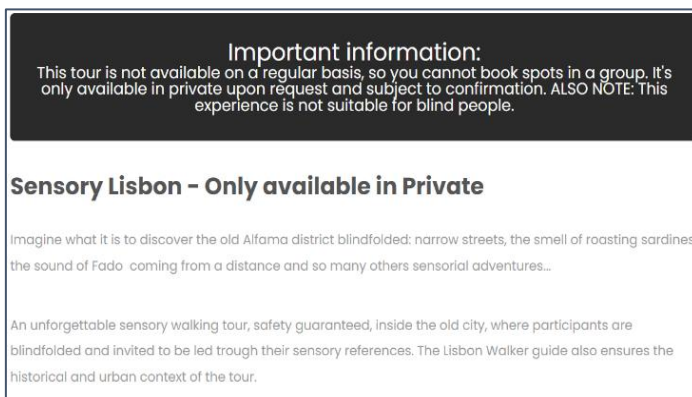


Figure 4 - Communication strategies used for the "Sensory Lisbon" experience. Source: Lisbon Walker website.



Figure 5 - Communication strategies used for the "Sensory Lisbon" experience. Source: Lisbon Walker's Instagram.



Figure 4 - Communication strategies used for the "Sensory Lisbon" experience. Source: Lisbon Walker's Twitter.

Lastly, when it comes to forthcoming plans, the goal is to focus on these campaigns and to implement promotional events referred to as "Opens", where individuals or couples can register for a specific date to participate in the experience at a reduced price. As the team observed immediate positive impacts from such events in the past, this initiative intends to encourage participation by offering discount rates. In the upcoming years, Lisbon Walker's strategy encompasses leveraging the potential of these methods whilst boosting their online presence through social media platforms to attract more participants (Varandas, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

### 5.1.2. The "Dining in The Dark" Experience

The "Dining in The Dark" experience is an immersive gastronomic journey that challenges both participants and the traditional way of eating. Using blindfolds, customers' non-visual senses are heightened, which emphasizes their perception of smell, taste, texture, and the above-mentioned proprioceptive sense. This experiential and multisensory experience has gained popularity throughout the world, and in Lisbon the concept is explored by the company *Fever*. This section thus investigates *Fever*'s history, evolution and its' role in exploiting "Dining in The Dark" in Lisbon.

*Fever* (fig.7) is the name of a "global live-entertainment discovery platform" (Fever, n.d.-a). Created in 2014 by Ignacio Bachiller and Francisco Hein (and implemented in Portugal five years later), it represents more than an "online event ticketing platform" (Tracxn, n.d.), as its aim is to "democratize access to culture and entertainment in real life" (Fever, n.d.-a).



Figure 5 - Fever company logo. Source: LinkedIn.

During an interview conducted for the present project with a member of *Fever*, Inês Machado (December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023) explained this motto based on the “Candlelight Concert Series” event. As the audience ranges from 18-year-olds to 60 and 70-year-old visitors, their efforts combine to expand classical music to a wider audience, instead of the usual limited demographic, aiming to “make classical music accessible to everyone, and so on with other events” (Machado, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023). Besides this, the explanation is associated with an accessibility factor, both concerning economic terms (affordability) and the purchasing process.

The cost of the tickets plays an important role, as there are other establishments providing similar events (with candlelight concerts or, for example, restaurants offering parallel versions of the “Dining in The Dark” idea). However, these alternatives tend to be much less economically accessible to most guests, compared to *Fever*’s events. Additionally, the easiness to which customers can purchase their tickets on the website also stands as a crucial factor. Discussing this theme, Inês Machado proudly mentions: “one of the things we’re really good at is this part of ticketing” (December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023). Connected to this matter, *Fever*’s services are inclusively required through partnerships with, for example, entities like *Netflix* and *Warner Brothers*, due to their user-friendly nature, since “anyone of any age can easily buy a ticket on our app” (Machado, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023).

The company provides social events information and services for numerous activities and experiences developed through partnerships with “entertainment and event creators to reach their audience and improve their experiences” (Golden, n.d.).

One of the main objectives is to grant unique and personalized experiences in more than 100 cities where *Fever* is present across the globe, from Toronto to New York, São Paulo to Mexico City, London to Lisbon and Madrid, Paris to Milan and, among others, Sydney, and Australia (Zendesk, n.d.).

*Fever* can be divided into three pillars: *Fever Marketplace*, *Fever Originals*, and *Secret Media*.

- *Fever Marketplace* refers to the online site that facilitates the purchase of multiple experiences, from cinema to brunch and a spa day. It works as an intermediary that sells experiences offered by *Fever*’s partners rather than their own.
- *Fever Originals* constitutes the segment of the company that develops its internally developed events. These correspond to *Fever*’s exclusive events, created and produced by them, to which “Dining in The Dark” stands as an example.
- Lastly, *Secret Media* serves as the promotional platform that produces articles spotlighting activities and events, being *Fever Original* events, *Fever Marketplace* events, or anything “worthy experiencing” associated with that destination. This platform hosts specific elements to each city *Fever* is connected to, like *Secret Lisbon* (“Lisboa Secreta”), *Secret London*, *Secret New York*, and many more (Machado, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023).

By combining these three pillars, this “data-led company” (Forbes, n.d.) enables users to access and book tourist attractions in a more convenient way, allowing them to discover “what to do, where to go and what to visit” (Zendesk, n.d.) in each destination, from “immersive exhibitions, interactive theatrical experiences, and festivals to molecular

cocktail pop-ups” (Fever, n.d.-a, PitchBook, n.d.). Among these events, some examples are the referred “Candlelight Concert Series” (that, according to Fever’s *LinkedIn*, have amounted to over three million visitors), the “Stranger Things” event (based in Los Angeles and derived from a partnership with *Netflix*), the also famous “Van Gogh: Immersive Experience” and, among many others, the “Dining in The Dark Experience” (Fever, n.d.-b).

This last case is a global phenomenon hosted in restaurants all over the world, “like USA, Australia, Spain, Mexico, Singapore, France, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Brazil, Denmark, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany and Portugal” (Fever, n.d.-b). Initially introduced in 2020 in a restaurant in Manchester, this concept immediately rose to success, which drove to its expansion to other cities, countries, and continents. Especially demanded in the USA, it is offered in thematic variations, such as Halloween, Sushi, Mexican, and even Valentine’s Day. Portugal also embraced this event in 2020, launching in the capital (Lisbon) and in Porto, and progressively expanding to other Portuguese destinations, such as Sintra. To develop this event, *Fever* partners with restaurants from each city to craft a unique menu and to adapt the restaurant to a blindfolded experience in the dark. Consumers are not aware of what they are eating, but they can choose between three options from the menu: vegan, fish, or meat (Fever, n.d.-b).

The main idea is to “put your taste buds to the test”, as Dade (2023) refers. Since “80% of people eat with their eyes” (Fever, n.d.-b), while “Dining in The Dark” intends to be a gastronomical experience that encourages visitors to enjoy their meal relying on other heightened senses, therefore appreciating food from a different perspective (fig. 8) (Dade, 2023).



Figure 6 – “Dining in The Dark” experiences. Source: Fever.

One of *Fever's* stronger points, besides the ticketing-purchasing experience, lies within digital marketing, as Machado (December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023) defends. Their communication and activity promotion are crafted by a marketing team, who promote these events by leveraging the potential of the *Secret Lisbon* platform through their website and by exploring various social media platforms (mainly Facebook and Instagram) to effectively launch marketing campaigns and promote events, expanding their audience and their reach (fig. 9 and 10).

Figure 8 - Communication strategies used for the "Dining in The Dark " experience. Source: Fever's website.

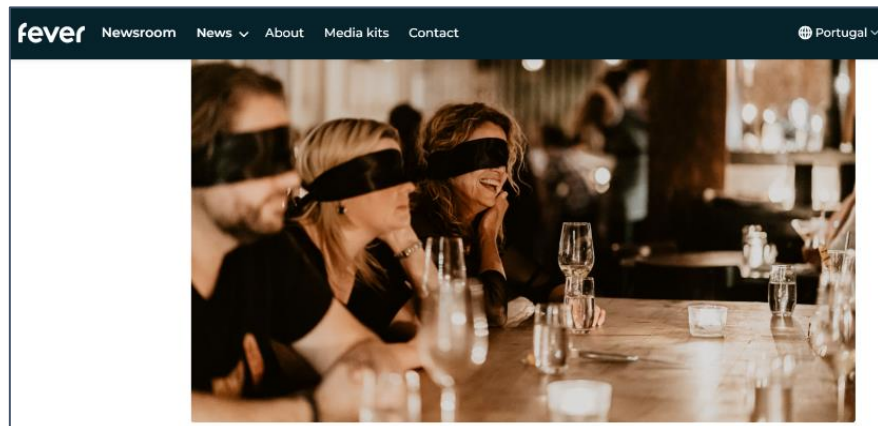
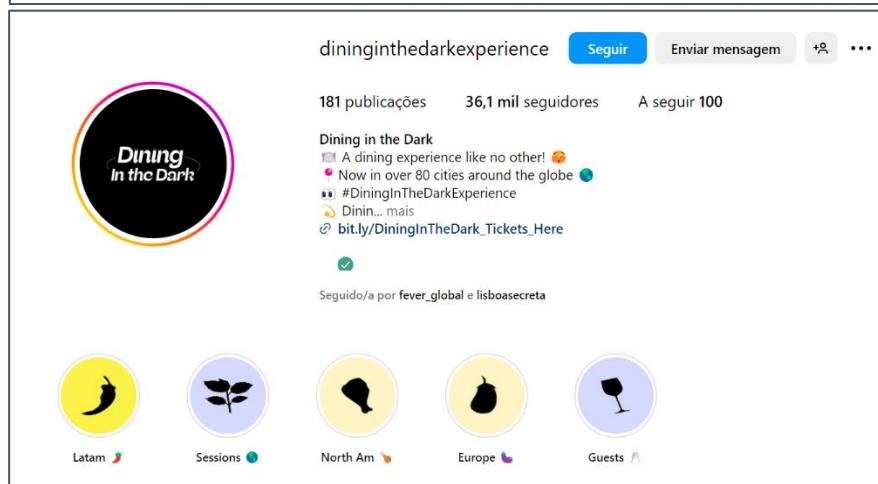


Figure 7 - Communication strategies used for the "Dining in The Dark " experience. Source: Fever's Instagram.



Results for "Dining in The Dark" are measured by meeting the monthly target of ticket sales and, according to Inês Machado (December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023), "the vast majority, if not almost all of the experiments we've done, we've sold out". Hence, given this positive achievement and the experience's exponential demand rate, *Fever's* plans encompass not only a continuous development of the activity, but also its expansion to other unexplored cities, especially in Portugal.

After examining *Lisbon Walker's* "Sensory Lisbon" and *Fever's* "Dining in The Dark" experiences, it is possible to define a common thread between the two companies and events: the commitment toward experiential sensory tourism. Despite being defined by different entertainment approaches (historical walks and gastronomy, respectively), scale and even target audience, there is a noticeable commitment to modern ways of acknowledging tourism, especially by influencing visitors' sensory perceptions through the usage of blindfolds to leverage their overall tourism experience in Lisbon.

The forthcoming section focuses on the understanding of this commitment to sensory engagement, memorable experiences and even the (more or less conscious) creation of a sense of place. Transitioning from the literature review approach to an empirical methodology, the section aims to draw conclusions from the findings of the interviews and hopefully contribute to the understanding of the impact of blindfolded sensory experiences on tourists and on their perception and sense of place.

## 5.2. Thematic Analysis: Communication, Senses, Memories, and Places

Drawing from the two sets of interviews, and establishing a link to the literature review, this analysis will be structured into six interconnected groups: communication, the senses, memorable encounters, sense of place, experience improvement and future considerations. This thematic categorization enables the identification of both strengths and challenges, as well as convergent and divergent ideologies among the interviewees. By analyzing these themes, the aim is to facilitate the recognition of emerging patterns and draw comprehensive conclusions into the broader implications of multisensory experiences in tourism.

### 5.2.1. “Sensory Lisbon”: Impact of the Blindfolded Tour

This section investigates the influence of “Sensory Lisbon” blindfolded tours on participants’ perceptions of Lisbon. By interviewing the creators and team members of *Lisbon Walker*, the analysis focused on how sensory deprivation affects emotional responses and fosters a deeper understanding of the urban environment. The goal is to gain insights into how the absence of visual stimuli might shape visitors’ impressions of Lisbon, and ultimately to highlight the broader implications of sensory experiential tourism.

#### 5.2.1.1. Communication

Developing promotion and communication strategies, especially in the sensory domain, is increasingly important for tourism destinations and brands due to their potential in influencing visitor experiences and shaping the perceptions of encounters and places (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Agapito et al., 2014; Imamović et al., 2022).

Regarding the marketing strategies employed in the “Sensory Lisbon” experience (**Q2.1**), it was relayed that “without a doubt, we adapted our promotion to this idea of vision loss, but in a positive way, working with real and social impact” (I14). In the initial stages of the project, the company organized a series of micro-events and a targeted press outreach to attract participants (I13, I14). This approach corroborates with Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) proposals for creating memorable tourism experiences by theming the experience, harmonizing impressions with positive cues and engaging all senses.

The experience producers explained that the dissemination of the experience was relatively easy not only because “when you are working on differentiating in tourism, the media also tries to benefit from it, also seeking to differentiate themselves through what

they communicate” (I14), but also because “people are eager to find out what is being done that it is still relatively unexplored” (I15), especially on an “experiential and sensory level” (I13). Currently, the experience is promoted through the *Lisbon Walker* official website, where careful consideration is given to photography, images, and messages “because this way you can amplify your voice more effectively” (I16), besides establishing distinctive features. This also contributes toward establishing a unique identity, as Jarratt et al. (2018) state. However, the production team explained that the project faces logistic challenges in scheduling activities and managing demand (I13, I16). As one interviewee explained, “the more we promote it, the more often we will have to turn people down” (I16). Furthermore, despite recognizing the importance of the promotional aspect, attracting visitors’ attention has become gradually more challenging “because people are more dispersed, as is their attention, across various platforms” (I13).

The success of tourism experiences heavily depends on sensorial marketing and strategic thematic approaches (Meacci and Liberatore, 2018), as practiced by *Lisbon Walker* at the beginning of the experience. These techniques not only enable brands and destinations to differentiate themselves but also shape visitor perceptions and desires (Jarratt et al., 2018; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022). Insights from the production team underline both the potential positive outcomes and the difficulties associated with implementing these sensory-focused cues, highlighting the importance of a well-structured communication methodology (Imamović et al., 2022).

#### 5.2.1.2. *The senses*

When asked to detail the experience’s objectives (**Q1.2**), the responses depicted distinct goals. One primary objective was to “provide an historical context of the space we were in” (I13). Company members elaborated that the event aimed to transform how visitors feel the urban space, emphasizing that connecting tourists with local communities offered “a way of giving more meaning to the place” (I14). Furthermore, by eliminating visual cues, the product enables visitors to “experience part of the city” while “awakening them to a series of other aspects that we usually don’t pay much attention to” (I15). As one volunteer stated:

“We first tried to understand how we could experience the urban space differently. It was about understanding how things are arranged in the daily urban life and creating experiences and rituals both within and outside the city.” (I13)

Understanding blindness and promoting inclusion were mentioned, “being an integration-focused project” (I16). The experience highlights the “lack of accessibility in the urban space” (I13) and allows participants to “put themselves in a blind person’s shoes, and to live that experience” (I12). Moreover, interviewees suggested that the experience’s main purpose is sensory exploration, managing the deprivation of sight while exploring and enhancing the other senses to foster a deeper familiarity with Lisbon and the Alfama neighborhood (I13, I16, I17, I18, I19, I20). These responses underscore the interrelation between the concepts of memorable tourism experiences based on the senses and the creation of a sense of place, as shown by Haven-Tang and Jones (2005), demonstrating how multisensory activities can enrich urban exploration and craft meaningful connections with destinations (Henshaw, 2013; Imamović et al., 2022).

Discussing this sensory dimension of the blindfolded experience, all respondents affirmed the use of specific techniques to stimulate the senses (**Q4.1**). By focusing on non-visual cues, these strategies enhance visitors' immersion in Alfama, as purposely integrated into the "Sensory Lisbon" script (I12). This approach helps individuals "feel more" (I16, I18) by prioritizing sensory-rich locations that stimulate participants (I13, I17, I21). The team "tried to combine the sensory aspect with the historical and social aspects" (I14), intertwining sensory encounters with historical narratives from Alfama (I13) and enhancing the storytelling through visitors' sensory experiences (I19).

By focusing on each sense individually, deliberate efforts are made to enhance sensory perception, which echoes the arguments put forward by literature on the experience economy and sensorial tourism (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Meacci and Liberatore, 2018; Agapito, 2020). The olfactory sense is accentuated by capturing Alfama's characteristic scents (I17, I19) and by guiding visitors through locales like butcher shops, fish markets, and taverns, and encouraging them to engage with distinct aromas (I13, I22). For auditory stimulation, the tour heavily relies on ambient sounds, leveraging elements such as Fado music, the chirping of birds, the chatter of local people, children playing (I17, I19, I20), and using echo-location techniques "to try to understand their location, by clicking and clapping" (I13). Taste is heightened at a local café where visitors sample the "As Alfamas" cake, crafted to embody traditional Portuguese flavors and to challenge participants (I16, I21, I22). The haptic sense derives from guided tactile experiences, encouraging visitors to touch elements such as trees, walls, Portuguese cobblestone pavements, water, and soap (I18, I19, I21), enriching their personal experience (I16, I22). Though unaware of the concept, interviewees also allude to proprioception, where multisensory cues like sound, touch and descriptive narrations are employed to "make people more attentive to the environment" (I20). Sensory deprivation, combined with the mentioned techniques, fosters a deeper spatial orientation and a heightened body position awareness (I18, I19, I21), which is corroborated by proprioceptive tourism studies (Agapito et al., 2012; Damasio, 2023). Participants' perception and ability to navigate their surroundings is influenced by these multisensory approaches (McGee, 2018; Renault et al., 2018; Everingham et al., 2021) which, as Taylor (2009) highlights, cultivate experiences deemed more impactful and memorable.

Ninety percent of the participants asserted that the deliberate absence of vision impacts the other senses during this experience (**Q.4.2**). When blindfolded, visitors initially experience a sense of fear, triggering different sensations such as insecurity and instability due to their fear of walking and falling (I14, I16, I21). Consequently, visitors "activate their other senses" (I18), which become more acute (I12, I13, I20, I21) and make them more alert (I12, I14, I22). As seen in literature (Tremblay, 2008; Edensor and Falconer, 2015; Shetty, 2022), this visual deprivation stimulates senses such as hearing and proprioception, as participants become "very attentive to sounds" (I22), more aware of their surroundings (I15, I17) and more perceptive to "sensations on the skin" (I22) (Taylor, 2009; Petkova et al., 2012; Pieniak et al., 2022).

Every respondent agreed that being blindfolded "significantly" (I14) influences the overall tourism experience offered (**Q4.3**), naming different reasons for this enhancement. As Edensor and Falconer (2015) defend, participants gain a renewed perspective of the urban landscape. Interviewee I13 described that the experience "goes beyond space, making you look at it in a different way, and even the way you walk in this space also

changes” (I13). Additionally, as literature corroborates (Tremblay, 2008; McGee, 2018; Renault et al., 2018; Everingham et al., 2021), visitors gain a novel understanding of the senses (I12, I14, I16, I19), allowing them to “sense and understand space without seeing it.” (I14). Others mentioned that this influence presents a different way of “doing tourism” (I12, I13, I21), challenging the ocular-centric dominance of tourism experiences (Agapito, 2020; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022). Lastly, the immersive influence of the blindfolded experience extends to memorability (I22), aligning with academic studies that interlink the notions of sensory encounters to memorable tourism experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Taylor, 2009; Agapito et al., 2017).

In a nutshell, it can be acknowledged that by removing the usual focus on visual cues, blindfolded experiences therefore ensure a rich sensory exploration, providing unique engagements with the environment, supporting theoretical studies that defend the influence of these experiences in visitors’ perception and memories, fostering a more meaningful sense of place (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005; Henshaw, 2013; Hosany et al., 2022).

#### 5.2.1.3. *Memories and Sense of Place*

Memorable tourism experiences serve as a powerful tool in molding visitors’ perspectives and in developing a deeper sense of place (Pred, 1983; McCunn and Gifford, 2018).

This connection is illustrated in the “Sensory Lisbon” case, where every team member confirmed the company’s attempt to incorporate the essence of Lisbon into the experience (Q5.1), highlighting the neighborhoods’ unique features. Regarding the choice of location, it was defended that “the place was, without doubt, taken into consideration from both a sensory perspective, and from a historical, sociological, and cultural perspectives” (I14), showing that the tour developers made deliberate efforts to incorporate the city’s essence, specifically in Alfama (I12, I16).

According to the experience designers and tour guides, the elements that most embody this incorporation are Alfama’s history, geography, and environment. These are encapsulated through architectural features such as steep hills, narrow alleys, typical staircases, viewpoints, and public washhouses (I12, I13, I14, I15, I16, I21). Additionally, the neighborhood’s atmosphere is conveyed through residents’ activities such as hanging laundry, arranging tables at cafés, and “shouting amongst themselves” (I21), as well as the aromas from grocery stores, and a culinary guessing activity included in the tour, with the “As Alfamas” beforementioned cake (I13, I16, I20, I21, I22). These features are said to represent “the brand of the city, and landmarks for many people who come from other cities” (I15) and that represent the neighborhood’s unique atmosphere (I20, I21). This atmosphere representation stands as a unique landmark in shaping visitors’ tourism experiences (Steadman et al., 2021; Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2023; Goulding, 2023; Paiva, 2023).

All these multisensory elements allow tourists to actively participate in the destinations’ daily routine, generating stronger bonds and memories, allowing individuals to feel part of the environment, and evoking a more personalized and immersive sense of place (Schultz, 2000; Schroeder, 2007; Masterson et al., 2019). Multidimensional events, like the one created by *Lisbon Walker*, therefore generate a “subjective well-being” (Hosany

et al., 2022, p. 1468), offer a distinct scope of the tourism destination, and curate lasting memories (Marschall, 2012; Agapito et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the interviewees elucidated that, by immersing visitors in Alfama's history, atmosphere and daily life, the experience alters, reinforces and/or helps establishing visitors' sense of place (I14, I19) (**Q5.2**). This immersion occurs due to multisensory engagement, which generates stronger emotional bonds to the destination. As a result, the experience influences Alfama's reputation and projection and bolsters attendee's image of Lisbon (I14, I21, I22). Additionally, it can provide a more positive understanding of this urban landscape and impact participants' perception of innovation and social inclusion within the city (I14, I16). This notion once again aligns with research pointing out that memorable experiences, by connecting emotionally and affectively with individuals (Cresswell 2004; D'órey et al., 2019), not only enhance the uniqueness and competitiveness of a place (Sumartojo, 2019; Chik and Leung, 2024), but also shape tourists' behaviors, sense of attachment and destination loyalty (Marschall, 2014; Kim and Chen, 2019; Wood, 2020).

When queried about the possible connection between this sense of place in Lisbon and memorable tourism experiences (**Q5.3**), all volunteers stated that it is a link that "clearly exists" (I19). The team acknowledges the positive impact on visitors (I13, I16), and that this blindfolded experience enables participants to "truly get to know the city in a way they would never do otherwise" (I19). This not only encourages them to "capture things with other senses, so it stays longer in their memories" (I22), but also offers a distinctive perspective of Lisbon, since it "influences the way of feeling and remembering the place" (I14). This notion corroborates the knowledge that sensory-rich experiences facilitate visitors' perception-formation and sense of place (D'órey et al., 2019; Csurgó and Smith, 2022).

Visitors appreciate numerous aspects of the experience (**Q6.1**). References were made concerning "the experience as a whole" (I13), as team members commonly noticed that it is the "intensity of the experience" that leaves an imprint on participants (I16, I17, I20, I22). Additionally, according to the interviewees, the sensory details encountered throughout the experience are naturally what resonates with visitors the most, unfolding situations where people gain a deeper notion of their surroundings (I15, I19). As seen in the literature review, this multidimensional integration leaves a positive imprint on participants' memories and once again shifts their way of remembering and relating to places (Agapito et al., 2017; Sumartojo, 2019).

The interrelationship between sensory cues in memorable experiences and the formation of a sense of place is therefore evident in the case study of Alfama which, from the design and experience-production scope, demonstrates how the use of the senses creates lasting impressions and how, in this case, the deliberate removal of sight not only impacts tourists' overall impressions of Lisbon but also, according to the team members, fosters a deeper sense of place (Marschall, 2012; Hosany et al., 2022).

#### 5.2.1.4. *Experience improvement*

Acknowledging that participants were always accompanied by a guide to allow a smooth walk through Alfama, the interviewees from the *Sensory Lisbon* staff were asked about any initial training, or previous coordinates given before dealing with blindfolded people and urban environments (**Q3.1**). Most (80%) detailed that, despite not undertaking formal courses, they received an initial briefing and instructions (I12, I14), and that they usually did the experience blindfolded themselves to become comfortable with the tour, understand the dynamics, and be at ease with small space management tactics (I15, I16, I18, I19, I20, I21, I22). Moreover, in terms of understanding the experience impact on visitors and evaluating its performance (**Q3.2**), some team members clarified that there is no evaluation process nor satisfaction surveys conducted (I14, I15, I17, I18). However, others indicated that paying attention to and observing participants' reactions throughout the tour suffices (I19, I20, I21, I22), while some stated that this could be managed by directly conversing with participants (I12, I13, I16).

Whilst conducting "Sensory Lisbon", specific obstacles were encountered (**Q7.1**). Two "external" challenges, over which the team had little to no control, included personal scheduling conflicts, affecting the availability to perform the tour (I14), and the complex coordination between *Lisbon Walker* and the different partnerships involved (I14, I15, I16). Additionally, logistical challenges were noted in the gastronomic activities (I13), and in the physical act of navigating through Alfama's cobblestone streets and steep staircases (I18, I19, I21). Lastly, another concern was the growing noise pollution from street work, replacing characteristic neighborhood sounds by machine noises and dust, thus impacting the immersive experience (I19). Furthermore, building upon these notions, although many interviewees believe that no further developments are necessary (I12, I15, I17, I18, I19, I20, I21), some team members suggested potential enhancements to the overall implementation and visitor experience (**Q7.2**). Improvements may include enhancing the gastronomic experience through better coordination with restaurants (I13), extending the tour time to allow visitors an independent exploration whilst still blindfolded (I22), introducing new activities inside typical Alfama houses (I16), and increasing social media presence by investing in an Instagram account to attract more visitors (I14, I16).

By neglecting to professionally train tour guides to accompany visits through Alfama, and by not conducting formal evaluations to gauge participant satisfaction, the "Sensory Lisbon" seemingly overlooks the significance of customers' feedback. However, literature indicates that it is crucial for tourism companies to continuously enhance their experience design and remain attentive to visitors' evolving desires (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Agapito et al., 2014; Imamović et al., 2022). This approach is vital to identify unnoticed challenges that participants may encounter, but do not mention, which is significant for maintaining visitor satisfaction, the attractiveness of experiences and the destination's overall appeal (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; Carvalho, 2022; Monteiro et al., 2023).

#### 5.2.1.5. *Future considerations*

Among interviewees, the future development of experiential tourism and blindfolded experiences (Q8.1) received distinct points of view. It was negatively looked upon by some interviewees, based on challenges like resource allocation, team availability, and the negative impacts of tourism massification and artificialization. These challenges are said to hinder the preservation of Alfama's essence and authenticity, impacting the experience in an undesirable way (I17, I19, I21). Additionally, this could generate a negative memory formation of the activity and the destination, ultimately influencing visitors' future actions profoundly (Tung and Ritchie, 2011; Prayag et al., 2013; Kim and Chen, 2019; Wood, 2020). Some volunteers cited the difficulty in predicting these evolutions, pointing the visual-centric tourist landscape's influence (I15), as well as the evolution of technology, which can either facilitate (I13) or introduce significant challenges to this development (I12, I16). Other participants expressed optimism by stating that the increasing demand for genuine experiences makes visitors more receptive to such encounters (I12, I18), fostering the development of these tourism experiences (I13), which is also understood in the works of Horng and Hsu (2021), Agapito (2022) and, among others, Rodrigues et al. (2023). One team member mentioned that "if all cities were the same, there would be no point in visiting them" (I14). Therefore, it stands the importance of defining "new and differentiated tourism experiences" and that, despite these multisensory encounters having "immense potential", there is still a need to be cautious and to maintain a respectful balance between innovation, replication and the sense of place

In summary, the combination of the previous challenges and opportunities represents the future for *Lisbon Walker's* tours and for blindfolded multisensory activities more broadly. Continued focus on the addressed themes stands as the basis for ensuring personal and meaningful experiences for tourists while establishing or reinforcing the unique atmosphere of a destination.

#### 5.2.2. *"Dining in The Dark": Assessing the Blindfolded Culinary Experience*

This section evaluated the influence of blindfolded dining on visitors' overall satisfaction, memorable sensory experiences, and sense of place. To explore how the deliberate removal of sight affects participants in the tourism context, participants were interviewed to capture expectations, to understand if these expectations were met, the role of communication strategies employed, and the overall impact of multisensory dining experiences. This analysis intends to highlight the strengths and challenges accompanying blindfolded culinary events and identifying potential areas to help provide more meaningful activities in the future.

##### 5.2.2.1. *Communication*

As seen in the first case study, the sensory marketing and communication side of an experience are equally important for its success, serving as a bridge for personalized encounters that linger on tourists' minds (Agapito et al., 2014; Duarte, 2017).

The interviewees were introduced to “Dining in The Dark” through diverse channels (Q2.1), either through gifts from friends and family (I1, I4, I5, I11), or through online searches, via *Google* (I2), social media platforms like Instagram (I3, I8), and directly from the *Fever*’s original company app (I6, I7, I9, I10).

Participants’ responses to *Fever*’s promotional materials and communication strategies employed (Q2.2) were distinct, which reflected the varied impact of communication efforts on initial perceptions (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005; Jarratt et al., 2018). Among the individuals who searched and provided feedback on the marketing strategies, the majority (70%) highlighted it as “very interesting” (I3), with compelling titles, engaging images and appealing summaries of the event (I8, I9, I11), which prompted their interest in participating in it (I8, I9, I11). However, the remaining 30% offered negative criticisms due to a lack of information detail (I1), social media presence (I2), and an incorrect promotional content, with one interviewee defending that “In the *Fever* app, there wasn’t even anything specific that led to this exploration of the senses properly. I felt that this wasn’t explored.” (I10). This diverse discovery process and reaction towards marketing tools depicts the importance of an effective promotion of tourism experiences which, more and more, must be tailored to consumers’ distinct preferences (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Imamović et al., 2022). Furthermore, this once again emphasizes the substantial weight of sensory-rich events which, as seen by the interviewees positive feedback, can evoke positive emotional responses and affect their decision-making process (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005; Jarratt et al., 2018; Imamović et al., 2020).

#### 5.2.2.2. *The senses*

At the beginning of the interviews, participants were questioned about their motivation for attending the “Dining in The Dark” event (Q1.1), followed by their prior expectations (Q1.2). Some interviewees highlighted the allure of the experience’s novelty. Through the appeal of sensory exploration (I8, I11), they marked it as a unique concept compared to usual tourist activities (I2, I4, I6, I7, I9). One visitor explained that personal experiences prompted interest, being reminded of previous experiences, clarifying: “it reminded me of something I had already thought about doing because I had seen it 20 years ago in Switzerland” (I10). Furthermore, social reasons were discussed, with participants stating their interest around sharing the event with friends and family (I1, I3, I5), “being interesting as a collective experience” (I11). Regarding expectations, one person specifically sought an experience “that would allow the other senses to be sharpened, to explore them better” (I10). Others anticipated a different gastronomic dynamic, with “better food” (I7) that would “stimulate the awakening of the palate” (I5). Participants also stated that they expected a different atmosphere (I1), with a 100% dark environment, and the experience did not meet these expectations, leading to disappointment (I2, I3, I5, I6, I9). This disappointment arose from two main issues: due to the brightness of the dining room, as the restaurant’s lights remained on, contrary to the promised obscure environment, and because of the provided blindfolds, which were insufficient in fully obscuring the participant’s vision. These aspects limited the full potential for a truly immersive experience. As one elaborated: “The only expectation I had was because of the name, and that was not met.” (I5).

Regrettably, none of the participants discerned any specific strategies or techniques employed to stimulate the senses (**Q4.2**), which led to their disappointment (I1, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I11). One of the interviewees confirmed that “there was a bit lacking in interaction with the people who were conducting the event, which, if it had existed, would have enhanced the experience in relation to the other senses” (I2). The literature highlights that blindfolded activities challenge participants’ sensory perceptions and way of acknowledging an experience and a destination. Therefore, developing techniques that meet participants’ expectations becomes extremely important to the success of these experiences (Chefin, n.d.; Edensor and Falconer, 2015).

Interviewees defined their initial moments in the blindfolded process (**Q4.1**) as “weird” (I3, I4, I5, I9), “strange and interesting” (I11), and “amusing” (I1). A mixture of nervousness and excitement was also conveyed due to the initial waiting period and to the newness and uncertainty surrounding the anticipation of the experience (I6, I8, I9, I10). Furthermore, one participant expressed a sense of relaxation, caused by the “shedding of some prejudice” (I10), and another felt that “after a while, it becomes rather tiring” and even “boring” (I6). These descriptions of sensory and emotional reactions reflect the impact of sensory deprivation on participants, specifically on their emotional responses (Hai and Feng, 2018; Vasilikou and Nikolopoulou, 2019; Agapito, 2022) and, as subsequent answers show, on their perceptions of the surrounding environment and established memories (Pred, 1983; Edensor and Falconer, 2015).

Regarding the question of whether the absence of sight altered other senses (**Q4.3**), visitors revealed not only an increased sense of awareness, becoming “more alert” (I1) and “more vigilant” (I9), but also an enhancement of their senses (I4, I8, I9, I11). As two respondents state:

“You feel everything differently, the temperature, the sound, and the taste itself as well, because, necessarily, if you can't see what you're eating, you're more focused on trying to decipher what's in your mouth” (I1)

“I ended up paying more attention to the dish itself, the seasonings, the texture, trying to discover what it was, so I was more focused on that and more focused on the eating experience itself.” (I3)

Participants named an enhanced perception of the auditory and haptic senses, as well as proprioception. These connect to increased noise perception, with intensified sounds and voices seemingly louder (I5, I10, I11), and bigger awareness of textures, accompanied by a sense of unfamiliarity when handling food (I5). A heightened awareness of visitors’ surrounding environment and increased sensitivity to their own movements was also described (I2, I4). Academic studies demonstrate this sensory acuity by mentioning that the deprivation of the visual cues leads to a compensation of the other senses (Ricatti et al., 2023) or, as Pieniak et al. (2022, p. 79) describe it, “the increased sensitivity of the intact senses”. These responses also show the influence of blindfolded tourism in transforming dining activities into sensory-rich and memorable encounters (Santa Monica, n.d.; Horng and Hsu, 2021; Agapito, 2022).

Most visitors (nine out of eleven) affirmed that the blindfolded aspect positively influenced their overall tourism experience (**Q4.4**). Some participants felt that it amplified their experience, citing not only the trust placed in the restaurant and its staff (I5) (as in the *Noobai* restaurant case), but also the renewed attention given to unusual aspects of

dining (I1, I2, I3), which created “a differentiating factor” (I9). One tourist believed that “if I had just gone to that restaurant without being blindfolded, it would have been just a normal, everyday meal. So being blindfolded made it special, more memorable, more fun, more enjoyable” (I4).

These aspects reveal the importance of multisensory experiences, as they present novel and unique ways of engaging with individuals and destinations, deepening emotional bonds, strengthening tourists’ memories, as well as establishing unique landmarks for tourism companies and destinations (Agapito et al., 2012; Imamović et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2023).

### 5.2.2.3. *Memories and Sense of Place*

For participants who had previous sensory encounters (**Q1.3**) (representing less than half of the interviewees), it was clear that these multisensory immersive experiences leave lasting impressions. As Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 103) unveil, “the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be”.

These prior experiences included blindfolded exercises “in a playful context, in the Scouts” (I1), chocolate tasting with the nose covered to demonstrate changes in the gustatory cues (I5), an exhibition “where we sat alone with noise-cancelling headphones, and spent 10 minutes without hearing, just to see how we felt” (I11), and another event developed by *Fever* called “Painting in The Dark”, where visitors painted in a dimmed environment and with ultraviolet lights (I3, I9). Even though some experiences took place some years prior to the interview, it was possible to denote how impactful these were and how they influenced participants’ memories, corroborating with academic works on the subject (Duarte, 2017; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022).

Specifically about “Dining in The Dark”, 90% of the selected sample affirmed that it is an impactful experience (**Q5.1**) that, without doubt (I3, I4, I5, I11), stands out among the rest due to its unique, personal, and immersive traits (I1, I2). Moreover, these immersive characteristics enhance participants’ perspective on memorable experiences and impact their future decision-making processes (Lai et al., 2020; Steadman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Some volunteers even expressed their desire to repeat the experience in other restaurants and at home with friends (I1, I8), and others added that:

“The execution might not have been perfect, but as an idea, and due to the super enjoyable experience, it left a mark on me as a concept, and it will stay with me.” (I11)

“Obviously, it’s not something people do every day, so the experience remains. Does it stay with us? Yes. Will it endure? Yes.” (I10)

Some of the most memorable aspects of the event (**Q5.2**) related to the sensory challenges encountered while eating, such as identifying what visitors were eating (I1), placing food on the fork and preventing it from slipping away (I3, I4, I5, I8, I10). Additionally, a significant majority (70%) mentioned that the social dynamics of the experience, such as sharing it with friends and family, were the most memorable aspects (I9, I11, I2, I3, I5, I8, I9). Works, for example, by Edensor and Falconer (2015) and Agapito (2022) refer to this aspect by mentioning the impact of the social side in these multisensory environments. As two participants stated:

“I would say it stands out because it's a whole experience lived together, and it ends up being memorable because of that, because of the company.” (16)

“In other words, we enhance the taste of the food, and we enhance the added value of being in company during a meal. That's what I liked.” (18)

To gain a deeper understanding of visitors' perceptions of the event's location, participants were asked to describe Lisbon using three words (**Q6.1**). Using the app *WordItOut*, the following word cloud emerged (fig.11).



Figure 9 - Word cloud displaying participants' perception of Lisbon.  
Source: Created by the author using WordItOut.

Through these descriptors, some participants expressed less favorable views, labeling the destination as "expensive" and "stressful". Nonetheless, they also captured Lisbon's dynamic character, rich cultural nature, and aesthetic attractiveness. The frequent use of the word "busy" captures the city's vibrant atmosphere, characterized by constant movement and energy. Meanwhile, "light" emphasizes Lisbon's known natural brightness. Respondents highlighted the city's diverse social fabric, expansive landscapes and reputation as a hub for growth and development. Furthermore, Portugal's distinctive sense of familiarity and hospitality was also mentioned. The capital's geographical and historical significance was noted, alongside its cultural depth, capable of fostering emotional connections through sensory experiences and music like Fado. As one participant stated:

“It's a city that manages to combine various environments in a very small space. So, I think it manages to bring together various types of people and various types of tourism that can be practiced, and various types of experiences that one wants to have.” (18)

This word cloud shows diverse perceptions and personal sensations associated with urban experiences in Lisbon, which serves as an important tool to understand visitors' sense of Lisbon.

Out of the eleven interviewees, nine considered that the essence of Lisbon was embodied in this experience (Q6.2), from which six attended the experience at the *Gulden Draak* establishment, and three at the *Noobai* restaurant. Participants from *Gulden Draak* highlighted the physical venue as a good representation of the city's diversity (I1), as well as the traditional cuisine and the staff from both establishments, exemplifying Lisbon's and Portugal's unique approach to hospitality (I3, I9) and allegedly demonstrating an effort to showcase traditional Portuguese gastronomy (I2, I3, I6, I7, I9, I11). Furthermore, the respondents were depicted as a prime example of the capital's essence, comprising "a public of various age groups and nationalities, much like the city of Lisbon itself" (I1). The subsequent responses further explored this experience as a characteristic Lisbon event, portraying "innovation" (I8), stating that "part of Lisbon's culture is to have this type of events, which do not exist elsewhere" (I4), and concluding that "it doesn't mean it's a Lisbon experience, but I associate the greater availability of these different experiences to Lisbon" (I2).

Respondents' answers showcase how blindfolded memorable experiences significantly impact visitors' perception of an urban destination (Edensor and Falconer, 2015). In the "Dining in The Dark" case, these sensory activities cemented participants' pre-established idea, viewing Lisbon as diverse, multicultural, welcoming, and innovative. These experiences interact with individuals in a way that facilitates deeper bonds and reinforces a place's identity (Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Carvalho et al., 2023).

Visitors' perception of the city was directly influenced by their distinct dining encounters in "Dining in The Dark" (Q6.3). The guests from *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant* (approximately 35%) expressed negative feelings, contending that the event "does not positively contribute to Lisbon's image" (I5), resulting in no impact on their perception of the city (I6, I7, I10). Volunteers from the *Gulden Draak Beer House*, however, felt that the experience reinforced their established idea of the destination (I1, I2, I8). They stated:

"It strongly reinforces the image I have of Lisbon as a place where there are these different elements and experiences, like *Dining in The Dark*." (I4)

"With so much on offer, there's a demand for diversification, and there are these specific offerings that reinforce the image I have of Lisbon, of variety, of choice." (I9)

This dual feedback reflects the complex relationship between sensory tourism and the cultivation of a sense of place, which aligns with studies indicating that such experiences, when effectively executed, can enhance visitors' overall satisfaction and develop deeper connections with the destination (Hosany et al., 2022)

Thus, participants were queried if there is a connection between these memorable experiences and their idea of Lisbon (Q6.4). 90% of respondents believe that these impactful events, if successfully conducted (I1, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, I11), influence their sense of place and their lasting impressions (I2, I3), adding that:

"Anyone coming from a small village to larger cities like Lisbon knows that the range of experiences is much more limited compared to a city like the capital, a tourist hotspot, which needs to attract people, draw them in, and simply existing is not enough for people to come there. And the existence of these experiences reinforces this image, clearly." (I9)

"We always associate experiences with the cities where we have them. I associate a city in the Czech Republic with romantic memories because it was where I honeymooned. Without doubt, in that case, I associate the experience very much with the city." (I4)

The interviewees' answers allowed to discern that the removal of visual cues, specifically in this case study, influences individuals' satisfaction and, consequently, their memory formation. This therefore affects the perception of place visitors have, underscoring and highlighting the destination's allure (Imamović et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Imamović et al., 2022). By impacting participants' senses, this dining experience creates positive and lasting emotional bonds between people and places, ultimately fostering a sense of place, proving its link to memorable experiences (Hornig and Hsu, 2021; Hosany et al., 2022).

#### 5.2.2.4. *Experience improvement*

Half of the visitors, which coincidentally attended the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant*, disclosed that they were not asked in any way about the experience's impact on them (I2, I5, I7, I10, I11) (Q3.1). In contrast, those at the *Gulden Draak Beer House* explained that there was an informal evaluation process. Throughout the event, a *Fever* team member inquired about guests' satisfaction and offered assistance. At the event's conclusion, they were asked for feedback on aspects such as the menu, venue and overall impression (I3, I4, I6, I8, I9), despite being merely verbal feedback, "meaning no one was taking notes, it wasn't recorded, none of that" (I1).

Participants mentioned that they encountered specific challenges (Q7.1) related, for example, to their lack of proprioceptive awareness. This resulted in memorable difficulties, such as walking to the toilet (I9) and the eating act itself through obstacles such as determining whether the plate was empty and figuring out how to place food on the fork and bring it to the mouth (I3, I4, I5, I8, I10). Additionally, visitors highlighted the insufficient attention to the event's culinary potential (I2, I5, I11) and an overall "lack of sensory details" (I6, I11), despite its shown importance (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Meacci and Liberatore, 2018; Agapito, 2020; Kah et al., 2020). Furthermore, the absence of privacy due to the limited space between visitors (I6, I7), an inadequate immersive exploration caused by repeated disruptions of participants' experience, and lastly an overall lack of communication and guidance from team members were mentioned (I1, I2, I4).

These details connect to the subsequent question, which explored potential enhancements to improve visitors' experience (Q7.2). Participants further explored the idea of a more guided experience, with increased intimacy within a smaller space and fewer guests (I1). They proposed a more comprehensive communication strategy addressing questions such as "its origins, previous and future editions, and also explaining more about the event's format and usual proceedings" (I2). Additionally, it was suggested that the presence of guides attributed to each group would enhance engagement (I2), as well as the possibility of a "greater sensory exploration" (I10), which could have been achieved in various ways. In terms of visual aspects, it would have been beneficial to provide better blindfolds (I9), and to dim the lights or even offer a completely dark environment (I3, I5, I6). Regarding auditory elements, participants noted that *Fever* "could have controlled the music and its volume throughout the experience" (I1) and developed a better setting where they would have been able to listen to the initial briefing provided by the organizer (I1, I2, I3, I4). It was also expressed that there should have been more dynamic activities throughout the gastronomic experience (I1), achieved by

offering a different menu, better food, adapted ingredients, and more varied choices (I1, I4, I5, I8), exploring this dynamic concept to surprise the attendees and exceed their expectations (I11).

Once again, the evaluation-side of the experience was overlooked by its organizers, as was seen in the first case study. By focusing on verbal feedback and un-attending to visitors' post-experience feedback, *Fever* missed crucial opportunities. Not only did they lose the chance of recognizing the challenges its' participants encountered before and during the experience, which proved to affect their way of acknowledging the event itself, the experience as a concept and even the possibility of attending similar activities in urban destinations in the future but, most importantly, they missed the chance to refine and improve the experience itself (Marschall, 2014; Agapito et al., 2017; Kim and Chen, 2019; Wood, 2020).

#### 5.2.2.5. *Future considerations*

When asked if they would consider engaging in similar sensory experiences in the future (Q8.1), only 25% of the interviewees responded affirmatively, underlining the unique experience (I1, I4, I10) and its unique, "out of the ordinary concept" (I4). The majority (60%) indicated they could consider repeating the event, but only if the previously established improvements were conducted, with clear upgrades from what they had initially encountered (I2, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I11). These responses suggest that sensory encounters, to significantly impact participants and continuously improve their craft, must align with their desires and emotional responses, maintain uniqueness, and resonate with each visitor (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; Agapito et al., 2017; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022).

Based on this notion, participants were asked if they would recommend this experience to others (Q8.2). In response, four people indicated that "regrettably", they would not (I5, I6, I7, I10). Three said "yes", but with warnings about its less positive aspects (I2, I4, I11), and the remaining four participants (most having attended the *Gulden Draak*) affirmed that, despite its limitations, they would still recommend it (I1, I3, I8, I9). The aspects visitors found most appealing and worth recommending were associated with the social dynamics, with "more focus on the company" (I8), the kindness of team members (I2), the blindfolded challenge (I1, I2, I3, I11), and the unique and out of the ordinary gastronomic experience (I3, I4, I9).

The final question sought to understand what tourists would like to see in future experiences (Q8.3). To this, 90% expressed a desire for an improved "Dining in The Dark". Suggestions include greater privacy, a completely dark environment (I9) and incorporating immersive activities that allow for a more extensive exploration of the sensory and blindfolded realm (I1, I2, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I11). Some participants expressed a preference for more socially sensory encounters in the future, such as dining with strangers or exploring urban tourism landscapes with local volunteers, "allowing a fully local blindfolded unformatted real experience" (I8). Participant I4 noted that "people enjoy having a twist of what we do on a daily basis", adding that "what appeals is a good balance between an experience you are very familiar with, but doing it in a very different

way, creating this balance between knowing what to expect and not knowing what to expect” (I4).

Despite some tourism activities being less impactful than others, and having some aspects that need improvement, such as “Dining in The Dark”, attendees are aware of what they want to experience in such activities and show clear signs of wanting to connect with non-visual cues. Tourists are eager for distinctive encounters with an immersive and sensory connotation that relieves them from their day-to-day usual routines (Jiang, 2020; Hosany et al., 2022; Agapito, 2022; Carvalho et al., 2023).

## 6. Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to explore how blindfolded sensory experiences impact tourism experiences, and understand how this sensory deprivation influences participants' sense of place and perception of the urban destination. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken, connecting the concepts of multisensory and blindfolded encounters, memorable tourism experiences and sense of place. The empirical investigation analyzed the "Sensory Lisbon" and the "Dining in The Dark" experiences. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, the investigation examined how these sensory events are conducted and, from the perspective of both producers and participants, how impactful they are for visitors/tourists in Lisbon.

Exploring *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever's* communication strategies for their experiential events highlighted the importance of leveraging multisensory elements to communicate their brand and create unique experiences. Despite this, promotional challenges remain, such as a limited social-media presence and incorrect promotional detail. From a production viewpoint, the "Sensory Lisbon" experience relayed difficulties in promotion and logistics, showcasing that, in the early 2000s, it was easier to captivate individuals' attention, and that managing demand is challenging. Furthermore, participants' perspectives from the "Dining in The Dark" experience showed a desire to discover unexplored and immersive sensory activities and more meaningful and innovative communication strategies that would captivate them and respond to their evolving desires. Therefore, companies and destinations should focus on immersive storytelling and sensory marketing, leveraging the events' unique aspects and, in this case, differentiating Lisbon as a modern tourism hotspot.

Blindfolded experiences like "Sensory Lisbon" can mold perceptions of urban tourism destinations, offering more meaning and place-attachment (Henshaw, 2013; Imamović et al., 2022). They also focus on integration and inclusion, offering a novel sensory understanding of the city. As seen throughout the "Dining in The Dark" interviews, these matters align with visitors' motivations, highlighting these experiences' appeal due to the multisensory exploration and social interaction they allow.

In the Alfama experience, sensory-enhancement techniques stimulate the olfactory sense, auditory, taste, haptic and proprioceptive, targeted to cultivate impactful and memorable encounters (Taylor, 2009; McGee, 2018; Renault et al., 2018; Everingham et al., 2021). On the other hand, participants from the second experience revealed discontent, expecting better sensory stimulation, a different gastronomic dynamic, and a completely dark environment. Without specific strategies employed, and solely relying on the event's uniqueness, these companies risk losing customers and failing to construct destination attachment and loyalty (Chefin, n.d.; Edensor and Falconer, 2015).

Despite this fact, both experiences indicate that the absence of sight significantly influences the other senses and the overall tourism experience. Participants from these blindfolded experiences in Lisbon reported that this novel approach to tourism, focusing on non-ocular objectives, influences participants' bodily and emotional responses, as they express sensory enhancement (Hai and Feng, 2018; Vasilikou and Nikolopoulou, 2019; Agapito, 2022; Pieniak et al., 2022; Ricatti et al., 2023). In turn, these experiences disrupt usual ways of experiencing tourism destinations, facilitating a revised understanding of space and consequently constructing new perceptions and memories

(Santa Monica, n.d.; Horng and Hsu, 2021; Agapito, 2022). Multisensory encounters thus significantly transform guided tours and dining activities, underlining the immersive and distinctive characters of companies and destinations (Agapito et al., 2012; Imamović et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2023).

This study underlines therefore that blindfolded sensory tourism develops holistic, intimate and lasting memories compared to traditional visual-centric experiences (Urry, 1992; Pan and Ryan, 2009; Kah et al., 2020). Visitors' vivid remembrance of past experiences indicates the impact on memories and on decision-making processes toward future choices (Duarte, 2017; Lai et al., 2020; Steadman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Agapito, 2022).

Memorable events such as "Sensory Lisbon" and "Dining in The Dark" influence attendees' sense of place by adjusting or strengthening their perception of a destination. This perception is clear, for example, through visitors' description of Lisbon as dynamic, innovative, and culturally rich. Experiential activities can therefore impact the notion of an urban landscape, affecting its reputation and tourists' knowledge of the destination (Edensor and Falconer, 2015; Agapito, 2022), ultimately facilitating a more meaningful sense of place (Pred, 1983; McCunn and Gifford, 2018).

In the studied experiences, participants relay greater appreciation for elements that differentiate encounters, such as the sensory details, a deeper and more intense understanding of the urban environment, and even the social aspects of events, known to impact visitors on a more personal level (Chefin, n.d.; Dans Le Noir, n.d.; Agapito, 2022).

From the producer's perspective, "Sensory Lisbon" integrates the city's essence into the experience through its social, cultural and historical elements, capturing Alfama's unique environment and sensory character through multisensory elements. This, in turn, allows a deeper connection with the environment, formulating a more personal and immersive comprehension and memorable appreciation of the tourism destination (Marschall, 2012; Agapito et al., 2017; Masterson et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2022). In "Dining in The Dark", efforts seemingly vary according to the establishments where they are conducted. Attendees from the *Gulden Draak Beer House* had more positive experiences, stating that their pre-established idea of Lisbon was positively reinforced through elements such as Lisbon's diversity (in age and nationality) and the representation of Portugal's traditional gastronomy and hospitality. However, participants from the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant* had less favorable impressions, noting a lack of sensory engagement and overall effort from the producers, failing to leave a memorable impact and to influence their idea of Lisbon.

These three perspectives illustrate the interplay between memorable tourism encounters and visitors/tourists' sense of Lisbon. The case studies showcase how different experiences construct a distinct sense of place. One experience, the guided tours, occurs in an open space, while the others are crafted in enclosed establishments. Two of the experiences integrate Portuguese traditional gastronomy (the tours and the *Gulden Draak Beer House*), while the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant* focused on more general dishes. There are characteristics that facilitate the identity-construction and the memory formation of Lisbon as an urban tourism destination. As companies like *Lisbon Walker* and *Fever* aim to provide memorable sensory experiences, and distinguish

themselves in a competitive tourism landscape, it becomes crucial to adopt strategies that work toward that goal.

As was underscored throughout this dissertation, these strategies center on effective communication, meeting expectations, engaging the senses, providing memorable encounters that resonate with customers, facilitating a deeper sense of place and, not least important, implementing evaluation processes to understand the impact of the experiences and to continuously improve their offer. This resonance hinges on building culturally relevant strategies that effectively transmit the core of the city/tourism destination. By implementing these approaches, tourists' satisfaction is enhanced, positive memories are implemented, and their loyalty, attachment and sense of place are influenced (Cresswell 2004; Marschall, 2014; D'órey et al., 2019; Kim and Chen, 2019; Sumartojo, 2019; Wood, 2020; Hosany et al., 2022; Chik and Leung, 2024). It is therefore clear that, in addition to highlighting and incorporating a destination's ambiance, it is crucial to integrate multisensory elements into tourism experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), as these offer a unique perspective of the tourism destination, formulate deeper connections, establish the place's identity and generate stronger and more positive memories (Kah et al., 2020; Horng and Hsu, 2021; Agapito, 2022; Hosany et al., 2022; Carvalho et al., 2023). Nonetheless, if sensory experiences are not carefully designed and effectively executed, as evidenced in the case of "Dining in The Dark" in the *Noobai Rooftop Bar & Restaurant*, the connection with visitors/tourists' senses may not be amplified, and the experience will be neither memorable nor will participants gain a different perception of Lisbon. As revealed in interviews, despite being enjoyable and memorable, only a quarter of the volunteers would repeat the "Dining in The Dark" experience as it is currently developed, demanding improvements and upgrades, which once again underlines the necessity to understand visitors' emotional responses and aligning these events with their expectations (Agapito et al., 2017; Kah et al., 2020; Agapito, 2022).

One of the most significant findings of this study is the emphasized role of sensory tourism in connecting memorable experiences and the concept of place. Multisensory encounters deepen visitors/tourists' sense of place, forming lasting memories and intimate emotional attachments to tourism destinations. To achieve this, companies and destinations must prioritize strategies that cater to individuals' needs and continuously improve their offer (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Imamović et al., 2022), which helps identifying and overcoming challenges, maintaining satisfaction, experience engagement and the destination's overall appeal (Carvalho, 2022; Monteiro et al., 2023).

Discussions with experience designers and participants relay that sensory blindfolded activities may face different potential outcomes. They could be negatively impacted by tourism massification and artificialization, jeopardizing the authenticity of destinations. Alternatively, their future is uncertain due to technological advances and the increasing importance of sensory cues in tourism. Lastly, they might thrive as tourists search for unconventional experiences that relieve them from their daily routines, engage their senses and influence their memories and perceptions of places (Jiang, 2020; Hosany et al., 2022; Agapito, 2022; Carvalho et al., 2023).

While Lisbon (and Portugal) lacks the offer of sensory experiences, the two case studies presented reveal that stakeholders acknowledge their importance for tourism destinations and visitor experiences. To provide distinctive memorable experiences and

showcase its unique traits as a multisensory destination, Portuguese tourism companies must focus on careful planning and implementation of these activities.

Tourism has become a holistic experience where travelers seek to create lasting memories apart from the mere journey between destinations. The future of sensory tourism is uncertain, but promising. Participants' recollections of blindfolded activities are important landmarks that define the tourism success of an urban space. Therefore, ongoing research and experience implementation are required to meet tourists' evolving and demanding expectations and maintain the success of tourism destinations.

The limitations of this dissertation present opportunities for future research. The empirical investigation emphasized two distinct case studies in Lisbon, and the difference between outdoor guided tours and enclosed dining establishments may shape visitors' perceptions and their overall sense of place. Within the investigation's timeframe constrictions, the sample size displays the maximum volunteer engagement and, although limited, the insights gathered offer valuable perspectives. While discussions for "Sensory Lisbon" involved producers and guides, "Dining in The Dark" centered on visitors. This divergence may have limited direct comparisons between the cases, but it originated varied and comprehensive perspectives. The last challenge corresponds to the limited number of blindfolded tourism experiences in Portugal, which showcases the distinctiveness and relevance of the present research, offering a foundation for further comprehending this developing field.

By exploring the role of crafting authentic and memorable experiences, this dissertation not only contributes to the understanding of sensory tourism, but also uncovers the strategic mechanisms and effects of multisensory cues, pivotal for enhancing visitors/tourists' sense of place and the destination's competitiveness. By addressing the scarcity of research on blindfolded tourism, especially in Lisbon, and connecting memorable tourism experiences to sense of place, this study offers a step toward bridging an academic gap. Furthermore, the investigation provides practical insights for tourism destinations and brands interested in sensory experiences, offering guidance for the industry stakeholders.

Future research can build upon this dissertation to explore blindfolded sensory tourism in specific cultural contexts and other urban landscapes beyond the Portuguese capital. Including different tourism destinations could illuminate how elements like culture and the environment influence visitors/tourists' experiences and sense of place. Lastly, future studies analyzing the long-term effects of multisensory tourism on participants' memories and perceptions, could also be valuable to relay the lasting effects of these experiential events.

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## 8. Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Connection table illustrating the alignment between each “Sensory Lisbon” interview question and a corresponding empiric sub-objective. Developed by the researcher.

		OBJECTIVES											
		Communication	The Senses			Memories	Sense of Place			Experience Development and Evaluation		Future Considerations	
		To explore how companies develop their communication strategies for these experiential events.	To understand the impact of the deliberate removal of sight on multisensory tourism experiences.	To investigate how the absence of sight influences tourists' other senses and their overall sensory experience.	To gain practical insights on specific techniques used to stimulate the senses during blindfolded experiences.	To identify how multisensory experiences influence participants' memories and create lasting impressions.	To understand whether there is a connection between sensory tourism, including blindfolded experiences, and the concept of place.	To gain insights on how the absence of sight impacts tourists' overall impressions and perceptions of Lisbon.	To explore the role of sensory tourism in fostering a sense of place in urban destinations.	To examine the interconnection between memorable experiences and the sense of place in urban destinations, with a specific focus on the city of Lisbon.	To analyze the techniques and strategies employed in the design and evaluation of these experiences.	To identify the challenges and obstacles encountered in conducting these experiences and recognize potential improvements.	To assess the future development and evolution of multisensory tourism experiences.
QUESTIONS	1. Experience Contextualization	1.1 What role do you play in this experience? How do you contribute to the visit?											
		1.2 What objectives do you aim to achieve through these experiences?											
		1.3 Do you identify any competition in this type of experience?											
	2. Communication Strategies	2.1 When designing and promoting these sensory experiences, which were the communication and marketing strategies employed?											
		3. Experience Conduction and Evaluation											
	4. Impact of the Blindfolded Experience	3.1 Do the tour guides have any initial training to deal with blindfolded people and open and urban environments? Are there any previous coordinators given? Any concept of what to say and how to act?											
		3.2 How do you conduct an evaluation of the experience performance? What strategies are applied to understand the impact of this experience?											
		4.1 Are there specific strategies or techniques employed to stimulate the senses? And are there conscious sensory elements you prioritize or aim to highlight?											
	5. Memorable Experiences and Lisbon's Sense of Place	4.2 Would you say that the absence of vision affects the other senses during this experience? If so, how?											
		4.3 Does being blindfolded influence the overall tourist experience offered? If so, how?											
		5.1 Would you say that you try to incorporate the cohesiveness of Lisbon into this experience?											
	6. Visitor Interaction	5.2 Do you believe the experience influences the perception that visitors have of Lisbon? And do you think that taking advantage of these elements helps establishing a stronger sense of Lisbon for visitors?											
5.3 Would you say that there is a connection between these memorable experiences and visitors' sense of place in Lisbon?													
6.1 What aspects of the experience do visitors most appreciate? Could you share examples of visitor reactions/ memorable moments that you found interesting or that marked visitors?													
7. Challenges & Improvements	7.1 What specific challenges or obstacles have you encountered while conducting this experience?												
	7.2 What could be done to improve the overall execution and enhance the visitor experience?												
8. Future Development / Industry Trends	8.1 How do you foresee these experiences evolving in the future?												

Appendix 2 - Connection table illustrating the alignment between each “Dining in The Dark” interview question and a corresponding empiric sub-objective. Developed by the researcher.

		OBJECTIVES																
		Communication	The Senses			Memories	Sense of Place				Experience Development and Evaluation		Future Considerations					
		To explore how companies develop their communication strategies for these experiential events.	To understand the impact of the deliberate removal of sight on multisensory tourism experiences.	To investigate how the absence of sight influences tourists' other senses and their overall sensory experience.	To gain practical insights on specific techniques used to stimulate the senses during blindfolded experiences.	To identify how multisensory experiences influence participants' memories and create lasting impressions.	To understand whether there is a connection between sensory tourism, including blindfolded experiences, and the concept of place.	To gain insights on how the absence of sight impacts tourists' overall impressions and perceptions of Lisbon.	To explore the role of sensory tourism in fostering a sense of place in urban destinations.	To examine the interconnection between memorable experiences and the sense of place in urban destinations, with a specific focus on the city of Lisbon.	To analyze the techniques and strategies employed in the design and evaluation of these experiences.	To identify the challenges and obstacles encountered in conducting these experiences and recognize potential improvements.	To assess the future development and evolution of multisensory tourism experiences.					
QUESTIONS	1. Experience Contextualization	1.1 What motivated you to participate in the experience?																
		1.2 What were your expectations before the experience?																
		1.3 Have you participated in similar sensory or immersive experiences before?																
	2. Communication Strategies	2.1 How did you become familiar with the experience?																
		2.2 Did you come across any promotions/materials or advertising for the experience? If so, what are your impressions of the strategies employed?																
	3. Experience Conduction and Evaluation	3.1 Was there an evaluation process of the experience? In case you didn't, what is the impact it had on you?																
		4.1 Can you describe your sensory and emotional responses to the blindfolded process?																
	4. Impact of the Blindfolded Experience	4.2 Did you notice specific strategies or techniques employed to stimulate the senses?																
		4.3 Did the absence of sight alter your other senses during this experience? What were those senses? How did you feel them?																
	5. Memorable Experiences and Lisbon's Sense of Place	4.4 Did the blindfolded aspect enhance your overall tourism experience? How?																
		5.1 Do you believe this experience had any lasting impact on you? Do you think it will have a lasting resonance on your memory?																
	6. Visitor Interaction	5.2 What aspects of the experience did you find most memorable? Which ones did you appreciate the most?																
		6.1 What does Lisbon mean to you? Can you use 3 words to describe this city?																
	7. Challenges & Improvements	6.2 Did you feel that the combination of Lisbon was included in this experience?																
		6.3 Did the experience influence your perception of Lisbon? If so, which were the most impactful elements?																
		6.4 Do you think there's a connection between these memorable experiences and your idea of Lisbon (your sense of place)?																
		7.1 What specific challenges or obstacles did you encounter in this experience?																
	8. Future Development / Industry Trends	7.2 What could be done to improve overall performance and improve your experience?																
		8.1 Would you consider engaging in similar sensory experiences in the future? Why or why not?																
		8.2 Would you recommend these experiences to others? If so, what aspects would you highlight as the most appealing?																
		8.3 What would you like to see in these experiences in the future?																

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**  
**[Dining in The Dark - ENG] | André Pereira**

**VISITORS**

**1. Experience Contextualization**

- 1.1. Can you describe the "Dining in the Dark" experience?
- 1.2. What motivated you to participate in the experience?
- 1.3. What were your expectations before the experience?
- 1.4. Have you participated in similar sensory or immersive experiences before? If so, how would you compare them to this experience?

**2. Communication Strategies**

- 2.1. How did you become familiar with the experience?
- 2.2. Did you come across any promotional materials or advertising for the experience? If so, what are your impressions of the strategies employed?

**3. Experience Conduction and Evaluation**

- 3.1. Was there an evaluation process of the experience? Where you asked about the impact it had on you?

**4. Impact of the Blindfolded Experience**

- 4.1. Can you describe your sensory and emotional responses to the blindfolded process?
- 4.2. Did you notice specific strategies or techniques employed to stimulate the senses?
- 4.3. Did the absence of sight alter your other senses during this experience? What were those senses? How did you feel them?
- 4.4. Did the blindfolded aspect influence your overall tourism experience? How?
- 4.5. Do you believe this experience had any lasting impact on you? Do you think it will have a lasting presence on your memory?
- 4.6. What aspects of the experience did you find most memorable? Which ones did you appreciate the most?

**5. Memorable Experiences and Lisbon's Sense of Place**

- 5.1. What does Lisbon mean to you? Can you use 3 words to describe this city?
- 5.2. Did you feel that the core/essence of Lisbon was embodied in this experience? Through elements such as its local identity, cultural representations, haptic dimensions and local gastronomy.
- 5.3. Did the experience influence your perception of Lisbon? If so, which were the most important elements?
- 5.4. Do you think there's a connection between these memorable experiences and your idea of Lisbon / your sense of place?

**6. Challenges & Improvements**

- 6.1. What specific challenges or obstacles did you encounter in this experience?
- 6.2. What could be done to improve overall performance and improve your experience?

**7. Future Considerations**

- 7.1. Would you consider engaging in similar sensory experiences in the future? Why or why not?
- 7.2. Would you recommend these experiences to others? If so, what aspects would you highlight as the most appealing?
- 7.3. What would you like to see in these experiences in the future?

**8. Visitor Contextualization**

- 8.1. Age
- 8.2. Nationality
- 8.3. Residence
- 8.4. Gender

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

**[Sensory Lisbon: Blindfolded - ENG] | André Pereira**

### **CREATION AND PRODUCTION TEAM | TOUR GUIDES**

#### **1. Experience contextualization**

- 1.1. What is "Sensory Lisbon: Blindfolded"? Can you describe it?
- 1.2. What role do you play in this experience? How do you contribute to the visit?
- 1.3. What objectives do you aim to achieve through these experiences?
- 1.4. Do you identify any competition in this type of experience?

#### **2. Communication Strategies**

- 2.1. When designing and promoting these sensory experiences, which were the communication and marketing strategies employed?
- 2.2. Can you discuss specific adaptations made to highlight the deliberate removal of sight?

#### **3. Experience Conduction and Evaluation**

- 3.1. Do the tour guides have any initial training to deal with blindfolded people and open and urban environments? Are there any previous coordinates given? Any script of what to say and how to act?
- 3.2. How do you conduct an evaluation of the experience performance? What strategies are applied to understand the impact of this experience?

#### **4. Impact of the Blindfolded Experience**

- 4.1. Are there specific strategies or techniques employed to stimulate the senses? And are there conscious sensory elements you prioritize or aim to highlight?
- 4.2. Would you say that the absence of vision affects the other senses during this experience? If so, how?
- 4.3. Does being blindfolded influence the overall tourist experience offered? If so, how?

#### **5. Memorable Experiences and Lisbon's Sense of Place**

- 5.1. Would you say that you try to incorporate the core/essence of Lisbon into this experience? Through elements such as its local identity, cultural representations, haptic dimensions, and local gastronomy.
- 5.2. Do you believe the experience influences the perception that visitors have of Lisbon? That it impacts the way of looking at the city? And do you think that taking advantage of these elements helps establishing/reinforcing the sense of Lisbon for visitors?
- 5.3. Would you say that there is a connection between these memorable experiences and visitors' sense of place in Lisbon?

#### **6. Visitor Interaction**

- 6.1. What aspects of the experience do visitors most appreciate? Could you share examples of visitor interactions / memorable moments that you found interesting or that marked visitors during the experience?

#### **7. Challenges & Improvements**

- 7.1. What specific challenges or obstacles have you encountered while conducting this experience?
- 7.2. What could be done to improve the overall execution and enhance the visitor experience?

#### **8. Future Development / Industry Trends**

- 8.1. How do you foresee these experiences evolving in the future?

#### **9. Interviewee Contextualization**

- 9.1. Age
- 9.2. Nationality
- 9.3. Residence
- 9.4. Gender



## DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

### *Beyond Sightseeing: Exploring Multisensory Tourism in Blindfolded Experiences in Lisbon*

(Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, ULisboa; Estoril School of Hospitality and Tourism)

This study is conducted by André Pereira under the guidance of Professor Daniel Paiva and Professor Ana Gonçalves, within the scope of the master's thesis in Tourism and Communication. The research is developed as a result of a partnership between the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning of the University of Lisbon and the Estoril School of Hospitality and Tourism.

The goal of this project is to investigate the impact of the deliberate removal of visual perception in tourism experiences and explore its implications for sensory-based tourism in urban destinations. The gathered information in this study will provide a significant advance in the study of sensory experiences in the tourism field.

Your participation will consist of a semi-structured interview of about 30 minutes, in which I will ask open-ended questions to explore your experience and perspective.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. As such, you may interrupt or terminate your participation at any time. At any time, you may request access to the materials relating to your participation or request their destruction.

All information collected will be used for academic purposes only. Records of your participation will be securely archived in password-protected digital media, in compliance with EU and national rules on the protection of personal data and will only be accessible to the researcher involved in the study. Once the investigation is complete, all records will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about the study in the future, I will be happy to clarify. My contact is: [apereira22@edu.ulisboa.pt](mailto:apereira22@edu.ulisboa.pt)

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign and date the attached declaration of authorization. It is the investigator's obligation to keep these authorizations on file.

Thank you very much for your participation. Best regards,  
André Pereira



**DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

***Beyond Sightseeing: Exploring Multisensory Tourism in Blindfolded Experiences in Lisbon (Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, ULisboa; Estoril School of Hospitality and Tourism)***

I, the undersigned, have read the declaration of informed consent and understood its contents. I agree to participate in the study as explained.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning (U.Lisboa); Estoril School of Hospitality and Tourism