


MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES AND THEIR IMPACT ON TOURIST SATISFACTION: THE CASE OF NORTHWEST VIETNAM

Abstract

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Purpose – The main purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the impact of memorable travel experiences on tourist satisfaction.

Methodology/Design/Approach – This study selected the mountainous region of Northwest Vietnam as the research context and focused on the experiences of tourists travelling in groups. The primary data from the survey samples were analysed using Smart PLS 4.0 software. The partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique was used to analyse the direct effects in the research model.

Findings – The results of the data analysis revealed that the effects of “meaningfulness”, “knowledge” and “local culture” on satisfaction were not statistically significant. The remaining four components of memorable tourism experiences, namely, “hedonism”, “refreshment”, “novelty” and “involvement”, affected tourist satisfaction. In addition, the number of visits of tourists played an intervention role in the effects of enjoyment and relaxation.

Originality of the research – This study helps to better understand the satisfaction of grouping tourists with tours in the mountainous region of Northwest Vietnam and provides research implications from the results.

Keywords tourist satisfaction, MTE, impact, mountainous tourism, Vietnam

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INTRODUCTION

Tourist satisfaction after a trip is an important factor for evaluating service quality and building a destination image. Destination marketing managers give much attention to exploring, examining and identifying the factors that influence tourist satisfaction (Yu et al., 2019). Memorable experiences are considered the ultimate experiences that consumers aim for (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In fact, all that remains with tourists is their memory of their experience (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006).

Although onsite tourism experiences are transient and may be temporary (Kim, 2009), the experiences that are retained in their memory are highly important because tourists often think about them (Neal et al., 1999). Previous tourism studies have emphasized the importance of memorable experiences, as memories are individuals' most important source of information. Tourist experiences influence tourist satisfaction (Sie et al., 2018), (Sharma et al., 2022).

In addition to self-sufficient trips, tourists commonly travel in tourist groups or with their colleagues and friends. Tourists travelling in groups have experiences according to the itinerary provided by travel agencies. In this form of tourism, information about the trip is provided fully and in detail as well as services are provided conveniently and diversely. Owing to the characteristics of travel experiences in groups depending on size and specificity, tourists' expectations and perceptions of services differ across groups. The study of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) has expanded rapidly over the past decade (Bai et al., 2023; Hosany et al., 2022; Hosseini et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024); however, the relationship between MTEs and tourist satisfaction remains relatively underexplored. Enhancing satisfaction among group travellers can strengthen the sustainability of tour operators' businesses, with benefits accruing to both individual customers and organizational clients.

Mountain tourism is becoming increasingly important in the context of competition with coastal or urban areas. Mountainous areas, with their diverse natural tourism resources and unique indigenous cultures, have become highly competitive in terms of tourism, are potential destinations for tourists (Beedie & Hudson, 2003) and have experienced high growth for decades (Mutana & Mukwada, 2018); (Anjum, F. & Ali, Y, 2025). In mountainous regions, tourists can be exposed to many different tourism experiences, such as mountainous landscapes and the people, cuisine, culture, services and entertainment activities of these regions.

In Vietnam, mountain tourism plays an important role in the economic development of many localities, especially areas with economic difficulties, and the GDP of these localities depends mainly on tourism (Hoa et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020). Northwest is a large region covering six provinces: Hoa Binh, Son La, Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, have wild,

majestic natural landscapes that attract tourists (Bui & Hoang, 2018; Hoang et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2019). These are also provinces where the tourism industry contributes significantly to the local GDP structure. Considering the impact of visiting mountainous tourist destinations on the relationship between memorable tourism experiences and satisfaction is extremely necessary for localities in the northwestern region of Vietnam. Furthermore, tourists' repeated visits to a destination can affect their travel experience (Gómez-Rico et al., 2022). Moreover, past experience (first-time or later experience) is a regulatory factor of the analysed relationships related to tourists' perceptions and feelings (Kim et al., 2018).

Mountain tourism is used as the background to survey memorable tourism experiences, with a focus on tourists travelling in groups using the services of travel agencies. Compared with other destinations, the mountainous research area is more difficult to access because transportation and service systems for tourists require significant support from travel companies. Consequently, it is relatively common for tourists to choose to travel in groups in the northwestern mountainous regions of Vietnam. This study aims to answer the following two questions: (1) To what extent do different dimensions of memorable tourism experiences influence tourist satisfaction in the mountainous region of Northwest Vietnam? (2) Do the frequency of visits moderate the relationship between memorable tourism experiences and tourist satisfaction among group travellers? Answering the two research questions supplements the understanding of the impact of each component of a memorable travel experience on the satisfaction of group tourists. This study also provides some suggestions for travel agencies to improve tourist satisfaction during the service use process.

1. THEORETICAL BASIS AND HYPOTHESES

Psychologists have reported that emotional factors or familiarity (Kim, 2014) play an integral role in the formation of autobiographical memory (an individual's memory of his or her travel experience; Kim et al., 2012). Additionally, psychology finds that the most frequently recalled experiences are those that are emotional in nature. In the context of tourism, the emotional feelings associated with the traveller's trip (such as sociability, pleasure, joy, frustration, guilt, sadness, or anxiety) are most frequently recalled after the experience (Kim, 2014).

Tourist satisfaction and revisit intention are closely related to tourists' experiences in their tourism activities. However, not all experiences can play an essential role in tourists' posttrip behaviour. It is assumed that only tourists' unforgettable or memorable experiences tend to influence their future decision-making processes (Wei et al., 2019).

Memorable tourism experience is an overarching concept that has been widely discussed in recent studies (Bai et al., 2023; Hosany et al., 2022; Hosseini et al., 2023). According to Kim et al. (2012), a memorable tourism experience includes important moments of what tourists did, how they felt, and what they thought about a destination. Memorable tourism experiences represent a consumer-centred perspective and attract tourists' emotional and subjective responses (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). Sharma et al., (2022) argue that MTE acts as a destination mediator between attributes and consumer attitudes and behavior post the experience. Studies of memorable experiences have gradually increased in the customer experience literature (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2021).

Although it has become a popular topic in international publications in recent years, it is seldom discussed in studies in Vietnam. This is the first study to construct and inspect a scale to measure memorable tourism experiences, Kim et al. (2012) proposed seven aspects: hedonism, refreshment, novelty, local culture, knowledge, meaningfulness, and involvement. These scales have been verified in many studies and are currently widely used to measure tourist experiences (Tsai, 2016; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Yu et al., 2019; Lončarić et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose the use of this seven-aspect scale in our study of memorable tourism experiences.

Tourist satisfaction includes the sum of the psychological states occurring when a tourism experience is consumed (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). Therefore, there is a positive and significant association between tourism experience and satisfaction (Juliana et al., 2025). The effects of seven components of a memorable tourism experience on satisfaction have been noted in several previous studies (Lončarić et al., 2021; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Yu et al., 2019).

Hedonism in a tourism experience is expressed as a feeling of pleasure that excites the individual (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). In fact, a significant part of the value of a product or service that tourists perceive depends on the level of enjoyment they achieve and on the experiences that are described as interesting and comfortable (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). According to the authors, hedonism involves doing memorable, thrilling, new and different things that tourists enjoy doing; giving them a sense of once-in-a-lifetime experience; providing an escape, challenging them, and sparking their imagination; and sharing their experiences later. The desire to seek hedonic experiences, such as excitement and enjoyment, appears to be a fundamental element of the tourism experience (Otto & Ritchie, 1996) and is a critical factor in determining tourist satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Campo et al., 2021). Lončarić et al., 2021 verified that enjoyment is the biggest factor influencing tourist satisfaction, motivated by the beauty of nature and landscape (Lončarić et al., 2021).

Novelty is a key structure in tourism and is characterized by new and unfamiliar experiences (Cheng & Lu, 2013). It captures the distinctive experiences and adventures that tourists accumulate during their memorable trips (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015). The pursuit of novelty constitutes a fundamental travel motivation and significantly shapes tourists' decision-making. In reality, numerous destinations may be visited several times; thus, visitors may want to look for something new during their trip. Novelty is a central factor related to tourist satisfaction (Albaity & Melhem, 2017).

Local culture is an identified MTES dimension capturing tourists' favourable impressions of residents, immersive engagement with local cultural practices, and the perceived friendliness of hosts (Kim et al., 2012). Travellers interact with local culture to have an enjoyable holiday experience, and it becomes a component of a memorable tourism experience (Kim, 2009). Social interaction between tourists and the local community (representing local culture) has been identified as a significant element of the tourism experience (Carmichael, 2005) and affects tourist satisfaction (Cempena et al., 2019; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Sie et al., 2018).

Refreshment is among the key components of the effects of memorable travel experiences on tourist satisfaction (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). It reflects tourists' desire to relax and seek mental restoration during travel. Feelings of rejuvenation and novelty are defining features of tourism that distinguish travel experience from everyday life (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). It refers to the mental state and the depth of participation in tourism activities (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Vacationers consider refreshment as a psychological benefit through their tourism experience during their trips (Uriely, 2005).

Meaningfulness is defined as the engagement in activities that are valuable to the individual (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015). The meaning of an experience makes it more memorable (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith, 2012). Meaningful experiences can engender enduring shifts in tourists' thinking and shape their lifestyle on an emotional level (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), prompting them to reinterpret life issues from novel perspectives (Tarssanen, 2007). The meaning gained when customers consume services has been found to increase the recall of past tourism experiences and influence tourist satisfaction (Ali et al., 2016).

Involvement denotes the enactment of personal travel preferences and tourists' active participation in onsite activities (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015). Previous research findings show that the greater the consumer's involvement in the experience is, the greater the likelihood of recall (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). Involvement in the experience of customers will strengthen the individual's emotional feelings while evaluating the experience and promoting cognitive analysis (Kim, 2014). As a result, the level of involvement of tourists affects their level of satisfaction (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Grisseman et al., 2013).

The opportunity to gain more knowledge is the motivation for customers to experience during travel (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Experiences in travel help tourists gain more knowledge of living life (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kim, 2014). This component of a memorable tourism experience also markedly affects tourist satisfaction (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

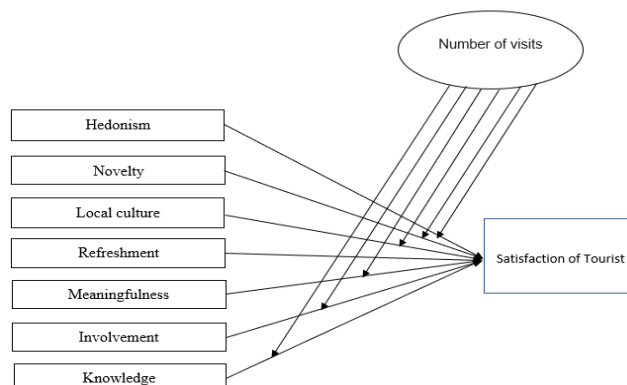
On the basis of these arguments, this study proposes the following hypothesis about the influence of these seven components on the satisfaction of visitors travelling in groups:

- H1: Hedonism positively affects tourist satisfaction.*
- H2: Novelty positively affects tourist satisfaction.*
- H3: Local culture positively affects tourist satisfaction.*
- H4: Refreshment positively affects tourist satisfaction.*
- H5: Meaningfulness positively affects tourist satisfaction.*
- H6: Involvement positively affects tourist satisfaction.*
- H7: Gaining more knowledge positively affects tourist satisfaction.*

Tourists' past experiences of visiting a destination also play a role in their current experience. Individuals often learn from past experiences, which can lead to changes in their expectations (Maghrifani et al., 2024). The number of visits to a destination affects tourists' overall satisfaction (Alegre & Cladera, 2009). The regulatory role of past knowledge in the relationship between the destination experience and tourist satisfaction has been noted in the study of Huang et al. (2016). Therefore, this study hypothesizes the following:

- H8: The number of visits to a destination regulates the effect of memorable travel experiences on tourist satisfaction.*

Figure 1: Research Model



2. RESEARCH METHODS

As presented in the theoretical section, the structure of memorable tourism experiences was measured by using the scale of Kim et al. (2012) with 24 observed variables on a 7-point Likert-type scale (on which 1 represented I have not experienced at all and 7 represented I have experienced very much). Accordingly, the aspects of MTE measured in this study also include hedonism (HED), refreshment (REF), novelty (NOV), local culture (CUL), knowledge (KNO), meaningfulness (MEA), and involvement (INV). Furthermore, the scale of satisfaction (3 observed variables) was used in the study of Kim (2018) (on a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)). In addition to the main observed variables of the study, the demographic characteristics included sex, education level, age, and income. Moreover, the respondents reported the number of times that they visited mountainous destinations during this interview.

We randomly selected 10 travel agencies in Hanoi to send survey questionnaires to visitors travelling in groups in tours of mountain regions in June and July 2024 (after their tours). This study focused on domestic tourists (questionnaire in Vietnamese language), who played a crucial role in the rapid recovery of the tourism industry after the COVID-19 pandemic. A pilot study involving 40 respondents (excluded from the main survey sample) was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results of the Cronbach's Alpha analysis confirmed that all constructs exhibited satisfactory levels of reliability, with coefficients exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70. Specifically, the Cronbach's Alpha values were as follows: HED = 0.75, REF = 0.85, NOV = 0.91, CUL = 0.83, KNO = 0.83, MEA = 0.75, and INV = 0.76. These findings suggest that the measurement instruments are internally consistent and suitable for further data collection and hypothesis testing in the main study. A convenience sampling method was employed during the data collection process due to its advantages in terms of time efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The main survey yielded a total of 416 responses, with participants completing the questionnaire through self-administration. After removing incomplete or invalid responses, 377 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis. This sample size meets the requirements for structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis (Chin, 1998). Structural equation modelling (SEM) with partial least squares (PLS) algorithm on SmartPLS4.0 version Structural equation modelling (SEM) with partial least squares (PLS) algorithm on SmartPLS4.0 version was chosen because of its suitability to the sample size, model complexity, allows for the analysis of single statement constructs, does not require normality assumptions and calculates both measurement and structural model simultaneously (Guleria et al., 2024). This study examines the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability) and validity of the scale (Factor loading, VIF, AVE) and investigates the proposed hypotheses (bootstrapping analysis) (Hayes, 2018).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

Among the 377 total respondents, 251 were female (66.7%), and the rest were male. In terms of age, 114 were under 35 years old (30.2%), 220 were between 36 and 45 years old (58.4%), and 43 were over 46 years old (11.4%). In the survey samples, the majority had a university degree or higher, 224 people (59.4%). With respect to monthly income, 141 tourists had an income of less than 10 million VND (37.4%), 177 had an income from 10 million VND to 20 million VND (46.9%), and the remaining 59 had an income of 20 million VND or more (15.6%).

3.2 Checking the Reliability and Validity of the Scale

The results of the data analysis with Cronbach's alpha coefficient and factor loading allow us to evaluate the reliability of the scales in the proposed model. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient and factor loading of the observed variables are greater than 0.7; thus, the scales are meaningful (Table 1). The composite reliability coefficient (CR) is greater than 0.7; the average variance extracted (AVE) of the scales is 0.654 or greater (greater than 0.5), so the scales converge. The variance inflation factors (VIFs) of the observed variables are all less than 5.

Table 1: Measurement Reliability

Concept	Symbol of observed variables	Factor loading	Variance inflation factor (VIF)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
<i>Hedonism (HED)</i>	HED1	0.794	1.725	0.844	0.846	0.681
	HED2	0.841	2.012			
	HED3	0.816	1.763			
	HED4	0.849	2.033			
<i>Novelty (NOV)</i>	NOV1	0.822	1.813	0.837	0.841	0.671
	NOV2	0.809	1.857			
	NOV3	0.820	1.739			
	NOV4	0.825	1.906			
<i>Local Culture (CUL)</i>	CUL1	0.852	1.626	0.768	0.776	0.683
	CUL2	0.817	1.501			
	CUL3	0.809	1.594			
<i>Refreshment (REF)</i>	REF1	0.820	1.739	0.824	0.837	0.654
	REF2	0.827	1.819			
	REF3	0.738	1.574			
	REF4	0.846	1.909			
<i>Meaningfulness (MEA)</i>	MEA1	0.801	1.678	0.791	0.819	0.703
	MEA2	0.836	1.614			
	MEA3	0.877	1.724			
<i>Involvement (INV)</i>	INV1	0.832	1.657	0.799	0.800	0.713
	INV2	0.845	1.727			
	INV3	0.855	1.738			
Knowledge (<i>KNO</i>)	KNO1	0.852	1.906	0.792	0.792	0.706
	KNO2	0.817	1.485			
	KNO3	0.809	1.819			
<i>Satisfaction (SAT)</i>	SAT1	0.896	2.448	0.881	0.881	0.807
	SAT2	0.908	2.605			
	SAT3	0.891	2.320			

Source: Data analysis of the study

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that all the scales exhibit robust psychometric properties, satisfying the reliability and validity criteria for this study.

To evaluate the measurement model, both convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. While convergent validity was confirmed through high factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability in prior analysis, discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell Larcker criterion; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As presented in Table 2, each construct's square root of AVE (bold diagonal values) exceeds its correlations with other constructs, indicating that all constructs are empirically distinct. Furthermore, the HTMT values remained below 0.90, providing additional support for discriminant validity. Therefore, the results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates both convergent and discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2016).

Table 2: Discrimination of Scales (Using Fornell Larcker Criteria)

	CUL	HED	INV	KNO	MEA	NOV	REF	SAT
CUL	0.826							
HED	0.471	0.825						
INV	0.271	0.274	0.844					
KNO	0.195	0.285	0.309	0.841				
MEA	0.271	0.371	0.116	0.227	0.838			
NOV	0.362	0.384	0.227	0.233	0.372	0.819		
REF	0.309	0.173	0.120	0.199	0.274	0.186	0.809	
SAT	0.467	0.507	0.655	0.366	0.350	0.490	0.490	0.898

Source: Data analysis of the study

Therefore, the results presented in Table 2 show that the proposed scales all achieve convergent validity and that the constructs achieve discriminant validity.

3.3 Results of Testing Hypotheses on the Direct Impact of Memorable Tourism Experiences on Satisfaction

Bootstrap analysis with a sample of 5,000 was performed when evaluating the relationships in the study model. The results of the data analysis revealed that the model had great predictive ability when the adjusted R² when the impact of tourism experiences on tourist satisfaction was 0.752. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Table 3. Visitor involvement had the greatest effect on satisfaction, with an impact coefficient of 0.390 (significance level p=0.000), followed by refreshment, with an impact coefficient of 0.262 (significance level p=0.000). With a reliability level of 90%, novelty and hedonism also influenced travellers' satisfaction, with impact coefficients of 0.162 (significance level p=0.000) and 0.148 (significance level p=0.000), respectively. Thus, Hypotheses H1, H2, H4 and H6 are accepted. However, the results revealed that local culture, meaningfulness and increased knowledge did not affect satisfaction when the significance level of these impacts was greater than 0.1. With the collected dataset, Hypotheses H3, H5 and H7 are rejected.

Table 3: Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Impact	Impact factor (β)	Sig. (p)	Conclude
H1	HED → SAT	0.148	0.000	Accept
H2	NOV → SAT	0.162	0.000	Accept
H3	CUL → SAT	0.045	0.150	Reject
H4	REF → SAT	0.262	0.000	Accept
H5	MEA → SAT	0.030	0.287	Reject
H6	INV → SAT	0.390	0.000	Accept
H7	KNO → SAT	0.041	0.157	Reject

Source: Data analysis of the study

3.4. Results of Testing Hypotheses on the Intervention Effect of the Number of Visits to a Destination on the Influence of Memorable Travel Experiences on Satisfaction

A bootstrap analysis with a sample of 5,000 participants was used to evaluate the intervention effect of the number of visits to a destination (denoted as TIMES) on the influence of hedonism, novelty, refreshment and involvement on tourist satisfaction is reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Testing Hypothesis H8

Impact	Impact factor	Sig.	Conclude
TIMES x HED → SAT	-0.076	0.035	Intervention effect
TIMES x NOV → SAT	-0.022	0.561	No intervention effect
TIMES x REF → SAT	-0.182	0.000	Intervention effect
TIMES x INV → SAT	-0.002	0.955	No intervention effect

Source: Data analysis of the study

Table 4 presents the results of Hypothesis H8 testing on the intervention effect of the number of visits to the destination on the effects of enjoyment, innovation, relaxation and participation on the satisfaction of the analysed tourists (testing Hypothesis H8). The impact of $TIMES \times HED \rightarrow SAT$ and $TIMES \times REF \rightarrow SAT$ is significant because the t test p value is less than 0.05, and $TIMES$ has a moderating role on the impact of HED and REF on SAT . Thus, with a reliability level of 90%, the number of times that tourists visit a destination interferes with the influence of hedonism and refreshment on satisfaction. Both intervention coefficients are negative, indicating that the interference variable weakens the positive influence of novelty and refreshment on travellers' satisfaction. In addition, with the collected dataset, the intervention effect of the number of visits to a destination on the relationship between novelty, involvement and satisfaction is not statistically significant.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis provides scientifically credible answers to both research questions. First, the seven MTE dimensions have heterogeneous effects on tourist satisfaction: involvement, refreshment, novelty, and hedonism are positively significant—ordered by decreasing magnitude as involvement (INV), refreshment (REF), novelty (NOV), and hedonism (HED)—whereas meaningfulness (MEA), knowledge (KNO), and local culture (CUL) are nonsignificant, and their hypotheses are rejected. Second, visit frequency moderates experience–satisfaction relationships by attenuating the positive effects of hedonism and refreshment on satisfaction; put differently, repeat visitation weakens the incremental gains in satisfaction derived from enjoyment and restoration.

Involvement and refreshment have significant effects on satisfaction. Studies by Sharma and Nayak (2019), Grisseman et al. (2013) and Lončarić et al (2021) also supported these findings. Notably, the refreshment dimension had the strongest statistically significant effect on revisit intention among community-based tourists in Vietnam, as reported by Tran (2021), who likewise analysed data from domestic tourists. In the context of mountainous tourism in Northwest Vietnam examined in this study, visitors travelling in groups both want to experience and visit places according to the itinerary and value rest and relaxation. This is the main motivation for tourists to visit mountainous landscapes and strongly affects their satisfaction.

Novelty and hedonism are two other factors that affect tourists' satisfaction with a trip. In the case of heritage tourism research, these two elements do not affect visitors' satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the results of this study are similar to those of previous studies that show the effects of novelty and hedonism on satisfaction (Albaity & Melhem, 2017; Rodríguez-Campo et al., 2021; Tran, 2021; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Lončarić et al, 2021). Specifically, Lončarić et al. (2021) found that tourists who pursue enjoyable experiences and perceive that their trips meet their expectations are more likely to experience satisfaction.

Novelty may influence memorable tourism experiences differently across cultural contexts and as a function of a destination's distinctive resources (Wei et al., 2019). The highlands of Northwest Vietnam, endowed with diverse natural assets and vibrant indigenous cultures, provide novelty-rich, excitement-eliciting encounters that saliently shape tourists' onsite perceptions and overall appraisals of the trip. In the situation in which visitors travel in groups, the interaction is much greater than when they travel individually; thus, tourists travelling in groups are more satisfied if they have further unique experiences during the trip. Tourism in the mountainous areas of Northwest Vietnam is a popular form of tourism, attracting the most domestic visitors because of its geographical characteristics. During the same period, tourists can take many trips to different destinations in mountainous regions to experience the atmosphere, natural landscapes and indigenous culture. Additionally, travellers can visit a destination more than once in their life.

The study results also revealed that the influence of meaningfulness, knowledge, and local culture on tourist satisfaction was not statistically significant. This is in contrast to the findings of several previous empirical studies that illustrated that these aspects play a role in determining tourists' pleasure (Ali et al., 2016; Chen & Chen, 2010; Tran, 2021). Local culture has been confirmed to strongly influence the satisfaction of tourists who participate in heritage tourism (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022) and to affect the intention of domestic tourists to return to Da Nang city (Huong et al., 2022). Meaningfulness did not affect travellers' satisfaction, as noted in previous studies (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2019). In a parallel survey of domestic tourists engaged in community-based tourism in Vietnam, Tran (2021) reported that all three dimensions—knowledge, meaningfulness, and local culture—were statistically significant, with knowledge exerting the strongest effect, ahead of meaningfulness and local culture. Taken together with our findings, these findings underscore that the influence of MTE components on satisfaction varies across tourism forms and across cultural–geographical contexts. With respect to mountainous tourism, domestic visitors tend to have less motivation to learn more about knowledge and culture. Experiences of relaxation and sightseeing seem to be more interesting than meaningful activities as well as understanding something deeply about themselves. In addition, when individuals travel in groups, the collective factor may be more emphasized than the individual factor, and the ability to experience culture will be more difficult. The psychology of visitors in groups tends towards the values of relaxation and sightseeing rather than personal experiences. This is also a noteworthy issue when implementing experience designs for tourists travelling in groups.

The role of the number of visits has been confirmed in the relationship between the two components of memorable travel experiences (i.e., hedonism and refreshment) and satisfaction. The more that travellers visit a destination, the weaker the impact of their enjoyment and relaxation on satisfaction. From a psychological perspective, the gradual decrease in excitement during visits is significant. Thus, it can be assumed that excitement, enjoyment and re-energization have a stronger influence on

satisfaction during the first visit of tourists. Moreover, when individuals travel in groups, the number of visits does not affect the relationships among novelty, involvement and satisfaction. This can be explained by the motivation to seek novelty and visit the desired places being present every time people visit the same destination such as the sea or island.

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study has clarified the impact of each memorable travel experience component on tourist satisfaction in the region of Northwest Vietnam: enjoyment, relaxation, novelty and involvement affect the satisfaction of domestic group tourists. The results of the study provide a new perspective on the impact of memorable travel experiences on satisfaction when placed in the context of mountainous tourism, where infrastructure and service limitations promote group tours, thereby creating unique memorable experiences. From this perspective, memorable travel experiences are closely related to the form of the organization and the characteristics of the context. Moreover, the number of visits of tourists plays a role as an intervening variable in the impact of memorable travel experiences on satisfaction.

In the context of mountainous areas with tourist groups, some managerial implications are drawn for travel businesses and destination managers: It is necessary to give attention to the following factors that strongly influence satisfaction in the competitive context of mountainous tourism (Hasan et al., 2020):

Involvement: Designing tourism programs to create many opportunities for tourists to actively participate in experiential activities on the basis of their needs and appropriate psychological characteristics, encouraging interaction between members to increase engagement. Several suitable group-bonding activities that tourism businesses may consider implementing include: (1) - Organizing highly interactive group experiences such as bonfire gatherings, traditional folk games, and co-cooking sessions with local ethnic communities (Juliana et al., 2025), (Guleria et al., 2024); (2) - Incorporating local storytelling elements into group travel experiences can evoke shared emotional responses, thereby fostering collective resonance among participants (Guleria et al., 2024), (Arsenault, 2019)

Refreshment: Ensuring elements of relaxation and rest with attentive service and convenient facilities to help tourists restore energy and fully enjoy their vacation.

Novelty: Designing unique activities to create novelty is important in all tours in general. This is especially true for tourists who have visited mountainous areas more than once. Businesses as well as destinations need to regularly innovate activities and diversify products, attractions and services to maintain excitement, especially for visitors returning to the destination. To improve repeat visits, it is necessary to continuously create new opportunities for new experiences (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

Hedonism: Focus on entertaining experiences and positive emotions to create excitement and joy in the traveller's journey. Exploiting indigenous ethnic cultural values in designing highly interactive entertainment activities: bamboo dance (traditional ethnic bamboopole dance), a handkerchief (scarf) dance, folk music performances...

In addition, long-term appeal needs to be maintained on the basis of product diversity, combining experiences that are unique to mountainous regions such as local cuisine, traditional culture, and unique natural landscapes. Personalizing services, especially for small groups, contributes to creating intimacy and friendliness and increasing satisfaction (Kim et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2023): adding flexible options in the itinerary for sightseeing (choose between ethnic culture and trekking experiences); recording guests' preferences before the trip and some personalized service proposals (encouraging the formation of personal imprints in the collective journey). Moreover, it is necessary to promote communication and interaction between individuals in the group because it will increase motivation and interest in travel experiences when individuals travel together.

This study has clarified the influence of each component of a memorable tourism experience on tourists' satisfaction. In the context of mountainous tourism, four elements of a memorable tourism experience, namely, hedonism, refreshment, novelty and involvement, influence domestic tourist satisfaction. This proves that it is necessary to study the influence of experience on satisfaction in different tourist situations of different tourist groups. Furthermore, the effect of the number of visits on the influence of a memorable tourism experience on satisfaction is analysed when the role of an intervention variable is tested.

This study has several limitations that need to be further studied in the future. In the scope of research on tourists travelling in groups, it is necessary to consider the experience and satisfaction more comprehensively because of the different natures and scales of tourist group activities. Research should be expanded to include other types of tourism and other groups of tourists, such as international visitors to Vietnam. This study has not yet considered the influence of some variables that may play mediating or intervening roles in the relationship between memorable tourism experiences and tourist satisfaction. The influence of memorable tourism experiences on satisfaction has not yet been investigated in terms of the role and interaction of tourists when the members of a group know each other in advance or not. In the future, we propose to expand the research model to improve the understanding of the tourist experiences and the satisfaction of visitors.

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