



Cultural Similarity and Revisit Intention of East Asian Tourists in SaPa, Vietnam

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Abstract

Cultural similarity is an important factor influencing tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions in tourism destinations. This study investigates the effects of cultural similarity on destination image, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention toward Sa Pa among international tourists. The study also examines the mediating roles of destination image and satisfaction. A quantitative research approach was employed. Data were collected from 381 East Asian tourists visiting Sa Pa (Korean, Chinese, and Japanese tourists) and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The results show that cultural similarity positively affects destination image, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention. Destination image significantly influences tourist satisfaction, while satisfaction positively affects revisit intention. In addition, destination image and satisfaction mediate the relationship between cultural similarity and revisit intention. This study provides managerial implications for destination managers in developing culturally appropriate marketing strategies and improving tourism experiences to increase East Asian tourists' revisit intention toward Sa Pa.

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Keywords: Cultural Similarity, Destination Image, Revisit Intention, SaPa, Tourist satisfaction

1. Introduction

Investigating the determinants of revisit intention has become a central issue in tourism behavior research, as revisit intention is closely associated with destination competitiveness and long-term tourism sustainability^[1, 2]. Previous studies have consistently emphasized the important roles of destination image and tourist satisfaction in shaping tourists' future behavioral intentions, particularly revisit intention and word-of-mouth communication^[3, 4]. In recent years, cultural factors have gained increasing scholarly attention due to their influence on tourists' perceptions, emotions, and destination evaluations^[5]. Among these factors, cultural similarity is considered particularly important because it can reduce psychological distance, enhance familiarity, and improve tourists' overall travel experiences^[6]. However, although many previous studies have addressed the role of culture, the relationship between cultural similarity and tourists' revisit behavior still requires further clarification, particularly in relation to mediating mechanisms such as destination image and tourist satisfaction.

Sa Pa is one of the most distinctive tourism destinations in Vietnam, well known for its natural landscapes and unique ethnic cultural identity. In recent years, Sa Pa has attracted an increasing number of international tourists, especially visitors from East Asian countries such as China, South Korea, and Japan, where certain cultural similarities with Vietnamese culture exist.

In this study, the author reviewed previous literature, developed research hypotheses, and examined the relationships among cultural similarity, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention. The study also tested the serial mediating roles of destination image and satisfaction in these relationships and proposed several managerial implications for managing and designing destination experiences to enhance East Asian tourists' revisit intention toward Sa Pa.

2. Research Hypotheses And Research Model

Hypothesis 1: Cultural similarity exerts a positive influence on destination image.

From the destination perspective, cultural similarity can be explained through Social Identity Theory. According to this theory, individuals tend to classify themselves and others into different social groups and usually favor groups that share similar characteristics with themselves [7]. In the tourism context, when tourists perceive cultural similarity between themselves and the local community, they may develop a sense of familiarity and attachment to the destination.

Tourists often use their own cultural values to understand and evaluate tourism experiences at destinations. When the cultural elements of a destination align with tourists' expectations and values, they are more likely to form positive perceptions of the destination [5, 8]. Wang and Wang [9] argued that cultural proximity helps tourists interpret destination symbols more accurately, thereby forming sharper cognitive images and deeper affective images compared with tourists from culturally distant backgrounds. Therefore, cultural similarity is expected to positively influence destination image.

Hypothesis 2: Destination image maintains a positive relationship with tourist satisfaction.

Destination image has been widely recognized as a factor strongly influencing destination choice, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention [10]. Chi and Qu [4] demonstrated that a positive destination image can enhance tourist satisfaction and increase the likelihood of revisiting or recommending the destination to others.

Cognitive image refers to tourists' evaluations of objective and tangible destination attributes such as infrastructure, costs, and service quality [11]. Satisfaction arises when these actual attributes meet or exceed tourists' expectations [12, 13]. Vila *et al.* [14] found that positive perceptions of physical conditions and convenience significantly increase tourist satisfaction.

While cognitive image provides a rational basis, affective image represents deeper psychological responses such as excitement, relaxation, or attachment to the destination [15]. Previous studies confirmed that emotions play a dominant role in shaping overall satisfaction, sometimes even stronger than cognitive factors [16, 17]. Hu and Zhang [18] emphasized that when a destination evokes positive emotions and a sense of belonging, tourists achieve higher levels of psychological satisfaction. Cultural similarity often directly influences affective image, transforming emotional resonance into lasting satisfaction [19]. Therefore, destination image is expected to positively affect tourist satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Tourist satisfaction is positively associated with revisit intention.

Oliver [12] suggested that satisfaction serves as empirical evidence for tourists to reconstruct their beliefs about a destination. A satisfying experience reduces initial doubts, creates trust, and generates a desire to relive positive experiences in the future [13]. Many tourism studies have demonstrated that satisfaction has a direct and strong influence on revisit intention and tourist loyalty [20, 4]. Revisiting a satisfying destination helps tourists maximize benefits and minimize the risks associated with poor choices [17]. Richards [21] and Chen and Rahman [16] indicated that satisfaction fostered by cultural similarity may create

stronger and more sustainable loyalty, where tourists perceive the destination as familiar and repeatedly revisit it. Therefore, tourist satisfaction is expected to positively influence revisit intention.

Hypothesis 4: Cultural similarity positively impacts the revisit intention of tourists.

Cultural similarity plays an important role in reducing psychological distance between tourists and destinations, thereby decreasing uncertainty and increasing comfort during travel experiences [5]. When tourists perceive compatibility in values, social norms, and lifestyles, they are more likely to develop familiarity and adapt more easily to the destination environment [22].

From a behavioral perspective, familiarity and high cultural compatibility may reduce perceived risk and strengthen future behavioral intentions. This relationship has been reflected in tourism studies, where familiarity and trust toward destinations are closely associated with revisit intention [23, 24]. Recent studies also confirmed that destination-related cognitive factors may directly influence revisit intention beyond mediating mechanisms such as satisfaction [23, 24]. For tourists from cultures emphasizing harmony and uncertainty avoidance, cultural similarity becomes even more important as a driver of revisit intention.

Hypothesis 5: Destination image mediates the relationship between cultural similarity and tourist satisfaction.

Cultural similarity helps tourists evaluate destination attributes more easily and positively [25]. According to Chen and Rahman [16], when tourists perceive cultural closeness, they tend to form favorable perceptions of service quality and facilities (cognitive image), which subsequently lead to satisfaction. Without perceptions of specific destination attributes, cultural similarity alone may not generate actual satisfaction.

Stylos *et al.* [2] suggested that positive cognitive images enhance tourists' overall evaluations of tourism experiences, thereby leading to higher satisfaction levels. Similarly, Zhang *et al.* [26] found that positive perceptions of destination attributes significantly influence tourist satisfaction and future behavioral intentions.

Cultural similarity also evokes feelings of familiarity and safety, which form the basis for positive affective images [18]. Ahn and Back [19] argued that satisfaction arises not only from cognition but also from emotions. Affective image acts as a mediator by transforming abstract perceptions of cultural similarity into concrete emotional responses such as excitement and relaxation, which directly contribute to satisfaction.

Hypothesis 6: Tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination image and revisit intention.

Tasci [13] argued that satisfaction acts as a mediator because it confirms the validity of destination image in tourists' minds. A destination may possess a positive image, but if the actual experience is unsatisfactory, revisit intention may decline [9]. Therefore, satisfaction explains why and how a favorable destination image can lead to tourist loyalty.

When tourists hold positive images of a destination, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their travel experiences. Chi and Qu [4] confirmed that destination image may influence

tourist loyalty through satisfaction as a mediating mechanism. Thus, tourist satisfaction is expected to mediate the relationship between destination image and revisit intention.

Hypothesis 7: Destination image and tourist satisfaction serve as serial mediators in the relationship between cultural similarity and revisit intention.

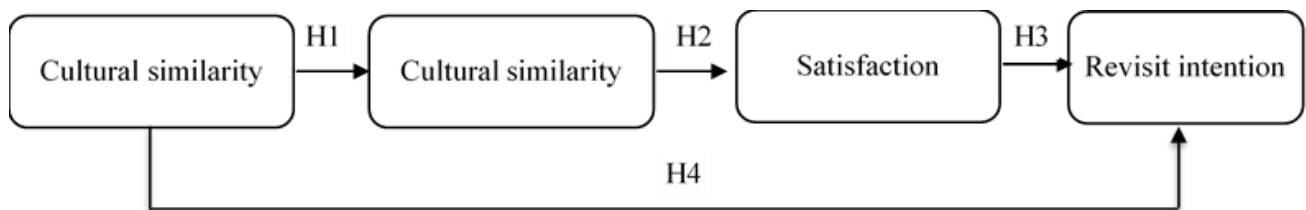
The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory proposed by Mehrabian and Russell [27] suggests that environmental stimuli influence internal psychological states, which subsequently drive behavioral responses. Tourist behavior is formed through a process in which cognitive factors influence emotional responses and ultimately behavioral intentions [10,23]. This framework has been widely applied in tourism studies to explain how external factors affect tourists' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors [28].

Accordingly, cultural similarity can be considered an initial

cognitive stimulus shaping how tourists evaluate and perceive a destination. When tourists perceive cultural compatibility, they tend to form more positive destination images [29]. Destination image, including both cognitive and affective components, subsequently influences tourist satisfaction [4].

Satisfaction is then regarded as a central factor transforming tourism experiences into behavioral outcomes and directly influencing revisit intention [20,6]. Therefore, cultural similarity may influence revisit intention not only directly but also indirectly through the serial mediating roles of destination image and tourist satisfaction. Recent studies have also supported this serial mediation mechanism, showing that initial cognitive factors may influence tourist behavior through multiple consecutive mediating layers in tourism contexts [23].

From the analysis and development of hypotheses, the research model is proposed as follows:



Source: Author's proposal

Fig 1: The proposed conceptual model

3. Research Methodology

The survey instrument was developed by adopting and refining established measurement scales from prominent scholarly works on social identity, destination image, and consumer behavior. Most measurement items were adapted from international studies to ensure theoretical robustness. The final questionnaire was structured into three distinct sections: an introduction stating the research objectives, the primary survey items, and a demographic profile section. A five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), was employed to measure the constructs. The collected data is processed by using SmartPLS software.

The target population comprised East Asian tourists, specifically from China, Japan, and South Korea, who had previously visited Sa Pa. A convenience sampling technique was utilized for data collection. A total of 489 questionnaires were distributed through both direct physical intercepts and online channels via Google Forms. After a rigorous screening process, 381 valid responses were retained for analysis, yielding an effective response rate of 77.9%.

Regarding the demographic profile, female respondents accounted for 45.9% of the sample while males represented 54.1%. The age distribution was diverse: the 18-24 age group constituted 20.7%, followed by 25-34 at 28.3%, 35-44 at 25.7%, 45-54 at 16.3%, and those over 55 at 8.9%. In terms

of nationality, Chinese tourists made up the largest segment at 42.3%, followed by Japanese at 30.7%, South Koreans at 24.9%, and other East Asian groups at 2.1%. Additionally, the frequency of visitation showed that 66.7% were first time visitors, 24.4% were visiting for the second time, and 8.9% had visited the destination more than twice.

4. Research Results And Discussion

4.1. Measurement Model

The initial measurement model consisted of four constructs used to evaluate the latent variables, namely CS (5 observed variables), DI (7 observed variables), SAT (4 observed variables), and RI (4 observed variables). To assess the observed variables, the first-round outer loading analysis was conducted. The results indicated that several observed variables had factor loadings below the recommended threshold of 0.4 [30], including CS5 (0.256), DI6 (0.242), and RI3 (0.392). These items were therefore removed to improve the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales. After the removal process, the final measurement model consisted of four constructs, including CS (4 observed variables), DI (6 observed variables), SAT (4 observed variables), and RI (3 observed variables).

The following table was used for the purpose of summarizing the load factors in the PLS-SEM model.

Table 1: Research results of measurement model

Construct	Indicator	Outer loading	Cronbachs alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
CS	CS1	0.832	0.828	0.829	0.886	0.660
	CS2	0.784				
	CS3	0.819				
	CS4	0.813				
DI	DI1	0.742	0.862	0.862	0.897	0.592
	DI2	0.778				
	DI3	0.783				
	DI4	0.769				
	DI5	0.791				
	DI7	0.751				
SAT	SAT1	0.826	0.825	0.826	0.826	0.676
	SAT2	0.800				
	SAT3	0.807				
	SAT4	0.806				
RI	RI1	0.822	0.761	0.761	0.761	0.656
	RI2	0.834				
	RI4	0.812				

Note: CS = Cultural similarity factor; DI = Destination image factor; SAT = Satisfaction factor; RI = Revisit intention factor
Source: Author's survey results

The results of factor analysis with the support of SmartPLS software show that the factor loading coefficients of the indexes were all greater than 0.7. That illustrates that the observed variables of each measurement component of the scale all met the requirements.

Evaluation of the reliability of the scale

The research model of the scale with 4 latent structures adopted from the scale that the authors have reviewed in the previous literature review. The results of using PLS-SEM analysis with the measurement model showed that the scales were reliable and appropriate (at the required value). Specifically, the analysis results showed that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of all 4 latent structures was in the range of 0.761 - 0.862 (all higher than 0.7), the rho_A coefficient was in the range from 0.761 - 0.862 (all higher than 0.7), and the mean extracted variance coefficients of all latent structures in the extended model were greater than 0.5 (table 1). It showed that the observed variables used to measure the latent concepts of the research model all had the necessary reliability and good internal consistency.

Evaluation of the convergent validity of the scale

From table 1, the results of factor analysis with the support of SmartPLS software showed that the factor loading coefficients of the observed variables in the latent structures were all greater than 0.5 (average extracted variance column AVE), the lowest also the extracted mean variance of coherence is 0.592 > 0.5. Therefore, each latent structure in the model showed good a convergence value.

Evaluation of the discriminant of the scale

Table 2: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix

	CS	DI	RI	SAT
CS				
DI	0.743			
RI	0.767	0.696		
SAT	0.516	0.832	0.757	

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker Criterion's discriminant criteria

	CS	DI	RI	SAT
CS	0.812			
DI	0.628	0.769		
RI	0.609	0.564	0.822	
SAT	0.427	0.703	0.601	0.810

Note: CS = Cultural similarity factor; DI = Destination image factor; SAT = Satisfaction factor; RI = Revisit intention factor
Source: Author's survey results

Table 3 shows that all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.9 recommended by Henseler *et al.* [31], indicating that discriminant validity is established for all constructs in the research model.

The discriminant validity is further confirmed through the Fornell - Larker criterion. From table 2, it can be easily seen from the above table that the discriminant value for all 4 latent constructs achieved discriminant validity because the square root of the AVEs (main diagonal in bold) was higher than the corresponding one outside the diagonal (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In detail, for the Destination image structure (DI) the square root of the AVE (0.769) was higher than the correlation values in its column (0.564; 0.703) and its row (0.628). Similarly for the remaining constructs, the square root of AVE (bold value on main diagonal) was higher than its off-diagonal correlation. In summary, all 4 latent factors were already highly discriminatory.

4.2. Results of SEM structural model testing

Multicollinearity Assessment

Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). According to the recommended threshold, VIF values should be lower than 5 [32] to ensure that no serious multicollinearity issue exists.

Table 4: Variance Inflation Factor

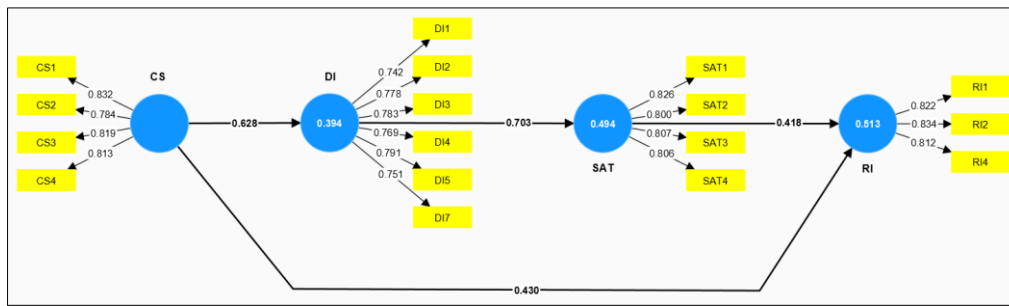
	VIF
CS → DI	1.000
DI → SAT	1.000
SAT → RI	1.223
CS → RI	1.223

Note: CS = Cultural similarity factor; DI = Destination image factor; SAT = Satisfaction factor; RI = Revisit intention factor
Source: Author's survey results

The results indicate that the VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.223, all of which were below the threshold of 5, suggesting that the model did not suffer from multicollinearity issues.

Structural Model Results

After removing the observed variables, the structural model is presented in the following figure:



Source: Author's survey results

Fig 2: The Structural Model

Figure 2 presents the structural model results after performing the bootstrapping procedure using SmartPLS. The path coefficients and R² values indicate that the research model has relatively good explanatory power for the dependent variables.

Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
H1	CS → DI	0.628	20.314	0.000	Accepted
H2	DI → SAT	0.703	28.123	0.000	Accepted
H3	SAT → RI	0.418	11.095	0.000	Accepted
H4	CS → RI	0.430	10.965	0.000	Accepted

Source: Author's survey results

The analysis results indicate that cultural similarity has a positive effect on destination image ($\beta = 0.628, p < 0.05$). The strong effect coefficient shows that when tourists perceive cultural closeness between their home country and the destination of Sa Pa, they tend to form a more positive destination image. This reflects the important role of cultural similarity in tourists' evaluation and perception of the destination. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is supported.

Destination image has a positive and statistically significant effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.703, p < 0.05$). The strong effect indicates that a positive image of Sa Pa contributes to enhancing tourists' travel experiences and satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis H2 is supported.

Satisfaction also has a positive and statistically significant effect on revisit intention ($\beta = 0.418, p < 0.05$). This is one of the relationships with a moderate effect in the research model, indicating that satisfaction plays an important role in encouraging tourists to revisit the destination. When tourists are satisfied with their experiences in Sa Pa, they are more likely to revisit in the future. Therefore, hypothesis H3 is supported.

Cultural similarity has a positive and statistically significant effect on tourists' revisit intention ($\beta = 0.430, p < 0.05$). With a moderate effect size, this result shows that perceptions of cultural closeness play an important role in promoting tourists' intention to revisit Sa Pa. Therefore, hypothesis H4 is supported.

The coefficient of determination (R²)

The coefficient of determination (R²) was used to assess the explanatory power of the model for the dependent variables.

Table 6: R² values

Dependent variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
DI	0.394	0.393
SAT	0.494	0.492
RI	0.513	0.510

Source: Author's survey results

The results from Table 6 show that the adjusted R-square value of destination image is 0.393. This indicates that cultural similarity explains 39.3% of the variance in destination image. The adjusted R-square value of revisit intention is 0.510. This means that the variables influencing revisit intention explain 51.0% of the variance in this variable. The adjusted R-square value of satisfaction is 0.492. This indicates that destination image explains 49.2% of the variance in satisfaction.

Effect Size (f²)

The effect size (f²) was used to assess the magnitude of the impact of independent variables on dependent variables.

Table 7: f² values

Relationship	f ²	Effect Size
CS → DI	0.651	Strong
DI → SAT	0.975	Strong
SAT → RI	0.293	Moderate
CS → RI	0.311	Moderate

Source: Author's survey results

Table 7 shows the relationships in the model as follows: Destination image has a strong effect on tourist satisfaction

($f^2 = 0.975$). This is the relationship with the largest effect size in the research model, indicating that destination image is a core factor contributing to tourists' satisfaction during their travel experience in Sa Pa. In addition, cultural similarity also has a strong effect on destination image ($f^2 = 0.651$). This result indicates that perceptions of cultural closeness play an important role in shaping tourists' cognitive and affective images of the destination. Tourist satisfaction and cultural similarity have moderate effects on tourists' revisit intention toward Sa Pa.

Predictive Relevance of the Model (Q^2)

The predictive relevance of the model was assessed using the Stone - Geisser's Q^2 index. Q^2 values greater than 0 indicate that the model has good predictive relevance.

Table 9: Results of intermediate analysis

Mediation Relationship	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Mediating effect
CS -> DI -> SAT	0.441	14.900	0.000	Mediation
CS → DI → SAT → RI	0.184	8.834	0.000	Partial mediation
DI → SAT → RI	0.293	10.019	0.000	Mediation

Source: Author's survey results

The results presented in Table 9 indicate that destination image plays a mediating role in the relationship between cultural similarity and tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.441$, $t = 14.900$, $p < 0.001$), with a relatively strong indirect effect. This means that when tourists perceive cultural closeness with the destination of Sa Pa, they are more likely to develop a positive destination image, which in turn increases their satisfaction with the travel experience.

In addition, the results also reveal an indirect effect of cultural similarity on revisit intention through the sequential mediation of destination image and satisfaction ($\beta = 0.184$, $t = 8.834$, $p < 0.001$). Since the direct relationship between cultural similarity and revisit intention remains statistically significant, this finding confirms the partial mediating role of destination image and satisfaction in the proposed model. This implies that cultural similarity not only directly enhances revisit intention but also indirectly influences it by improving tourists' positive perceptions of the destination and their level of satisfaction.

Furthermore, satisfaction also plays a mediating role in the relationship between destination image and revisit intention ($\beta = 0.293$, $t = 10.019$, $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that a positive destination image can enhance tourists' revisit intention through increasing their satisfaction during the tourism experience.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The research results show that cultural similarity has a positive effect on destination image, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention toward Sa Pa. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that cultural closeness helps reduce feelings of unfamiliarity, increase psychological comfort, and promote tourists' positive evaluations of a destination [5,6]. Destination image also has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction. This result is consistent with the studies of Chi and Qu [4], Prayag [33]. In the context of Sa Pa, factors such as natural landscapes, ethnic culture, and local experiences contribute to enhancing tourists' positive perceptions and satisfaction levels. In addition, satisfaction was found to have a positive effect on revisit intention. This finding is consistent with many studies in tourist behavior

Table 8: Q^2 values

	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE
DI	0.389	0.787	0.631
RI	0.366	0.800	0.643
SAT	0.179	0.912	0.732

Source: Author's survey results

Table 8 indicates that the Q^2 values of DI, SAT, and RI are all greater than 0. Therefore, the model has predictive relevance.

4.3. Analysis of the role of mediating variables

The mediating effect is tested through the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS.

research, in which satisfaction is considered an important antecedent of loyalty and revisit intention [3,1,24].

Moreover, the mediation analysis results indicate that destination image and satisfaction play mediating roles in the relationship between cultural similarity and revisit intention. This finding supports the cognition – emotion - behavior relationship in tourist behavior theory, in which perceptions of cultural similarity influence destination evaluation, thereby affecting tourists' emotional responses and behavioral intentions [2,7,31]. This result is also consistent with the logic of the Stimulus–Organism–Response model, in which cultural similarity acts as the stimulus, destination image and satisfaction represent internal psychological states, and revisit intention is the behavioral response.

Based on the research findings, several managerial implications are proposed to enhance the attraction and retention of international tourists, especially East Asian tourists, to the destination of Sa Pa: *First*, destination managers should focus on promoting and communicating cultural elements that can create a sense of familiarity for East Asian tourists, such as community spirit, local experiences, and similarities in lifestyle. *Second*, greater attention should be paid to building a consistent, distinctive, and experience-oriented destination image. Promotional activities should emphasize Sa Pa's key values, including natural landscapes, ethnic culture, mountain climate, and local tourism experiences. *Third*, improving the overall tourism experience is important to increase tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. This includes enhancing the quality of accommodation services, transportation, environmental sanitation, foreign language communication skills, and professionalism in serving international tourists. *Finally*, destination marketing strategies for the East Asian market can be further designed based on cultural segmentation. Understanding the cultural characteristics, behaviors, and expectations of different East Asian tourist groups can help managers develop more suitable tourism products and communication strategies, thereby improving the effectiveness of attracting international tourists and increasing revisit rates to Sa Pa.

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