



The Influence of Cultural Authenticity,
Destination Image, and Tourist Trust on Repeat Visit Intention:
A Case Study of Ethnographic Tourism in Northern Thailand
อิทธิพลของความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรม ภาพลักษณ์ของแหล่งท่องเที่ยว
และความไว้วางใจของนักท่องเที่ยวที่มีต่อความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ:
กรณีศึกษาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาการรับรู้ของนักท่องเที่ยวเกี่ยวกับความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรม ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว และความไว้วางใจของนักท่องเที่ยวที่มีต่อความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ 2) ศึกษาความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำของนักท่องเที่ยวที่เคยเข้าร่วมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย 3) วิเคราะห์อิทธิพลของความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรม ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว และความไว้วางใจที่มีต่อความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ และ 4) เสนอแนวทางการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์อย่างยั่งยืนในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย การวิจัยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยจำนวน 280 คนที่เคยเดินทางท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือ เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลด้วยแบบสอบถามและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณนา การวิเคราะห์การถดถอยพหุ และแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง (SEM) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรม ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว ความไว้วางใจของนักท่องเที่ยว และความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำอยู่ในระดับสูง ผลการวิเคราะห์แบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง (SEM) พบว่า ความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรมมีอิทธิพลเชิงบวกต่อความไว้วางใจของนักท่องเที่ยว ($\beta = 0.65$) ขณะที่ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยวมีอิทธิพลเชิงบวกต่อความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ ($\beta = 0.25$) และความไว้วางใจของนักท่องเที่ยวมีอิทธิพลเชิงบวกสูงสุดต่อความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ ($\beta = 0.42$) ทั้งนี้ ความไว้วางใจมีบทบาทสำคัญในการเชื่อมโยงระหว่างความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรมกับความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ ผลการศึกษาสะท้อนให้เห็นว่า การอนุรักษ์ความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรมควบคู่กับการสร้างความไว้วางใจและการพัฒนาภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว เป็นปัจจัยสำคัญในการส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์อย่างยั่งยืน ทั้งนี้ งานวิจัยได้นำเสนอแนวทางการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์อย่างยั่งยืนในด้านการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรม การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชน การพัฒนาศักยภาพบุคลากร และการจัดการความยั่งยืนของแหล่งท่องเที่ยวในระยะยาว

คำสำคัญ: ความแท้จริงทางวัฒนธรรม ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว ความไว้วางใจของนักท่องเที่ยว ความตั้งใจกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ การท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย

Abstract

This study aimed to: (1) examine tourists' perceptions of cultural authenticity, destination image, and tourist trust in relation to revisit intention; (2) investigate the revisit intention of tourists who had previously participated in ethnographic tourism in Northern Thailand; (3) analyze the effects of cultural authenticity, destination image, and tourist trust on revisit intention; and (4) propose guidelines for the sustainable development of ethnographic tourism in Northern Thailand. A quantitative research approach was employed with a sample of 280 Thai tourists who had visited ethnographic tourism destinations in Northern Thailand. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings revealed that cultural authenticity, destination image, tourist trust, and revisit intention were all rated at high levels. SEM results indicated that cultural authenticity had a significant positive effect on tourist trust ($\beta = 0.65$), while destination image positively influenced revisit intention ($\beta = 0.25$). Tourist trust exerted the strongest positive effect on revisit intention ($\beta = 0.42$). Furthermore, tourist trust played a crucial mediating role in linking cultural authenticity to revisit intention. The findings suggest that preserving cultural authenticity, strengthening tourist trust, and enhancing destination image are essential

factors in promoting sustainable ethnographic tourism. Based on the results, strategic recommendations are proposed focusing on cultural preservation, community participation, capacity development, and sustainable destination management to support the long-term sustainability of ethnographic tourism in Northern Thailand.

Keywords: Cultural Authenticity, Destination Image, Tourist Trust, Revisit Intention, Ethnographic Tourism Northern Thailand

Introduction

Tourism is one of Thailand's most important economic sectors and has increasingly shifted toward sustainable and experience-based tourism. Among emerging forms of tourism, ethnographic tourism has gained attention because it offers opportunities for visitors to engage with local cultures and indigenous communities while supporting sustainable destination development. (National Tourism Policy Board, 2023). The Thai tourism industry plays a crucial role in the country's economy, providing direct and indirect economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits. It is a major source of foreign exchange, generating domestic currency, creating jobs, and distributing prosperity to various regions of the country. It also plays a key role in the development of transportation infrastructure, as well as trade and investment, which contribute to Thailand's economic growth and drive.

The travel situation of foreign tourists to Thailand during the high season from January to March 2024, the number of tourists to Thailand

increased by 1.3 million from 8 million in October to December 2023. There were a total of 9,381,098 foreign tourists visiting Thailand, an increase of 44 percent, generating tourism income of approximately 476,072 million baht, an increase of 44 percent compared to the same period in 2023. The ASEAN, European, and South Asian regions have recovered in number and income comparable to what Thailand experienced during the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, Northeast Asian tourists have accelerated in number, recovering by 67 percent of 2019, higher than expected (as of December 22, 2024, a 50 percent recovery of 2019). (International Market Analysis, Marketing Strategy Division, 2024) Tourism is a key economic sector that has experienced rapid and continuous growth despite the global economic recession over the past decade. It creates jobs and distributes income to tourism-related businesses, accelerates the development of local infrastructure and service businesses, and opens opportunities for more people in remote areas to participate in the tourism supply chain. Consequently, many countries prioritize and accelerate the development of the tourism sector as a key tool for national development. However, the rapid expansion of technology, including the internet, digital platforms, and low-cost airlines, has led to an unprecedented increase in both international and domestic tourist arrivals. This has led the global tourism sector to face the challenge of unsustainable growth, particularly in many tourist destinations that lack preparedness and effective tourism management, and the COVID-19 pandemic that has abruptly halted international tourism.

The tourism industry is constantly changing in line with global conditions and tourist behavior. Therefore, the Thai tourism industry must adapt to changing global trends and develop development plans that align with market demands. This aims to enhance tourism capabilities, develop the tourism ecosystem, and foster environmental factors that support tourism competitiveness and sustainable tourism management to add value to Thai tourism. The 20-Year National Strategic Master Plan (2018-2037) for tourism highlights the context of tourism, emphasizing competitiveness and growth based on environmentally friendly quality of life. This aims to create sustainable tourism growth on a socio-economic level, as well as foster tourism diversity. This emphasizes maintaining Thailand's status as a key global tourism destination, attracting tourists of all levels and increasing the proportion of high-quality tourists (Office of the Secretary of the National Strategy Committee, 2018). The Minister of Tourism and Sports' policy to promote tourism in line with the White Tourism and Sports approach defines white tourism as: “Convenient, clean, safe, fair and environmentally friendly tourism” which is in line with the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and in line with the drive under the Sustainable Development Goals in 4 dimensions: 1) Sustainable economic growth 2) Recognizing the value of culture 3) Social security and 4) Protection of natural resources and the environment. It aims to promote responsible tourism throughout the tourism chain. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global goals set by the United Nations to address global economic, social and environmental challenges.

Ethnic tourism is a form of alternative tourism that aims to enable tourists to closely experience, learn, and engage with the lifestyles, cultures, and traditions of various ethnic groups. It does not solely focus on natural or historical sites (Nindam et al., 2019). Tourists participate in community activities, including dressing, learning about local culture, traditions, and rituals. This exchange of cultural beliefs, knowledge about dress, and relationships between tourists and communities contributes to the tourism experience for the community, which differs from past tourism experiences (Nantakit, 2022). The northern region exhibits remarkable ethnic diversity, particularly among indigenous and highland tribes such as the Hmong, Karen, Lisu, Akha, Yao, and Pga K'nyau. Each of these ethnic groups possesses a unique cultural identity, manifested through diverse beliefs and rituals, including language, dialect, clothing, symbols used in rituals, and even the style of buildings and houses at the village and community levels. These styles are unique to each context and vary with each social, cultural, and belief context. Culture determines the characteristics of lifestyles and is often reflected in the physical environment, creating a significant attraction for both Thai and international tourists seeking novelty (Jaratphet, 2021).

However, while ethnic tourism is a novel and interesting form of tourism today, what must be considered or emphasized is “cultural authenticity,” which refers to the purity, originality, and authenticity of the way of life, traditions, or cultural activities tourists experience (Uslu et al., 2023). In many areas, traditional cultures are altered, developed, or improved, including through cultural displays or staged performances, to

meet the needs of tourists in a commercialized manner. While such cultural improvements and transformations enhance and stimulate tourism, these are short-term. However, they have negative long-term impacts, particularly on the image of the destination, which may be perceived as insincere and lacking local spirit. Previous studies have suggested that cultural authenticity plays a significant role in shaping tourists' evaluations of destinations and their behavioral intentions. However, findings regarding the relationships among cultural authenticity, destination image, tourist trust, and revisit intention remain inconclusive. Some studies have reported that cultural authenticity directly influences tourists' intention to revisit a destination, whereas other studies have found that its influence occurs indirectly through tourists' perceptions of destination image and trust. These inconsistent findings indicate that the mechanisms through which cultural authenticity contributes to revisit intention are not yet fully understood.

Furthermore, the majority of existing studies have been conducted in the contexts of heritage tourism, cultural tourism, and urban tourism destinations. Comparatively fewer studies have examined these relationships within ethnographic tourism settings, where tourists engage directly with ethnic communities and experience living cultural traditions. Given the unique characteristics of ethnographic tourism, tourists may develop perceptions of authenticity, trust, and destination image differently from visitors in other tourism contexts. As a result, the applicability of existing theoretical explanations remains uncertain. In addition, previous research has frequently examined cultural authenticity, destination image, tourist trust, and revisit intention as

separate constructs or isolated relationships. Limited empirical evidence exists regarding the simultaneous examination of these variables within an integrated structural framework, particularly in the context of ethnographic tourism in Northern Thailand, a region characterized by rich ethnic diversity and distinctive cultural heritage. Consequently, there remains both a theoretical and empirical gap concerning how these constructs interact to influence tourists' revisit intentions.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the relationships among cultural authenticity, destination image, tourist trust, and revisit intention within the context of ethnographic tourism in Northern Thailand. The findings are expected to contribute to tourism behavior literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying revisit intention and by offering practical implications for the sustainable development of ethnographic tourism destinations.

Objective

1. To study tourists' perceptions of cultural authenticity, tourist attraction image, and trust in ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand.
2. To study the level of recurrence intention of tourists who have participated in ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand.
3. To analyze the influence of cultural authenticity, tourist attraction image, and trust on tourists' recurrence intention.
4. To propose guidelines for sustainable development of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand, taking into account the preservation of cultural authenticity and the building of trust in the destination.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is developed based on the concepts of Cultural Authenticity, Destination Image, Tourist Trust, and Destination Loyalty Theory. The framework proposes that tourists' perceptions of cultural authenticity play a fundamental role in shaping their evaluations of a destination, influencing both destination image and trust. In the context of ethnographic tourism, authentic cultural experiences enable tourists to perceive destinations as unique, credible, and reflective of local identity, thereby enhancing positive destination evaluations. The framework further posits that destination image and tourist trust are important antecedents of revisit intention. A favorable destination image increases tourists' confidence in the destination and strengthens their intention to revisit. Likewise, trust in the destination and host community reduces perceived risk and uncertainty, encouraging tourists to maintain a long-term relationship with the destination and increasing their likelihood of returning in the future.

In addition, trust is conceptualized as a mediating mechanism linking cultural authenticity and destination image to revisit intention. When tourists perceive cultural experiences as authentic and develop positive destination images, they are more likely to establish trust in the destination, which subsequently enhances their revisit intention. Therefore, the proposed framework integrates destination attributes and psychological factors to explain tourists' behavioral intentions within the context of ethnographic tourism in Northern Thailand. Based on the conceptual framework, six hypotheses were proposed to examine the direct relationships among cultural authenticity, destination image, tourist trust, and revisit intention.

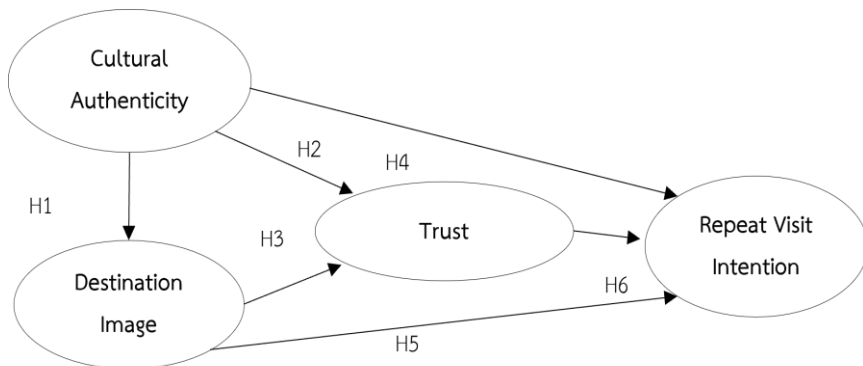


Figure 1. Research conceptual framework

Literature Review

1. Cultural Authenticity and Destination Image

The degree to which visitors believe that a destination's cultural portrayal is authentic, customary, and representative of the local way of life is known as cultural authenticity (Wang, 1999). Authenticity in tourist experiences increases visitor happiness and destination attachment by fostering an emotional bond with the host culture. Local customs, artwork, food, clothes, and architecture that uphold the community's identity and traditional legacy are frequently examples of cultural authenticity in the context of ethnic tourism. Travelers who experience a high level of cultural authenticity are more likely to have positive cognitive and emotive perceptions of the place, which enhances its reputation (H1). Studies such as Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Zhang et al. (2023) confirm that authentic cultural encounters positively shape destination image, as they signal respect for heritage and provide memorable experiences.

Cultural Authenticity refers to the level of tourists' confidence in the cultural image of a destination that they have visited as authentic and unaltered, and that the cultural scene is staged for tourists to experience (Wang, 1999). Cultural authenticity contributes to tourism experiences, fostering emotional attachment to the host culture. Local traditions, artwork, food, clothing, and architecture that preserve the community's traditional identity and heritage are often examples of cultural authenticity in the context of ethnic tourism. Tourists who experience a high level of cultural authenticity are likely to have positive cognitive and emotional perceptions of the destination (H1). This is consistent with the studies of Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Zhang et al. (2023), who found that cultural authenticity contributes to positive experiences and a positive image of the destination, as it symbolizes respect for cultural heritage and provides memorable experiences.

2. Cultural Authenticity and Trust

According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), trust in tourism is the conviction that a place, its people, and its service providers are trustworthy, sincere, and able to provide a fun and safe experience. Because travelers frequently associate authentic experiences with openness, honesty, and moral sincerity, cultural authenticity can strengthen this kind of trust. Visitors' trust may be damaged if cultural events or traditional goods are thought to be staged or commercialized (H2). Tourists' perceptions of genuine cultural participation promote emotional confidence in the host community and destination management, according to research by Ramkissoon and Uysal (2011). As a result, authenticity acts as a basis for establishing trust, which in turn fosters enduring visitor loyalty.

3. Destination Image and Trust

Destination image refers to the overall perceptions, ideas, and beliefs that people hold about a place (Beerli & Martín, 2004). When tourists have positive perceptions, they tend to trust the destination more, as positive perceptions reduce feelings of risk and uncertainty (H3). When travelers perceive a destination as attractive, safe, and reflecting authentic cultural values, they are more likely to trust the reputation of the place and local businesses. Research by Chen and Phou (2013) and Yoon and Uysal (2005) found that destination image is a significant predictor of tourist trust, both affectively and objectively. That is, if tourists have positive memories of a place, they are not only more likely to visit it for the first time, but also intend to return and perceive future travel experiences as more valuable and trustworthy.

4. Cultural Authenticity, Trust, and Repeat Visit Intention

Recurrence intention, also known as repeat visit intention, is a measure of a visitor's propensity to return or suggest a place to others (Oppermann, 2000). In the link between revisit behavior and authenticity, trust plays a critical mediating role (H4, H6). Travelers' pleasure and trust levels rise when they believe that a place's culture is genuine, which further solidifies their desire to return. In cultural and heritage tourism environments, trust acts as a mediator between authenticity and loyalty behaviors (Artuger & Çetinsöz, 2017). Additionally, travelers acquire affective commitment, which translates into return visits, when destinations uphold ethical standards in reflecting local culture and transparent communication.

5. Destination Image, Trust, and Repeat Visit Intention

Tourists' propensity to return is influenced both directly and indirectly by a favorable perception of the destination (H5). It serves as both an independent predictor of behavioral intention and an antecedent of trust. Consistency, quality, and emotional connection are communicated by a well-established image, which makes travelers feel less anxious and more satisfied. Research on historical and ethnic tourism has repeatedly shown that image has a significant impact on trust and intention to return (Chi & Qu, 2008; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Additionally, travelers' confidence in the destination's continued authenticity and social responsibility strengthens its excellent reputation and starts a positive feedback loop that promotes the expansion of sustainable tourism.

6. Trust and Repeat Visit Intention

“trust” is a crucial element. High levels of trust reflect tourists' expectations of reliable service, sincere hospitality, and transparent and ethical management (H6). In the context of ethnic tourism, trust is not limited to business or economic benefits, but also encompasses social and ethical dimensions. Tourists must feel that their trip contributes to the preservation and continuation of local culture, rather than simply being a profit-making commercial activity. Research by Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2013) found that tourists' trust in local stakeholders significantly influences their revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth. This demonstrates that trust is a key factor in transforming satisfaction into lasting loyalty. Therefore, building and maintaining long-term relationships with tourists requires “sincerity” in service delivery, along with building a “credible image” of the destination.

Method

1. Population and Sample

The population used in this study consisted of Thai tourists who had traveled to ethnic tourism destinations in the northern provinces of Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, and Nan. This research required a large sample size (Wiratchai, 1999). Bentler and Chou (1987, as cited in Schumaker & Lomax, 1996) suggested that the optimal sample size should be at least 20 cases per observed variable. Consistent with Kline (2010), the structural equation model employed in this study consisted of 14 observed variables; therefore, a minimum sample size of 280 respondents was deemed appropriate. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit respondents who met the inclusion criteria, namely Thai tourists who had previously visited ethnic tourism destinations in Northern Thailand. This non-probability sampling approach was considered appropriate because the study specifically targeted individuals with direct experience of ethnic tourism activities. The final sample consisted of 280 respondents. The majority were female ($n = 159$, 56.79%), held a bachelor's degree ($n = 102$, 36.43%), earned a monthly income between 15,001 and 30,000 baht ($n = 74$, 26.43%), and were business owners or freelancers ($n = 96$, 34.29%).

2. Research Instruments

The research instrument for this study was a closed-ended questionnaire developed based on a review of relevant literature, theories, concepts, and previous studies. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was

evaluated by three experts in tourism and consumer behavior research using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method. All items achieved IOC values above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. A pilot test was conducted prior to the main survey to assess the reliability of the instrument. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.70 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory reliability. Construct validity was further assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were calculated to evaluate convergent validity, while discriminant validity was examined according to established SEM guidelines.

3. Data Collection

The researchers collected data using a structured online questionnaire administered through Microsoft Forms. A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed and returned. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection commenced. All completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and accuracy before being processed for statistical analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Statistics Used

This research used quantitative methods, using descriptive statistics to present the general characteristics of the sample and inferential statistics to test hypotheses for population reference. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, skewness,

and kurtosis. modeling (SEM) (Hair et al., 2010) was used to confirm the relationship between latent and observed variables. The structural model examined the causal relationship between latent variables. Model fit was evaluated using several goodness-of-fit indices, including Chi-square/df, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The model was considered acceptable when $\chi^2/df < 3.00$, CFI ≥ 0.90 , TLI ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA ≤ 0.08 , and SRMR ≤ 0.08 .

Synthetic Research Results

1. Descriptive Statistics

1.1 Tourists' perceptions of cultural authenticity, tourist attraction image, and trust in ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of Cultural Authenticity

Cultural Authenticity	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Interpret
1. Non-symbolic Aspects of Culture	3.76	0.59	High
2. Intangible Aspects of Culture	3.88	0.63	High
Total	3.82	0.61	High

From Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of Cultural Authenticity were found to be at a high level ($\bar{X}$ = 3.82). The aspect with the highest mean was Intangible Aspects of Culture ($\bar{X}$ = 3.88), followed by Non-Symbolic Aspects of Culture ($\bar{X}$ = 3.76), respectively. This finding suggests that tourists place greater importance on experiencing intangible

cultural elements, such as local traditions, beliefs, customs, and ways of life, than on tangible cultural representations alone. The result highlights the significance of preserving living cultural practices as a core component of ethnographic tourism experiences in Northern Thailand.

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation of Destination Image

Destination Image	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Interpret
1. Attractions	4.08	0.65	High
2. Facilities	3.85	0.63	High
3. Accommodation	3.96	0.63	High
4. Value for Money	4.07	0.62	High
5. Cultural Image	4.05	0.65	High
6. Safety and Environment	3.91	0.62	High
Total	3.99	0.63	High

From Table 2, the mean and standard deviation of Opinions on Destination Image were found to be at a high level ($\bar{X}$ = 3.99). The aspect with the highest mean was Attractions ($\bar{X}$ = 4.08), followed by Value for Money ($\bar{X}$ = 4.07), Cultural Image ($\bar{X}$ = 4.05), Accommodation ($\bar{X}$ = 3.96), Accommodation ($\bar{X}$ = 3.91), and Facilities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.85), respectively. These findings indicate that tourists generally held positive perceptions of ethnographic tourism destinations in Northern Thailand, particularly regarding their attractions, cultural identity, and overall value.

Table 3 Mean and standard deviation of Tourist Trust

Tourist Trust	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Interpret
1. Communication	4.03	0.65	High
2. Caring and Giving	4.05	0.66	High
3. Commitment	3.83	0.63	High
4. Comfort / Compatibility	4.00	0.62	High
5. Conflict Resolution	4.04	0.65	High
Total	3.99	0.64	High

From Table 3, the mean and standard deviation of Tourist Trust were found to be at a high level ($\bar{X} = 3.91$). The highest mean was Caring and Giving ($\bar{X} = 4.05$), followed by Conflict Resolution ($\bar{X} = 4.04$), Communication ($\bar{X} = 4.03$), Comfort / Compatibility (mean = 4.00), and Commitment ($\bar{X} = 3.83$), respectively. These findings suggest that tourists developed trust primarily through positive interactions, perceived care from local communities, and effective communication during their visits.

1.2 Recurrence intention of tourists who have participated in ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand

Table 4 Mean and standard deviation of Recurrence intention of tourists who have participated in ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand

Recurrence intention of tourists	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Interpret
1. I intend to return to this ethnographic tourist attraction in the future.	3.39	0.49	High

Recurrence intention of tourists	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Interpret
2. The atmosphere and environment of this place make me want to visit again.	4.03	0.66	High
3. The diversity and uniqueness of the local culture influence my intention to return.	4.10	0.63	High
4. If new activities or services are added, I am more likely to return.	3.93	0.72	High
5. I intend to recommend this place to friends or family for repeat visits	4.05	0.64	High
Total	3.90	0.62	High

From Table 4, the mean and standard deviation of Recurrence intention of tourists who have participated in ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand were found to be at a high level ($\bar{X}$ = 3.90). The highest mean was The diversity and uniqueness of the local culture influence my intention to return ($\bar{X}$ = 4.10), followed by I intend to recommend this place to friends or family for repeat visits ($\bar{X}$ = 4.05), The atmosphere and environment of this place make me want to visit again ($\bar{X}$ = 4.03), If new activities or services are added, I am more likely to return (mean = 3.93), and I intend to return to this ethnographic tourist attraction in the future ($\bar{X}$ = 3.39), respectively. These findings suggest that the uniqueness of local culture and positive tourism experiences play important roles in encouraging tourists' intentions to revisit ethnographic tourism destinations.

2. Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing

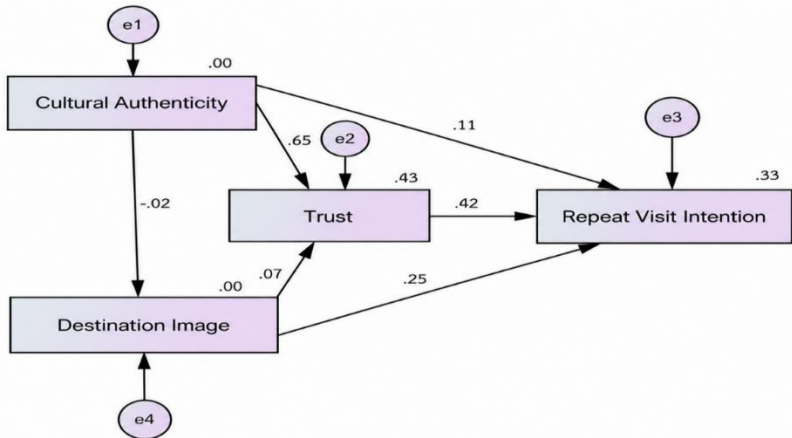


Figure 2. The Influence of Cultural Authenticity, Destination Image, and Tourist Trust on Repeat Visit Intention: A Case Study of Ethnographic Tourism in Northern Thailand

The results of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis revealed that Cultural Authenticity had a statistically significant positive influence on Trust (standardized weighted coefficient = 0.65), indicating that the perception of cultural authenticity and originality of a destination plays an important role in building tourists' trust. Cultural Authenticity had a low positive effect on Repeat Visit Intention (0.11) and did not have a direct significant influence on Destination Image (-0.02). Destination Image had a moderate positive influence on Revisit Intention (0.25) and a low effect on Trust (0.07), indicating that image alone may not be sufficient to build trust without cultural authenticity. In addition, Trust had a significant positive effect on Revisit Intention (0.42), which was the highest coefficient

in the model for the direct relationship with Revisit Intention. This is consistent with the idea that building trust in a destination plays an important role in stimulating repeat tourism. The results indicated that the structural equation model demonstrated an acceptable fit with the empirical data. The goodness-of-fit indices met the recommended criteria, with $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = 0.953, TLI = 0.944, RMSEA = 0.069, and SRMR = 0.047. Therefore, the proposed model was considered appropriate for examining the structural relationships among Cultural Authenticity, Destination Image, Tourist Trust, and Repeat Visit Intention.

This model suggests that trust acts as the main mediating variable linking cultural authenticity to revisit intention, while destination image plays a complementary but not the sole driving factor in tourists' revisit decision.

The results of the structural equation model analysis for the research hypotheses revealed:

H₁: Cultural Authenticity has a positive influence on Destination Image

The analysis did not support this hypothesis, as the correlation between cultural authenticity and destination image had a standardized weighted coefficient of -0.02, which was negative and statistically insignificant. This indicates that perceived cultural authenticity does not directly influence tourist image in the study context.

H₂: Cultural Authenticity has a positive influence on Tourist Trust

The analysis supported this hypothesis, finding that cultural authenticity had a significant positive influence on tourist trust ($\beta = 0.65$), the

highest correlation value in the model. This suggests that maintaining cultural identity and authenticity can effectively enhance trust in destinations.

H₃: Destination Image has a positive influence on Tourist Trust

The analysis clearly did not support this hypothesis. Although the relationship between destination image and tourist trust was positive ($\beta = 0.07$), it was small and not statistically significant. This indicates that image alone may not be sufficient to build trust without the intrinsic cultural factor.

H₄: Cultural Authenticity has a Positive Influence on Repeat Visit Intention

The analysis did not significantly support this hypothesis. Although a positive relationship ($\beta = 0.11$) was found, the value was low and not significant, indicating that perceived cultural authenticity alone may not be sufficient to stimulate repeat visit intention.

H₅: Destination Image has a Positive Influence on Repeat Visit Intention

The analysis supported this hypothesis, finding that destination image had a moderate positive influence on repeat visit intention ($\beta = 0.25$), indicating that a positive image can play a role in promoting repeat visit intention.

H₆: Tourist Trust has a Positive Influence on Repeat Visit Intention

The analysis clearly supported this hypothesis, with tourist trust having a high positive influence on repeat visit intention ($\beta = 0.42$), the highest coefficient among the independent variables influencing repeat visit intention. This indicates that building and maintaining trust is the most important factor in stimulating repeat visits.

Table 5 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	Result
H1	CA $\rightarrow$ DI	-0.02	Not Supported
H2	CA $\rightarrow$ TT	0.65	Supported
H3	DI $\rightarrow$ TT	0.07	Not Supported
H4	CA $\rightarrow$ RVI	0.11	Not Supported
H5	DI $\rightarrow$ RVI	0.25	Supported
H6	TT $\rightarrow$ RVI	0.42	Supported

4. Guidelines for sustainable development of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand, taking into account the preservation of cultural authenticity and the building of trust in the destination.

To develop sustainable ethnic tourism development guidelines in the northern region, the researcher relied on the results of the model analysis that indicated that cultural authenticity influenced trust, and that trust was a key factor affecting repeat visit intention. Furthermore, destination image directly promoted repeat visits. Therefore, development guidelines must focus on preserving cultural identity, building trust, and communicating destination image in a balanced manner. Maintaining and communicating cultural authenticity is a key mechanism in building tourist trust ($\beta = 0.65$). Trust is the main driver of repeat visit intention ($\beta = 0.42$). Destination image has a positive effect on repeat visit intention ($\beta = 0.25$). However, destination image will be fully effective if cultural authenticity and trust are managed in tandem. The researcher proposes the following guidelines:



Figure 3. Guidelines for sustainable development of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand, taking into account the preservation of cultural authenticity and the building of trust in the destination

4.1 Preservation and Management of Cultural Authenticity

Develop a Community-led Cultural Management Plan, giving communities ownership over conservation measures, such as cultural performance regulations, limiting activities that disrupt traditional rituals, supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer (workshops, community teacher training), and recording cultural information (audio, visual, and narrative). Develop a code of conduct for the display and sale of handicrafts to prevent commercialization that could compromise their unique identity.

4.2 Building Trust in Destinations

Provide clear information about cultural activities, restrictions, and visitation procedures on websites and public relations materials. Create a community-approved seal of authenticity for homestays, guides, and products that have been verified by the community. Train local guides on tour ethics, cultural knowledge, and tourist care to increase confidence in the service. Establish a system for receiving complaints or suggestions from tourists and the community to resolve issues quickly and transparently.

4.3 Destination Image Development and Communication

Create content that tells the true stories of the community, with community participation in content creation (storytelling by locals) to avoid distorting the image. Target tourists who value culture and conservation over mass tourism. Design tourism programs that emphasize cultural learning, such as learning to make handicrafts, participating in ceremonies within boundaries, and interacting with local families under the protection and consent of the community.

4.4 Community Participation and Benefit Distribution

Promote partnerships between communities, government agencies, and the private sector by giving communities a say in tourism policy decisions. Create a local fund from tourism revenue to be used for conservation and development of community infrastructure. Support local entrepreneurs' groups (homestays, handicraft shops, and guides) to develop common standards and negotiate marketing strategies.

4.5 Capacity Development and Training

Provide training in service skills, knowledge on hygiene, safety, and communication techniques with international tourists. This also includes enhancing the capabilities of local entrepreneurs in online marketing, pricing, and product and service quality management.

4.6 Environmental and Social Sustainability Management

Use an advance booking system, establish tourist quotas in vulnerable areas, and organize tourist routes to distribute visits. Waste, water, and energy management: Promote “reduce, reuse, recycle” practices and renewable energy in tourism communities. Establish restricted/controlled access zones for rituals or sacred areas.

4.7 Measurement and Evaluation

4.7.1 Key Indicators (KPIs)

- Tourist Confidence Index (via pre- and post- visit questionnaires)
- Number of repeat visits per target tourist group
- Cultural Authenticity Index (community participation in decision-making, preservation of traditional rituals, etc.)
- Average household income from tourism and the proportion returned to the community
- Environment (volume of waste, wastewater, etc.)

4.7.2 Evaluation Mechanisms

- Tourist Satisfaction and Confidence Survey (annual)
- Evaluation of Cultural Conservation by an independent agency in collaboration with community representatives (every 2–3 years)
- Annual Social and Environmental Impact Report

Discussion

The researchers' findings indicate that Cultural Authenticity significantly impacts Trust ($\beta = 0.65$), but has no direct effect on Repeat Visit Intention. This is consistent with Uslu et al. (2023) who found that perceived Cultural Authenticity positively impacts tourist attraction attachment and support for heritage tourism, with perceived cultural sustainability acting as a moderator. However, in the context of northern Thai ethnic tourism, building Cultural Authenticity alone may not be sufficient. It is necessary to integrate sustainability measures such as community-based management and equitable benefit distribution to empower authenticity to inspire tourist attraction loyalty. Furthermore, the researchers' SEM model shows that tourist trust is the strongest direct predictor of Repeat Visit Intention ($\beta = 0.42$) and acts as a mediator between Cultural Authenticity and Repeat Visit Intention, which is consistent with Zhou, Chen, and Wu (2022) who explain that Cultural Authenticity Affects Repeat Visit Intention through memorable tourist experiences and place attachment. It is also consistent with Tian et al. (2020) who found that perceived Cultural Authenticity of Intangible Cultural Heritage affects tourist attraction satisfaction and loyalty. Although Regression and SEM analysis found that Destination Image has an effect on Repeat Visit Intention, the SEM results indicated that the influence of Destination Image on Trust was not clear, reflecting the view of Uslu et al. (2023) and Tian et al. (2020) that Destination Image alone is not enough, it must work together with Cultural Authenticity and building relationships between communities and tourists to create engagement and loyalty.

According to Jaratphet's (2021) research, the North's varied ethnic groups share cultural origins that are connected to their homes, beliefs, and way of life. These elements are significant sources of identity. According to the researcher's suggestions, preserving cultural authenticity in these areas can provide “cultural capital,” which can boost visitor confidence even further. This is also in line with the findings of Nantakit (2025), who discovered that travelers want ethnic tourism activities that are methodically planned and have promotions that relate to local narratives. Building authenticity in northern ethnic tourism destinations should be combined with creating memorable experiences and allowing communities to communicate cultural values through participation in order to boost satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty, in contrast to the work of Tian et al. (2020) and Zhou, Chen, and Wu (2022). International research that stresses the integration of cultural and economic components for sustainability is consistent with the researcher's recommendations, which include community-based management, authenticity certification systems, the use of local stories in promotion, and continuous review. This finding is consistent with trends in both domestic and international research showing that “cultural authenticity” is a crucial basis for fostering trust and loyalty in ethnic tourism destinations, with tourist image acting as a supporting role and tourist confidence acting as a crucial mechanism. Development initiatives should therefore concentrate on: Ethnic tourism's economic, social, and environmental sustainability depends on community-based cultural preservation, producing unforgettable experiences, and openly sharing values.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on ethnographic tourism and destination loyalty in three important ways. First, the findings extend existing research on cultural authenticity by demonstrating that authenticity does not directly influence revisit intention, but rather exerts its influence through tourist trust. This suggests that trust functions as a critical psychological mechanism that transforms authentic cultural experiences into future behavioral intentions. Second, the findings refine existing assumptions regarding destination image by showing that destination image alone is insufficient to generate tourist trust in ethnographic tourism settings. Instead, trust appears to be developed primarily through direct cultural experiences and interactions with local communities. Third, the study confirms the importance of tourist trust as a central determinant of destination loyalty, thereby supporting and extending Destination Loyalty Theory within the context of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand.

The findings also contribute to the ongoing debate concerning authenticity as performance versus authenticity as lived experience. The insignificant direct effect of cultural authenticity on revisit intention suggests that tourists may not respond solely to staged cultural performances or symbolic representations of ethnicity. Rather, they appear to value authentic interactions, genuine community engagement, and meaningful cultural experiences that foster trust and emotional connection with the destination. This finding highlights the importance of experiential authenticity in sustaining long-term tourist relationships.

Research Suggestion

The findings suggest that sustainable ethnographic tourism development in Northern Thailand should focus on strengthening tourist trust through the preservation of cultural authenticity and meaningful community–tourist interactions. While destination image remains important in attracting visitors, long-term destination loyalty is more likely to be achieved when tourists perceive cultural experiences as genuine, trustworthy, and community-based. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) preserving and managing cultural authenticity through intergenerational knowledge transfer, community ownership and ethical control of cultural displays; (2) building tourist trust through clear communication, authentication systems and transparent complaint channels; (3) developing and communicating a destination image that accurately reflects local stories and values; and (4) promoting collaboration between the public, private and community sectors to balance cultural preservation with economic growth. These efforts will contribute to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of ethnographic tourism destinations in Northern Thailand.

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