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Exploring the influence of expectations on community-based tourism choice in Vietnam's Central Highlands

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of expectations on decision-making in community-based tourism in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. While numerous studies have explored tourism expectations, limited research has specifically addressed their influence on choosing community-based tourism in a particular region. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by identifying the expectations that influence tourists' choices of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and determining the extent of their impact. By applying quantitative research method to analyze data collected from 528 visitors, the findings indicate that when tourists' cultural, historical, and climatic expectations are met, their preference for community-based tourism in the Central Highlands increases significantly. This study enriches the literature by clarifying how specific expectations influence community-based tourism choices in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Additionally, the results contribute to the development of successful policies that promote the growth of community-based tourism in this area. This paper provides new insights into how these expectations shape community-based tourism decisions, offering valuable guidance for policy development, and promoting sustainable tourism practices in the region.

Keywords: Expectation, Community-based tourism, Choice, Vietnam's Central Highlands

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1. Introduction

In recent years, community-based tourism has gained significant attention as a sustainable and responsible approach to tourism development. It emphasizes the involvement and empowerment of local communities in tourism activities, aiming to promote economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation (Lo and Janta, 2020). The Central Highlands region of Vietnam, renowned for its diverse ethnic communities, unique cultural heritage, and pristine natural landscapes, holds immense potential for community-based tourism development.

Tourists' selection of community-based tourism is a crucial aspect of sustainable tourism development (Lee and Jan, 2019). Understanding the factors that influence tourists' decision-making processes can contribute to effectively managing and promoting community-based tourism initiatives. One prominent theoretical framework that can shed light on this issue is the expectancy theory, initially proposed by Vroom (1964). According to this theory, individuals' motivation and behavior are influenced by their expectations of outcomes. They are also influenced by the degree to which they believe their efforts will lead to those outcomes. Expectancy theory is frequently employed in research related to management within enterprises. Applying expectancy theory to tourism, particularly community-based tourism, constitutes a novel aspect and an innovative extension of this theory.

The application of the expectancy theory in the context of tourism has gained recognition in recent years, providing valuable insights into tourists' decision-making process (Bashir *et al.*, 2014; Xuefeng *et al.*, 2021). However, limited research has investigated the expectancy theory's applicability in selecting community-based tourism, particularly in the Central Highlands region. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this research gap by examining the factors that influence tourists' decision-making process in selecting community-based tourism in the Central Highlands region of Vietnam, based on the theoretical lens of expectancy theory.

The research aimed to identify tourists' expectations when selecting community-based tourism in the Central Highlands and elucidate how these expectations influence the decision-making process. Based on the research findings, recommendations were formulated for managing community-based tourism in the Central Highlands region by implementing effective marketing strategies to enhance visitor attraction. This study is the first exploration of tourists' expectations in selecting community-based tourism in the Central Highlands region. It supplements and extends the theory of expectations, consolidating knowledge about tourist consumption behavior. Consequently, it provides directional insights for product development to better align with tourists' expectations and suggests effective marketing strategies for increased tourist engagement.

The remainder of the paper is structured in five sections. The second section reviews the relevant literature. The third section outlines the research methods and data collection.

Subsequently, the fourth section details the research findings. Finally, the fifth and sixth sections discuss policy implications, present conclusions, and outline future research directions.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 Literature review

Expectancy theory is a significant theoretical framework in human resource management, complementing Maslow's hierarchy of demands. Victor Vroom proposed this theory in 1964, explaining why individuals exert effort to accomplish tasks. Subsequent scholars, such as Porter and Lawler (1968) and Witt and Witt (1992), further refined and expanded Vroom's expectancy theory. Witt and Witt (1992) applied expectancy theory in the tourism sector to evaluate tourists' expectations and motivations when participating in trips.

Expectations are vital to understanding how tourists feel about their trips and how likely they are to return (Del Bosque and Martín, 2008). According to Del Bosque and Martín (2008), expectation is a person's beliefs and hopes about how a particular experience will unfold. Chen and Tsai (2007) state that tourists' expectations can affect their trip ratings and willingness to return to the same destination. Expectations are shaped by personal experiences, recommendations from others, advertising, and the media (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2020). Researchers have extensively studied the impact of expectations on destination choice, satisfaction, and loyalty in tourism literature. Understanding the factors that shape tourists' expectations is essential for tourism businesses and destinations. This knowledge helps them provide visitors with a positive experience that meets or exceeds their expectations.

To provide an overview of related research, we have compiled research from the Web of Science, one of the two largest databases today, including scientific journals, conferences, books, inventions, manufacturer information, publications, school/institute information, and author information. Using the keyword "expectations", the search range was set from 2013 to the present and was limited to tourism. A total of 813 articles related to the keyword were found. After processing with VOSviewer, it was found that the analyzed data did not focus much on the keyword "expectations". This indicates that there is still limited research on expectations in tourism. Research was heavily concentrated in the period 2019-2020. The results show that research on expectations in tourism mainly focuses on themes such as satisfaction, perception, attitude, motivation, quality, and loyalty.

In addition to providing an overview of documents from the Web of Science to identify research gaps using related keywords, relevant sources from around the world were reviewed. Studies on expectancy theory have shown that satisfaction occurs if the achieved results meet or exceed expectations. However, when actual results fall short of expectations, visitors may be disappointed and dissatisfied with their experience (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Huang (2015) explained that disconfirmation theory has been widely used to explain the relationship between expectation and satisfaction in tourism.

Additionally, prior studies have shown numerous factors affecting the complex relationship between expectation and satisfaction. For example, studies by Aliman *et al.* (2014), Zhang and Niyomsilp (2020) found that cultural differences affect the relationship between expectation and satisfaction in tourism. These studies compared Chinese and American tourists' expectations and satisfaction levels, revealing that Chinese tourists had higher expectations and were less satisfied than American tourists. Moreover, studies have shown that the level of involvement and motivation of tourists influences the relationship between expectation and satisfaction (Bigné and Andreu, 2004; Horner and Swarbrooke, 2020). Highly motivated and involved tourists are more likely to have higher expectations and be less satisfied with their experience when their expectations are unmet. Wang *et al.* (2021) suggested that tourists with high expectations and high-quality experiences give the highest ratings for their overall tour experience, memorability, and authenticity. Meanwhile, travelers with low expectations and low-quality experiences give the poorest reviews. An investigation conducted by Chan *et al.* (2019) on service quality, which combines SERVQUAL and expectation disconfirmation theory, played a pivotal role in enhancing the understanding of theme park tourism in China. This study revealed that the expectation-perception gap exists across all service dimensions. The service quality perception-expectation analysis map demonstrates that reliability, assurance, and responsiveness are service strengths that positively contribute to the visitor experience.

Research by Hsu *et al.* (2009) suggested that the expectation of visiting a foreign destination directly impacts the motivation to visit the destination. Additionally, motivation directly influences attitudes toward visiting a destination. Expectations of visiting a destination also directly influence attitudes toward visiting the destination, and motivation plays a mediating role in the relationship between expectations and attitudes. Wong *et al.* (2013) demonstrated a significant correlation between tourists' expectations, motivations, and attitudes. Additionally, some other studies, such as those on experiences, motivations, perceptions, and attitudes regarding ethnic minority village tourism (Li *et al.*, 2021), have also explored these relationships.

In addition to destination choice and satisfaction, expectations also play a role in destination loyalty (Cossío-Silva *et al.*, 2019). Destination loyalty refers to the likelihood of a tourist returning to a destination and recommending it to others (Chi and Qu, 2008). Research has shown that tourists are likelier to develop loyalty toward destinations that meet or exceed their expectations (Muntean *et al.*, 2023). A positive experience that fulfills or exceeds tourists' expectations can lead to positive word-of-mouth promotion, enhance the destination's image, and attract more visitors (Chi and Qu, 2008). Therefore, destination managers and marketers should focus on providing high-quality services and experiences and managing tourists' expectations effectively. Oh *et al.* (2022) also conducted a study that integrated deep learning techniques with the expectation-confirmation theory to elucidate customer satisfaction in hospitality services.

There are also some other studies, such as an empirical validation of a loyalty model based on expectation disconfirmation (Yoon and Kim, 2000), an investigation of the effects of customers' expectations and perceived quality on customer loyalty with the mediating role of perceived value and customer satisfaction (Mostaghimi *et al.*, 2016), the influence of customer expectation and marketing mix on customer loyalty with customer satisfaction as intervening (Mukarromah *et al.*, 2021), and determinants of loyalty to public transit, integrating satisfaction-loyalty theory and expectation-confirmation theory (Fu *et al.*, 2018).

Regarding how expectation theory affects the choice of travel products, many studies have examined how advertising and marketing shape tourists' expectations. For example, according to Law and Au (2000), advertising can create unrealistic expectations that may not be met upon arrival at the destination. The study found that tourists with high expectations based on advertising were more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their travel experience. Buhalis and Law (2008), on the other hand, stated that marketing could be used to manage tourists' expectations and enhance their travel experience. In another study, Chen and Tsai (2007) found that tourists' expectations about a destination's features, such as its natural scenery and cultural attractions, were strong predictors of their intended activities. In particular, tourists with higher expectations about a destination's features were likelier to visit and recommend it to others.

Researchers have also focused on the role of expectations in tourist destination choice, as noted by Abdellatif *et al.* (2015). Several variables influencing destination choice have been identified, including demographic characteristics, trip purpose, travel motivation, and information sources (Crompton, 1979; Fodness, 1994; Pizam and Sussmann, 1995). Tourists tend to select destinations that match their expectations (Moutinho, 1987). Destination image is one of the major factors influencing expectations in tourist destination choice (Cai *et al.*, 2011).

In Vietnam, expectancy theory has also been studied in the context of tourism. For example, studies on factors influencing tourists' expectations of their experiences in the Central Highlands of Vietnam (Hanh and Dung, 2023) indicated that psychological factors are significant determinants of travel expectations and hope for experiences. Sociocultural factors are believed to shape expectations regarding experiences, while economic factors are also considered important. Environmental factors have also been found to impact expectations regarding experience significantly. Hung *et al.* (2021) and Thanh *et al.* (2020) investigated the role of destination image in shaping tourists' expectations and influencing their decision-making process. Their research found that tourists' expectations were influenced by their perceptions of the destination's image, including its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and infrastructure. These studies highlight the importance of managing tourists' expectations in the tourism industry, particularly in emerging destinations like Vietnam. By understanding tourists' expectations and perceptions of the destination's image, tourism managers and marketers can develop strategies to enhance tourists' satisfaction and loyalty towards the destination and promote positive word-of-mouth.

Most research on expectations centers around satisfaction, perception, attitude, motivation, and loyalty. There is a noticeable scarcity of studies exploring the influence of expectations on the selection of a specific type of tourism or tourism product. In Vietnam, particularly in the Central Highlands region, research on applying expectancy theory in the context of community-based tourism is absent. Therefore, this study aims to address these research gaps, enhance understanding of the application of expectancy theory in the tourism sector, and consolidate knowledge related to the demand side of community-based tourism today.

2.2 Hypothesis development

Price expectations

It is important to acknowledge that the inclusion of price in the research hypothesis aligns with previous studies that have highlighted the significance of economic factors in tourist decision-making process (Kim and Lee, 2017; Masiero and Nicolau, 2012; Tiwari *et al.*, 2021). By studying visitors' expectations about prices, this study aims to ascertain whether price expectations significantly influence tourists' likelihood of choosing community-based tourism in the Central Highlands. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Price expectations positively impact the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

Amenities expectations

Amenities play a significant role in shaping tourists' expectations and influencing their decision-making process. They include accommodations, dining options, recreational activities, transportation, and other supporting services. The availability and quality of amenities greatly impact tourists' satisfaction levels and overall experience in community-based tourism destinations (Chen and Chen, 2010; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H2: Expectations regarding amenities positively impact the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

Cultural and historical expectations

Culture and history play a vital role in shaping tourists' perceptions and expectations when selecting community-based tourism destinations. The presence of unique cultural practices, historical landmarks, archaeological sites, traditional festivals, and local arts and crafts contribute to the appeal and authenticity of the tourism experience. As stated by Baclig and Ylagan (2022), Garrod and Nicholls (2022), and Moufakkir (2013), culture and history form the backbone of community-based tourism experiences. Tourists are often drawn to destinations that offer an opportunity to engage with local culture, experience traditional rituals, and learn about the historical significance of the region. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Culture and history expectations have a positive impact on the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

Climate expectations

Climate plays a crucial role in influencing tourists' preferences and expectations when choosing community-based tourism destinations. The weather conditions in a particular region can significantly impact the overall tourist experience and the range of activities available. A favorable climate can enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, sightseeing, and exploration of natural landscapes (Awojobi, 2017; Hanh and Dung, 2023; Zhong and Chen, 2019). As Bigano *et al.* (2006) and Dahiya and Batra (2016) stated, climate is crucial in tourists' decision-making process, particularly in nature-based and outdoor tourism. Pleasant weather conditions, suitable temperatures, and comfortable climatic conditions contribute to tourists' satisfaction and enjoyment during their visit. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Climate expectations have a positive impact on the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

Safety expectations

Safety is a crucial factor influencing tourists' decision-making when selecting a destination. It encompasses various aspects, such as personal safety, crime rates, political stability, the availability of healthcare facilities, and emergency preparedness. The perception of a safe environment is essential for tourists to feel comfortable and enjoy their travel experience. According to Preko and Gyepi-Garbrah (2023), Terrah *et al.* (2020), and Zou and Yu (2022), safety is a fundamental concern for tourists, as it directly affects their sense of well-being and enjoyment during their visit. Perceived safety measures and a secure environment are key factors that influence tourists' choices of destinations. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H5: Safety expectations have a positive impact on the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

Natural landscape expectations

The natural landscape is a key factor influencing tourists' decision-making process when selecting community-based tourism destinations. The region's unique natural attractions, such as mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, and waterfalls, contribute to the overall appeal and attractiveness of the tourism experience. They offer outdoor activities, nature exploration, wildlife observation, and relaxation opportunities. According to Halling (2011), Tessema *et al.* (2021), and Zhang *et al.* (2014), the natural landscape is a major draw for tourists, as it provides a sense of tranquility, aesthetic pleasure, and the chance to connect with nature. Tourists often seek destinations with diverse and pristine natural environments. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Natural landscape expectations have a positive impact on the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

Activities and entertainment expectations

Activities and entertainment options are crucial factors influencing tourists' decision-making process when selecting a tourism destination. They contribute to the overall satisfaction and enjoyment of tourists during their visit. The availability of diverse and engaging activities, such as cultural performances, traditional crafts workshops, hiking, biking, and local festivals, enhances the attractiveness of community-based tourism experiences. According to Dong *et al.* (2020) and Tasci and Gartner (2007), providing diverse and authentic activities and entertainment is a key aspect of community-based tourism. Engaging tourists in local traditions, customs, and interactive experiences creates a memorable and enriching visit. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H7: Natural landscape expectations have a positive impact on the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

The research model is proposed based on prior studies, as shown in Figure 1.

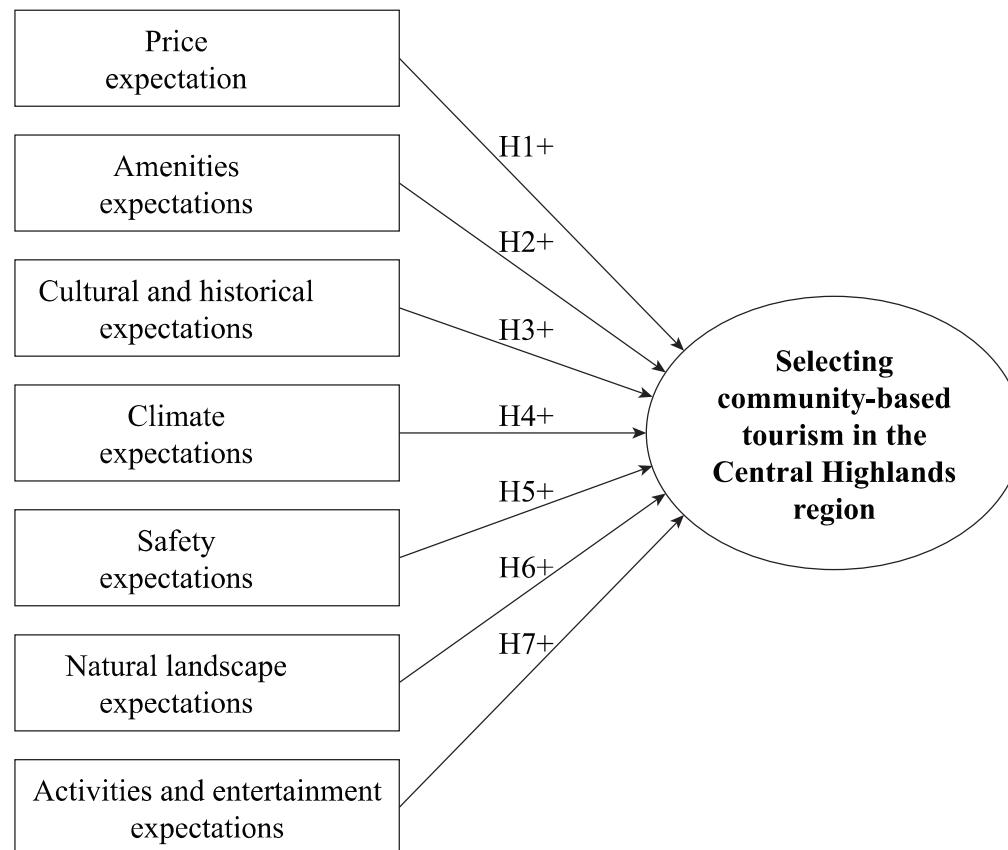


Figure 1. Proposed research model

Source: Authors' suggestion

3. Research methods

3.1 Measurement scale

The measurement scale, which consisted of 36 observed variables (Table 1), was developed and used for the survey and subsequent analysis. All scale items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1. Variables and scales in the study

Variable	Code	Scale	References
Price (PR)	PR1	Prices for community-based tourism services in the Central Highlands are suitable.	Adnan <i>et al.</i> (2021), Gumussoy and Koseoglu (2016), Roy <i>et al.</i> (2014)
	PR2	Prices for community-based tourism services correspond to the quality of the services received.	
	PR3	Prices for community-based tourism services in the Central Highlands are more competitive than in other areas.	
	PR4	Prices are clearly announced without incurring many other costs.	
	PR5	There are various price options for visitors to choose from.	
Amenities expectations (AM)	AM1	Accommodation facilities and services meet expectations.	Ferri <i>et al.</i> (2019), Nurlaila <i>et al.</i> (2022), Voon <i>et al.</i> (2022)
	AM2	Facilities and food services meet expectations.	
	AM3	Transportation services meet expectations.	
	AM4	Service information centers and instructions meet expectations.	
	AM5	Souvenir shops, local markets, shopping malls, or grocery stores meet expectations.	
Cultural and historical expectations (CH)	CH1	The area features significant historical sites.	Boonpat and Suvachart (2014), Jennie (2021), Li and Borbon (2021)
	CH2	The area exhibits unique cultural elements.	
	CH3	Houses and structures in the area possess distinctive and diverse architecture.	
	CH4	The area hosts distinctive artistic and cultural events.	
	CH5	The region has a distinct culinary heritage.	
Climate expectations (CL)	CL1	The climate is pleasant and suitable for sightseeing and experiencing activities.	Jeuring (2017), Ngxongo (2021)
	CL2	The climate is fresh and free from pollution.	
	CL3	Stable and predictable climate for convenient trip planning.	
	CL4	The climate is cooler than other regions.	

Table 1. Variables and scales in the study (*continued*)

Variable	Code	Scale	References
Safety expectations (SA)	SA1	The area has a safe and peaceful tourist environment, helping tourists not to worry about personal security.	Tilaki <i>et al.</i> (2017), Xie <i>et al.</i> (2020)
	SA2	The crime rate is low, and there is no risk of theft, robbery, or assault.	
	SA3	Clear information and instructions regarding security and safety are provided.	
	SA4	It is safe from insects and reptiles.	
	SA5	Measures are in place to prevent diseases, fires, and explosions, ensure food safety and hygiene, and ensure traffic safety.	
Natural landscape expectations (NL)	NL1	Beautiful natural landscape.	Chang <i>et al.</i> (2021), Terkenli <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	NL2	The landscape is rich and diverse.	
	NL3	There are many activities and experiences related to the natural landscape.	
	NL4	The natural landscape is different from other areas.	
Activities and entertainment expectations (AE)	AE1	There are outdoor activities to explore and enjoy the natural environment.	Nurlaila <i>et al.</i> (2022), Sheng and Chen (2013)
	AE2	There are activities to experience the local culture.	
	AE3	There are entertainment activities and nightlife experiences.	
	AE4	There are artistic, creative, or musical performance activities.	
	AE5	There are interesting travel experiences and activities suitable for the whole family.	
Selecting community-based tourism in the Central Highlands region (SC)	SC1	My expectations were satisfied by community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.	Kiper and Arslan (2007), Experts' viewpoints
	SC2	In the immediate future, I will continue to favor Central Highlands community-based tourism.	
	SC3	I will introduce to my relatives the option of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.	

Source: Authors' compilation

3.2 Data collection

We surveyed three areas: the foot of Lang Bian Mountain, Ga village (Lam Dong), and Jun village (Dak Lak), from early July to late September 2023, using a purposive sampling technique. To maintain objectivity during the sampling process, we ensured that the surveyed

guests in each group did not exceed 10% of the total group. Within three months, a total of 572 questionnaires were distributed across three research areas, resulting in 546 completed questionnaires. However, many questionnaires did not meet the requirements. Following data cleansing, there were 528 questionnaires for research purposes, which was considered sufficient for reliable statistical analysis and generalization of the findings (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

The questionnaire included three parts. The first section introduced the topic and provided anonymity assurances and guidance to respondents (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). The second part included demographic information about the respondents (Aji *et al.*, 2020). Table 2 describes the sample characteristics of 528 domestic tourists selected community tourism destinations. Female tourists accounted for the majority (53.41%), while male tourists accounted for 46.59%. The largest age group in the sample was 35 to 44 years old, accounting for 31.06%, followed by the 25 to 34 age group at 20.45%. This indicates the dominance of young and middle-aged customer groups. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the sample had completed a university degree (51.52%), followed by those with less than a university degree (32.01%). The sample population is considered representative of domestic tourists to community-based tourism destinations in the Central Highlands, providing a solid basis for analyzing the study variables and drawing relevant conclusions. The third part included survey questions related to each study variable.

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Attributes	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	246	46.59
	Female	282	53.41
Age	Under 25	80	15.15
	25-34	108	20.45
	35-44	164	31.06
	45-54	91	17.23
	Over 55	85	16.10
	Education	Undergraduate	169
	Bachelor's	272	51.52
	Postgraduate	87	16.48

Source: Authors' research sample

3.3 Data analysis

The study employed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach, which includes confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measures. CFA was used to measure the data, while SEM was used to test the hypotheses (Akram, 2022).

4. Results

4.1 Checking the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

After testing the reliability of the scale, we removed the observed variables with a corrected item-total correlation of less than 0.3 (AM4, CH4, CL3, NL3, AE4) and retested the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the remaining variables. All variables had values greater than 0.7, indicating that the scale was used effectively. Consequently, the scale demonstrates good reliability and is suitable for further analysis. For the variable AE1, after retesting the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha if the deleted item was 0.816, which was higher than the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the entire variable AE (0.800). However, since the corrected item-total correlation exceeded 0.3, we decided to retain it, noting its consideration in subsequent analyses (DeVellis, 2017).

4.2 The results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results show a KMO coefficient of 0.742. This result indicates that the KMO coefficient satisfies the criteria, being greater than 0.5 and less than 1, suggesting that this dataset is suitable for factor analysis. The Bartlett's test is used to evaluate the correlation between the observed variables within the factor. In this situation, the sig. value is 0.000, which meets the requirement of being less than 0.05. This shows that the observed variables in the population are significantly associated with one another, confirming the dataset's suitability for exploratory factor analysis.

Table 3. Total variance explained by extracted factors

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.618	16.494	16.494	4.618	16.494	16.494
2	2.758	9.848	26.343	2.758	9.848	26.343
3	2.516	8.985	35.328	2.516	8.985	35.328
4	2.321	8.290	43.617	2.321	8.290	43.617
5	2.073	7.404	51.021	2.073	7.404	51.021
6	1.900	6.787	57.808	1.900	6.787	57.808
7	1.684	6.015	63.823	1.684	6.015	63.823
8	0.944	3.373	67.196			
9	0.796	2.843	70.039			

Source: Authors' calculation

Only components with eigenvalues of 1 or more are considered important and preserved (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Table 3 shows that the eigenvalue for the 7th component is 1.684, which is greater than 1, while it is only 0.944 for the 8th factor, indicating that the extraction process should end at the 7th component. This indicates the extraction of seven components. The total variance extracted is greater than 50%, suggesting that the seven extracted factors account for

66.823% of the variation in the observable variables included in the EFA. The data processing findings in Table 4 indicate that the extracted components are statistically significant and may be used for future analysis.

Research results show that most variables with load factors greater than 0.4 are clearly represented in the rotation matrix; thus, they are preserved, indicating that the observed variable has high statistical significance.

After deleting the inappropriate variables AM4, CH4, CL3, and NL3, the revised research model is as follows: Price (PR) includes five observed variables (PR1, PR2, PR3, PR4, PR5); Amenities (AM) includes four observed variables (AM1, AM2, AM3, AM5); Cultural and History (CH) includes four observed variables (CH1, CH2, CH3, CH5); Climate (CL) includes three observed variables (CL1, CL2, CL4); Safety (SA) includes five observed variables (SA1, SA2, SA3, SA4, SA5); Natural Landscape (NL) includes three observed variables (NL1, NL2, NL4); Activities and Entertainment (AE) includes four observed variables (AE1, AE2, AE3, AE5)

For the dependent variable, the coefficient KMO is 0.672, which is greater than 0.5. The significance level (Sig.) is 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the factor analysis is deemed appropriate. Additionally, the analysis results reveal that one factor was extracted with an eigenvalue equal to 1.911, exceeding 1. This factor explains 63.691% of the data variation of the three observed variables participating in EFA.

4.3 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) findings

Research results show that the Chi-square value is 2.663, which is less than 3. Additionally, the GFI and CFI values are 0.900 and 0.901, respectively, both meeting or exceeding the 0.9 threshold, indicating a good result. The RMSEA is 0.056, which is below the threshold of 0.06, indicating a good level of fit. The PCLOSE value is 0.012, which is above the acceptable threshold of 0.01 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). These results indicate that the observed variable data align well with other variables on the same scale and are consistent with the proposed model. Consequently, it can be concluded that the model fits the survey dataset well.

4.4 The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis

SEM was employed to test the research hypotheses (Figure 2). The analysis results in Table 4 show that the p-values of the variables PR, AM, NL, SA, and SA are 0.747, 0.180, 0.116, 0.742, and 0.215, respectively. All five variables are greater than 0.05, which indicates that these independent variables have no effect on the dependent variable. Consequently, these variables are excluded from the research model. The p-values for the remaining variables, CH and CL, are 0.000, meeting the condition of less than 0.05. Therefore, these two independent variables are closely related to the dependent variable. They are retained in the model.

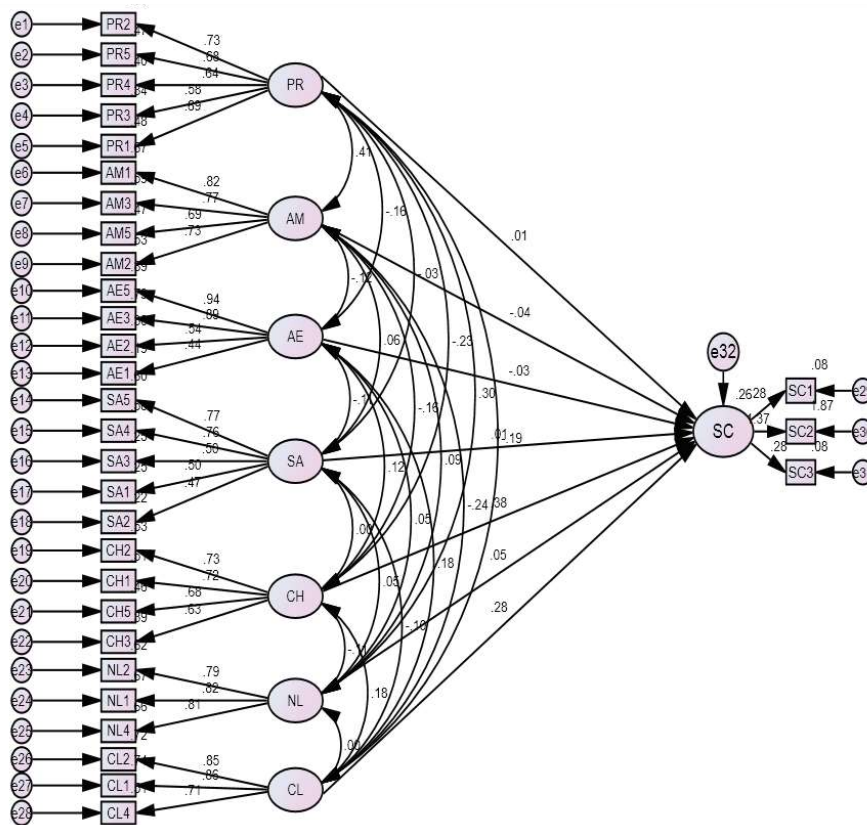


Figure 2. The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis

Table 4. Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Relationship	P-value	Estimate	Results
H1	PR → SC	0.747	0.010	Not supported
H2	AM → SC	0.180	-0.042	Not supported
H3	CH → SC	0.000	0.376	Supported
H4	CL → SC	0.000	0.282	Supported
H5	SA → SC	0.742	0.009	Not supported
H6	NL → SC	0.116	0.046	Not supported
H7	AE → SC	0.215	-0.033	Not supported

Squared multiple correlations: 0.262

Source: Authors' calculation

Considering the estimated coefficients, it is evident that the two independent variables, CH and CL, positively impact the dependent variable. With an estimate of 0.376, the CH variable has the most significant impact on the dependent variable, and the CL variable comes in second with an estimate of 0.282. Together, these two independent variables account for 26.2% of the variation in the dependent variable.

Based on the research results, only hypotheses H3 and H4 are accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that the higher the satisfaction of cultural and historical expectations, the greater the likelihood of choosing community-based tourism in the Central Highlands. Additionally, the higher the satisfaction with climate expectations, the greater the possibility of choosing community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

5. Discussion

This study examines the impact of various factors on the choice of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands, using expectancy theory as a theoretical framework. The SEM analysis yielded fascinating findings that enhance our understanding of the factors influencing visitor behavior in this environment.

Initially, the study examined the effect of several independent factors on the dependent variable, including price, amenities, activities and entertainment, safety, and the natural landscape. However, the study revealed that these characteristics had no significant impact on the choice of community-based tourism. As a result, these factors were omitted from further analysis. This conclusion implies that when selecting community-based tourism, visitors in the Central Highlands may prioritize other variables or have alternative concerns, which should be investigated further in future studies.

On the other hand, the analysis revealed that two independent variables, cultural and historical factors, and climate, exhibited a strong relationship with the dependent variable. The estimated coefficients indicated that both variables positively impacted the likelihood of selecting community-based tourism. Cultural and historical factors had the most significant influence, followed by climate factors.

The result is consistent with the Central Highlands' potential strengths (Ngoc, 2023). However, due to limited prior research on this issue in the Central Highlands region, the research findings represent a novel discovery that contributes to gaining an objective perspective from the tourism demand side. This helps enhance understanding of tourists' expectations regarding community-based tourism in the Central Highlands.

The findings suggest that tourists in the Central Highlands place considerable importance on satisfying their cultural and historical expectations when choosing community-based tourism. Efforts to preserve and promote the region's cultural heritage and historical significance can attract tourists interested in community-based tourism experiences. Similarly, satisfaction with climate expectations was found to be another crucial factor influencing the selection of community-based tourism. This highlights the importance of ensuring favorable climatic conditions and providing appropriate climate-related activities and experiences to attract potential tourists.

Various conclusions emerge when we compare these data to earlier research in Vietnam and worldwide. For example, Lang *et al.* (2023) discovered that cultural and historical elements influence visitors' choices to participate in community-based tourism in various parts of Vietnam. Richards and Hall (2000) found that cultural and historical attractions play a crucial role in developing community-based tourism in different global settings. These similarities

indicate that a focus on cultural and historical features is a standard variable in community-based tourism, which is consistent with our findings from the Central Highlands.

One potential explanation for these findings is that the Central Highlands region possesses unique characteristics that differentiate it from other locations where comparable studies have yielded different results. For instance, the region's distinct cultural heritage and climate may take precedence over other factors, such as pricing and facilities, which are typically more critical in different contexts. These results are consistent with previous studies that have emphasized the significance of cultural and environmental factors in shaping tourist behavior in unique regions (McKercher and Du Cros, 2002). Furthermore, this study provides new insights into the specific preferences of tourists in the Central Highlands, indicating that their demographic profile may have distinct tastes and priorities compared to tourists in other regions, thereby influencing the study's outcomes.

Tourism stakeholders, including policymakers, tour operators, and local communities, should focus on enhancing and promoting the Central Highlands' cultural and historical aspects. Investments in preserving cultural heritage sites, organizing cultural events, and developing educational programs about the region's history can attract culturally inclined tourists. Furthermore, ensuring favorable climate conditions and developing climate-adapted tourism activities can cater to visitors' climate preferences.

6. Conclusions

This study contributes to understanding the factors that influence the selection of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands region. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural and historical satisfaction and climate satisfaction in attracting tourists to community-based tourism experiences. These findings underscore the need to preserve the cultural and historical values of the Central Highlands region. Additionally, measures should be implemented to protect forests and landscapes to preserve the current cool and fresh climate. The research results can assist policymakers in conducting thorough research to formulate measures that preserve local cultural and historical values and sustain the current climate sufficiently to meet the expectations of both local residents and tourists. This, in turn, would contribute to fostering community tourism in the Central Highlands region.

It is important to acknowledge that while this study has shed light on the factors influencing the selection of community-based tourism in the Central Highlands region, it also has certain limitations. First, the study focused on a specific geographic area and may not be fully generalizable to other regions or contexts. Future research could explore similar topics in different regions to validate and extend the findings. Secondly, the data collection relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to response bias. Employing alternative methods, such as observational or experimental approaches, could provide additional insights and enhance the validity of the results. Moreover, this study examined a set of predetermined factors, and there may be other variables that were not considered but could influence the selection of community-based tourism. Further research is encouraged to explore additional variables and extend the findings to different regions, thereby advancing our knowledge in this field.

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