

Ethnic Tourism Activity Uniqueness Development: Karen Community, a Western Thailand Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the potential for developing the uniqueness of ethnic tourism activities, using the Karen ethnic community in Western Thailand as a case study. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews and a focus group for data collection. The data were analyzed using content analysis. A total of 20 participants were interviewed, and 10 participants took part in the focus group discussion. The findings highlight how the uniqueness of ethnic tourism activities can be developed, proposing six key components in activity experience design: authenticity, cultural landscape, sensory experience, knowledge acquisition, social interaction, and spiritual retreat.

Keywords: Ethnic Tourism, Ethnic activity uniqueness, Ethnic Lifestyle, Local culture experience design, Ethnic group in Thailand

Introduction

Tourists acquire lifelong memories and experiences to feel a sense of distinction from others, thereby fulfilling their sense of pride, which is considered an evolutionary foundation of human social interaction (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010). Ethnic tourism is one of the most crucial industries in ethnic communities, attracting tourists who seek exotic experiences (Lor, Kwa, & Donaldson, 2019; Yang & Li, 2011; Zhang, Xu, & Xing, 2017). The most commonly referenced type of ethnic tourism emphasizes the exotic dimension (King, 1994; Yang & Wall, 2016). It caters particularly to tourists who seek unique cultural experiences through visits to ethnic villages, engagement with local lifestyles, appreciation of artifacts and performances, sampling of traditional food, learning about historical narratives, and observing minority dwellings elements that evoke a strong sense of cultural identity (Yang & Li, 2011).

Especially, ethnic groups that maintain authentic cultures, traditional lifestyles, and distinct ways of life including beliefs and values often exist outside the mainstream society and its prevailing norms, which are typically shaped by modernity (Xie, 2010; Yang & Wall, 2009). The primary objective of ethnic tourism is to provide visitors with the opportunity to engage with the unique characteristics of both tangible and intangible traditional cultures, including ways of life, rituals, and customs (Tatiana & Denis, 2020). Consequently, the development of ethnic tourism has garnered considerable scholarly interest. Numerous studies have explored this topic in depth. For example, recent research has examined ethnic tourism in China, with a focus on the empowerment of Miao communities in Hunan Province, the role of tourism in enhancing the status of women in the Hui minority in Ningxia, and the preservation and everyday use of ethnic languages (Ai, Ma, & Liu, 2023; Borcoman & Sorea, 2023; Fan & Li, 2023; Su, Wall, Ma, Notarianni, & Wang, 2023; Tian, Stoffelen, & Vanclay, 2023). Other studies

have addressed the sustainable development of ethnic tourism (Borcoman & Sorea, 2023; Borgohain & Patowary, 2023), as well as tourist behavior related to the consumption of ethnic food and associated cultural experiences (Mawroh & Dixit, 2023). Additionally, research has explored minority residents' attitudes and emotional solidarity toward ethnic neighborhood tourism, along with the perceived impacts of ethnic tourism development (Borcoman & Sorea, 2023; Maruyama, Ribeiro, & Woosnam, 2023).

However, it has been found that the development of activity uniqueness is a key factor influencing tourists' intentions to visit or revisit a destination. Nevertheless, empirical studies focusing specifically on the authenticity of ethnic groups remain limited. Existing research on activity uniqueness has primarily centered on food tourism, such as Thai cooking classes, and on creative tourism, with an emphasis on tourist perspectives. (Ashton, Thosuwanjinda, & Phetsome, 2019; Thosuwanjinda & Ashton, 2016). Hence, addressing the existing research gap is essential for several reasons. First, promoting tourism in response to tourist demand is a key strategy for generating income and foreign exchange for ethnic communities, as it has become a powerful tool for reinforcing ethnic identity (Yang & Wall, 2016). Furthermore, the development of unique ethnic activities plays a vital role in creating meaningful and memorable visitor experiences.

Such development allows tourists to engage in authentic local experiences within communities that maintain traditional lifestyles such as festivals, performances, and other culturally significant activities which encompass both tangible and intangible heritage (Lemelin, Koster, & Youroukos, 2015; Samarathunga, 2019). Third, the preservation and sustainable transmission of cultural practices are supported through tourism that values the distinct ways of life passed down across generations (Tu & Zhang, 2020). This form of tourism serves not only as a means of heritage conservation but also as a vehicle for maintaining cultural identity life (Yang, Wall, & Smith, 2008). Finally, the growth of the ethnic tourism industry contributes to a strengthened sense of identity and ethnic pride (Esman, 1984). Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to enhance the development of unique ethnic tourism activity experiences, using the Karen ethnic community in western Thailand as a case study. To achieve this aim, the study sets out two main objectives: (1) to examine the potential of tourism resources and activities within the ethnic tourism destination, and (2) to develop memorable lifetime experiences through the creation of unique tourism activities in the ethnic context.

Tourism experience

A memorable experience defined as an event distinct from ordinary or routine occurrences—is often characterized by emotional intensity and its temporal and spatial uniqueness. Such experiences typically occur outside of familiar settings or commonly visited attractions (Packer & Ballantyne, 2002). The memorability of an experience can be influenced by various factors, including individual characteristics, situational contexts, physical environments, and elements of human interaction (Bodnár, 2019).

Furthermore, the formulation of the tourism experience construct within the integrative concept of tourism experience involves two transformative components: (1) the meta-concept and (2) the facilitation of core and peripheral experiences. The meta-concept refers to a strategic framework that incorporates a destination's positioning based on a comprehensive understanding of when, where, and how tourists seek deeper and more meaningful experiences. The second component, facilitation, encompasses both core and peripheral experiences. Core experiences consist of a combination of attractions, activities, and interactions that enable tourists to learn, acquire skills, and participate in creative domains. These may include structured programs and events, with storytelling playing a critical role in conveying values and enhancing the significance of the experience. Peripheral experiences are those designed to complement and support the realization of core experiences (Tussyadiah, 2014). The popular theory of the experience economy identifies four key realms of experience: entertainment,

education, esthetics, and escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Su, Long, Wall, & Jin, 2016). Entertainment experiences may include talk shows, concerts, magic performances, or traditional dance performances (Luo & Lam, 2017). Such experiences can be understood either as a subset of performing arts (Hughes, 2013) or as a form of tourism product designed to deliver unforgettable moments for participants (Pearce, 2008). In the context of ethnic tourism, entertainment also plays a significant role; ethnic entertainment typically refers to authentic and culturally embedded forms of performance art that reflect the values and heritage of local communities (Su et al., 2016; Wong, Lai, & Tao, 2019).

Educational experience: Nowadays, tourists travel not only for pleasure but also for educational purposes. They seek to learn more about other cultures and the historical background of destinations, as they believe such experiences promote self-understanding and a broader worldview (Roberson Jr, 2018). Educational experiences are intentionally designed to open the mind to learning and to reinforce knowledge related to a destination's history, art, cuisine, and culture (Tomasi, Paviotti, & Cavicchi, 2020). **Esthetic experience:** The concept of esthetic experience can be interpreted from various perspectives. When viewed subjectively, it is defined as a distinct mental state of perceiving and appreciating certain characteristics of an object for its own sake without the necessity of any accompanying emotional response (Shusterman, 2006, p. 219). **Escapism experience:** Healthy individuals often possess an inherent desire to escape seeking well-being and adventure, as life itself offers the potential to transcend constraints and limitations (Heilman, 1975, p. 443). Escapism can be conceptualized in several ways: as a form of distraction or relief from daily routines or reality, or as a retreat from the pressures of real life. It may involve severing ties to one's current environment or striving to be entirely free from any restrictions (Heilman, 1975). Research has shown that escapism provides significant hedonic value, particularly for international tourists, with the feeling of escape becoming even more profound when traveling abroad (Ponsignon, Lunardo, & Michrafy, 2021).

Ethnic tourism and the uniqueness theoretical foundation for this study

Ethnic tourism is considered a productive strategy for raising awareness of the concept of ethnic identity (Tatiana & Denis, 2020; Xie, 2010). *Ethnic identity* refers to inheritance, ancestry, place of origin, skin color, language, religion, or any combination of these factors (Umaña-Taylor, 2011; Xie, 2010). However, the development and promotion of ethnic tourism may involve four key tensions: (1) state regulation versus ethnic autonomy, (2) cultural exoticism versus modernity, (3) economic development versus cultural preservation, and (4) authenticity versus cultural commodification (Yang et al., 2008). The ethnic tourism experience encompasses six dimensions: authenticity, cultural landscape, sensory engagement, knowledge acquisition, social interaction, and spiritual retreat.

First, an authentic experience involves the provision of tourism products and activities that allow tourists to observe and interact with people whose way of life differs significantly from their own (Petroman et al., 2011; Xie, 2010). It is believed that ethnicity contributes to authenticity by offering immersion in both cultural and physical environments. This pursuit of environmental and experiential quality enables tourists to experience novelty and uniqueness as a central part of ethnic tourism (Li, 2000). Authenticity in ethnic tourism is often utilized as a form of national representation. For instance, the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China, featured performances by children dressed in elaborate costumes representing China's various ethnic groups. This display served as a prominent example of cultural identity being showcased to the world (Xie, 2010).

Second, cultural landscape experience refers to the visual and spatial characteristics of a destination, including both natural and cultural scenery, which together reflect national or regional uniqueness (Wong et al., 2019). Alternatively, a cultural landscape can be seen as the environmental setting in which local people engage in daily activities. It is shaped by ethnic traditions and involves social and religious practices that serve as resources to attract tourists. Hence, the cultural landscape represents a link between religious traditions and environmental elements. It demonstrates how traditional roles can accommodate tourism activities while maintaining harmony within the destination (Adhika & Putra, 2020).

Third, sensory experience plays a significant role in human life and has been the subject of philosophical reflection for centuries (Meacci & Liberatore, 2018). The five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—form a hierarchy of perception that humans use to interpret the world (Kolbeneva & Alexandrov, 2016). Sensory experiences arise from various stimuli, including: Visual stimuli such as form, color, dimension, lighting, transparency, design, image, and style; Auditory stimuli such as sound, tonality, rhythm, and melody; Olfactory stimuli such as natural and artificial smells and aromas; Gustatory stimuli such as taste, flavor, and gastronomy; Tactile stimuli such as texture, hardness, elasticity, temperature, pressure, and comfort (Dițoiu & Căruntu, 2014).

Fourth, social interaction experience refers to instances in which tourists engage with the living culture of ethnic communities during their travels (Su et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2019). As noted, successful ethnic tourism development is shaped by interactions between visitors and local residents (Wang, Shen, & Ye, 2020). For example, villagers often invite tourists into their homes to share local cuisine, or offer overnight stays that allow visitors to experience daily routines—referred to as host–guest interactions (Lor et al., 2019). However, while such interactions can lead to positive outcomes, they may also produce challenges. Tourists may seek genuine social engagement, while some hosts may feel uncomfortable or uncertain about how to respond to visitor preferences, especially when tourism products reflect sensitive cultural elements (Moscardo & Pearce, 1999). Social interaction experiences may also be shaped by the customs and boundaries of particular ethnic groups, such as cultural restrictions and social distancing norms. Respect for these boundaries is essential. For instance, Aboriginal communities in Australia receive training and education about tourism dynamics, which helps them offer warm hospitality and demonstrate friendliness toward visitors (Ryan & Aicken, 2005).

Fifth, knowledge experience is understood as a form of justified true belief and is sometimes referred to as *epistemic value*, which can be generated through the transformation of experience (Tarrant & Lyons, 2012). Epistemic value refers to the acquisition of new knowledge and the stimulation of curiosity related to nature, culture, landscapes, and belief systems—offered through tourism, service providers, or the host destination (Pritchard, 2009). Typical tourists consistently seek fresh information to satisfy their needs and curiosities when traveling to a destination (Ashton et al., 2019). These experiences may result in short-term memories for the perceiver (Sylvan, 2020). Hence, epistemic experiences can arise from content properties, factual knowledge, phenomenal evidence, and the relationship between perceptual content and belief (Byrne, 2016).

Sixth, spiritual experience is considered more fundamental than religiosity and is associated with transcendent values and the way individuals find meaning and purpose in life (Chan, 2018). In the context of ethnic tourism, spiritual experience reflects the correlation between ethnic culture and religion (Chistyakova, 2020). Importantly, ethnic tourism also aims to revive historical and religious heritage. It encompasses the emergence and development of philosophical and ethical values, religious teachings, and the traditions of specific ethnic groups. From this perspective, spiritual experience is

manifested through artifacts of art, architecture, Christian iconography, temple paintings, and mosque mosaics.

Uniqueness concept

Uniqueness gives a compelling reason for the tourist to select the particular destination or participate in a tourism activity (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Likewise, destination branding is a way to communicate a destination's unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitor's development and is influenced by brand associations, including cognitive, affective, and uniqueness image (Qu et al., 2011). The uniqueness of a destination refers to something different from, or unique in comparison to, other competing destinations and is perceived by visitors. (Jun, 2016; Netemeyer et al., 2004). The uniqueness destination variable measurement can use four variables of brand theory: produced in a different way, unique, stands out, and distinct in comparison to other cities or areas (Netemeyer et al., 2004).

Unique image is highlighted as a construct that reflects the overall image of a destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The unique destination image attributes can be measured based on the characteristics of native people, and natural environment - for instance, culture, friendly and helpful local people, scenery and natural wonders, restful and relaxing atmosphere, and clean environment (Qu et al., 2011). Second, appealing destination, such as appealing as a travel destination, having entertainment or nightlife, a wide choice of outdoor activities, shopping, and a safe and secure environment. Furthermore, local attractions, for instance lots of tourist attractions and cultural/historical attractions (Qu et al., 2011). On the other hand, activity uniqueness development has been explored, and activity uniqueness is about people's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral response to information (Ashton et al., 2019; Thosuwanjinda & Ashton, 2016). For example, the activity uniqueness development for food tourism model comprises three components: first, it must be innovative, referring to creative activity, which gives tourists a great lifetime experience and value. Second, positive distinctive activity refers to authenticity, leaving society and norms. Third, the activity gives one the five senses, i.e. vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch (Thosuwanjinda & Ashton, 2016).

In summary, the ethnic tourism and uniqueness theory comprises several similar concepts; for instance, ethnic identities refer to inheritance, ancestry, and a combination of place of origin, skin color, language, and religion. Hence, as discussed above, the relevant main concepts for the study of ethnic tourism uniqueness will focus on six components: authenticity, cultural landscape, sensory, social, knowledge, and spiritual.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used, and the data collection process employed face-to-face interviews and the focus group technique. The advantage of using face-to-face interviews is that the process can help achieve a better understanding and elicit deeper information from people's opinions (Books, 1997). Hence, the researchers interviewed participants to gather their opinions on historical identity, traditions, and local lifestyles at the ethnic tourism destination. The focus group technique was designed to obtain quality data and knowledge concerning individuals' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and opinions. (Books, 1997). Hence, the researchers interviewed participants to find their opinion on historical identity, traditions, and local lifestyles at the ethnic tourism destination. The focus group technique was designed to obtain quality data and knowledge concerning individuals' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and opinions (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998). The participants were selected based on their roles as stakeholders involved in ethnic tourism activities within the community.

These included community committee members, local administrators, community-based tourism operators, local guides, and representatives from the government tourism sector.

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which is recognized as an effective technique, particularly within qualitative research frameworks. Individual interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, while focus group discussions were conducted in the local village and lasted approximately two hours. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews and focus group discussions. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. All data were treated with strict confidentiality and were accessible only to the researchers, to be used solely for purposes aligned with the objectives of the study.

Participant's Profile

A total of 20 participants were interviewed, 12 were males and 8 females, age between 33 and 77 years old. Some of them were working in the government, including CEO of the subdistrict, Chief village, farmers, community members, and academician, business owner, and local tour guides. A total of 10 participants for focus group, and age range between 38 and 62 years old. The participants' career, such as researcher/academics, Chief administrator of the region, CEO, sport tourism officer, Chief village, Camping entrepreneurs, local resort entrepreneur, and community director.

Results

The main aim of this study is to enhance ethnic tourism activity uniqueness experience development, using the Karen ethnic community in western Thailand as a case study. To achieve this aim, two research objectives were formulated. The first is to examine the potential of tourism resources and activities within the ethnic tourism destination that can be developed. The second is to create memorable lifetime experiences based on the unique resources and activities available at the destination. The results are presented below.

The potential of the unique resources and activity within the ethnic community

The first research objective seeks to identify the potential tourism resources and activities that can be developed within the ethnic community. The overall findings can be categorized into three main groups: historical identity, traditional local lifestyle, and destination image uniqueness.

First, regarding historical identity and destination attractions: for example, this village has become well known for its legends and community history, particularly due to a visit by the late King Rama IX. The late king left many legacies to the people in this area. According to participants, King Rama IX found the village and its surroundings remarkable and declared that the area should be preserved and well-protected.

Abundant in natural resources, the landscape is rich with forests, green trees, and high mountains, through which a major river flows, providing life to the region. Since the king's visit, the village has become a legendary site and has evolved into a spiritual center. It holds a special place in the hearts of the villagers—a place where they feel protected and proud. The findings also revealed that the village is considered highly authentic and maintains a well-preserved cultural landscape.

In addition, the community established the King Rama IX Museum to preserve his personal belongings, such as the equipment he used and the items he possessed during his visit to the village. King Rama IX is regarded as one of the greatest monarchs of Thailand; therefore, his visit and the establishment of the

museum have become significant aspects of the village's history. Tourists can visit the museum to learn about this history. For example, one participant said:

I was one of the villagers who had the honor of meeting the late King Rama IX when he visited our community. I received a school uniform from him, and the school itself was built with funding from the King. He traveled here with the Queen, and their visit became a significant part of our village's history. They visited our community and planted a tree to commemorate the occasion. The King also gave us a royal token as a symbol of his morality, love, and care, which remains an anchor in our hearts" [ID 8]

Second, regarding traditional local lifestyles, it was found that many interesting traditions are still practiced and can be demonstrated to provide visiting tourists with enriching learning experiences and lasting memories. These activities include elements of the ethnic group's own culture, traditions, festivals, and certain spiritual beliefs associated with sacred places. The community maintains its own unique customs and festivals, many of which involve merit-making practices rooted in their spiritual beliefs. For example, the "Kao Ho Karen" tradition is a time when every family pays respect to the memory of their ancestors as an expression of gratitude. Additionally, certain ceremonies held at sacred sites serve as a form of spiritual retreat for villagers. Tourists are welcome to participate in these rituals if they feel connected to or respectful of the local beliefs. The use of traditional ethnic musical instruments reflects the community's artistic craftsmanship, producing beautiful and captivating sounds. These instruments are performed by skilled local musicians, allowing tourists to relax and enjoy the music, which also serves as a form of sound healing for both visitors and residents.

Moreover, the community preserves aspects of its authentic lifestyle through demonstrations of traditional hunting practices. In the past, villagers used handmade archery equipment for food gathering. Although hunting is no longer practiced, these tools have been adapted for cultural demonstration purposes, allowing tourists to learn how villagers once sustained themselves.

It was found that the community offers traditional crafts for sale to tourists. These include ethnic-style weaving and handmade embroidered fabrics that reflect the unique characteristics of their traditional clothing. Traditional local food is also presented to tourists, prepared using distinctive recipes and local ingredients that are rarely found in other areas.

For example, a participant stated:

"We have very delicious fermented fish. It's very popular, and the way we cook it using raw ingredients cannot be found anywhere else—only in this village. The taste is very hot and spicy due to the use of Karen chilies, which are well known as the hottest of all chilies." [ID 18, 20]

As for desserts, the community prepares simple yet unique options using ingredients gathered from nearby farms and rice fields. For instance, some desserts are made with sesame as the main ingredient, which is abundant in the local environment. Certain foods and desserts are seasonal, making them especially valuable and distinctive. The community also possesses a rich natural and cultural landscape. It was observed that the ethnic group maintains a harmonious way of life with nature and continues to live happily without reliance on modern lifestyles.

One of the most important resources with potential for development is the creation of tour routes, enabling tourists to experience and learn about the village's history. Storytelling plays a key role in shaping an engaging narrative that highlights unique destination attractions—such as lush green forests, waterfalls, rivers, mountains, and especially the legacy of King Rama IX. These stories emphasize themes of environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, traditional lifestyles, and local cuisine made with region-specific ingredients. In particular, the stories recount the contributions of King Rama IX and the developments he initiated for this ethnic community. A boat trip along the river is one of the enjoyable activities, during which tourists can listen to these stories while appreciating the surrounding natural scenery.

Thus, based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that this approach is one of the most effective strategies for promoting both cultural and environmental sustainability. Developing such unique attractions not only enriches tourist experiences but also helps preserve and promote sustainable ethnic culture.

How to develop an ethnic tourism destination for unique activity experience

The findings from the second research objective revealed that, in order to create a memorable lifetime experience through the development of unique activities at an ethnic tourism destination, clear implementation strategies must be established. The results indicated that local residents present unique activities that reflect their traditional way of life, incorporating fascinating customs and authentic tourism products for visitors. For example, the village showcases local festivals, traditional ceremonies, and captivating performances such as folk dances that are both original and distinctive—experiences that can only be found in this particular village [ID10].

Likewise, Netemeyer et al. (2004) asserted, the development of original or authentic activities must be rare, deviate from societal norms, stand out, and be clearly distinct in comparison to other places. However, contradictions between tourism activity development and cultural preservation—as well as between cultural exoticism and modernity—tend to intensify in the context of ethnic tourism. Therefore, such developments should not be influenced by modern lifestyles or follow contemporary trends. For example, the design of housing and architectural styles should not be altered to reflect modern aesthetics but should instead retain traditional forms. Otherwise, the community's cultural identity may be lost, potentially resulting in a decline in tourist interest and visitation. Similarly, a study conducted by Tuntates, Tuntates, and Chittasutthiyan (2019) found that the way of life of the Kayan ethnic group has changed over time. As a result, local governments and tourism authorities have encouraged the preservation of their identity by supporting income generation and promoting their annual traditional ceremonies.

Moreover, the results revealed that tourists gain experiences from cultural landscapes characterized by the unique culture, history, and spiritual practices of the ethnic group. For example, some sacred places were identified—especially those where locals go to worship, seek blessings, find relief from suffering, or seek spiritual protection for the soul [ID9, ID10]. Further findings indicated that participants described activities that allow tourists to engage all five senses. For instance, tourists can participate in local festivals that involve traditional ethnic food. Through such activities, tourists encounter a multi-sensory experience, particularly in festivals that feature ethnic cuisine. These experiences include the taste and texture of food, the aroma of special dishes, and the visual presentation of ingredients and cooking methods. Tourists observe distinct cooking styles, unique dishes, and a wide variety of local ingredients, as well as the ways in which food is decorated and presented. These interactions provide visitors with new knowledge and insights that differ from their usual daily routines [ID18, UD16].

Tourists can also actively participate in cultural activities such as watching traditional performances, folk dances, and folk games. For example, one folk game involves the use of traditional hunting equipment that was historically used by the tribe. Today, the game has become part of a storytelling tradition and is considered a village legend. Through this activity, tourists are invited to try the equipment and experience how it was traditionally used for hunting food [ID5, ID6, ID10].

Finally, in addition to tangible activities, intangible cultural experiences also contribute meaningfully to tourist engagement. One participant stated that in their community, sacred places still exist, and during traditional merit-making ceremonies, tourists are invited to join—if they are willing. This participation can lead to emotional and spiritual experiences. After worshipping at these spiritual sites, tourists may feel a sense of peace, blessing, or even spiritual protection believed to be granted by the sacred forces in which the locals have deep faith [ID2, ID20].

Conclusion and contribution of the study

The emergence of ethnic tourism has been regarded by many as a mixed blessing for host communities. In particular, the benefits and sense of pride felt by hosts who possess and practice their authentic culture coexist with the ongoing development of tourism. The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the process begins with the identification of ethnic characteristics within tourism activities, as well as the production and consumption of ethnic tourism resources and traditional ways of life. This approach allows for the careful selection of culturally significant elements that represent the village's ethnic diversity—particularly its unique historical identity, traditional local lifestyle, and destination image. The evidence from the study suggests that developing unique ethnic tourism activities contributes valuable insights to destination planning. This study thus provides a theoretical foundation for the development of ethnic tourism activity uniqueness experiences. Ethnic tourism activity development must take into account six key components to create memorable, lifetime experiences: (1) authenticity, (2) cultural landscape, (3) sensory experiences, (4) social interaction, (5) knowledge, and (6) spiritual experiences. First, authentic experience: This refers to providing activities based on original cultural practices, beliefs, and values maintained by local communities. The long-term conservation of authentic and genuine culture is essential. Ethnic hosts should avoid incorporating modern influences into tourism development designs. Moreover, ethnic communities must refrain from adopting modern living facilities especially for the younger generation, who may sometimes be reluctant to wear traditional clothing. Therefore, government support and encouragement are necessary to help preserve and promote cultural identity (Tuntates et al., 2019) .

Second, cultural landscape refers to the ethnic community's sense of place from both physical and emotional perspectives. The cultural landscape of a destination conveys a strong historical and geographical identity and incorporates the spiritual practices of the ethnic group. It can be developed through the integration of natural elements and human-made structures, particularly in relation to spiritual retreat activities. This includes the establishment of sacred and ceremonial zones where tourists can respectfully participate during local spiritual ceremonies or merit-making events. As supported by Adhika and Putra (2020), the cultural landscape encompasses social life and religious practices, which contribute to maintaining emotional and mental well-being. Participation in these spiritual performances fosters a sense of peace, spiritual protection, and a blessed life.

Third, the five-senses experience plays a vital role in tourism, as it contributes not only to tangible but also to intangible experiences, creating positive and lasting memories. A well-designed five-senses experience in ethnic tourism—such as ethnic food activities—includes learning to cook, tasting traditional dishes, seeing colorful and aesthetically presented food, smelling unique aromas, touching ingredients or utensils, and hearing sounds during food preparation. This is supported by Meacci and Liberatore (2018).

Fourth, social interaction experience involves engaging directly with locals, such as being invited into their homes or participating in overnight stays, where tourists can share ethnic meals and observe daily routines. Wang et al. (2020) contended that successful ethnic tourism development is shaped by meaningful interactions between visitors and residents.

Fifth, knowledge experience is an essential aspect of tourist satisfaction when visiting ethnic destinations. For example, learning about the village's historical background—especially the visit of a prominent national figure such as King Rama IX—can enhance tourist interest. His contributions to infrastructure development and environmental conservation have made the destination well known. Ashton et al. (2019) also noted that typical tourists often seek new knowledge to satisfy their curiosity and enrich their travel experiences.

Sixth, spiritual experience is deeply rooted in sacred places that are often central to ethnic communities. Therefore, the village should maintain spiritual and sacred zones, which serve as venues for merit-making and religious worship to support spiritual well-being. Chan (2018) proposed that spiritual experiences are connected to transcendent values and the search for life purpose, while (Chistyakova, 2020). emphasized the link between ethnic culture and religious traditions.

For the managerial contribution, Relevant stakeholders must collaborate closely to preserve place identity, ensuring authenticity and sustainability. One of the key attractions in ethnic tourism lies in the distinct lifestyle of minority communities—how they differ from the modern world. To maintain authenticity, it is essential that modern influences do not compromise ethnic cultures, traditions, customs, or ways of life. The most critical guideline for preserving this identity is the active involvement of government and local authorities. These entities must provide encouragement, support, and promotion of authentic cultural practices, festivals, and traditional lifestyles.

Future research and limitation

This study encountered several limitations, particularly during the data collection process, such as recruiting participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Villagers were generally hesitant to provide interviews, as they tend not to trust individuals from outside the community. By nature, the villagers live private and somewhat isolated lives, and they are typically willing to engage only when referred by the village chief. To address this, the researchers approached the village chief with an official letter introducing themselves and explaining the purpose of the research project. Upon receiving permission, the villagers were informed about the research objectives and the reason for collecting data through interviews. The village chief assisted in identifying suitable participants and relevant stakeholders for both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. For future research, studies could be conducted to examine tourists' intentions to revisit the destination, using quantitative methods such as surveys. These should target both domestic and international tourists to assess their experiences related to activity uniqueness. In addition, this study did not explore aspects related to tourism marketing, cultural destination branding, or service quality development—areas that future studies may consider addressing to further enrich the body of knowledge in ethnic tourism research.

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