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## Destination authenticity: Investigating the mediating role of tourist satisfaction and loyalty

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### Abstract

West Sumatra's tourism sector underperforms economically despite its rich cultural and natural heritage. This study investigates the influence of destination authenticity on tourist satisfaction and loyalty, with satisfaction serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative survey of 620 respondents from six prominent tourist sites was executed utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Partial Least Squares (PLS). Indicators were evaluated for validity, reliability, and their causal linkages. The results indicate that destination authenticity has a substantial impact on tourist satisfaction ( $p < 0.000$ ) and loyalty ( $p < 0.026$ ), with satisfaction serving as a mediator in this relationship. Genuine experiences, including participation in cultural customs, distinctive local architecture, and community engagement, augment satisfaction, resulting in heightened tourist loyalty. While tourist satisfaction demonstrated moderate predictive relevance, tourist loyalty showed stronger explanatory power. The study identifies destination authenticity as a crucial factor in sustainable tourism development. Authenticity not only creates emotional connections but also promotes repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Nonetheless, deficiencies in assessing satisfaction and the influence of demographic variables persist as avenues for future investigation. The research underscores the strategic significance of cultural authenticity in bolstering competitiveness and sustainability in tourism. Policymakers and stakeholders are encouraged to safeguard and enhance genuine aspects through immersive cultural experiences and sustainable destination management. This strategy will enhance tourist happiness, bolster loyalty, and promote economic growth while safeguarding cultural heritage in a competitive global tourism environment.

**Keywords:** Authentic tourism experience, Destination authenticity, Mediating role, Tourist loyalty, Tourist satisfaction.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism has become an essential sector in promoting regional economic development; nevertheless, its potential remains inadequately harnessed in some areas, such as West Sumatra. Notwithstanding its increasing allure as a tourist destination, West Sumatra's tourism sector accounts for about 1.15% of the regional GDP (PDRB) in 2023, much below the national average. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of [BPS \[1\]](#), the province ranks seventh among ten provinces in Sumatra, indicating a deficiency in utilizing its natural and cultural resources to enhance economic sustainability. Bangka Belitung distinctly dominates the area, highlighting variations in tourist competitiveness among regions.

The distinctive amalgamation of natural splendor and cultural legacy in West Sumatra has drawn an increasing influx of visitors, with tourist arrivals rising from 8,169,147 in 2019 to 11,234,179 in 2023 [\[2\]](#). Nonetheless, this expansion is marked by considerable volatility from 2019 to 2023, primarily attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a significant drop of 40.49% in 2021. This volatility highlights the essential requirement for effective tactics to maintain tourist loyalty in the face of global and regional issues. Authenticity, as a fundamental characteristic of tourism destinations, has been recognized as a crucial factor affecting tourist satisfaction and loyalty [\[3, 4\]](#).

This study seeks to investigate the impact of destination authenticity on tourist contentment and loyalty, along with the mediating effect of satisfaction in this dynamic. The research is driven by the minimal economic impact of West Sumatra's tourism sector in comparison to its huge potential, highlighting a significant research deficiency in comprehending how destination authenticity might foster competitive advantages. Previous research (e.g., [\[3, 4\]](#)) has highlighted the influence of authenticity on satisfaction and loyalty; nonetheless, their disjointed methodologies create an opportunity for a comprehensive model that consolidates these variables into a unified framework.

In West Sumatra, the authenticity of tourism destinations is crucial for fostering tourist loyalty. This is evident in the well-preserved cultural elements, including the traditional Rumah Gadang, ceremonial practices, and Minangkabau traditional dance arts. Studies demonstrate that authenticity in cultural heritage tourism includes objective, constructive, and existential components [\[4, 5\]](#). In West Sumatra, tourists can encounter genuine authenticity through the architecture of Rumah Gadang and traditions transmitted over centuries. Participation in local cultural activities, such as learning Tari Piring or observing Pacu Jawi, enhances the perception of the destination's authenticity [\[6, 7\]](#). Consequently, it is imperative to undertake additional research on how these aspects of authenticity influence tourist pleasure and loyalty, thereby ensuring effective tourism management in West Sumatra executed with greater sustainability.

This research introduces a comprehensive conceptual model that identifies location authenticity as a strategic factor influencing tourist satisfaction and loyalty, thereby filling gaps in the current literature. This study employs a multistage random sampling strategy, thus improving the generalizability of its findings in contrast to prior research that utilized less representative sampling techniques, such as purposive or convenience sampling. Moreover, it expands upon fundamental theories (e.g., [\[8, 9\]](#)) by emphasizing the strategic significance of authenticity in promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Theoretically, it enhances tourist literature by providing a cohesive paradigm that links authenticity, satisfaction, and loyalty [\[10, 11\]](#). The findings offer practical insights for destination managers and local governments to design policies that leverage cultural and environmental authenticity, thus augmenting destination attractiveness. From a policy standpoint, the research advocates for the establishment of sustainable tourist policies that not only encourage environmental conservation but also enhance employment generation and foreign exchange revenue [\[6, 12\]](#). This study highlights the strategic importance of destination authenticity in attaining sustainable economic growth and safeguarding local history. By integrating theoretical and practical aspects, it aids in the formulation of a sustainable tourism model that corresponds with global trends and local ambitions.

## 2. Theoretical Review

### 2.1. Authentic Destination

Destination authenticity denotes the true portrayal and experience of a location's cultural, historical, and social characteristics, aligning with tourists' expectations for significant interaction. Authenticity entails safeguarding local traditions, customs, and legacy, ensuring that tourism activities embody the destination's genuine character rather than a commodified representation. Cultural events like the Voodoo festivals in Haiti are emphasized as a method to augment destination authenticity, exhibiting distinctive cultural characteristics while offering economic advantages to the local community [Seraphin and Gowreesunkar \[13\]](#). [Wachyuni, et al. \[14\]](#) similarly underscore the significance of authenticity in culinary tourism, examining tourists' perceptions of original versus altered cuisine experiences and the impact of these impressions on tourist satisfaction and involvement.

The notion of authenticity is congruent with tourism branding efforts [\[15\]](#) and characterizes authenticity as the distinctive traits and experiences that define a destination, drawing visitors in search of authentic cultural engagements. It further exemplifies how authenticity functions as a fundamental component for efficient tourism management, augmenting competitive advantages for locations [\[16\]](#). Destination authenticity encompasses objective, productive, and existential components. Objective authenticity pertains to concrete cultural relics, including the architectural legacy of "rumah gadang" in West Sumatra. Constructive authenticity pertains to the interpretation of local traditions via visitor engagement, whereas existential authenticity concerns personal experiences and emotional connections [\[4\]](#). Furthermore, participatory cultural activities, such as traditional dance workshops, can substantially elevate tourists' perceptions of authenticity [\[6\]](#).

In emerging nations, safeguarding cultural authenticity is essential for fostering national pride and enticing international tourists [\[7\]](#). Furthermore, the function of destination authenticity promotes sustainable tourism practices by prioritizing the conservation of cultural and natural heritage [\[12\]](#). These findings emphasize the necessity of incorporating authenticity into destination management frameworks to attain long-term sustainability and improved tourist experiences visitor Allegiance.

## **2.2. Tourist Loyalty**

Tourist loyalty denotes the inclination of holidaymakers to repeatedly select a specific individual select a destination for their experiences based on their happiness from prior visits and the perceived value of the location. This is evident in behaviors including return visitation, favorable word-of-mouth endorsements, and emotional attachments to the destination [17]. This loyalty is influenced by multiple aspects, including service quality, distinctive experiences, and tourists' cognitive evaluations of the destination's image. Effective destination management strategies should prioritize the enhancement of tourist pleasure to cultivate long-term loyalty, since favorable experiences are crucial in promoting a commitment to revisit or endorse the location [18].

The local culture and experiences substantially enhance tourist loyalty. Unique aspects, such as local cuisine offerings, have been recognized as significant factors influencing favorable tourist experiences, enhancing emotional connections with the site and promoting return visits [19]. Loyalty is further solidified by attitudinal and behavioral characteristics, with attitudinal loyalty signifying a psychological attachment to the location, while behavioral loyalty includes activities such as revisitation [20]. Ultimately, providing high-quality, genuine experiences customized to guests' expectations is crucial for ensuring return visitation, maintaining competitive advantages, and fostering long-term success of tourist destinations.

## **2.3. Tourist Satisfaction**

Tourist satisfaction denotes the comprehensive contentment and fulfillment attained by travelers when their expectations are met or surpassed during a journey. It is a pivotal element in tourism, affecting repeat visits and market share of destinations [21]. Given that tourism is service-oriented, assuring customer happiness is crucial for competitiveness, with customer experience (CX) being a critical factor, especially in online visitor attractions [22]. Satisfaction mediates the relationship among tourism quality, perceived value, and loyalty, underscoring its significance in cultivating enduring ties with visitors [23]. Satisfaction includes service quality, distinctive experiences, and overall enjoyment, indicating a favorable assessment of a destination's offers [24]. Premium tourism offerings that meet visitor expectations substantially improve satisfaction and foster loyalty [25]. To achieve sustainable success, destination managers must prioritize enhancing service quality and customizing experiences to guarantee favorable and memorable visitor interactions.

## **2.4. The Correlation Among Destination Authenticity, Tourist Satisfaction, and Tourist Loyalty**

The relationship among destination authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty is a critical area of study in tourism research. Destination authenticity, characterized as the genuine the depiction of cultural, historical, and social characteristics is crucial in influencing tourists' impressions and overall pleasure [13]. Genuine destinations offer distinctive and significant experiences that appeal with visitors, satisfying their yearning for deep and authentic cultural encounters. Such experiences frequently result in elevated satisfaction levels, as tourists like sites that correspond with their expectations for originality and distinctiveness [14].

Tourist satisfaction functions as a mediation variable between destination authenticity and fidelity. When tourists regard a site as authentic and their experiences match or beyond expectations, they are more inclined to establish an emotional bond, cultivating a sense of loyalty [15]. This loyalty is manifested in actions such as repeated visits and favorable word-of-mouth endorsements [16]. Moreover, research indicates that authenticity-driven satisfaction enhances both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty by fostering memorable experiences that tourists are enthusiastic to recreate or share [7]. Consequently, including authenticity into destination management plans is crucial for improving tourist happiness and fostering long-term loyalty, thereby maintaining competitive advantages and sustainable growth in the tourism industry.

## **3. Research Method**

This study employs a causal research methodology to examine the links and influences of variables pertaining to visitor satisfaction and loyalty in West Sumatra. A quantitative survey method was employed, utilizing standardized questionnaires for the empirical testing of hypotheses. This method facilitates comprehensive statistical examination of the interrelations among variables. The research population comprises tourists visiting West Sumatra from August to November 2024. The minimum sample size, estimated using Hair, et al. [26] formula, was determined to be 620 respondents, based on 62 indicators. A multistage sample technique was employed, concentrating on six regions with over one million yearly visits (e.g., Padang, Pariaman, Bukittinggi), as per the 2024 Sumatera Barat Statistical Report. This methodology guaranteed representative coverage throughout the study region. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire administered to tourists who visited West Sumatra a minimum of twice throughout the study period. The questionnaire, constructed with validated scales, utilized a five-point Likert scale to assess perceptions and attitudes. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS), utilizing Smart-PLS software. This method was selected for its capacity to model intricate interactions among latent variables while maintaining predicted accuracy and dependability.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Analysis**

Prior to hypothesis testing, an assessment of the reflective measurement model is performed to validate the manifest variables (indicators) and constructs that can be subsequently examined. The initial examination entails examining the loading factor, which signifies the intensity of the association between the manifest variable and its latent counterpart. Hair, et al. [27] assert that a reflective indication must be eliminated from the measurement model when the loading value ( $\lambda$ ) is less than 0.5, subsequent to which the model is recalibrated. If the loading value ( $\lambda$ ) exceeds 0.5, the indicator is deemed genuine.

Indicators with elevated loading factors significantly contribute to elucidating their latent variables. In contrast, indicators with low loading factors contribute minimally to the explanation of their hidden variables. The loading value ( $\lambda$ ) is presented in [Table 1](#):

**Table 1.**  
Loading factor of the variables.

Exogenous variable	Loading factor		
	Destination authenticity	Tourist satisfaction	Tourist loyalty
1	0.981	0.708	0.988
2	0.954	0.733	0.991
3	0.982	0.763	0.989
4	0.978	0.773	0.943
5	0.984	0.811	0.974
6	0.978	0.789	0.988
7	0.963	0.708	0.990
8	0.955		0.987
9	0.956		0.988
10	0.946		

The loading factor table for the exogenous variables Destination Authenticity and Tourist Loyalty reveals high reliability, as evidenced by consistently strong loading factor values exceeding 0.9, signifying substantial contributions from their respective indicators. Conversely, Tourist Satisfaction demonstrates lower loading factor values (0.708–0.811), indicating a necessity for enhancement in its indicators. Moreover, markers 8, 9, and 10 exhibit absent loading factor values for Tourist Satisfaction, indicating a deficiency in the measurement of the construct. Prospective research should concentrate on enhancing the indicators for Tourist Satisfaction, rectifying the absent indicators, and investigating the influence of construct strength on causal links among variables to establish a more comprehensive and valid model.

Convergent validity evaluates the extent to which a construct explains the variance in its related elements. A widely utilized statistic for assessing convergent validity is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An AVE value of 0.50 or above is typically regarded as the minimum acceptable threshold, indicating that the construct accounts for at least 50 percent of the variance in its components. The outcomes of the convergent validity analysis yielded the following results.

**Table 2.**  
Convergent validity test results.

Variable	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Destination authenticity	0.937
Tourist satisfaction	0.583
Tourist loyalty	0.965

The convergent validity assessment indicates that Destination Authenticity (AVE: 0.937) and Tourist Loyalty (AVE: 0.965) exhibit robust validity, while Tourist Satisfaction (AVE: 0.583) meets the minimum criterion but shows smaller indicator contributions. This gap suggests possible issues in the assessment of Tourist Satisfaction. Subsequent studies should enhance its indicators, rectify the discrepancies in AVE values, and assess construct linkages to ensure model robustness. Three prevalent methodologies were employed to evaluate discriminant validity: the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, cross-loadings, and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. HTMT was shown to be the most reliable procedure. All HTMT values in this analysis were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, thereby confirming discriminant validity. Consequently, HTMT was used to assess discriminant validity; [Table 3](#) summarizes the results.

**Table 3.**  
Discriminant validity test result.

	Destination authenticity	Tourist satisfaction	Tourist loyalty
Destination authenticity			
Tourist satisfaction	0.363		
Tourist loyalty	0.259	0.567	0.172

The discriminant validity assessment verifies that all constructs are distinct, with correlations below 0.7. Destination Authenticity exhibits mild associations with Tourist Satisfaction (0.363) and Tourist Loyalty (0.259), whereas Tourist Satisfaction demonstrates a moderate correlation with Tourist Loyalty (0.567). The tenuous direct correlation between Destination Authenticity and Tourist Loyalty indicates a possible mediating effect of Tourist Satisfaction, necessitating further investigation through structural equation modeling (SEM) and mediating factors to elucidate these associations.

**Table 4.**

Composite reliability test results.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Destination authenticity	0.993	0.978
Tourist satisfaction	0.857	0.997
Tourist loyalty	0.995	0.986

The composite reliability analysis demonstrates robust internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Specifically, Destination Authenticity exhibits exceptional reliability ( $\alpha = 0.993$ , CR = 0.978), while Tourist Satisfaction ( $\alpha = 0.857$ , CR = 0.997) and Tourist Loyalty ( $\alpha = 0.995$ , CR = 0.986) also achieve high reliability standards. These findings validate the measurement model's reliability, supporting its suitability for structural analysis. However, a potential research gap lies in exploring whether this reliability holds across diverse cultural contexts or alternative tourism segments, where construct reliability might vary due to differing perceptions of authenticity, satisfaction, and loyalty. Addressing this gap can enhance the generalizability of the findings.

The R-squared quantifies the extent to which variation in endogenous variables is elucidated by external variables, indicating their aggregate contribution. R-squared results are categorized as strong (0.67), moderate (0.33), and weak (0.19). This study evaluates R-squared concerning factors such as institutions, education, community engagement, resource usage, and poverty. Furthermore, it assesses Stone-Geisser's predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) to authenticate the model, with  $Q^2$  values exceeding zero signifying substantial predictive capability.

**Table 5.**

Analysis of the inner model.

Variable	R square	Q square
Tourist Satisfaction	0.259	0.141
Tourist Loyalty	0.287	0.271

The inner model analysis indicates that tourist satisfaction has a R Square of 0.259 and a Q Square of 0.141, demonstrating little explanatory and predictive capacity. Tourist loyalty, exhibiting a R Square of 0.287 and a Q Square of 0.271, indicates somewhat greater strength the model demonstrates more predictive significance for tourist loyalty compared to satisfaction. The projected route coefficients are as follows:

**Table 6.**

Direct and indirect construct of variable.

Construct of variable	Coefficient	T-value	P-value
Direct effects			
Destination authenticity → Tourist satisfaction	0.244	5.544	0.000
Destination authenticity → Tourist loyalty	0.090	2.234	0.026
Indirect effects			
Destination authenticity → Tourist satisfaction → Tourist loyalty	0.121	4.921	0.000

The results in Table 6 indicate that destination authenticity has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction (coefficient = 0.244, t-value = 5.544, p-value = 0.000) and tourist loyalty (coefficient = 0.090, t-value = 2.234, p-value = 0.026), although the direct influence on loyalty is less pronounced. Tourist satisfaction significantly mediates the link, exhibiting a pronounced indirect influence on loyalty (coefficient = 0.121, t-value = 4.921, p-value = 0.000). This indicates that although authenticity affects loyalty, its effect is enhanced by satisfaction. Enhancing destination authenticity and prioritizing tourist satisfaction are essential for cultivating increased visitor loyalty. The bootstrapping procedure validated all path coefficients as statistically significant, surpassing the threshold t-value of 1.96 at a 5% significance level. Table 6 illustrates that destination authenticity considerably influences tourist contentment and loyalty, with a more pronounced indirect effect mediated by tourist satisfaction.

**Table 6.**

Hypothesis testing

Construct of variable	ST. dev	P-value
Destination authenticity → Tourist satisfaction	5.544	0.000
Destination authenticity → Tourist loyalty	2.234	0.026
Destination authenticity → Tourist Satisfaction → Tourist loyalty	4.921	0.000

The research establishes that destination authenticity markedly affects visitor satisfaction (ST. Dev 5.544, P = 0.000) and tourist loyalty (ST. Dev 2.234, P = 0.026). Moreover, tourist satisfaction mediates the association between destination authenticity and visitor loyalty (ST. Dev 4.921, P = 0.000). These findings emphasize the crucial role of happiness in converting destination authenticity into loyalty, underscoring its strategic significance for destination management.



#### *4.2. The Impact of Destination Authenticity on Tourist Satisfaction*

This study highlights the crucial importance of place authenticity in influencing tourist satisfaction, using West Sumatra as a case study. The study demonstrates that the preservation and promotion of cultural, traditional, and architectural heritage underscore authenticity as a fundamental element in providing unique and meaningful travel experiences. Genuine sites in West Sumatra, including traditional villages and pristine landscapes, exemplify the lasting allure of authentic cultural immersion and the significance of direct interaction with local residents.

The findings underscore an important contribution to tourism literature by reinforcing the importance of authenticity as a factor influencing tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The study not only enhances comprehension of the experiential aspects of authenticity but also highlights its wider significance. The capacity of tourists to engage in genuine cultural activities, such as studying traditional Rumah Gadang or participating in local ceremonies, cultivates emotional bonds and enhances their appreciation of local traditions. This emphasis on experiencing authenticity provides a fresh viewpoint, transcending superficial allure to highlight immersive involvement. The ramifications of this study reach beyond West Sumatra, providing significant insights for global destinations striving to sustain competitiveness in the tourism sector. By safeguarding their genuine cultural and ecological attributes, places may elevate their international reputation, promote sustainable tourism, and invigorate local economic growth. The findings indicate that real tourism enhances a destination's attractiveness to both local and foreign tourists while fostering long-term loyalty and recurrent visitation.

Moreover, the beneficial consequences of authenticity-driven tourism, including cultural preservation, economic expansion, and the spread of positive reviews through digital platforms, highlight its transformative capacity within the broader framework of sustainable and responsible tourism development. Furthermore, research conducted by [Wang and Leou \[28\]](#) emphasizes the correlation among perceived value, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty, indicating that authentic experiences enhance satisfaction levels. This corresponds with the conclusions of [Lesjak, et al. \[29\]](#) who observed that contentment directly affects loyalty to a destination signifies that genuine experiences must align with tourist expectations to create allegiance. The research presents persuasive evidence that authenticity transcends mere marketing; it constitutes a strategic asset for places seeking to offer significant, culturally enriched, and unforgettable experiences. West Sumatra's dedication to preserving its genuine character establishes it as a paradigm for other regions, demonstrating how authenticity-focused tourism may serve as a catalyst for sustainable development and cultural conservation in an increasingly globalized environment.

#### *4.3. The Impact of Destination Authenticity on Tourist Loyalty*

This study elucidates the critical influence of destination authenticity on tourist loyalty, revealing that each improvement in authenticity correlates with a quantifiable rise in loyalty among visitors to West Sumatra. By safeguarding cultural assets, local traditions, unique architecture, and inherited values, places foster authentic experiences that transcend mere passive sightseeing. These events generate emotional ties and enduring impressions, prompting tourists to return, advocate for, and uphold allegiance to locales that respect their distinct characteristics. The study emphasizes that genuine interactions, such as engaging with the local community through traditional cuisine, hands-on crafts, or participation in cultural ceremonies like those of the Minangkabau, provide tourists with significant satisfaction and a sense of personal connection. This direct engagement cultivates respect for local culture, elevates tourists' perceived value, and encourages return trips. The continual maintenance of cultural authenticity not only retains the destination's allure but also elicits nostalgia, enhances loyalty, and fosters positive word-of-mouth promotion.

These findings underscore the significance of authenticity as a fundamental principle for sustainable destination management, especially in culturally affluent areas such as West Sumatra. The study provides significant insights into the correlation between authenticity and loyalty, while also highlighting critical topics for future investigation. The study specifically recognizes the necessity to investigate how distinct elements of authenticity, including cultural practices, local relationships, and traditional architecture, separately and collectively affect loyalty. Authenticity is crucial in cultivating tourist loyalty. This supports [\[30\]](#) thesis that the pursuit of authenticity is essential for constructing destination images, indicating that locations that effectively communicate authenticity are likely to foster loyal tourists. The findings highlight the transforming power of authenticity in developing sustainable tourism strategies. In West Sumatra and analogous areas, the adoption and augmentation of cultural authenticity provide a means to sustain economic advantage in a progressively globalized tourism industry. Genuine encounters not only enhance destination loyalty but also add to cultural preservation, community development, and the generation of significant travel experiences. By prioritizing authenticity as a strategic advantage, places can attain sustained success while cultivating profound relationships between visitors and the cultural heritage they wish to explore.

#### *4.4. The Impact of Tourist Satisfaction on Tourist Loyalty in Tourism Destinations in West Sumatra Province, Indonesia*

This study demonstrates that tourist satisfaction has a substantial effect on loyalty, suggesting that each enhancement in satisfaction fosters increased tourist retention and advocacy. Content tourists are more inclined to return to a destination and endorse it to others, highlighting the significance of cultivating positive and memorable experiences. Elements such as service quality, destination authenticity, and emotional involvement are crucial in influencing satisfaction. Exceptional service, defined by skilled personnel, comfortable amenities, and readily available information, guarantees a smooth travel experience. Simultaneously, authenticity, manifested in the preservation of cultural traditions and limited commercialization, provides travelers with a unique and real experience that enriches overall contentment.

Destination authenticity is a crucial factor in fostering loyalty, as it transcends just physical characteristics to encompass significant relationships with local populations. [Nghiem-Phú \[31\]](#) discovered that the affective aspect of a destination's image

exerts the most significant influence on tourists' loyalty, indicating that emotional experiences are essential in determining tourists' intentions to revisit. This discovery corresponds with the concept that tourists possessing a profound emotional connection to a destination are more inclined to demonstrate loyalty. Actions, including endorsing the destination to others and organizing subsequent visits. The emotional gratification obtained from genuine engagements with local cultures can cultivate a sense of belonging and connection, which is crucial for nurturing enduring loyalty [28].

Notwithstanding these discoveries, a significant study gap persists about the mechanisms by which service quality, authenticity, and emotional experiences converge to cultivate loyalty. The influence of demographic variables, including distinctions between domestic and overseas tourists remain underexplored, as does the impact of visitor preferences on their satisfaction-loyalty dynamics. Subsequent research ought to concentrate on these features to yield a more refined comprehension of how to effectively cultivate and maintain tourist loyalty across many situations. Rectifying these deficiencies will allow locations such as West Sumatra to enhance their plans and strengthen their standing in the competitive tourism sector.

#### 4.5. The Impact of Destination Authenticity on Tourist Loyalty Mediated by Tourist Satisfaction in West Sumatra Province, Indonesia

Destination authenticity significantly influences tourist satisfaction, which then affects their loyalty. Authenticity in a destination consisting of

The cultural uniqueness, natural authenticity, and various attractions significantly influence tourists' satisfaction levels. Tourists who recognize authenticity in their travel experiences generally report higher satisfaction, as they believe they have acquired a genuine and distinctive experience that sets them apart from typical tourist encounters. This satisfaction subsequently acts as a crucial element in enhancing their loyalty to the destination.

This study emphasizes that experiences regarded as authentic by tourists are more profound and emotionally significant, cultivating greater emotional connections to the

This study highlights that experiences regarded as authentic by tourists are not only more profound but also emotionally significant, hence cultivating greater emotional ties to the area. According to Walter [32], in community-based cultural tourism, the genuineness of interactions and relationships frequently surpasses objective authenticity, resulting in profound and enlightening experiences that deepen tourists' emotional involvement [32]. Moreover, it is emphasized that cultural, local, and gastronomic identities are intricately connected to the authenticity of experiences, which foster feelings of identification and place attachment during traditional festivals [33]. Ezeuduji [34] advocates that rural tourism can center on real experiences that resonate with travelers' values, thereby improving happiness and loyalty [34]. The findings align with Buffa's argument that enhancing a destination's distinctive attributes helps address tourists' individual needs, thus augmenting the authenticity of their experiences [35]. This emphasizes that destination authenticity is essential for attracting visitors and for cultivating meaningful encounters that promote enduring relationships between tourists and the place.

This studies indicate that place authenticity considerably improves tourist satisfaction, which in turn affects their loyalty. Research by Bassiony and Chahine [36] indicates that tourists' perceived authenticity, which includes cultural, environmental, and service dimensions, can enhance emotional connection and foster a sense of belonging to the areas they visit. This authenticity creates a deeper and more real travel experience, significantly enhancing tourist pleasure.

## 5. Conclusion

This study establishes that location authenticity substantially affects tourist satisfaction and loyalty, with satisfaction acting as a crucial mediator. Conserving cultural history, traditions, and distinctive architecture cultivates significant experiences that encourage return visits and favorable recommendations. Authenticity bolsters satisfaction, which in turn fosters loyalty by promoting stronger emotional connections through cultural activities and local interactions. These findings underscore authenticity as a strategic asset for sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, and competitive advantage. Future studies should investigate demographic aspects to enhance techniques for utilizing authenticity in destination management. Ultimately, authenticity serves as a fundamental pillar for sustainable growth and significant tourist engagement.

## 6. Recommendation

Policymakers and stakeholders must emphasize the preservation of West Sumatra's cultural heritage by maintaining authenticity through the protection of traditions, heritage, and local customs. Investments in sustainable tourism infrastructure and immersive experiences, including festivals and workshops, are crucial for improving tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Targeted marketing should highlight the region's distinctive authenticity, while subsequent studies should investigate demographic variables to enhance sustainable tourism strategies.

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