

How Host-Guest Interaction Drives Visitor Experience, Satisfaction, and Support for Regenerative Tourism: Evidence from Homestays in Sapa, Vietnam

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Abstract

This study investigates how host–guest interaction shapes visitor experience, visitor satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism practices within the context of homestay tourism in Sapa, Vietnam. Building on Social Exchange Theory and Service-Dominant Logic, the study views tourism experiences as emerging from meaningful interactions between hosts and guests, and examines how these interactions influence visitors' behavioral support for regenerative tourism. Data were collected from 217 homestay visitors in Sapa and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results show that host–guest interaction plays a significant role in enhancing visitor experience, which in turn strongly influences visitor satisfaction. In addition, satisfied visitors are more likely to support regenerative tourism practices, including engaging in environmentally responsible activities and contributing to local communities. Notably, the findings suggest that the impact of host–guest interaction on satisfaction is largely indirect, occurring primarily through the experiences it helps to create. This indicates that interaction alone is not sufficient unless it leads to meaningful and engaging experiences. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of a sequential mediation process, in which host–guest interaction influences visitor-level support for regenerative tourism through visitor experience and satisfaction. By focusing on these underlying mechanisms, the study offers new insights into how interaction-based tourism experiences can encourage more responsible and regenerative forms of tourism development.

Keywords: Host-Guest Interaction, Visitor Experience, Visitor Satisfaction, Regenerative Tourism, Sapa, Vietnam

1. Introduction

While tourism has long been recognized as a driver of economic and social development, its value is increasingly understood to lie not only in economic outcomes but in the experiences, it creates. However, this shift toward experience-based tourism raises an important question: what actually shapes meaningful tourism experiences, especially in contexts where interaction is central? Tourism is widely recognized as an experience-based industry in which value is created through tourists' active participation and interaction rather than passive consumption [1]. In countries such as Vietnam, tourism not only generates income but also contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and the improvement of local livelihoods. Among different forms of tourism, homestay tourism has attracted increasing attention, especially in destinations like Sapa, where visitors are looking for more authentic and culturally immersive experiences. rural

homestays as a key sustainable tourism product with potential for economic, social, and environmental benefits, particularly in developing regions [2].

Host–guest interaction is widely recognized as a central component of tourism experience, influencing both visitor satisfaction and behavioral outcome [3]. Visitors stay with local families, share daily activities, and engage in direct communication with hosts. High-intensity interaction between hosts and guests is a defining characteristic of homestay tourism and a key source of experiential value [4]. These interactions often shape how visitors experience the destination, as meaningful conversations, shared meals, and participation in everyday life can create a deeper sense of connection. emotional value derived from interaction plays a more decisive role than purely functional attributes in shaping users' behavioral intentions [5]. In many cases, what visitors remember

most is not the physical setting, but the human interaction that defines the experience.

Despite these benefits, the rapid expansion of tourism has exposed significant limitations in existing development models. Conventional approaches to sustainable tourism often focus on minimizing negative impacts, yet they struggle to address deeper structural issues such as cultural commodification and environmental degradation. This is particularly evident in the increasing commodification of culture, where heritage is transformed into marketable experiences for visitors, often prioritizing consumption and engagement over deeper cultural meaning [6]. This limitation has led to growing interest in regenerative tourism, which shifts the focus from reducing harm to actively creating positive outcomes. However, while regenerative tourism is conceptually appealing, its underlying mechanisms at the visitor level remain poorly understood. Tourism-related challenges tend to disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, exposing deep-seated social and environmental inequalities [7].

Against this backdrop, conventional approaches to sustainable tourism have been increasingly criticized for their limited ability to address the structural drivers of these issues. Tourism development has been criticized for its “addiction to growth”, which is fundamentally incompatible with sustainability goals [8]. These limitations have led to growing interest in alternative approaches to tourism development, particularly regenerative tourism, which goes beyond minimizing negative impacts and instead seeks to create positive outcomes for local communities and ecosystems. One of the emerging perspectives is regenerative tourism, which goes beyond minimizing negative impacts and instead focuses on creating positive contributions to local environments and communities. As highlighted by regenerative tourism is more than a sustainable model, balances local community well-being with ecological respect [9]. This approach emphasizes restoring ecosystems, strengthening cultural identity, and ensuring that tourism leaves destinations better than before, emphasizing value creation not only for visitors but for local communities and environments. regenerative tourism is to leave places better than found [10].

In Vietnam, these ideas are increasingly reflected in tourism development strategies, particularly in rural and ethnic minority areas. Rural tourism has been widely recognized as an important tool for local development, contributing to economic opportunities and community revitalization [11,12]. Homestay tourism in destinations such as Sapa has been supported as a way to promote local culture, create income opportunities, and strengthen community participation in tourism. However, existing research has paid limited attention to how micro-level interactions, particularly host–guest interaction, shape visitor experience and subsequent behavioral outcomes in homestay contexts.

Most prior studies have focused on service quality or destination attributes, while the role of interpersonal interaction remains underexplored, especially in developing country settings.

Many small-scale, family-run tourism businesses face ongoing challenges in achieving long-term economic viability [13]. In such contexts, the performance of these enterprises is often closely tied to the capabilities, skills, and everyday practices of individual operators. Yet, existing research has paid relatively limited attention to these micro-level dynamics, particularly at the level of individual businesses [11]. More importantly, there remains a lack of understanding of how interpersonal interactions—especially host–guest interaction—shape visitor experiences and influence subsequent behavioral responses within homestay tourism settings.

Interactions enrich tourism experiences and contribute to the formation of memorable experiences, which can further shape tourists’ environmental awareness and behavioral intentions [12]. Tourism facilitates intercultural understanding by encouraging positive interaction between visitors and local communities, thereby fostering mutual respect and reducing cultural barriers [14]. Visitors are often drawn to the authenticity of these experiences, where interaction with local hosts, traditional practices, and everyday life creates a sense of connection that is difficult to replicate in more commercialized forms of tourism.

As suggested by balancing biodiversity conservation with the benefits of human-nature interaction, ensuring that PAs remain valuable for both ecosystem health and visitor well-being [15]. Although the concept of regenerative tourism has been widely discussed as a paradigm shift aiming to generate net positive benefits for people, places, and nature, empirical research explaining how such outcomes are formed at the visitor level remains limited. In particular, there is still a lack of understanding of how everyday tourism experiences—especially those shaped by host–guest interaction—contribute to visitor satisfaction and support for regenerative tourism practices [16]. Most existing studies tend to focus on service quality or destination attributes, while the role of interpersonal interaction in shaping these outcomes has received less attention, particularly in the context of homestay tourism in developing countries [17-19].

In particular, the role of host–guest interaction remains underexplored, especially in homestay settings and developing country contexts where social exchange is central to the tourism experience. This study is among the first to empirically examine how micro-level host–guest interaction translates into regenerative tourism outcomes through experiential and evaluative mechanisms. Despite the increasing attention given to regenerative tourism, there is still limited understanding of how its principles are applied in practice across different destinations [20]. In addition, the role of visitors in shaping regenerative outcomes has received relatively little attention, particularly in terms of how their experiences influence sustainable and community-oriented impacts.

To address this gap, this study investigates how host–guest interaction influences visitor experience, visitor satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism practices in the context of homestays in Sapa, Vietnam. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and Service-Dominant Logic, the study proposes that interaction

between hosts and guests plays a central role in shaping tourism experiences, which in turn affect satisfaction and behavioral support for regenerative tourism. This study makes three main contributions to the tourism literature.

First, it clarifies how host–guest interaction leads to regenerative tourism outcomes by identifying a sequential process in which interaction shapes visitor experience, which then influences satisfaction and, ultimately, support for regenerative tourism. This highlights how micro-level interactions translate into visitor-level behavioral outcomes. Second, it provides insights from a homestay context in a developing country, where everyday interaction plays a central role in shaping tourism experiences. This extends existing research beyond standardized settings and developed destinations. Third, it integrates Social Exchange Theory and Service-Dominant Logic to explain how interaction creates value in tourism, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding the link between experience, satisfaction, and regenerative tourism behavior.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Homestay Tourism and Host–Guest Interaction

While tourism development can bring considerable economic benefits, it may also give rise to unintended consequences, including social inequality, cultural commodification, and the displacement of local communities, particularly in heritage destinations [21]. In response, balancing economic growth with social sustainability has become an ongoing challenge. Community-based tourism approaches, such as homestay programs, offer a promising alternative by enabling local residents to participate directly in tourism while preserving their cultural identity and social fabric. Homestay tourism has increasingly become an important form of community-based tourism, particularly in rural and culturally distinctive destinations [22].

Unlike conventional accommodation such as hotels and resorts, homestays offer visitors the opportunity to stay with local families and experience everyday life from an insider's perspective. Social interaction with guests has been identified as a primary source of competitive advantage for homestay hosts [4]. This form of tourism is built around cultural exchange, personal interaction, and shared experiences, allowing visitors to engage more directly with local traditions and ways of living. Previous research has highlighted that homestays offer unique experiential value because they enable closer interpersonal relationships between visitors and local communities [2].

At the center of this experience is host–guest interaction, which refers to the communication and social engagement that take place between hosts and visitors during their stay. suggests that such a perspective is as host–guest relationships are fundamentally social in nature [23]. Tourism experiences are inherently social, as they involve interactions with service providers, hosts, and other visitors, which significantly influence satisfaction outcomes [24]. This perspective is particularly relevant in homestay tourism settings, where interactions between hosts and guests are more intimate,

personal, and embedded in everyday life. These interactions may include casual conversations, shared meals, participation in daily activities such as cooking or farming, and storytelling about local culture and traditions [22,25].

Unlike standardized service encounters in hotels, these interactions are often informal, personal, and emotionally meaningful, making them a defining feature of homestay tourism. From a theoretical perspective, Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) suggests that value in tourism is co-created through interactions among service providers and customers rather than delivered unilaterally by businesses [26]. Drawing on Service-Dominant Logic, tourists are viewed as active co-creators of their own experiences, engaging in value creation through interaction with hosts, service providers, and the surrounding environment [1]. In the context of homestays, value emerges when hosts and guests actively engage with each other.

Hosts contribute local knowledge, hospitality, and cultural interpretation, while guests bring curiosity, participation, and emotional involvement. Through this mutual exchange, the tourism experience becomes more dynamic and meaningful. In addition, social exchange theory (SET) provides further insight into why host–guest interaction matters. According to SET, social relationships are shaped by the perceived benefits and costs of interactions between individuals [27]. When visitors perceive interactions with hosts as enjoyable, meaningful, and beneficial, they are more likely to develop positive emotional responses and favorable evaluations of their experience. Interaction is a fundamental component of co-creation, as tourism experiences emerge through the dynamic interplay between tourists and other actors [1].

In homestay settings, such positive interactions can enhance perceptions of authenticity, hospitality, and cultural immersion. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that host–guest interaction is not merely a supplementary aspect of homestay tourism but a central element that shapes how visitors experience a destination. Meaningful interaction allows visitors to gain deeper insights into local culture and everyday life, thereby enriching their overall experience. Based on this reasoning, host–guest interaction is expected to play a key role in influencing visitor experience in homestay tourism.

2.2. Host–Guest Interaction and Visitor Experience

Host–guest interaction plays a central role in shaping tourism experiences, particularly in homestay settings where personal contact between hosts and visitors is frequent and meaningful. In particular, community-based and immersive forms of tourism, such as homestays, create opportunities for meaningful interaction, which are essential in shaping rich and memorable visitor experiences [20]. These interactions not only enrich the overall experience but also lead to higher levels of satisfaction, as experiences that are jointly created tend to feel more meaningful and personally relevant to visitors [28].

Unlike more standardized forms of accommodation, homestays rely heavily on interpersonal exchange, where communication, trust, and mutual understanding develop through everyday interactions. Social interaction plays a critical role in shaping the richness and quality of visitor experiences [24]. These interactions may begin with simple conversations but can quickly evolve into more meaningful exchanges that create a sense of connection between visitors and the local community.

Visitor experience has been widely recognized as a key concept in tourism research, reflecting tourists' emotional, cognitive, and sensory responses during their travel. Visitor experience is a multidimensional construct shaped by emotional, behavioural, informational, and social interaction components [24]. Importantly, tourism experiences are not formed solely through physical environments or service quality, but also through social interaction and emotional engagement. Experiences that involve direct interaction with local people are often perceived as more authentic, as this sense of authenticity emerges from tourists' personal engagement with the everyday life of the destination [29].

Such experiences tend to be more memorable and meaningful, which in turn can shape how visitors evaluate their experiences and influence their subsequent behavioral intentions. In the context of homestay tourism, the quality of host–guest interaction becomes a major factor influencing how visitors experience the destination. Interaction strategies employed by hosts can evoke positive emotional responses, which significantly enhance visitors' experiential value [4]. When hosts actively engage with visitors—by sharing stories, explaining local customs, or inviting them to participate in daily activities—visitors are more likely to develop a deeper understanding of local culture and lifestyle.

These interactions can transform a simple stay into a richer and more immersive experience. Interaction between tourists and local communities has been shown to enhance cultural understanding and shape tourists' perceptions of the destination [30]. Positive host–guest interaction can foster mutual understanding and meaningful engagement, thereby enriching the tourism experience [14]. Empirical studies have shown that social interaction between tourists and local residents significantly enhances experiential value and emotional engagement [1,2]. Through these interactions, visitors can experience a sense of authenticity and even develop a feeling of belonging within the host community. Compared to standardized tourism services, these personalized and interactive experiences tend to be more meaningful and memorable.

Moreover, host–guest interaction contributes to multiple dimensions of visitor experience, including cultural learning, emotional connection, and perceived authenticity, indicating that the quality and intensity of host–tourist interaction significantly influence the richness of tourism experience [3]. When visitors are invited to engage in local practices or hear personal stories from hosts, the destination becomes more than just a place to visit—it becomes a lived experience. This suggests that interaction with local communities allows tourists to gain deeper cultural insights

and enhances experiential value [14]. This not only enriches the overall perception of the trip but also increases its uniqueness and memorability. Based on these arguments, it can be expected that host–guest interaction plays a significant role in shaping visitor experience in homestay tourism contexts. Positive and meaningful interaction with hosts is likely to enhance visitors' emotional engagement, cultural understanding, and overall evaluation of their experience.

H1: Host–Guest Interaction Positively Influences Visitor Experience

2.3. Host–Guest Interaction and Visitor Satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction is widely regarded as a key outcome in tourism research, reflecting how visitors evaluate their overall travel experience [18]. It is typically formed through a comparison between prior expectations and actual experiences during the trip. When experiences meet or exceed expectations, visitors are more likely to feel satisfied and develop positive attitudes toward the destination [19]. In homestay tourism, satisfaction is not determined solely by service quality or physical facilities, but is strongly shaped by interpersonal interaction between hosts and guests. Unlike hotels, where interactions are often brief and formal, homestays provide a setting in which communication is more personal, frequent, and informal. These interactions can influence how visitors feel about the experience, including their sense of being welcomed, respected, and emotionally connected to the host community.

Building on the previous discussion, host–guest interaction not only shapes visitor experience but may also have a direct influence on satisfaction. While meaningful experiences often act as a key pathway to satisfaction, direct interaction with hosts can independently contribute to how visitors evaluate their stay. Friendly communication, personalized attention, and genuine hospitality have been shown to enhance satisfaction in tourism contexts. When visitors feel valued and cared for, they are more likely to perceive their stay as enjoyable and worthwhile.

In addition, opportunities to engage in local activities or learn about cultural traditions can further strengthen satisfaction by providing unique and authentic experiences. These interactions create a sense of intimacy and authenticity that is difficult to achieve in more standardized tourism settings.

From the perspective of social exchange theory, satisfaction can be understood as an outcome of perceived positive exchange. Visitors receive not only accommodation but also cultural knowledge, emotional engagement, and social connection. When these interactions are perceived as beneficial and meaningful, visitors are more likely to evaluate their experience positively and report higher levels of satisfaction. Taken together, these arguments suggest that host–guest interaction plays an important role in shaping visitor satisfaction in homestay tourism. Beyond its indirect effect through experience, interaction itself can directly influence how visitors evaluate their stay.

H2: Host–Guest Interaction Positively Influences Visitor Satisfaction

2.4. Visitor Experience and Visitor Satisfaction

Visitor experience and visitor satisfaction are closely related but represent different stages of the tourism process. Visitor satisfaction is largely driven by emotional responses and behavioural engagement arising from the experience [24]. Visitor experience refers to the emotional, cognitive, and sensory responses that occur during the trip, while satisfaction reflects how visitors evaluate those experiences after they have taken place. In general, more positive and high-quality experiences tend to enhance perceived value and satisfaction, which can then influence visitors' subsequent attitudes and behavioral intentions [31]. In this sense, experience captures what tourists go through, whereas satisfaction reflects how they feel about it afterward.

Building on the previous discussion, while host–guest interaction can directly influence satisfaction, its strongest impact is likely to occur through the experiences it creates. These types of experiences not only enhance satisfaction but also encourage visitors to develop a stronger sense of responsibility toward the destination, increasing their willingness to support community-based initiatives and contribute positively to local development [19]. In homestay tourism, visitors are not only consuming a service but actively engaging in everyday life with local families [25]. In homestay tourism, visitors are not simply passive consumers of services but become actively involved in the daily lives of local families, reflecting the co-creative nature of tourism experiences [25]. These interactions often shape experiences that are personal, immersive, and emotionally meaningful.

Previous studies have consistently shown that positive and memorable experiences lead to higher levels of visitor satisfaction. Tourism experiences play an important role in shaping how visitors evaluate their trips, influencing not only their level of satisfaction but also how well those experiences are remembered, which can ultimately affect their future behavior [32]. Experiences that involve cultural immersion, emotional engagement, and authentic interaction tend to leave a stronger impression on visitors and influence how they evaluate their overall trip [28]. In the context of homestays, activities such as sharing meals with hosts, participating in local traditions, or learning about everyday life can significantly enhance the perceived value of the experience.

These experiences are deeply personal and shaped by how individuals think, feel, and respond to the activities they encounter during their trip [33]. Moreover, memorable tourism experiences are often characterized by elements such as authenticity, novelty, social interaction, and emotional connection [28]. These elements are particularly prominent in homestay tourism, where visitors are invited to participate in daily routines and interact directly with local residents. Such experiences go beyond functional service delivery and create lasting impressions that shape visitors' overall evaluation of their stay.

From an experiential perspective, tourism goes beyond the delivery of standardized services, as visitors' satisfaction is largely shaped by their subjective perceptions, emotional responses, and overall lived experiences [34]. Tourists increasingly seek meaningful and engaging experiences rather than standardized services [26]. When visitors perceive that their experiences are unique, authentic, and emotionally rewarding, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their trip [35]. In this way, visitor experience becomes a key mechanism through which satisfaction is formed. Taken together, these arguments suggest that visitor experience plays a central role in shaping visitor satisfaction in homestay tourism contexts. Positive and meaningful experiences are expected to lead to higher levels of satisfaction.

H3: Visitor Experience Positively Influences Visitor Satisfaction

2.5. Visitor Satisfaction and Support for Regenerative Tourism Practices

Regenerative tourism emphasizes the importance of delivering long-term well-being for both local communities and ecosystems, moving beyond traditional sustainability approaches [36]. However, despite its promises, tourism systems often struggle to balance environmental, social, and cultural outcomes, highlighting the need for transformative change. Such transformation requires shifts not only in institutional structures but also in the values, practices, and behaviors of key actors, including visitors. In this context, visitor experiences—particularly those involving emotional engagement and meaningful interaction—play an important role in shaping attitudes and fostering support for regenerative tourism practices.

Regenerative tourism has emerged as an approach that goes beyond minimizing negative impacts and instead focuses on creating positive contributions to local communities, cultures, and ecosystems [10]. In this perspective, tourism is not only about preserving resources but also about restoring and strengthening the social and environmental systems of a destination. An important aspect of regenerative tourism is the active role of visitors. Visitors can be seen as important agents of change, as their values, preferences, and behaviors directly influence how tourism evolves [37]. Supporting regenerative tourism practices involves behaviors such as respecting local culture, participating in environmentally responsible activities, supporting community-based initiatives, and choosing tourism services that contribute to local sustainability. However, such behaviors do not occur automatically. They are influenced by visitors' underlying motivations, personal values, and lived experiences, and may be limited by the well-known intention–behavior gap, where positive attitudes do not always translate into actual behavior [37]. In this sense, visitors' experiences and their overall evaluation of the trip play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and encouraging more responsible and regenerative tourism practices.

Visitor satisfaction is widely recognized as a central outcome in tourism research, representing a psychological sense of well-being shaped by the overall travel experience [38,39]. When these experiences meet or exceed expectations, visitors are more likely

to feel satisfied and develop positive evaluations of the destination. When visitors feel satisfied with their experiences-particularly. In contexts where visitors engage in meaningful interactions with local communities, such satisfaction can foster a stronger emotional connection to the place. This emotional bond, in turn, increases visitors' willingness to support practices that contribute to the well-being of local communities and the surrounding environment. Satisfied visitors are also more likely to express favorable attitudes toward the destination and engage in supportive behaviors, such as recommending responsible tourism experiences or choosing services that align with sustainability values.

In homestay tourism, where interaction with hosts plays a central role, satisfaction is often linked not only to service quality but also to cultural appreciation and emotional engagement. As a result, visitors who feel satisfied may become more aware of the importance of preserving local culture and natural resources. From this perspective, visitor satisfaction can be seen as a bridge between experience and behavior. It translates positive experiences into supportive attitudes and actions toward regenerative tourism. Previous research has also suggested that satisfaction is closely associated with emotional responses, social interaction, and perceived value all of which are relevant in shaping responsible tourism behavior [40,41]. Taken together, these arguments suggest that higher levels of visitor satisfaction are likely to encourage stronger support for regenerative tourism practices.

H4: Visitor Satisfaction Positively Influences Support for Regenerative Tourism Practices

2.6. Mediating Role of Visitor Experience and Visitor Satisfaction

Beyond the direct relationships discussed above, it is important to understand how these variables are connected through underlying processes. In tourism research, experiential and emotional factors are often considered key mechanisms that explain how interpersonal interactions translate into attitudes and behavioral outcomes. In the context of homestay tourism, host-guest interaction is unlikely to influence visitor satisfaction in isolation. Instead, its effect is more likely to occur through the experiences it creates. When visitors engage in meaningful interaction with hosts-such as sharing daily activities, learning about local culture, or participating in community life-these interactions shape their overall experience. In turn, richer and more engaging experiences are likely to lead to higher levels of satisfaction.

Similarly, the relationship between visitor experience and support for regenerative tourism practices may not be purely direct. While positive experiences can influence attitudes, their effect is often strengthened when they lead to a sense of satisfaction. Visitors who feel satisfied are more likely to develop positive emotional connections to the destination and become more willing to support practices that protect local culture and the environment. Taken together, these relationships suggest a sequential process in which host-guest interaction first enhances visitor experience, which then increases visitor satisfaction, and ultimately encourages support for regenerative tourism practices. In this way, visitor

experience and visitor satisfaction act as key mediating variables that link interpersonal interaction with behavioral outcomes. Understanding this mediation process is important because it highlights that regenerative tourism support does not emerge automatically from interaction alone. Instead, it develops through a chain of experiential and evaluative responses. By identifying these pathways, the study provides a more nuanced explanation of how micro-level interaction can lead to broader tourism outcomes. Based on this reasoning, the following mediating hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Visitor experience mediates the relationship between host-guest interaction and visitor satisfaction.

H6: Visitor satisfaction mediates the relationship between visitor experience and support for regenerative tourism practices.

H7: Host-guest interaction has an indirect positive effect on support for regenerative tourism practices through visitor experience and visitor satisfaction.

In particular, training local hosts in communication skills, cultural storytelling, and guest engagement can significantly enhance the overall attractiveness of homestay tourism. As suggested in previous research, genuine interaction and personalized experiences are essential in creating memorable accommodation experiences. From the visitor perspective, a better understanding of host-guest interaction may also influence decision-making. Tourists who value meaningful cultural engagement and environmental responsibility are more likely to choose homestay experiences that align with these expectations. In this sense, interaction becomes not only part of the experience but also a factor that shapes tourists' preferences and choices within the broader home-sharing ecosystem [42].

Despite growing research on visitor satisfaction and community-based tourism, limited attention has been given to how host-guest interactions simultaneously influences visitor experience, satisfaction, and regenerative tourism outcomes. While the importance of interaction in tourism has been widely acknowledged, its role as a mechanism linking individual experiences to broader regenerative impacts remains underexplored. This gap is particularly evident in the context of homestay tourism. Although homestays provide opportunities for cultural exchange and community engagement, they also face challenges such as the commodification of local culture under increasing tourism pressure. Existing studies tend to focus on sustainable tourism practices or general host-guest dynamics, but empirical research examining regenerative tourism within homestay settings-especially in developing countries such as Vietnam-remains limited.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature is concentrated in Western contexts, leaving a lack of understanding of how these dynamics operate in culturally distinct destinations such as Sapa. The integration of experiential, social, and behavioral dimensions in a single framework is still relatively rare, and approaches that combine both quantitative and qualitative insights remain underdeveloped.

Addressing these gaps is important for advancing both theory and practice. A more comprehensive understanding of how host-guest interaction shapes visitor experience and satisfaction can provide valuable insights for promoting regenerative tourism. Such insights can help policymakers and tourism stakeholders design strategies that balance visitor expectations with the preservation of local culture and environmental sustainability.

Recent studies have emphasized that regenerative tourism goes beyond sustainability by actively improving community well-being and ecological systems [9,43]. This perspective aligns closely with the development direction of tourism in Vietnam, where there is increasing emphasis on cultural preservation and environmentally responsible practices. At the same time, factors such as perception, interaction, and experience continue to play a critical role in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions in homestay contexts [44].

2.6.1. Concept of Homestay

Homestay tourism in Vietnam represents more than simply a form of accommodation; it offers visitors an opportunity to engage directly with local communities and experience everyday life in a more personal and immersive way. Unlike conventional lodging, homestays are typically located in rural or culturally distinctive areas and emphasize close interaction between hosts and guests. Through shared activities such as preparing meals, participating in daily routines, and exchanging stories, visitors are able to gain deeper insights into local lifestyles, traditions, and values. This immersive environment allows tourism experiences to move beyond passive consumption toward more meaningful cultural engagement. At the core of this experience is host-guest interaction, which serves as a defining element of homestay tourism. Hosts are not only service providers but also cultural interpreters and social partners, while guests are active participants in the interaction process. These interactions can generate both positive and negative effects, influencing not only visitor experience but also the well-being of host families. However, when interaction is managed effectively, it can create mutual understanding, strengthen social connection, and enhance the overall quality of the tourism experience.

Positive host-guest interaction has been shown to play an important role in shaping visitor satisfaction. When communication is open, welcoming, and meaningful, visitors are more likely to feel comfortable and emotionally connected to the destination. Opportunities to participate in daily activities and engage in cultural exchange can further reduce social distance between hosts and guests, allowing visitors to feel more like temporary members of the community rather than outsiders. In this context, effective communication-whether through shared language or non-verbal understanding-becomes essential in facilitating richer and more enjoyable experiences.

These interaction processes are closely aligned with the principles of regenerative tourism. Rather than focusing solely on minimizing negative impacts, regenerative tourism emphasizes creating positive outcomes for both communities and environments. In

homestay settings, this involves encouraging practices that support cultural preservation, community participation, and environmental responsibility. As suggested by, the appeal of homestay experiences is closely linked to effective management, cultural authenticity, and sustainability-oriented practices [45]. One important aspect of regenerative tourism in homestay contexts is community-centered cultural revitalization. By actively involving local residents in designing and delivering tourism experiences-such as traditional craft activities, storytelling, and cultural events-homestays can create opportunities for both economic benefit and cultural preservation.

This co-creation process not only enhances the authenticity of the visitor experience but also strengthens local identity and community pride. At the same time, it helps mitigate the risk of cultural commodification, which has been identified as a common challenge in community-based tourism [46]. Taken together, these perspectives highlight that homestay tourism is fundamentally built on interaction, experience, and co-creation. Host-guest interaction not only shapes how visitors experience the destination but also plays a key role in linking individual experiences with broader regenerative tourism outcomes.

2.6.2. Overview of Sapa as a Homestay Tourism Destination

Sapa, located in the mountainous region of Lao Cai province in northern Vietnam, has become one of the country's most prominent destinations for homestay tourism. Situated at an altitude of approximately 1,500 meters above sea level, Sapa is known for its cool climate, terraced landscapes, and rich cultural diversity. The area is home to various ethnic minority groups, including the H'Mong, Dao, and Tay communities, whose distinct traditions and lifestyles contribute to the unique cultural identity of the destination. In recent years, Sapa has attracted a growing number of domestic and international visitors seeking more authentic and immersive travel experiences. Homestay tourism has developed rapidly in this context, offering visitors the opportunity to stay with local families and engage directly with community life. Unlike mass tourism settings, the appeal of Sapa lies not only in its natural scenery but also in the quality of interaction between visitors and local residents. Activities such as participating in traditional practices, sharing daily routines, and experiencing local customs are central to the tourism experience in this destination.

This interaction-based tourism environment makes Sapa an appropriate context for examining how host-guest relationships influence visitor experience and subsequent behavioral outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, service-dominant logic suggests that tourism value is co-created through interaction rather than delivered as a fixed product. In homestay settings, value emerges through communication, cultural exchange, and shared activities between hosts and guests. At the same time, social exchange theory provides a useful lens for understanding the dynamics of these interactions. Hosts and guests engage in exchanges that involve both benefits and costs, and the perceived balance of these exchanges can influence the quality of interaction and the overall experience. When both parties perceive the interaction as positive

and mutually beneficial, the resulting experience is more likely to be meaningful and satisfying.

Taken together, the characteristics of Sapa as a culturally rich and interaction-based tourism destination, combined with these theoretical perspectives, provide a strong foundation for examining the role of host–guest interaction in shaping visitor experience, satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism practices. Figure 1 provides an overview of the conceptual model proposed in this study, outlining the key relationships among the main constructs.

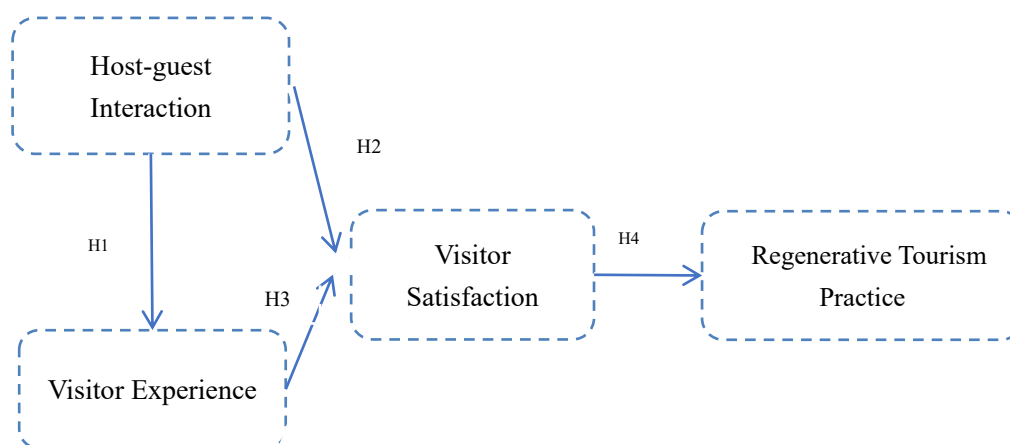


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine how host–guest interaction influences visitor experience, visitor satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism practices in the context of homestay tourism in Sapa, Vietnam. The quantitative component is designed to test the proposed relationships among key constructs using a cross-sectional survey of visitors who had recently stayed in homestays. This approach enables the study to capture visitors’ perceptions and evaluations of their experiences in a structured and comparable manner. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed as the primary analytical technique, as it allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple relationships between latent variables while accounting for measurement error. The analysis followed a two-step procedure, including the assessment of the measurement model and the testing of the structural model, enabling the evaluation of both direct and indirect effects.

To complement the quantitative findings, a qualitative component was incorporated to provide deeper insight into how host–guest interaction is experienced and interpreted in practice. In total, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including 5 homestay hosts and 7 tourists with direct experience of homestay stays in Sapa. These participants were selected purposively to capture both provider and visitor perspectives, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of interaction dynamics within the homestay setting. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enables the study not only to test theoretical relationships but also to better

explain the processes through which these relationships emerge. In particular, while the quantitative analysis identifies the strength and significance of relationships among constructs, the qualitative findings help to interpret these relationships by illustrating how interaction, experience, and satisfaction are formed in real-life contexts. Overall, this research design provides a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of host–guest interaction and its role in shaping regenerative tourism outcomes.

explain the processes through which these relationships emerge. In particular, while the quantitative analysis identifies the strength and significance of relationships among constructs, the qualitative findings help to interpret these relationships by illustrating how interaction, experience, and satisfaction are formed in real-life contexts. Overall, this research design provides a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of host–guest interaction and its role in shaping regenerative tourism outcomes.

3.2. Study Site: Sapa, Vietnam

This study was conducted in Sapa, a mountainous tourism destination located in Lao Cai province in northern Vietnam. Sapa is widely recognized for its scenic landscapes, including terraced rice fields and mountainous terrain, as well as its rich cultural diversity. The region is home to several ethnic minority communities, such as the H’Mong, Dao, Tay, and Giay groups, whose traditional lifestyles and cultural practices form a central part of the tourism experience.

In recent years, Sapa has experienced rapid growth in homestay tourism, particularly in villages such as Cat Cat, Ta Van, Lao Chai, and Ta Phin. These homestays provide visitors with opportunities to stay in traditional houses, experience local cuisine, and participate in everyday community activities. Because this form of tourism involves close and frequent interaction between visitors and host families, Sapa provides an appropriate context for examining the role of host–guest interaction in shaping visitor experience and satisfaction.

At the same time, the expansion of tourism in Sapa has raised concerns about environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and the uneven distribution of tourism benefits. These challenges have led to increasing interest in promoting more sustainable and regenerative tourism practices. In this context, understanding visitors' perceptions and their willingness to support regenerative tourism within homestay settings is particularly relevant for the long-term development of the destination.

3.3. Sampling and Data Collection

The target population of this study consists of domestic and international tourists who have stayed in homestays in Sapa. Given the absence of a complete sampling frame of homestay visitors, a non-probability sampling method was adopted. Specifically, convenience sampling was used, which is commonly applied in tourism research where access to respondents is limited. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed to visitors at various homestay locations in Sapa, particularly in villages where homestay tourism is well established. Respondents were approached either after completing their stay or at the point of departure to ensure that they had sufficient experience to evaluate their visit. To improve data quality, a screening question was included to confirm that participants had stayed in a homestay during their trip. Only respondents who met this criterion were included in the survey. The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Vietnamese to accommodate a diverse range of visitors.

Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of respondents to ensure clarity and relevance of the measurement items. Based on the feedback received, minor revisions were made to improve wording and comprehension. The main survey was conducted over several weeks during the peak tourism season in Sapa. In total, approximately 230 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding incomplete or invalid responses, the final dataset was deemed 217 suitable for analysis using structural equation modeling.

3.3.1. Qualitative Data Collection

Rather than relying on a fixed sample size, the number of interviews was guided by the principle of data saturation. Data collection continued until additional interviews no longer generated new insights, suggesting that sufficient thematic depth had been achieved. This approach aligns with prior research indicating that saturation can often be reached within a relatively small number

of interviews in studies with a focused scope [47]. To enrich the quantitative findings, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including 5 homestay hosts and 7 tourists who had direct experience with homestay stays in Sapa. Participants were selected purposively to ensure that they could provide meaningful and experience-based insights into host–guest interaction.

The number of interviews was guided by the principle of data saturation. Interviews continued until no new themes or significant insights emerged from the data, suggesting that sufficient depth had been achieved. The interviews were conducted in an open and conversational manner, allowing participants to freely share their experiences and perspectives. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. To protect participants' privacy and ensure confidentiality, all names used in the qualitative findings are pseudonyms.

3.4. Measurement Scales

The measurement scales used in this study were adapted from well-established literature in tourism research and refined to fit the context of homestay tourism. Items measuring host–guest interaction were developed based on prior studies on interpersonal interaction and value co-creation in tourism settings [4,22]. The visitor experience scale was adapted from research on memorable tourism experiences and experiential value e.g., [31-33]. Visitor satisfaction was measured using items drawn from widely used satisfaction scales in tourism [18,19]. Finally, the items capturing support for regenerative tourism practices were adapted from studies on pro-environmental and responsible tourism behavior [48,49].

Items measuring host–guest interaction capture aspects such as communication, cultural sharing, and the sense of being welcomed. Visitor experience was measured using items related to memorability, emotional engagement, and cultural understanding, based on prior studies on tourism experience.

Visitor satisfaction was assessed using widely used satisfaction measures in tourism research, focusing on overall evaluation and expectation fulfillment. Support for regenerative tourism practices was measured through items reflecting visitors' willingness to engage in environmentally and socially responsible tourism behaviors. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Construct	Code	Measurement Item
Host-Guest Interaction (HGI)	HGI1	The host communicated with me in a friendly and welcoming manner.
	HGI2	I had meaningful interactions with the host during my stay.
	HGI3	The host shared information about local culture and traditions.
	HGI4	I felt welcomed as part of the household or community.
Visitor Experience (VE)	VE1	My homestay experience in Sapa was memorable.
	VE2	I gained meaningful cultural experiences during my stay.
	VE3	The experience helped me better understand local culture and lifestyle.

	VE4	My stay in the homestay was emotionally rewarding.
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Table 1: Measurement Items

Construct	Code	Measurement Item
Visitor Satisfaction (VS)	VS1	I am satisfied with my homestay experience in Sapa.
	VS2	The experience met my expectations.
	VS3	Choosing this homestay was a good decision.
	VS4	Overall, I am pleased with my stay in the homestay.
Support for Regenerative Tourism Practices (SRTP)	SRTP1	I support tourism practices that protect local culture and traditions.
	SRTP2	I am willing to participate in environmentally responsible tourism activities.
	SRTP3	I prefer tourism businesses that benefit local communities.
	SRTP4	I would choose homestays that adopt regenerative tourism practices in the future.

Table 2: Measurement Items (Continued)

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM), which allows for the simultaneous examination of relationships among multiple latent constructs. The sample size of 217 respondents is considered adequate for this analysis. As highlighted by sample size plays a critical role in multivariate analysis, as it directly affects statistical power, parameter estimation, and the stability of results [51]. The analysis followed a two-step procedure. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while validity was assessed through factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. Model fit was evaluated using commonly accepted indices, including χ^2/df , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Once the measurement model was confirmed to be satisfactory, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships. Path coefficients and significance levels were used to determine whether the hypotheses were supported. Mediation analysis was also conducted to examine indirect effects, providing additional insight into the mechanisms through which host–guest interaction influences regenerative tourism outcomes.

3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. All interview transcripts were read several times to ensure familiarity

with the data and to identify recurring ideas and patterns. An initial coding process was conducted by identifying meaningful segments of text related to participants' experiences and perceptions of host–guest interaction. Codes were developed inductively from the data, allowing patterns to emerge naturally rather than being imposed based on pre-existing categories. These initial codes were then grouped into broader themes through an iterative process of comparison and refinement across interviews. Through this process, key themes such as cultural immersion, emotional connection and satisfaction, awareness of regenerative tourism practices, and perceived challenges were identified.

The qualitative findings were subsequently used to complement and interpret the quantitative results, providing deeper insight into how host–guest interaction shapes visitor experience and behavioral responses in homestay settings.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

A total of 217 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. The sample consisted of visitors who had stayed in homestays in Sapa, Vietnam, and therefore had direct experience relevant to the constructs examined in this study. The sample size exceeds the commonly recommended threshold for structural equation modeling and was considered adequate for testing the proposed conceptual model.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	50.2
	Female	108	49.8
Age	18-24	11	5.1
	25-34	31	14.3
	35-44	54	24.9
	45-54	58	26.7
	55-64	37	17.1
	65+	26	12.0

Travel Experience	First-time visitor	111	51.2
	Repeat visitor	106	48.8

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=217)

Table 3 summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample of 217 participants shows a nearly equal gender distribution, with males accounting for 50.2% and females 49.8%. In terms of age, respondents were predominantly middle-aged, with the largest groups falling between 45–54 years (26.7%) and 35–44 years (24.9%). Participants aged 55–64 represented 17.1%, while those aged 25–34 accounted for 14.3%. A smaller proportion of respondents were aged 65 and above (12.0%) or under 25 (5.1%). Regarding travel experience, the sample was almost evenly divided between first-time visitors (51.2%) and those who had visited Sapa more than once (48.8%). Overall, the data suggest that the respondents tend to be relatively mature travelers with prior travel experience, providing a balanced and meaningful basis for examining homestay experiences in Sapa.

4.2. Preliminary Analysis and Reliability

Before testing the structural relationships, the suitability of the dataset for factor-based analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.825, indicating good adequacy of the data for latent construct analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2229.23$, $p < .001$), confirming that the correlation matrix was appropriate for multivariate analysis. The internal consistency of the constructs was then examined. The Cronbach's alpha values were 0.658 for host-guest interaction, 0.767 for visitor experience, 0.672 for visitor satisfaction, and 0.706 for support for regenerative tourism practices. While the Cronbach's alpha values for host-guest interaction and visitor satisfaction are marginally below the recommended threshold of 0.70, such values are still considered acceptable in exploratory research, particularly when measurement scales are adapted to a specific context [51]. These results indicate acceptable reliability overall, particularly given the exploratory nature of the model development and the contextual adaptation of the scales.

4.3. Measurement Model Fit

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate the measurement model. The results indicated a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.079, SRMR = 0.051). These values meet the recommended thresholds, confirming that the measurement model provides an adequate representation of the data.

4.4. Structural Model Results

The proposed structural relationships among host-guest interaction, visitor experience, visitor satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism practices were then tested. The findings showed that host-guest interaction had a significant positive effect on visitor experience ($\beta = 0.660$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. This indicates that more meaningful and positive interactions between hosts and guests substantially enhance visitors' overall experiences in homestay settings. Host-guest interaction also had a significant positive effect on visitor satisfaction ($\beta = 0.147$, $p = .017$), thus supporting H2. Although the magnitude of this direct effect was smaller than that for visitor experience, it still suggests that interpersonal interaction contributes directly to how satisfied visitors feel with their homestay stay. Although the direct effect is significant, its relatively small magnitude suggests that interaction influences satisfaction primarily through experiential processes.

Visitor experience had a strong and significant positive effect on visitor satisfaction ($\beta = 0.636$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. This result confirms that memorable, emotionally engaging, and culturally meaningful experiences are a major determinant of visitors' overall satisfaction. Visitor satisfaction, in turn, had a significant positive effect on support for regenerative tourism practices ($\beta = 0.680$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. This suggests that satisfied visitors are more likely to support tourism practices that protect local culture, benefit communities, and encourage environmental responsibility.

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	p-value	Result
H1	HGI → VE	0.660	< .001	Supported
H2	HGI → VS	0.147	.017	Supported
H3	VE → VS	0.636	< .001	Supported
H4	VS → SRTP	0.680	< .001	Supported
H5	HGI → VE → VS	0.420	95% CI [0.300, 0.546]	Supported
H6	VE → VS → SRTP	0.433	95% CI [0.303, 0.566]	Supported
H7	HGI → VE → VS → SRTP	0.286	95% CI [0.189, 0.393]	Supported

Table 4: Hypothesis Supported

4.5. Explained Variance

The explanatory power of the model was assessed through the R^2 values of the endogenous constructs. The model explained 43.6% of the variance in visitor experience, 54.9% of the variance in visitor

satisfaction, and 46.3% of the variance in support for regenerative tourism practices. These values indicate that the proposed model has moderate to strong explanatory power, particularly for visitor satisfaction and regenerative tourism support.

4.6. Mediation Analysis

To further examine the indirect effects proposed in the conceptual model, bootstrap mediation analysis was conducted. The results confirmed that visitor experience significantly mediated the relationship between host-guest interaction and visitor satisfaction (indirect effect = 0.420, 95% CI [0.300, 0.546]), supporting H5. This finding indicates that host-guest interaction enhances satisfaction largely through its positive effect on visitor experience. Visitor satisfaction also significantly mediated the relationship between visitor experience and support for regenerative tourism practices (indirect effect = 0.433, 95% CI [0.303, 0.566]), supporting H6. This suggests that positive visitor experiences translate into stronger support for regenerative tourism mainly because they increase satisfaction. Finally, the sequential indirect effect of host-guest interaction on support for regenerative tourism practices

through visitor experience and visitor satisfaction was significant (indirect effect = 0.286, 95% CI [0.189, 0.393]), supporting H7. This result demonstrates that host-guest interaction contributes to regenerative tourism support indirectly by first enhancing visitor experience and then increasing visitor satisfaction.

4.7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Overall, all proposed hypotheses were supported. The results highlight that host-guest interaction is a key antecedent of visitor experience and satisfaction, while visitor satisfaction is a critical driver of support for regenerative tourism practices. The mediation findings further reveal that visitor experience and visitor satisfaction are important explanatory mechanisms linking interpersonal interaction with regenerative tourism outcomes.

Construct	item	Loading	Cronbach's	CR	AVE
(HGI)	HGI1	0.68	0.66	0.78	0.47
	HGI2	0.72			
	HGI3	0.69			
	HGI4	0.65			
Visitor Experience (VE)	VE1	0.78	0.77	0.84	0.57
	VE2	0.75			
	VE3	0.74			
	VE4	0.73			
Visitor Satisfaction (VS)	VS1	0.71	0.67	0.80	0.50
	VS2	0.73			
	VS3	0.70			
	VS4	0.69			
Support for Regenerative Tourism Practice (SRTP)	SRTP1	0.76	0.71	0.83	0.55
	SRTP2	0.74			
	SRTP3	0.72			
	SRTP4	0.73			

Table 5: Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity. All factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.60, indicating adequate item reliability. Composite reliability (CR) values range from 0.78 to 0.84, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thus confirming internal consistency. The

average variance extracted (AVE) values are mostly above or close to the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating acceptable convergent validity. Although the AVE of host-guest interaction is slightly below 0.50, it is still acceptable given that CR exceeds 0.70, as suggested in prior research.

Constructs	HGI	VE	VS	SRTP
HGI	0.69			
VE	0.60	0.75		
VS	0.48	0.70	0.71	
SRTP	0.42	0.65	0.68	0.74

Table 6: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Discriminant validity was further assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs, indicating that discriminant validity is established.

4.8. Qualitative Findings

Illustrative quotes from selected participants are presented to represent broader patterns identified across all interviews. To complement the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews

were conducted with both homestay hosts and tourists. These interviews aimed to provide deeper insight into how host–guest interaction influences visitor experience, satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism. Overall, the qualitative findings help explain the underlying processes behind the relationships identified in the SEM results.

4.8.1. Host–Guest Interaction as A Foundation of Visitor Experience

The interview findings clearly show that host–guest interaction plays a central role in shaping visitor experience. Rather than being limited to basic service delivery, interaction in homestays is highly personal and emotionally engaging. For instance, Host Peter shared: *“I greet guests warmly and explain our home’s traditions. We eat meals together and share stories by the fire.”* This reflects a form of interaction that goes beyond functional hospitality and involves cultural exchange and emotional connection. Similarly, Host Jelley explained: *“I give a house tour and introduce my family. We invite them to help with farming if interested.”* Such practices indicate that guests are not treated as outsiders, but are instead welcomed into the daily life of the host family. This sense of inclusion helps create a more meaningful and memorable experience. From the tourist perspective, these interactions were equally important. Mr. William described his stay as: *“Living with a H’Mong family was eye-opening. Their hospitality made the experience unforgettable.”* This suggests that close interaction enhances both emotional engagement and cultural understanding. Taken together, these findings support the quantitative result that host–guest interaction has a strong positive effect on visitor experience.

4.8.2. Cultural Immersion as A Key Element of Experience

A recurring theme across the interviews is the importance of cultural immersion. Hosts actively involve guests in traditional practices, allowing them to experience local life firsthand. For example, Host Peter noted: *“We teach guests how to weave brocade and cook traditional dishes.”* Likewise, Host Ron described: *“We run workshops on traditional crafts... visitors try hand-weaving, herbal baths, and hiking in the rice terraces.”* These activities encourage active participation rather than passive observation, making the experience more engaging and authentic. Tourists strongly valued these opportunities. Supipi stated: *“I learned how to catch fish, plant rice and make herbal medicine with the locals.”* and added: *“Experiencing their lifestyle was why I chose a homestay over a hotel.”*

This highlights that cultural immersion is a key reason why tourists prefer homestays. It also shows how interaction is translated into meaningful experiences, reinforcing the SEM finding that visitor experience is significantly influenced by host–guest interaction.

4.8.3. Visitor Satisfaction Shaped by Authenticity and Emotional Connection

The qualitative data also help explain how visitor experience leads to satisfaction. Tourists consistently linked their satisfaction to

feelings of authenticity, comfort, and personal connection with hosts.

For example, Fariza commented: *“The house was cozy, and the hosts were very welcoming. The homemade food was the highlight.”*

This suggests that satisfaction is not only based on physical facilities, but also on emotional and cultural aspects of the stay. Similarly, Sadu emphasized: *“Understanding their way of life through direct interaction was the best part of my trip.”*

These responses indicate that satisfaction is largely driven by the depth and quality of the experience rather than by standardized service elements. This supports the quantitative finding that visitor experience is a strong predictor of visitor satisfaction.

4.8.4. Awareness and Support for Regenerative Tourism Practices

The interviews further reveal that both hosts and tourists are actively engaged in environmentally and culturally responsible practices.

From the host perspective, Ali explained: *“We separate waste, compost food scraps, and use solar-powered lights.”*

He also highlighted cultural preservation efforts: *“We display local handicrafts and organize cultural nights.”*

Tourists were aware of and influenced by these practices. Fariza noted: *“I noticed waste-sorting bins, and the hosts encouraged reducing plastic usage.”*

Similarly, Yinyin shared: *“I saw the community planting trees to reduce deforestation.”*

These findings suggest that exposure to sustainable practices during the stay increases tourists’ awareness and encourages more responsible behavior. This aligns with the SEM result showing that visitor satisfaction leads to stronger support for regenerative tourism.

4.8.5. Behavioral Change and Regenerative Outcomes

The qualitative data also indicate that homestay experiences can lead to observable behavioral change. Mr. Thao explained: *“Trash is clearly classified... organic waste is recycled into fertilizer... and tourists are more conscious of protecting the environment.”*

This suggests that regenerative tourism practices not only reduce environmental impact but also influence tourists’ behavior.

Mrs. Thi further noted: *“Providing separate trash bins creates habits for tourists... nowadays they want to experience, like planting trees or being close to nature.”*

This reflects a shift in tourist expectations, from passive sightseeing to active participation in sustainable activities. Such changes are consistent with the concept of regenerative tourism, where visitors contribute positively to the destination.

4.8.6. Supporting Factors and Challenges

While the overall findings are positive, some challenges remain. Language barriers were commonly mentioned by hosts. For example, Host Peter stated: *“I use simple English and Google Translate.”* and Host Jelley added: *“My son helps translate, and I’ve learned some basic English.”*

Despite these limitations, meaningful interaction still occurs, suggesting that emotional connection and shared activities can compensate for language differences.

In addition, institutional support plays an important role. Host Lahiru explained: *“The tourism office helped us promote our homestay and provided training.”* He also highlighted economic benefits: *“Our family income has doubled.”*

These findings indicate that external support and economic incentives can strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of homestay tourism.

5. Discussion

This study set out to examine how host–guest interaction shapes visitor experience, visitor satisfaction, and support for regenerative tourism practices within the context of homestay tourism in Sapa, Vietnam. The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual model and offer important theoretical and practical insights into the role of interpersonal interaction in fostering regenerative tourism outcomes.

5.1. The Role of Host–Guest Interaction in Shaping Visitor Experience

The results demonstrate that host–guest interaction has a strong and significant positive effect on visitor experience, supporting H1. This finding confirms that interpersonal interaction is not merely a supplementary aspect of homestay tourism but rather a central driver of experiential value. In line with service-dominant logic, tourism experiences are co-created through active engagement between hosts and guests rather than passively consumed as predefined services. In the context of Sapa, where homestay tourism is deeply embedded in local ethnic communities, interactions such as sharing meals, storytelling, and participating in daily activities allow visitors to engage directly with local culture.

These interactions enhance emotional engagement, cultural understanding, and perceived authenticity, all of which contribute to a more meaningful tourism experience. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing that authentic social interactions significantly enrich tourism experiences, particularly in community-based tourism settings. Importantly, the strength of the relationship ($\beta = 0.660$) suggests that host–guest interaction is one of the most influential determinants of visitor experience in homestay contexts. This highlights the unique value proposition of homestays compared to conventional accommodation, where interaction is often limited and standardized.

5.2. Direct and Indirect Effects of Host–Guest Interaction on Visitor Satisfaction

The study also found that host–guest interaction has a direct positive effect on visitor satisfaction, supporting H2. However, the magnitude of this effect is relatively modest compared to its impact on visitor experience. This suggests that while interpersonal interaction contributes directly to satisfaction, its primary influence operates through enhancing the quality of the visitor experience. This interpretation is further supported by the mediation analysis, which shows that visitor experience significantly mediates the

relationship between host–guest interaction and visitor satisfaction (H5). In other words, host–guest interaction enhances satisfaction mainly by first creating meaningful and engaging experiences. This finding refines the traditional understanding of satisfaction formation in tourism by highlighting the importance of experiential processes rather than direct service evaluation alone. From the perspective of social exchange theory, this result can be interpreted as a process of value perception. Visitors evaluate their interactions with hosts not only based on immediate outcomes but also based on the experiential benefits derived from those interactions. When these interactions lead to meaningful experiences, visitors perceive greater value and, consequently, report higher satisfaction.

5.3. The Critical Role of Visitor Experience in Driving Satisfaction

The findings confirm that visitor experience has a strong and significant positive effect on visitor satisfaction, supporting H3. This result aligns with a large body of tourism literature suggesting that satisfaction is primarily an outcome of experiential evaluation. Experiences that are emotionally engaging, culturally meaningful, and memorable tend to generate higher levels of satisfaction. In the context of homestay tourism, visitor experience is shaped by factors such as cultural immersion, authenticity, and emotional connection with hosts. These elements differentiate homestay experiences from standardized tourism products and contribute to their perceived uniqueness. The strong effect observed in this study ($\beta = 0.636$) reinforces the importance of designing tourism experiences that go beyond basic service provision and focus on emotional and cultural engagement. This finding also supports the shift in tourism research from a product-oriented perspective to an experience-centered approach, where the quality of the experience becomes the primary determinant of visitor satisfaction.

5.4. Visitor Satisfaction as A Driver of Regenerative Tourism Support

One of the most important contributions of this study lies in its examination of the relationship between visitor satisfaction and support for regenerative tourism practices. The results show that visitor satisfaction has a strong and significant positive effect on regenerative tourism support, supporting H4.

This finding suggests that satisfaction is not only an outcome variable but also a key antecedent of pro-environmental and pro-social behaviors in tourism. Visitors who are satisfied with their experiences are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the destination and are more willing to support practices that benefit local communities and the environment.

In the context of regenerative tourism, this relationship is particularly important because it highlights how experiential and emotional factors can translate into responsible tourism behaviors. Rather than relying solely on awareness campaigns or external regulations, fostering visitor satisfaction through meaningful experiences may be a more effective strategy for encouraging regenerative tourism practices. This result also aligns with the idea that emotional connection and place attachment play a crucial role in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions. When visitors

feel satisfied and emotionally connected to a destination, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that support its long-term sustainability and regeneration.

5.5. Mediation Mechanisms and The Pathway to Regenerative Tourism

The mediation analysis provides deeper insight into the mechanisms through which host–guest interaction influences regenerative tourism outcomes. The results show that visitor experience and visitor satisfaction jointly mediate the relationship between host–guest interaction and support for regenerative tourism practices (H6 and H7).

This sequential mediation highlights a multi-stage process:

Host–guest interaction → Visitor experience → Visitor satisfaction → Regenerative tourism support

This pathway suggests that regenerative tourism behaviors are not directly driven by interaction alone but emerge from a chain of experiential and emotional responses. In other words, interaction creates meaningful experiences, experiences generate satisfaction, and satisfaction leads to supportive attitudes and behaviors.

This finding contributes to the literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of how regenerative tourism outcomes are formed at the micro level. It emphasizes that interpersonal interaction is a foundational element that initiates a cascade of psychological and behavioral responses.

5.6. Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions.

- First, it extends the application of social exchange theory in tourism by demonstrating that the benefits of interaction are not limited to satisfaction but also include broader behavioral outcomes such as support for regenerative tourism practices.
- Second, it reinforces the relevance of service-dominant logic by showing that value in tourism is co-created through interaction and experience. The findings highlight that tourism experiences are dynamic and relational rather than static and product-based.
- Third, the study contributes to the emerging literature on regenerative tourism by providing empirical evidence linking micro-level interactions to macro-level sustainability outcomes. While much of the existing research on regenerative tourism focuses on conceptual frameworks, this study offers quantitative support for the role of visitor experience and satisfaction in driving regenerative behaviors.

5.7. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that homestay operators should prioritize enhancing host–guest interaction to create more meaningful visitor experiences. Training programs that focus on communication skills, cultural storytelling, and guest engagement can significantly improve the quality of interaction and, consequently, visitor experience and satisfaction. Destination managers and policymakers should also support initiatives that encourage community participation in tourism and promote authentic cultural experiences. Integrating visible regenerative practices, such as environmental conservation activities and

cultural preservation programs, into the tourism experience can further strengthen visitors' awareness and support for regenerative tourism. Moreover, tourism development strategies should move beyond a focus on service quality and infrastructure to emphasize human interaction and experiential value. By fostering meaningful connections between visitors and local communities, destinations can create more sustainable and regenerative tourism models.

6. Theoretical and Practical Implications

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to tourism research in several ways. First, it extends Social Exchange Theory by showing that the outcomes of interaction are not limited to satisfaction but can also influence support for regenerative tourism practices. This provides a broader understanding of how social interaction shapes tourist behavior. Second, the findings support Service-Dominant Logic by confirming that tourism value is created through interaction and experience. Rather than being passive consumers, visitors actively participate in shaping their own experiences through engagement with hosts. Finally, this study adds to the growing literature on regenerative tourism by providing empirical evidence from a homestay context in a developing country. It highlights how everyday interactions can play a role in encouraging more responsible and sustainable tourism behavior.

6.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for homestay operators, destination managers, and policymakers seeking to promote regenerative tourism.

- First, the results highlight the critical importance of host–guest interaction in shaping visitor experience and satisfaction. Homestay operators should therefore prioritize enhancing interpersonal interaction as a core component of their service offering. This can be achieved through training programs that focus on communication skills, storytelling, cultural interpretation, and emotional engagement. Encouraging hosts to actively interact with guests—such as inviting them to participate in daily activities, sharing local traditions, and engaging in meaningful conversations—can significantly enhance the overall tourism experience.
- Second, the findings suggest that visitor experience is a key driver of satisfaction, which in turn influences support for regenerative tourism practices. This implies that improving service quality alone is not sufficient; instead, homestay operators should focus on designing immersive and meaningful experiences. Activities such as cooking traditional meals, participating in farming, learning handicrafts, or attending local cultural events can create memorable experiences that strengthen visitors' emotional connection to the destination.
- Third, the strong relationship between visitor satisfaction and support for regenerative tourism practices indicates that satisfied visitors are more likely to engage in responsible and regenerative behaviors. Destination managers and policymakers can leverage this by integrating regenerative elements into the tourism experience. For example, promoting visible environmental practices (e.g., waste sorting, plastic

reduction, renewable energy use) and cultural preservation initiatives (e.g., traditional performances, craft workshops) can enhance visitors' awareness and encourage supportive behaviors.

- Fourth, the findings emphasize the importance of community involvement in tourism development. Policymakers should support local communities by providing training, resources, and institutional support to improve the quality of homestay services and ensure that tourism benefits are distributed equitably. Strengthening community participation not only enhances the authenticity of the tourism experience but also contributes to long-term sustainability and regeneration.
- Fifth, the study suggests that tourism development strategies should move beyond a traditional focus on infrastructure and economic growth to prioritize human interaction and experiential value. By fostering meaningful connections between visitors and local communities, destinations can create more sustainable and regenerative tourism models that benefit both tourists and residents.
- Finally, for destinations such as Sapa that are experiencing rapid tourism growth, the findings provide important guidance on how to balance development with preservation. By emphasizing host-guest interaction, experiential value, and community-based practices, tourism stakeholders can mitigate the negative impacts of mass tourism and promote a more regenerative approach to tourism development.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling means that the findings may not fully represent all types of visitors. Future studies could use more diverse samples to improve generalizability. Second, the data were collected at a single point in time, so changes in visitor attitudes over time could not be examined. Longitudinal studies would help address this issue.

In addition, the study focused on a single destination, Sapa, which has its own unique cultural and environmental characteristics. Future research could compare different destinations to better understand how context influences these relationships. Finally, incorporating qualitative approaches such as interviews or observations could provide deeper insights into host-guest interaction.

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Ethics Declaration

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The study was conducted by our author. Prior to participation, all participants were duly informed of their rights and responsibilities. The questionnaire were distributed via Wechat, Zalo and Facebook.

Contributions Conceptualization: Doan Trung Thanh wrote introduction, literature review, methodology, analyze, and conclusion. Hewaralalage Chethiya Raj Sampath wrote methodology, analyze data. All author read and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing Interests

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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