



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Destination Marketing & Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm

Research paper

Destination distinctiveness: Concept, measurement, and impact on tourist satisfaction

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Destination identities
Local distinctiveness
Destination attributes
Measurement
Satisfaction

ABSTRACT

Identifying the distinctive, unique characteristics of a destination is necessary for tourism development and management. After exploring the concept of destination distinctiveness, this article presents a standardized method for identifying unique and distinctive place-based attributes of a tourist destination, by comparing supply and demand views. Using Dalat, a mountain city in Vietnam, as a case study, this research combines qualitative and quantitative data in an identification grid that comprises natural, human, infrastructure and facility factors to reveal the most distinctive attributes of the destination, which differ depending on the segment of tourists and can explain tourists' satisfaction and behaviors. The combination of the most distinctive attributes with a strong emotional component is important to the destination's positioning strategy.

1. Introduction

Tourism managers use a destination's unique and distinctive characteristics as attractors that increase tourists' attention to the destination and build its image in their minds. Indeed, 'uniqueness is particularly important due to its influence on differentiation among similar destinations in the target consumers' minds' (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011, p. 467). Many destinations build on their distinctiveness to attract tourists, from Singapore's cleanliness to Costa Rica's Amazonian jungles. Such characteristics can increase a destination's attractiveness and competitiveness, especially as 'travelers increasingly seek unique and meaningful travel experiences to satisfy their needs and desires' (Kim, 2014, p. 37). Destinations with unique features also tend to be perceived as beautiful and therefore exhibit strong pull motivation (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014).

Although tourist advertising often cites such typical characteristics, little attention has focused on their role in destination management. Such features may help build a destination's image as unique (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Qu et al., 2011), explain place attachment and tourist involvement (Tsai, 2012), and contribute to memorable experiences (Kim, 2014). Because of their unique, distinctive nature, typical attributes offer potential sources of differentiation in positioning the destination brand. Accordingly, identifying a destination's unique and distinctive elements is a first, necessary step for a place marketing strategy that can encourage tourists to select it as a destination (Qu et al., 2011). Local distinctiveness is mentioned as one of the decisive

factors for a destination's evolution (Garay & Cànoves, 2011) and for the production of a distinctive and competitive place identity (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). Such distinctiveness is also crucial for product development and particularly related to crafts, local foods and drinks (Haven-Tang & Sedgley, 2014; Lin & Mao, 2015) because it ensures to uphold the tourists' vision about the destination through their sensory involvement with the unique, distinctive and original place-based assets (Lin & Mao, 2015; Littrell, Reilly, & Stout, 1992; Sims, 2010). However, local distinctiveness is an elusive concept (Grant, Human, & Le Pelley, 2002) for academics and practitioners in tourism due to the overlap in meanings with other concepts such as authenticity (Camus, 2010), sense of place or place identity (Anggraini, 2017).

The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) strongly recommends identifying positive elements for tourism product development (Mac Nulty & Cleverdon, 2011) and destination branding (Anholt, 2009). Identification of unique and distinctive characteristics helps destinations determine their key resources in distinction strategies (Richards, 2011). These elements may come from basic resources or living heritage, such as the diversity and abundance of foods that attract international tourists to Taiwan (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2010) or creative resources, especially in cultural tourism (Richards, 2011). However, prior literature lacks consistent and appropriate instruments to help destination managers identify distinctive local characteristics (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013). As a result, it reduces the ability of creating the uniqueness of destinations and leads to the serial

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.04.004>

Received 12 December 2016; Received in revised form 4 April 2017; Accepted 8 April 2017
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reproduction of culture (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Similar to any perceptual process, the characterization of these typical attributes entails subjective appreciation, influenced by various individual and situational moderating factors, such as the status of and attachment to a specific destination, according to tourists and other stakeholders. Identifying and evaluating destinations' distinctiveness thus remains a critical issue for tourism research (Haven-Tang & Sedgley, 2014; Kumar & Nayak, 2014).

This research accordingly aims to explore the notion of destination distinctiveness by positioning it in relation with other related concepts and to identify distinctive attributes of a destination by comparing perceptions from the supply and demand sides. Specifically, this study pursues three main objectives: First, it seeks to develop a standardized method for identifying typical attributes of a tourist destination, from supply and demand points of view. Second, it explores the relationship between typical attributes (as assessed by international and domestic tourists) and tourists' satisfaction and their intentions to return or recommend. In line with these objectives, this study makes two significant contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this article advances the understanding of the notion of local/destination distinctiveness from the analysis of related concepts. The proposed identification scale helps distinguish a destination's distinctive and unique attributes from other attributes and reveals how they contribute to tourist satisfaction. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, from both supply (experts and local stakeholders) and demand (tourists) perspectives, offers more reliable results than conventional uses of expert perceptions. The elaborated instrument can also help destination managers exploit their distinctiveness and implement marketing strategies accordingly.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Local distinctiveness

Local distinctiveness is derived from the concept of local identity, originated from place identity theory developed by Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983). So far, the concept of local identity remains vague, unclear and ambiguous (Haschar-Noé, 2005; Higham & Hinch, 2009). Local identity refers to a set of social, geographical, historical, ethnic, natural ... characteristics, that allow identifying particularities of a territory (or a community) in order to distinguish that territory (or community) from others (Charlot, 2001, cited in Haschar-Noé, 2005). Local identity is a social and historic structure that has two functions: The first function is to create a sense of belonging to place (or a community) (Marques, Lima, Luísa, Moreira, & Reis, 2015) and the second is to distinguish it from other territories (or communities) (Haschar-Noé, 2005). Local identity emphasizes place attributes and their effects to individuals related to that place.

Local distinctiveness connects directly to the notion of place identity, a component of place attachment that refers to the congruence between the place's symbolism and image and tourists' self-concept (Tsai, 2012). Place identity is a process of building the identity of an individual based on the perception of physical environment around it. Korpela (1989) emphasizes the connection between place and identity by describing place identity in terms of "cognitions of those physical settings and parts of the physical environment, in or with which an individual – consciously or unconsciously – regulates his experience of maintaining his sense of self". Place identity is determined not only by the physical components, but also by the sense and association developed between people and the place. The first principle of place identity - distinction / differentiation - concerns the sense of personal distinctiveness or uniqueness (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Wang & Xu, 2015). This principle predicts that people, when experiencing (physically or culturally) a distinctive or unique place, would exhibit more place identification (Wang & Xu, 2015; Wang, Chen et al., 2015), thus expressed stronger emotional attachment with that place (Proshansky

et al., 1983). As a result, the place's typical attributes represent input to tourists' cognitive identification process. In turn, place identity can increase a person's feelings of belonging to a tourist destination, and the tourism setting enables him or her to affirm this identity (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Therefore, place distinctiveness is the basis for a consciously individual cognition process of a specific place.

Previous research usually regards local distinctiveness as antecedents of place attachment and analyzes its components such as place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, or social bonds (Gross & Brown, 2008; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013; Tsai, 2012; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010). For instance, Gross and Brown (2008) find that food and wine, as specific features of Australia, predict both dependence and identity components of place attachment. Uniqueness as a functional attribute significantly contributes to the holistic experience, which helps maximize tourists' enjoyment during their stay and long-lasting place attachment. The functional attributes of a destination should characterize not only its practical utility but also its uniqueness, providing the value that tourists regard as essential and non-substitutable for fulfilling their substantive needs and desires. Functional attachment is embodied in a destination's physical characteristics and strongly related to the perception that the setting possesses unique qualities (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Therefore, the nurturing process of place attachment starts from the effective management of a destination's distinctiveness, in addition to other emotional and symbolic attributes (Tsai, 2012). Ram, Björk, and Weidenfeld (2016) also find a close relationship between authenticity and place attachment. Overall then, the need to identify and preserve a destination's unique features is crucial (Gross & Brown, 2008) and deserves more concrete exploration.

Local distinctiveness is also related to authenticity, which remains a critical issue for academics and tourism stakeholders and reflects 'a concept that encapsulates what is genuine, real, and/or true' (Castéran & Roederer, 2013, p. 153). It is mostly mentioned in relation to a particular thing or experience (Chalmers & Price, 2009). An object or experience can be authentic but not necessarily distinctive or unique of a place. Furthermore, authenticity can be approached in several ways: objective authenticity is based on originality and the genuineness of objects and sites, as verified by experts (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Ram et al., 2016); constructive authenticity is determined by the tourist and is subjective, negotiable, and contextual (Ram et al., 2016); and experiential authenticity refers to the subjective tourism experience (Wang, 1999). Referring to food products, Camus (2004) proposes three main components: origin, uniqueness, and projection. An authentic product first is determined by its origin, but it also is exclusive in nature, with no possibility of imitation. The uniqueness of the experience is an existential component of authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010) that implies that no equivalent exists elsewhere or that it exists in multiple copies. Finally, the projection dimension implies individual identification with the genuine product or experience at that place, such that unique and distinctive features of the place enhance its authenticity. The 'terroir', or specific attributes of a place that confer unique characteristics on products originating from that place, constitutes the crossroads of natural and human factors that give identity to a product or experience, which in turn become sources of value and differentiation (Camus, 2010) for a destination.

Local distinctiveness includes special social, economic or unique environmental characteristics of a place that makes it special, different from anywhere else (Grant et al., 2002). Uniqueness, distinctiveness, originality or rarity with enduring value, are, therefore, key features of local distinctiveness. With these features, a destination can differentiate itself and construct a local identity (Korpela, 1989; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), which then shapes the destination's image and influences tourists' behavior (Kim, 2014). The dimensions of the destination, which include the specificity and importance of social or physical features, highlight the characteristics of place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) and create memorable and unique experi-

Table 1
Local distinctiveness and related concepts: place attachment, place identity, and authenticity.

Concept	Authors	Definition	Dimensions	Perspectives
Place attachment/ destination attachment	Low and Altman (1992)	Place attachment involves the interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, behaviors, and actions in reference to a place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Attachments (affect, cognition, and practice) – Places that vary in scale, specificity, and tangibility – Different actors (individuals, groups, and cultures) – Different social relationships (individuals, groups, and cultures) – Temporal aspects (linear and cyclical) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – This study analyzes the unique emotional experiences and bonds of people with places
	Gross and Brown (2008)	Place attachment is conceived as an affective bond or link between people and specific places. Involvement can be defined as the perceived personal importance and/or interest consumers attach to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of a good, service, or an idea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Place attachment: place dependence and place identity – Place involvement: attraction, self-expression, and centrality to lifestyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The study measures destination-specific tourism experiences, focusing on destination attributes strongly identified with food and wine. – The aim should be to identify unique or particularly characteristic aspects of a destination and then match product, service, and experience provision accordingly.
	Yuksel et al. (2010)	Place attachment is defined as an emotional, cognitive, and functional bond with a place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Place dependence – Place identity – Affective attachment 	<p>Attachments may be formed with real, mythical, hypothetical, and imagined places. Not all environments have a strong link with a person's self-identification process; however, individuals often identify with places that reflect their own identities.</p>
	Scannell and Gifford (2010)	Place attachment is the bonding that occurs between individuals and their meaningful environments.	<p>The person dimension: individual and collective place attachment</p> <p>The psychological process dimension of place attachment</p> <p>The place dimension of place attachment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Differentiation in place identity depends on distinguishing features. – A person is attached to a place because it facilitates "distinctiveness" from other places.
	Tsai (2012)	Place attachment refers to the emotional and psychological bonds formed between an individual and a particular place.	<p>Three components: place dependence, affective attachment, and identity</p> <p>Six antecedents: functional/emotional benefits, uniqueness, trust, attractiveness, and self-connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Six exogenous constructs serve as causal antecedents of place attachment (functional benefits, emotional benefits, uniqueness, trust, attractiveness, and self-connection). – The tourism destination must maintain its uniqueness and extraordinariness in comparison with competitors.
	Prayag and Ryan (2012)	Place attachment is an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination (Tsai, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007).	<p>Place attachment (place dependence and identity)</p> <p>Destination image</p> <p>Personal involvement (importance, pleasure, sign, risk consequence, and risk probability)</p> <p>Overall satisfaction as a single item</p> <p>Loyalty (revisit intention and likelihood to recommend)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Place dependence is related to the perception that a setting possesses unique qualities.
	Ramkissoon et al. (2013)	The emotional bond between an individual and a particular spatial setting. Place attachment refers to the bonding people share with places and emerges as people get to know a place and endow it with value.	<p>Place dependence</p> <p>Place identity</p> <p>Place social bonding</p> <p>Place affect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Visitors' functional attachment to a specific place and their awareness of its uniqueness are key factors. – Natural settings offer individuals the opportunity to develop a sense of identity with a place due to its uniqueness.
	Suntikul and Jachna (2016)	Place attachment refers to the personal connection that one feels with a particular place. Like the concept of experience, place, place attachment is founded on emotional engagement	<p>Place dependence</p> <p>Place identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The unique character of a destination is one of three items that represent the place dependence. The feeling of this unique character is given by the atmosphere at the destination.
Place identity	Proshansky (1978)	Place identity is a dimension of the individual's personal identity.	<p>Personal construction</p> <p>Physical environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unique experiences and personality characteristics also impose their influence on <p>(continued on next page)</p>

Table 1 (continued)

Concept	Authors	Definition	Dimensions	Perspectives
	Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996)	Place identification expresses membership of a group of people who are defined by location.	Cognitive structures Self-identity Distinctiveness Continuity Self-esteem Self-efficacy	tastes and preferences for physical settings and their properties. – Holding specific settlement identifications engenders positive distinctiveness. – Distinctiveness was achieved by inhabitants at both a spatial and temporal scale.
	Hallak, Brown, and Lindsay (2012)	Place identity is more than an attachment to a place; it is an individual's cognitions, beliefs, perceptions or thoughts that the self is invested in a particular spatial setting.	Distinctiveness Continuity Self-esteem Self-efficacy	– Place identity influences an individual's self-identity, social identity, attitudes and behaviors. – People develop relationships within groups and they then use these relationships and memberships to distinguish themselves from those outside of the groups or from other groups; thus, psychological distinctiveness.
	Loureiro and Kaufmann (2013)	Place identity is related to dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioural tendencies and skills relevant to this environment.	A symbolically important connection between an individual and a setting A psychological investment with a setting that has developed over time	– Place identification is the connection between the tourist's self and a particular setting of a region's characteristics.
	Wang and Xu (2015)	A place identity is determined not only by the physical components but also the meaning and association developed between people and place.	Distinctiveness Continuity Self-esteem Self-efficacy	– The distinctiveness principle is the establishment of a sense of personal distinctiveness or uniqueness. – Residents living in a (physically or culturally) distinctive/unique place, relative to other places comparable to the current one, would exhibit more place identification.
Authenticity	Wang (1999)	Authenticity has four meanings: – "historical verisimilitude" of representation – genuine, historically accurate, and immaculate simulation – original – authority or power that authorizes, certifies, and legally validates authenticity.	Object-related authenticity in tourism (objective authenticity, constructive authenticity) Activity-related authenticity in tourism (existential authenticity)	– Authenticity connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real, or the unique.
	Camus, (2010, 2004) Zeng, Go, and de Vries (2012)	Authenticity refers to original, unspoiled, and located outside the commercial sphere. Authenticity refers to the 'real thing,' and serves as a label that attaches a particular identity to an object, subject or person.	Food product: origin, uniqueness, projection Tourist site: original, non-denatured, non-profit Three dimensions of authenticity: objective, constructive and personal concerning the relationship between object and experience Constructive authenticity is used as the unit of analysis to measure restaurant authenticity. The constructive dimension of authenticity is substantive, staged and negotiated.	– Originality, uniqueness – Source of value and differentiation – Authenticity and standardization represent contradictory forces and might therefore pose a managerial paradox: establishing a sense of uniqueness while simultaneously possessing criteria. – Restaurant authenticity can lead to the creation of a distinctive identity and, in turn, a differential competitive advantage compared to those competitors. – A restaurant group that chooses to differentiate on authenticity, needs to communicate a sense of uniqueness.
	Castéran and Roederer (2013)	Authenticity can be defined as a concept that encapsulates what is genuine, real, and/or true.	Object authenticity Existential authenticity Objective authenticity to authenticated tourist experience	– Origin of the offer – The dimensions of an experience (namely the hedonic-sensorial, sociocultural rhetoric, praxeologic, and time-related dimensions) are <i>(continued on next page)</i>

Table 1 (continued)

Concept	Authors	Definition	Dimensions	Perspectives
	Trinh, Ryan, and Cave (2014)	Not identified	Authenticity of a tourist site: Iconic (in) authenticity, Indexical authenticity or originality and artificiality dimensions of authenticity Souvenirs represents an experiential and not necessarily an objective authenticity.	what structures existential authenticity. - Criteria used by tourists when buying souvenirs: uniqueness and originality, workmanship, aesthetics seen as traditional in function and looks, cultural and historic integrity, local craftsmanship and the genuineness of the shopping experience - Tourists perceive authenticity in terms of an evaluation of its "genuineness" when visiting major attractions. - More generic actions applying to increased authenticity can include engaging signage and innovative interpretations to enliven attractions through uncovering stories in a unique and authentic way.
	Ram et al. (2016)	"Authentic" is often described in terms of its characteristics: being real, reliable, trustworthy, original, firsthand, true in substance, and prototypical as opposed to copied, reproduced, or done the same way as an original.	Subjective authenticity Experiential authenticity	

ences among tourists (Kim, 2014). Such unique experiences result from an identification and valorization process focused on the destination distinctiveness (e.g. nature, culture, history, lifestyle; Kim, 2014). Tourism destination's unique elements contribute significantly to its brand identity (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Qu et al., 2011). The distinctive or unique tourist attractions within a destination relate to tourists' sub-brand awareness (Stepchenkova & Li, 2014). Unique assets may affect awareness, because they influence familiarity through tourists' ability to recall and recognize the brand, such that they may attract more tourists (Hornig, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012). However, local distinctiveness values can easily be lost due to environmental impacts or excessive exploitation of human beings. In general, local distinctiveness not only comes from existing resources such as natural environment, cultural or traditional factors, ...but also could be completely invented, such as the cleanliness in Singapore or the aircraft industry in Toulouse, France (Clavé, 2010). In the trend of innovation and creativity towards sustainable development, each place can create its own unique values.

Table 1 summarizes the relationships between local distinctiveness and other related concepts.

In summary, destination's distinctiveness is a key aspect for tourism. It can refer to uniqueness, distinctiveness, originality, and exoticism, among other concepts. Furthermore, this character encompasses unique and distinctive resources for product development or unique image for branding, such that it is critical to tourist satisfaction. Fig. 1 enriches the understanding of the notion and its characteristics by relating it to place identity, attachment, and authenticity.

2.2. Identifying local distinctiveness of a tourism destination

Knowledge about how to identify distinctive features of a destination is scarce; this character is relatively subjective and depends on people's perceptions of the destination. Thus, both researchers and managers would benefit from a standardized method for identifying a destination's typical attributes. Many studies adopt a multi-attributational approach by identifying and evaluating a series of attributes to define an image that represents its most evident characteristics (Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Qu et al., 2011; Valle, Silva, Mendes, & Guerreiro, 2006) or by assessing tourists' satisfaction (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ragavan, Subramonian, & Sharif, 2014; Valle et al., 2006).

Researchers have used various methods to identify suitable destination attributes. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) recommend mixed methods to measure dimensions of the destination image but qualitative methods to assess the unique image construct. Some typical attributes

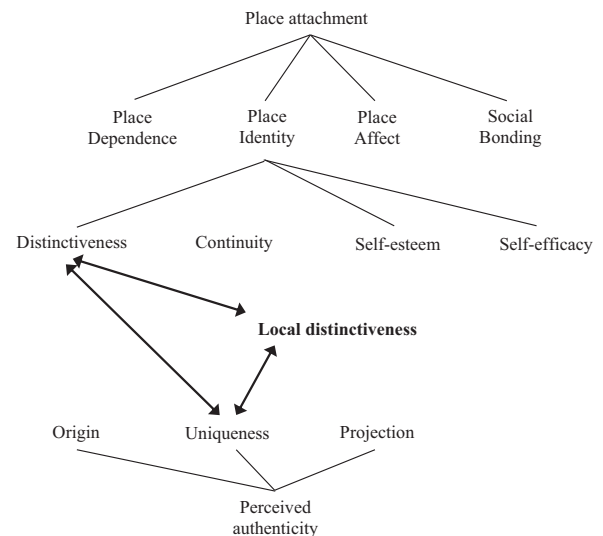


Fig. 1. Local distinctiveness in relation with other concepts.

Table 2
Literature review of destination attributes' measurement.

Concept	Authors	Methodology	Validity or dimensionality obtained
Tourist destination image	Echtner and Ritchie (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Experience survey, insight-stimulating examples, critical incidents, focus groups, and structured and unstructured questionnaire (three open-ended questions on holistic and unique components of image) – 35 attributes, producing a total of 70 scale items using a six-point Likert scale – Sample of 600 students (150 questionnaires per destination) – Four tourist destinations (Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, and Switzerland) 	34 items for eight dimensions: comfort/security, interest/adventure, natural state, tourist facilitation, resort atmosphere/climate, cultural distance, inexpensiveness, lack of language barrier
	Beerli and Martín (2004)	Structured questionnaire with 24 items of cognitive image grouped in nine dimensions measured on a seven-point Likert scale: 2 items of affective image, 1 item of overall image, 7 items of motivations, item about experience of vacation travel, and socio-demographic characteristics 616 tourists in Lanzarote (Canary Islands)	Cognitive image: five dimensions (natural/cultural resources, general/tourist leisure infrastructures, atmosphere, social setting/ environment, and sun and beach)
	Valle et al. (2006)	Structured questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30 attributes of the destination assessed in terms of importance (1 = “totally irrelevant” to 5 = “extremely important” and satisfaction (1 = “very unsatisfied” to 5 = “very satisfied”) – overall satisfaction with the journey, intention to revisit, and recommendation intention Five-point Likert scale.486 tourist interviews (domestic/international)	Affective image General satisfaction, attribute satisfaction, met expectations, revisiting intention, and willingness to recommend The four weaknesses of the destination: urban planning, traffic, cleanliness, and cultural initiative problems A very good evaluation of the natural conditions of the destination Facilities more related to tourism activity are also greatly appreciated.
	Moon, Ko, Connaughton, and Lee (2013)	Structured questionnaire of 27-item on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”) 451 visitors or spectators who attended the Tour de Korea in three regions (Kangin-kun, Danyang-kun, and Yangyang-kun)	Cognitive image (5 items on opportunity for adventure, ease of communication, hospitality/friendliness/receptiveness, tourist sites/ activities, and nightlife/entertainment) Affective image (6 items on relaxing/distressing, friendly/unfriendly, arousing/sleepy, interesting/boring, pleasant/unpleasant, and exciting/gloomy)
Destination image	Qu et al. (2011)	Structured questionnaire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cognitive image (28 attributes on a five-point Likert scale – unique image (15 items on a five-point Likert scale, – Affective image (4 items on a seven-point Likert scale) – 1 item on perception of overall image on a seven-point scale – 2 items (five-point Likert scale) on intention to revisit and to recommend – 2 questions on intention to revisit and to recommend on a five-point Likert scale 379 domestic visitors at five welcome centers in Oklahoma	Four dimensions of cognitive image (quality of experiences, tourist attractions, environment and infrastructure, and entertainment/outdoor activities) 3 items of affective image (pleasant, relaxing, and exciting) 3 dimensions of unique image (native American/natural environment, appealing destination, and local attractions)
Destination image, place identity	Loureiro and Kaufmann (2013)	Structured questionnaire on five-point Likert scale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 4 items of place identity – 22 items on destination image – 3 items of tourist satisfaction 272 tourists at the airport and in the port of the Sao Tome and Principe islands	Destination image: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Place quality (3 items) – Agreeableness (6 items) – Typicality (2 items) – Culture (3 items) – Accessibility (2 items) – Functionality (6 items) Satisfaction (3 items) Place identity (4 items)
Destination image (supply and demand sides)	Ji and Wall (2015)	Projected image: promotional materials (brochures, travel guides issued by the Qingdao Municipal Government and Tourism Administration) 15 themes Perceived image: questionnaire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2 open-ended questions about overall image – 22 items of cognitive image on five-point Likert scale – 4 items of affective image on five-point Likert scale – 9 types of information sources on five-point Likert scale – Number of previous visits and personal information (sex, age, education, place of residence) 578 visitors at 3 tourist sites selected from 28 sites recommended on Qingdao Tourism Administration's website	Congruence between projected and perceived images: 11 items (natural scenery, cultural attractions, special events, city landscape, squares, place for vacations and holidays, transportation system, seafood, golf, shopping, weather)
Stakeholder's images of a tourist destination	Styliadis, Belhassen, and Shani (2015)	Structured questionnaire on 7-point scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cognitive image (26 items) – Affective image (4 items) 	Destination image: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cognitive image (24 items) – Affective image (3 items)

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Concept	Authors	Methodology	Validity or dimensionality obtained
Destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty	Ramseook-Munhurrin, Seebaluck, and Naidoo (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall image (2 items) - Recommendations (2 items) - Demographic questions 3 stakeholder groups: 240 tourists, 200 residents and 168 tourism business owners/employees in Eilat Structured questionnaire on 5-point Likert-type scale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 23 items of specific destination characteristics - 3 items of perceived value - 3 items of tourist satisfaction - 2 items of tourist loyalty 500 questionnaires distributed to over 18 year-old departing international tourists at the airport of Mauritius, 370 copies usable. Convenient sample technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall image (2 items) - Recommendations (2 items) Destination image: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel environment (4 items) - Attractions (5 items) - Events (5 items) - Infrastructure (5 items) - Sport (4 items)
Destination image, consumer experience, satisfaction and loyalty	Wu (2016)	Structured questionnaire on 7-point scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destination image (6 items) - Consumer experience (3 items) - Destination satisfaction (9 items) - Destination loyalty (4 items) 475 valid responses	6 items of destination image: reputation, natural attractions, entertainment and events, historic and culture attractions, accessibility of the destination, level of service quality
Popular culture and Destination image formation	Lee and Bai (2016)	Semi-structured focus group and in-depth interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7 codes of destination image - 8 codes of pop-culture - 6 codes of pop-star's event - 2 codes of revisit intention 	Destination image: Positive (3 themes), Negative (2 themes) Pop-culture: Direct (2 themes), Indirect (4 themes) Pop-star's event: Direct (4 themes), indirect (1 theme) Future behavior: Revisit (1 theme) and Word of Mouth (1 theme)
Pre-visit beliefs and projected destination images	Önder and Marchiori (2017)	Demand site: unstructured method with open questions through online survey with 120,000 American adults (> 18 years old) in 3 main geographic American regions (East Coast, West Coast, Central, 4116 responses, 2658 usable answers about perception of given destination, 2153 written belief describing the given destination. Online visual representation of destinations from official tourist board websites: 12 topic categories	From demand side: At least one keyword related to tangible aspect is associated to the destination investigated. Prior belief: iconic attraction might contribute in forming the main destination image. From supply side: 12 topic categories Comparison between prior visit belief and online visual communication: 7 topic categories matched: cultural events and facilities; local cuisine and dining; tourism facilities and infrastructure; people and local residents; sports and recreation activities; city landscapes and attractions; and weather
Perceived destination landscapes	Sun, Zhang, and Ryan (2015)	Structured and unstructured methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an open-ended semi-structured questionnaire asking for a series of phrases that form an image of New Zealand - a series of photographs of iconic components of South Island landscape, culture, heritage, and food 235 respondents	14 themes suggested by respondents (beautiful landscape and scenery, harmony, quiet, peaceful, a good environment, clean, air, small size of population, comfortable, cold, mountains/skiing, fresh food, friendly/polite local people, and moderate development/commercialization) 25 most-mentioned words
Destination attributes associated with memorable experiences	Kim (2014)	42 items after expert's evaluation on a five-point scale 265 questionnaires, quota sampling method based on the population of local residents in Kaohsiung qualitative and quantitative methodologies structured and unstructured combination	33 items loaded onto 10 dimensional constructs: local culture, activities, special events, hospitality, infrastructure, destination management, accessibility, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure
Destination attributes	Ragavan et al. (2014)	Structured questionnaire of 25 statements capturing the travel features of Kuala Lumpur, rated on a seven-point Likert scale 140 international tourists in Kuala Lumpur, convenience sampling	23 indicators measuring the following formative constructs: accommodation and food, attractions, climate and image, commodities, convenience, culture, people, and price
Place attachment and place involvement	Gross and Brown (2008)	Structured questionnaire of multiple- item scales using a five-point Likert scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumer involvement construct (8 items of attraction, 6 items of centrality to lifestyle, and 6 items of self-expression) - place attachment construct (4 items of place identity and 4 items of place dependence) - destination attributes (4 items of food and wine) 476 tourists	Involvement constructs: centrality to lifestyle (8 items), attraction (6 items), self-expression (6 items), food and wine (3 items) Place attachment constructs: place dependence (4 items) and place identity (4 items)
	Tsai (2012)	Conceptual framework development stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literature review - In-depth interviews with 85 tourists - a preliminary placement attachment scale administered to 116 international tourists in Singapore Empirical model validation:	22 manifest indicators for 10 latent constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place dependence, affective attachment, and place identity representing the compositional dimensionality of place attachment - Six components of functional benefits, emotional benefits, uniqueness, trust, attractiveness and self-

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Concept	Authors	Methodology	Validity or dimensionality obtained
Destination image, place attachment	Prayag and Ryan (2012)	<p>– Structured questionnaire of 29 items – 2185 tourists</p> <p>Mixed method approach: Qualitative: 103 in-depth interviews with international tourists to identify destination-specific images jQuantitative: structured questionnaire: 10 attributes that best represent the destination's core image, 12 items of place attachment, 15 items of personal involvement, 1 item of overall satisfaction, and 2 items of loyalty measured on a seven-point scale. 705 international tourists in Mauritius</p>	<p>connection representing the causal antecedents of place attachment</p> <p>Destination image: 7 items (cultural and historical attractions, cultural diversity, variety and quality of accommodation, general level of service, accessibility of the destination, reputation of the island, exoticness of the place) Place attachment: 8 items Personal involvement: 6 items</p>

have already been identified as components of different destinations, such as the food and wine of Australia (Gross & Brown, 2008) or houses of São Tomé and Príncipe (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2013). Qu et al. (2011) also list the attributes such as native American/Western cultures, restful and relaxing atmosphere and safe and secure environment that constitute the unique image of Oklahoma.

However, no study shows how to identify destination-specific characteristics. Govers, Go, and Kumar (2007) propose content analysis techniques to capture the unique image of a destination, but this method requires neural network software, large samples, and complicated analysis procedures. Many researchers have attempted to develop measurements of destination attributes (see Table 2).

In addition, the data collection methods used in the previous studies vary widely, from multidimensional scales to semantic differential or Likert items, and from free proposal of adjectives to repertory-grid techniques (Assaker et al., 2011). To measure unique and distinctive attributes that differ from one destination to another, a consistent format with common constructs seems more appropriate, because it could be applied to any destination. However, a predetermined destination attribute list inherently reflects researchers' bias (Stepchenkova & Li, 2014). Echtner and Ritchie (1993) combine qualitative and quantitative methods but identify unique image attributes using only three open-ended questions. Overall, the unique, distinctive attributes remain difficult to quantify.

To develop a standardized method for identifying destination distinctiveness, this study first undertakes an analysis of empirical researches based on destination attributes. As representations of the unique and distinctive characteristics of a territory, local distinctiveness relates to the most fundamental factors: location and basic resources in terms of physical characteristics and history (Mac Nulty & Cleverdon, 2011). The analytical framework relies on the classification of a destination's tourism resources provided by the UNWTO and modified by Bui and Nguyen (2006) that include natural, cultural and human, and complementary resources. Accordingly, this study proposes three main dimensions: natural factors, human factors, and infrastructures and facilities. Natural and human factors have long been established as key attributes for building cognitive, affective, and conative destination images (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Infrastructure and facilities also have important roles in both attracting tourists and ensuring the quality of their experiences (see Table 3). This identification grid also takes into account creative resources (Richards & Wilson, 2006), especially for destinations that possess limited or exhausted local assets and are trying to make a transition towards an economy of signs and symbols (Lash & Urry, 1994).

3. Empirical study

This study proceeds in two steps, using qualitative and quantitative methodologies (see Fig. 2) through a case study of a tourist destination in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, the city of Dalat. This mountain destination appealed to tourists in the past because of its local

distinctiveness. However, its recent economic development has caused it to lose some charm and made it less attractive, as tourists noted in online forums (www.vietnamheritage.com.vn; vietnamgateway.org.vn; saigoneer.com), complaining that Dalat is losing typical attributes such as souvenirs, French villas, and pine forests. Identifying such unique and distinctive attributes or typical attributes could help Dalat enhance tourist satisfaction and encourage local stakeholders to preserve these features (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2013). To identify such attributes, qualitative methods provide a better understanding of the notion of destination distinctiveness.

3.1. Qualitative methods

A series of qualitative methods were used to identify the perceived unique and distinctive elements of a tourism destination: desk research with local studies (undertaken between 2005 and 2014); content analysis with 10 websites identified through a Google search for the keyword 'Dalat tourism'; interviews with 37 local suppliers (e.g. travel agencies, shops, attractions, coffee bars, restaurants and accommodations). The surveyed local suppliers were asked to respond in their own words to several open-ended questions in a supported answering grid administered to them during their working time. The open-ended questions are: What is local distinctiveness? What are unique and distinctive attributes of Dalat – Lam Dong? Content analysis was proceeded for qualitative answers.

The process of local distinctiveness identification included three steps. In the first step, words that might represent Dalat's distinctiveness were extracted and added to a list. Then different words that might be categorized under one sub-dimension were merged, which eliminated redundancies across the various sources. After being classified into the categories listed in the identification grid, this process ended by forming a rating grid with attributes that encompass significant words from previous steps, grouped into the natural factors, human factors and facilities dimensions. Thirty local experts (state managers, researchers, suppliers related to tourism, and local tour operators) reviewed this rating grid and evaluated each attribute according to its typicality, on five-point Likert scales.

3.2. Quantitative method

A questionnaire was developed using qualitative data from the thirty experts' evaluations. We first validated unique and distinctive attributes by comparing them against the attributes noted by tourists, according to a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'not typical at all' to 5 = 'very typical'). We then measured tourists' satisfaction with 11 items on five point Likert scales (from 'completely dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied'). Seven items focused on the destination's attractiveness (attractions, environment, activities, events, and hospitality), derived from previous destination studies (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2013; Valle et al., 2006) and adapted for this study; four other items referred to tourism products (authenticity,

Table 3
Identification grid for unique and distinctive attributes.

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Authors
Natural resources	Geographic location	Enright and Newton (2004)
	Geology, topography, and soil	Beerli and Martín (2004); Snepenger, Snepenger, Dalbey, and Wessol (2007)
	Climate	Beerli and Martín (2004); Enright and Newton (2004)
	Water resources	Beerli and Martín (2004)
	Biological resources	Deng et al. (2002); Ji (2011)
Human resources	Natural landscape	
	Historical buildings	Beerli and Martín (2004); Kim (2014); Valle et al. (2006)
	Architecture	Echtner and Ritchie (1993); Ji (2011); Kim (2014); Valle et al. (2006)
	Religious buildings/religions	Beerli and Martín (2004)
	Antique objects/museums	
	Urban planning	Valle et al. (2006)
	Cultural heritage	Kim (2014); Valle et al. (2006)
	Festivals and events	Ji (2011); Kim (2014); Lorenzini, Calzati, & Giudici (2011); Valle et al. (2006)
	Handicrafts and traditional villages	Beerli and Martín (2004)
	Souvenirs and local products	Ji (2011); Valle et al. (2006)
	Food/gastronomy	Beerli and Martín (2004); Ji (2011); Valle et al. (2006)
	Ethnographic attributes	Beerli and Martín (2004); Ji (2011)
	Literature and poetic values/folklore	
	Local people	Ji (2011); Valle et al. (2006)
Lifestyle	Beerli and Martín (2004); Echtner and Ritchie (1993); Gross and Brown (2008)	
Infrastructures and facilities	General infrastructures	Beerli and Martín (2004); Ji (2011); Kim (2014); Valle et al. (2006)
	Environment	Beerli and Martín (2004); Ji (2011); Valle et al. (2006)
	Tourism infrastructures and facilities	Beerli and Martín (2004); Echtner and Ritchie (1993); Gallarza, Gil-Saura, and García (2002); Ji (2011); Larson, Lundberg, and Lexhagen (2013)

The subsequent assessment is based on destination attributes. The quantitative tools ensure more reliable and consistent results.

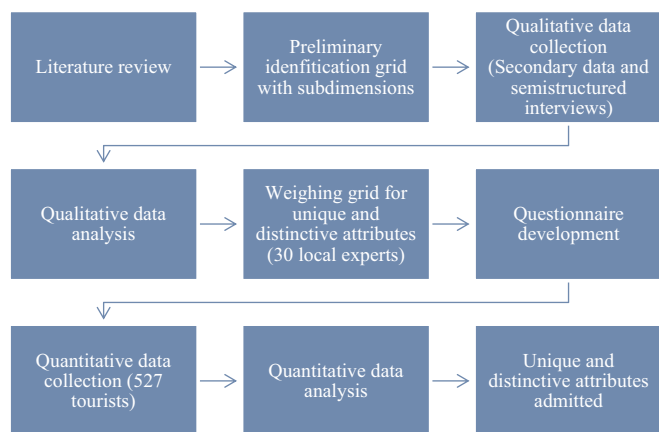


Fig. 2. Process of identification and assessment of local distinctiveness.

typical values, image of Dalat and specific signs) which served to test whether tourists recognized the destination's typical character when consuming tourist products during their experience in Dalat. Two other

yes/no questions asked about intentions to return to or recommend the destination appeared at the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered directly to 527 domestic and international tourists between November 2014 and March 2015 who stayed at hotels, motels, resorts, and guesthouses in the area. The two-stage sampling approach began with proportionate stratified sampling to determine the sample sizes according to the number of domestic and international tourists visiting Dalat in the previous year. Next, cluster sampling helped select survey participants within each stratum of accommodation. Respondents were selected from the list provided regularly by accommodation managers at the beginning of their stay in Dalat. The questionnaire (in both Vietnamese and English) was given to the participants at the end of their stay by trained collectors. Normally, each respondent took from 10 to 15 min on average to complete the questionnaire. Table 4 summarizes the characteristics of the respondents.

Domestic tourists represent 77.3% of the total. Dalat has many characteristics considered unique and distinctive by Vietnamese people but not by foreigners. For example, it is the only place in Vietnam where strawberries can grow. This fruit is quite strange for many natives of Vietnam and has become a unique characteristic of Dalat for them. However, for foreign tourists, strawberries are very familiar and

Table 4
Sample characteristics (n = 527).

Origin	%	Sex	%	Age (Years)	%	Education	%
Domestic	77.2	Male	50.4	< 18	.4	Under high school	4.5
International	22.8	Female	49.6	18–29	54.7	High school	15.1
				30–45	32.0	College	20.3
				46–60	10.8	Undergraduate	41.5
				> 60	2.1	Graduate	18.6
Types of accommodation	%	Group type	%	Length of stay	%	Visit purpose	%
1–3 star hotels	29	Alone	17.8	< 2 days	59.7	Visitation and relaxation	81.4
4–5 star hotels	10.2	Family	32.8	2–3 days	26	Conference/Events	7.8
Resorts, villas	3.6	Friends	34.2	3–5 days	11.9	Visit relatives	3.6
Hostels, motels	49.1	Organizations	11.9	5–7 days	1.5	Business reasons	4.2
Homestays	3.4	Other groups	3.3	> 7 days	.9	Other purposes	3
Other accommodations	4.7						

not typical at all, an important point that raises the question of the need for two relevance grids of typical attributes: one for local tourists and the other for international tourists. This need reflects the sense that ‘real places may vary in scale and specificity, from very small scales to the nations, to planets or to the universe’ (Yuksel et al., 2010, p. 275).

In addition to checks of the validity using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability according to Cronbach’s alpha values, all links between typical attributes and satisfaction were tested in multiple regression analyses.

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of local distinctiveness

This section is mainly based on the results of interviews with local tourism suppliers. When asked to define local distinctiveness, local suppliers listed the following characteristics:

‘Local distinctiveness represents unique features that belong to the destination, that means nowhere else have this character’ (#15, p.2). A lot of local suppliers shared this idea. They emphasized that this uniqueness reminds people about the place. Or in reverse, when the place is named, people think about some of its unique features. For example, when tourists hear about Dalat as a tourism destination, they think of romantic landscape, flowers (endemic cherry flower, mimosa, marigolds, etc...), pine forests, or temperate vegetables ...

A local supplier mentioned that ‘it has distinctiveness features with better or outstanding quality of products or characteristics that the destination possesses’ (#3, p.2). These distinctive features concern essentially the existing resources of the destination, such as natural or cultural aspects, local products.

Another characteristic of local distinctiveness concerns the place origin. ‘It refers to the place of origin’ (#31, p.3). In fact, this character links to the phenomena of product with geographical indication or country of origin. For example, Dalat is famous with its temperate vegetable products and flowers. Potatoes from Dalat always get a high price because of the quality compared to the same product from other places.

Local distinctiveness also ‘reflects typical attributes of the place’ (#13, p.2). Most of the local suppliers used the word ‘typical’ to describe this character. For them, local distinctiveness represents strengths of the destination in terms of resources, local products or cultural particularities, compared to other destinations.

In sum, local distinctiveness, in the eye of Dalat’s local suppliers, refers to (1) uniqueness, (2) distinctiveness; (3) origin and (4) strength of existing resources of the place.

4.2. Identification of unique and distinctive attributes

4.2.1. Supply side approach

The identification of local distinctiveness from a supply side perspective resulted from the secondary data analysis, tourism websites, and interviews with the local suppliers that sought to extract words representing unique and distinctive features of Dalat. The use of the resulting identification grid took less time and ensured more systematic information about the destination. In sum, 69 attributes can be identified as potential unique and distinctive features in previous studies (see Appendix A). This list could serve as a database for managers in different tourism fields for more detailed application.

The websites that represent the primary source for introducing Dalat as a tourism destination to tourists contain references to 50 unique and distinctive attributes related to natural factors (e.g. location, landscape, biological resources), human factors (e.g. architecture, historical spots, food, local people), and infrastructure (e.g. transportation system) (see Appendix B). In general, the tourism websites highlight unique and distinctive attributes of Dalat instead of providing general information. There is a broad consensus among the websites on

typical factors related to natural resources, such as climate or landscape. However, typical human factors differ from a website to another. For example, TripAdvisor appreciates 300 French villas; [dalat-tourism.com](#) enhances hill tribes or LonelyPlanet chooses local products. This divergence in highlighting destination attributes of websites shows that the perception of typical attributes represents some relativity and depends considerably on the target segments of tourists of websites.

From the local suppliers’ point of view, 24 features are unique and distinctive of Dalat (see Appendix C), much fewer than mentioned by the tourism websites or local research reports. This smaller number reflects the difficulty that local suppliers recalled just a few typical attributes. Moreover, the unique and distinctive attributes mentioned varied across respondents, and only three of the 37 local suppliers asserted that the combination of natural and human factors is what creates a typical impression of Dalat.

The two qualitative methods, reflecting these inductive and deductive approaches, revealed 70 potential unique and distinctive attributes of Dalat. Only 25 typical attributes, with mean scores above the average when the 30 experts rated them according to their distinctive character, were retained.

For the supply side, these 25 attributes indicated that Dalat possesses a variety of unique and distinctive features. This view is subjective though, in that suppliers often overestimated their own products. Therefore, a demand-side evaluation was necessary to achieve a more objective perspective on the typical attributes of Dalat.

4.2.2. Demand side approach

The quantitative method helps identify what tourists consider unique and distinctive of Dalat. A one-sample *t*-test in turn revealed whether each attribute score differed significantly from the mid-point. Table 5 displays the ranked average scores for each perceived place characteristics. The tourists rated the degree of typicality of each attribute. Among the attributes with the highest mean, only five revealed means significantly above the median and thus were retained. They all referred to the natural dimension, and the two most positive and significant features were climate and pine forests, followed by high altitude mountains. Romantic landscape and flowers were also considered typical. These results indicate that the destination possesses just a few unique and distinctive features.

To determine if the level of perceived specificity varies between domestic and international tourists, an independent *t*-test produced the results shown in Table 6.

A significance difference appears between local and international tourists’ perceptions of unique and distinctive attributes. The means for most items are higher among local than international tourists, likely because international tourists often come from countries where flowers, pine forests, or a temperate climate are normal. In contrast, domestic tourists find these elements unique in Dalat and in the south of Vietnam. Another reason may be the lack of effective marketing of

Table 5
Tourists’ assessment of Dalat’s distinctiveness.

Unique and distinctive attributes	Test value = 3.8 (Median of 25 items)			
	t	df	Significance (one-tailed)	Mean difference
Climate (four seasons in a day)	5.049	523	.000	.20000
Pine forests	5.014	519	.000	.19423
Mountains	2.424	520	.008	.10019
Romantic landscape	1.798	518	.036	.07476
Flowers	1.654	524	.049	.07048
Transportation without traffic lights	1.094	520	.137	.05029
Lakes, waterfalls	-.916	523	.180	-.03473
Natural spots/attractions	-1.405	518	.080	-.06012

Table 6
International and domestic tourists' assessment of Dalat's distinctiveness.

Descriptive statistics	International Tourists			Domestic Tourists			Independent Samples Test	
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	Significance
Mountains	118	3.69	1.07	402	3.97	.90	-2.582	.011 [*]
Climate (four seasons in a day)	118	3.44	.99	405	4.16	.81	-7.211	.000 [*]
Lakes, waterfalls	120	3.93	.83	403	3.71	.88	2.507	.013 [*]
Pine forests	116	3.62	.98	403	4.10	.82	-4.780	.000 [*]
Romantic landscape	119	3.61	1.03	399	3.95	.91	-3.224	.002 [*]
Natural spots/attractions	117	3.66	1.10	401	3.76	.94	-.938	.350
Flowers	120	3.63	1.14	404	3.94	.91	-2.734	.007 [*]
French style architecture	117	3.66	1.12	400	3.83	1.02	-1.517	.131
Transportation without traffic lights	116	3.33	1.08	404	4.00	.99	-6.049	.000 [*]
Green spaces	116	3.74	.91	401	3.72	.91	.243	.808
Local people	117	3.72	1.05	396	3.81	.96	-.809	.420
Mean		3.49			3.77			

Notes:

Unique and distinctive attributes with the highest score of means are shown in bold.

* $p < .05$.

local products and services to international tourists; they account for only 5–25% of total visitors to Dalat (Cuc Thong Ke Lam Dong, 2016). Although some tourism products target foreign tourists, such as easy-rider tours, they have been developed individually by local suppliers, without an overriding strategy for appealing to this consumer segment. Only one attribute, mountains, was highly evaluated by both international and domestic tourists. These results confirm the importance of distinguishing the perceptions of destination distinctiveness attributes according to different target segments.

4.2.3. Comparative synthesis

A comparison of perceptions from the supply side (local stakeholders) and the demand side (tourists) reduced the relativity of the distinctiveness attributes and helped identifying the most significant features. On average, across the 25 items, the local experts assigned greater weights ($M = 3.98$) than the tourists ($M = 3.71$). As noted previously, only five attributes were evaluated as unique and distinctive by both experts and tourists: climate, flowers, pine forests, romantic landscape, and transportation (see Table 7).

For Dalat, the four most distinctive attributes all involved natural factors; attributes related to human factors were not significant.

Table 7
Comparative results: experts versus tourists.

Unique and distinctive attributes	Mean (30 Experts) Typicality	Mean (527 Tourists) Typicality
Flowers	4.47	3.87
Transportation (transportation with no traffic lights)	4.29	3.85
Vegetables	4.27	3.79
Pine forests	4.27	3.99
Climate	4.26	4.00
Romantic landscape	4.23	3.87
Natural spots/attractions	4.20	3.74
Lakes, waterfalls	4.10	3.77
Architecture (French-style architecture)	4.07	3.79
Hygiene and cleanliness	4.07	3.52
Security environment	4.00	3.71
Green city/green spaces	4.00	3.73
Religious buildings (pagodas, meditation pagodas)	3.89	3.78
Mountains	3.87	3.90
Gentleness, welcoming style of local people	3.76	3.78
Mean of 25 items	3.98	3.71

Note: Unique and distinctive attributes with the highest score of means are shown in bold.

Surprisingly, souvenirs and local products, which tourism websites mentioned as one of most distinctive attributes, received very low scores from both experts and tourists. This result reflects the inadequacy of the city's communication policies with regard to tourism. Anecdotal evidence confirms that souvenirs and local products of Dalat are losing their identity because Chinese products have gained a foothold due to the weak protection of local stakeholders. This finding confirms the need to measure typical attributes from both tourists' and local stakeholders' points of view.

4.3. Distinctive attributes, tourist satisfaction and their behaviors

The quantitative approach also sought to explore the relationship among local distinctiveness attributes, tourists' satisfaction, and their future behaviors, especially reflecting their satisfaction and loyalty (coming back and recommendation intentions). Reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) of distinctive attributes and tourist satisfaction resulted in robust values of .896 and .901, respectively.

4.3.1. Impact of distinctive attributes on tourists' satisfaction

To explore the dimensions underlying satisfaction with the destination, an EFA was applied to each group of tourists. Employing principal components factor analysis with Promax rotation, two factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1 that explained 65.19% (international tourists) or 60.78% (domestic tourists) of the variance in the destination satisfaction scale: destination products and destination attractions (see Table 8). Destination products that represent destination distinctiveness account for the greatest part of the total variance in satisfaction for Dalat; tourists recognize that the specificity of the destination has been integrated into tourism products and affects their satisfaction with the place they have visited. The destination attractions items instead varied across the groups. The finding that some items do not concentrate on the same dimensions across the two groups confirms that expectations about the destination vary from one target segment to another. However, for both groups, the destination products dimension that relates to the distinctive character of the destination influences tourist satisfaction most.

Any specific destination only has a few typical characteristics; the six most distinctive representing the three dimensions (natural, human, and facilities), according to the mean scores for each group, therefore were retained to analyze the relationships among local distinctiveness attributes, satisfaction, and future behaviors. Table 9 specifies the typical attributes that influence both international and domestic tourists' satisfaction, according to the different stepwise multiple linear regressions.

Table 8
Factor analysis of satisfaction of tourists.

Items	Destination Products		Destination Attractions	
	International tourists	Domestic tourists	International tourists	Domestic tourists
Products reflecting typical values of Dalat	.900	.710		
Products reflecting the image of Dalat	.877	.761		
Products with specific signs about Dalat	.768	.765		
Authenticity of the product	.718	.751		
Natural attractions	.830			.723
Built and architectural attractions			.894	
Cultural and historic attractions			.835	
Festivals and events			.718	
Safety and Security			.556	
Climate				.897
Variance explained (%)	52.49	43.32	12.71	17.46
Cronbach's alpha (α)	.877	.739	.747	.510

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: Promax with Kaiser normalization.

The distinctive character of Dalat, as perceived by tourists, explained 12–24.4% of destination satisfaction. For international tourists, the local people and green space predict 17.2% of their satisfaction with Dalat products. Lakes, waterfalls, and French-style architecture contribute 19.6% to international tourists' satisfaction with the attractiveness of Dalat.

For domestic travelers, the mountains and romantic landscape contribute to destination satisfaction, for both products and attractions. Satisfaction is slightly greater with destination attractions, at 24.4%. Climate is the first predictor of satisfaction for Dalat's attractiveness. Transportation with no traffic lights is an explicative element for the satisfaction of domestic tourists.

As these results indicate, the determinants of destination satisfaction differ significantly between the two segments: International tourists seek 'strangeness and novelty' (Wang, 2007, p.798), whereas local tourists prefer familiar, relaxed elements. All surveyed respondents wanted pleasurable, satisfactory, and memorable experiences that could be built from the original, distinctive, or unique features of the place to help them understand that place.

Emotional values also account for destination satisfaction. Dalat is known as a popular destination for honeymooners in Vietnam, because of its romantic landscape. The concept of a romantic landscape reflects not only its physical features but also the intuitive impression visitors receive: Mountains in high altitude and pine forests give this destination a special climate with cool weather all year round, which is a

favorable condition for flowers. This combination creates a romantic landscape for the city. The distinctive character is therefore a decisive factor of tourists' satisfaction, because it also is a determinant of emotional value.

4.3.2. Impact of distinctive attributes on tourist behaviors

Finally, we conducted two discriminant analyses by segment to test the effect of distinctive attributes on loyalty (intentions to return and recommend). Only one attribute ('local people') explains the international tourists' intentions to return. With regard to recommendations, international respondents would do so to their family and friends because of the natural spots/attractions. Foreign visitors rarely return to a destination more than once. The obtained discriminant function in turn could correctly classify only 58.9% of observations for the intention to return and 68.5% for the intention to recommend.

In contrast, domestic tourists tend to return to the places they have visited more regularly: Five of the six most distinctive attributes explained their loyalty to Dalat (Tables 10 and 11). Romantic landscape had the highest explanatory power, and mountains, climate, and pine forests contributed further to local visitors' perceptions. The obtained discriminant function correctly classified 75.1% (return) and 78.3% (recommend) of observations. Transportation without traffic lights, a unique feature of Dalat, is second on the list of local distinctiveness attributes that influences the loyalty of local tourists.

In summary, the typical attribute of local people explains the

Table 9
Impact of distinctive attributes on tourists' satisfaction.

Segment	Dependent Variable	Unique and Distinctive Attribute Predictors	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Significance	Collinearity Statistics		R ²	
						Tolerance	Variance Inflation Factor		
International Tourists	Satisfaction products	(Constant)		-3.911	.000			.172	
		Local people	.308	5.294	.004	.962	1.039		
		Green space	.224	4.406	.032	.962	1.039		
International Tourists	Satisfaction attractions	(Constant)		-4.294	.000			.196	
		Lakes, waterfalls	.329	3.254	.002	.956	1.046		
		French style architecture	.235	2.319	.023	.956	1.046		
Domestic Tourists	Satisfaction products	(Constant)		-6.511	.000			.118	
		Romantic landscape	.287	5.669	.000	.954	1.048		
		Mountains	.137	2.702	.007	.954	1.048		
	Satisfaction attractions	(Constant)			-10.227	.000			.244
		Climate	.365	7.490	.000	.888	1.126		
		Transportation without traffic lights	.120	2.458	.014	.885	1.130		
		Mountains	.112	2.298	.022	.892	1.121		
		Romantic landscape	.103	2.090	.037	.868	1.151		

Table 10
Predictors of intention to come back.

Unique and distinctive attributes	Wilks' Lambda	F	Significance	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients	Structure Matrix
International tourists					
Local people	.954	5.301	.023	1.120	.938
Eigenvalue	.055				
Percentage of variance	100				
Percentage of cases correctly classified	58.9%				
Group centroids (Intention to return)					
No	.375				
Yes	-.143				
Domestic tourists					
Romantic landscape	.938	25.181	.000	.632	.842
Transportation without traffic lights	.971	11.181	.001	.270	.561
Mountains	.972	10.865	.001	.298	.553
Pine forests	.980	7.605	.006	.212	.463
Climate (four seasons in a day)	.981	7.296	.007	.138	.453
Eigenvalue	.093				
Percentage of variance	100				
Percentage of cases correctly classified	75.1%				
Group centroids (intention to return)					
No	-1.204				
Yes	.077				

satisfaction and future behaviors of international tourists coming to Dalat. For domestic visitors, the romantic landscape, which obtained one of the highest scores for typicality, explains both tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

5. Discussion

From a conceptual point of view, this study enables a specification of the notion of local distinctiveness in relationship with other concepts (place identity, place attachment and authenticity). As this study shows, local distinctiveness can be included in the concept of authenticity, in terms of unique and original things and unique experiences or activities (Wang, 1999). It refers directly to a specific destination; authenticity relates more to genuineness and origin and focuses on objects instead of the place necessarily. It also relates to a distinctive visual environment that gives all sorts of activities or experiences a special or unique character with a strong component of sensation (Urry,

1992). Local distinctiveness (especially in the fields of cultural and heritage tourism) is considered not only as available local assets but also creative resources (Richards, 2011). In fact, local distinctiveness is not something fixed and unchanged, it could also be the result of many distinction strategies or the natural evolution of the destination. Local distinctiveness also reflects the distinctiveness/differentiation aspect included in the place identity concept (i.e. establishment of a sense of personal distinctiveness or uniqueness; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Wang & Xu, 2015). Thus, it evokes distinctiveness, uniqueness, and originality features that help differentiate the tourism destination.

The identification of a destination's distinctive attributes is essential for tourism development in terms of product development, marketing issues, and resource preservation. Developing a measurement scale for unique and distinctive attributes could offer destination managers practical tools, which require various steps and methods, both qualitative and quantitative, as well as comparisons of perspectives from the supply and demand sides to identify potential local distinctiveness

Table 11
Predictors of intention to recommend.

Unique and distinctive attributes	Wilks' Lambda	F	Significance	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients	Structure Matrix
International tourists					
Natural sports/attractions	.962	4.312	.040	.938	.862
Eigenvalue	.053				
Percentage of variance	100				
Percentage of cases correctly classified	68.5%				
Group centroids (intention to recommend)					
No	-.882				
Yes	.059				
Domestic tourists					
Romantic landscape	.932	27.741	.000	.622	.828
Transportation without traffic lights	.960	15.703	.000	.374	.623
Pine forests	.975	9.606	.002	.259	.487
Mountains	.978	8.609	.004	.192	.461
Climate (four seasons in a day)	.981	7.403	.007	.133	.428
Eigenvalue	.093				
Percentage of variance	100				
Percentage of cases correctly classified	78.3%				
Group centroids (intention to recommend)					
No	-1.350				
Yes	.079				

attributes. The final grid identification can serve as a general framework for comparing tourist destinations.

These findings add to the growing literature devoted to the attributes of tourism destinations, providing scholars with new insights into the role of local distinctiveness in association with distinctive destination images and attachment. It is found that local distinctiveness features are always mentioned in communications in tourism websites to attract tourists' attention. Quantitative results show that the category of destination products, that refers to typical values, unique image, specific signs and authenticity, explains significantly the tourist satisfaction. The current study offers evidence of the role of place-based typical attributes in determining tourists' destination satisfaction (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2013). Unique and distinctive features contribute also to tourist's future behaviors, as predictors of place dependence and place identity (Gross & Brown, 2008), by affecting their intentions to recommend or return. Domestic and international tourists perceive local distinctiveness attributes differently according to their motivation, expectations, or experiences. This offers new perspectives for further studies of tourism motivations as potential moderators of the relationship between perceived local distinctiveness and destination satisfaction. In general, tourists evaluate the destination from the supply side, according to their perceived image before coming to the place. When they realize that the reality does not match their expectations (e.g. poor preservation, environment changes), they suffer disappointment, which then affects their satisfaction. This common occurrence indicates the need for more effective, sustainable development of tourism at this destination. Considering local distinctiveness as key aspects of tourism development could help the destination enhance its territorial identity (Salvo, Hernández-Mogollón, Di-Clemente, & Calzati, 2013), exploit local values, attract tourists, and create a differentiated image for a sustainable tourism strategy.

Positioning and promotional strategies should rely on unique characteristics that differentiate a destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Qu et al., 2011). Aaker and Shansby (1982) suggest that only one or two attributes should be used for brand positioning because emphasizing too many attributes simultaneously may deteriorate the maximum level of implementation of the core identity. In the case of Dalat, we recommend choosing one or two of the most distinctive attributes for each tourist group for an effective positioning strategy. For international visitors, emphasizing local people as a typical feature of Dalat is key. For domestic tourists, the romantic landscape, which subsumes other elements such as climate, mountains, flowers, and pine forests, instead serves as a pull attractor of Dalat, because it has a significant impact on their satisfaction and loyalty. Local stakeholders should enhance the romantic landscape as a competitive element by enhancing visitors' experiences in creative, differentiating ways. This attribute, when emphasized, could offer visitors the emotional benefits of the natural environment that includes other distinctive features of Dalat.

Appendix A. Distinctiveness features of Dalat from secondary data

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Typical features of Dalat
Natural resources	Geographic location	Geographic location (on the gate to Central Highland)
	Geology, topography and soil	Mountains, Altitude from 1500 m above sea level, Basalt soil appropriated to agriculture; many passes (Prenn, Dran)
	Climate	Average temperature from 18 to 25 °C; fresh cool climate all year round; six-month rainy season; fog; four seasons in one day
	Water resources	Variety of waterfalls and torrents; natural and artificial lakes; cold water source due to altitude
	Biological resources	Diversity of species: 128 animals, more than 2000 species of plants; diversity of forest types; diversity of ecosystems; medicinal plants; flowers; vegetables; industrial plants (e.g., coffee, tea); cold water fish (salmon, sturgeon)
	Natural landscape	Natural spots/attractions; pine forests; agricultural landscape (e.g., hills of tea, terraces; romantic landscape)

6. Conclusion

The findings provide a clear recognition of destination attributes associated with unique and distinctive characteristics. Because the notion of local distinctiveness is linked to many concepts (destination image, place identity, authenticity, place attachment), it has been difficult to determine its true meaning. This study provides a clarification by comparing it with other, more broadly encompassing concepts.

Identifying and evaluating a destination distinctiveness has also remained an under-researched question (Haven-Tang & Sedgley, 2014), even though it is key for tourism development strategies (Moreira dos Santos, 2014). The proposed instrument to measure unique and distinctive attributes of destinations, using specific steps and methods of evaluation by scoring and comparing data reveals the core local distinctiveness. This scale thereby represents a pioneering attempt to explore destination attributes that are potentially available at a particular destination, according to the grid. Tourism managers could use them to identify their own local particularities. The robust results suggest that combining the most distinctive attributes with a strong emotional component is important for a destination's positioning strategy. Although this procedure clearly identifies the natural setting and roles of unique and distinctive attributes, integrating them into the tourism product or experience, from a sustainable development perspective, remains an open question for strategic research.

This study is not exempt from some limitations, which point to interesting avenues for further research. First, because this study was based in Dalat, an Asian tourism destination in an early stage of development, the ability to generalize the place-specific findings is limited. Second, Dalat's very intense economic development has led to the disappearance of many of its distinctive attributes, especially those linked to the natural environment. To enhance understanding of local distinctiveness, this study should be replicated in other destinations, where the promises on local websites correspond better to reality. In a similar vein, this study suggests some influence of unique and distinctive attributes on tourist satisfaction and behaviors, but these links should be tested for various tourist segments. For example, additional international comparisons could help explore the similarities and differences in various contexts and verify the transferability of the instrument. Third, further efforts should test the reliability and validity of the scales. Researchers might consider other aspects that can influence perceptions of typical attributes, such as emotional values, the total impression created by their combination, tourists' motivations, or tourism experiences at the destination. Such aspects could be incorporated into the scale, to ensure the valid, ongoing measurement of potential place-based attributes. Besides, a closer look at the emotionality of tourist destinations would provide, from future explorative research, new insights into the paradox created by the dissociation between rational judgments and emotions, especially in the creation of identity through differentiation strategies.

Human resources	Historic buildings	Three palaces of the last emperor of Dalat; prison for children
	Architecture	Architectural heritage (e.g., Chicken Cathedral); pink color in architecture; typical traditional long house of South Central Highland; French style architecture; Crazy House
	Religious buildings	Meditation Monastery, pagodas
	Antique objects	Stone musical instruments
	Urban planning	City in the forests
	International cultural heritage	The space of indigenous gong culture; Nguyen Dynasty woodblocks
	Festivals and events	Festival of Flower, Festival of Rain; cultural events; sporting events
	Handicrafts and traditional villages	Handicrafts (hand embroidery; floriculture, horticulture, knitting); flower villages (Thai Phien, Ha Dong, Van Thanh)
	Souvenirs	Souvenirs (e.g., fired pen on wood pictures, dried flowers, wool objects, embroidery pictures; local products (e.g., fruit jams, flowers, vegetables, fruits, Dalat wine)
	Food	Local specialties; folk cuisine; typical drinks: Dalat wine, fruit or vegetable juices; cuisine of minority ethnic peoples; taste of different regions
	Ethnographic attributes	Multi-ethnic cohabitation; customs of indigenous peoples; traditional ceremonies of indigenous people; variety of folklore: myths, tales, comedy, fable, prose; religious activities
	Literature and poetic values	Famous songs about Dalat
	Local people	Gentleness, welcoming style of local people; appearance of local people; the voice of local people
Infrastructures and facilities	Lifestyle	“Slow” lifestyle of Dalat's people
	General infrastructures	Transportation without traffic lights; horse-drawn carriages
	Environment	Cleanness; security; green spaces
	Tourism facilities	Mountain resorts in the forest; stylish cafés and bars; variety of restaurants (night market, restaurants); walking town

Appendix B. Distinctive features of Dalat according to tourism websites

Typical features of Dalat mentioned in websites	Websites
1500 m (4900 feet) above sea level, Dalat's specific sights are pine wood; temperate weather; twisting roads and tree marigold; city of eternal spring; temperate agriculture products; typical flowers; confectionery industry: fruit preserve made from strawberry, mulberry, sweet potato, and rose; lakes, waterfalls, evergreen forests and gardens; local products include silk, garden vegetables and flowers; country's favorite honeymoon spot; diverse fauna; hill tribes; traditional dress.	http://www.dalat-tourist.com/
Poetic and romantic charm at 1500 m above sea level and 18 °C average temperature; most famous and beautiful lakes and waterfalls in Vietnam; hills, pine-tree forests, vegetables, fruit gardens and flowers; 300 French villas; mountainous city; covered in forest.	http://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g293922-c5394/Dalat:Vietnam:Dalat.And.Lam.Dong.Overview.html
Because of its history, special architecture, unique climate features and wide range of beautiful spots. Houses in a French style; warm temperatures during the day and quite cool at night; temperate produce; typical flowers; architectural places; lakes, waterfalls; local specialties.	http://www.vietnamonline.com/destination/dalat.html
Mountain resort town; colonial estates; rural villages and peaceful lakes; romantic environment; one of Vietnam's main honeymoon destinations; cafes, restaurants and hotels; waterfalls; lake; trails for horseback riding; palaces built by Vietnam's last emperor; French Quarter with colonial architecture; religious sites Truc Lam Zen Monastery; pagodas; romantic, fine dining experience; local cuisine; many cafes and restaurants.	http://traveltips.usatoday.com/tourism-dalat-vietnam-40335.html
Pine-covered hills, lakes, and higher peaks, lovely scenery; temperatures warm by day, and quite cool at night; spacious landscape; pretty hotels, cafes, restaurants, and lakes; rolling green hills and pine trees; fields of fruits, vegetables, coffee, and canopied flower gardens; tempo of life in Dalat relaxed, traffic not frenetic; local populace friendly; pine forests; world class golf; small shops offering from orchids to knitwear; vivid blue skies, fresh air, flower-filled parks, and local culinary treats; destination for weekend outings, family get-aways, and honeymooners; French legacy; momentous glories and the architecture untouched by the Vietnam conflict; a unique place to enjoy the atmosphere of a unique country and its people; best mountain biking, hiking opportunities in Vietnam; high altitude (1500–2000 m) and fertile landscape; premier agricultural areas, producing varieties of fruits, vegetables, tea, coffee beans, and flowers; three palaces and summer home of the colonial-era, last	http://wikitravel.org/en/Dalat

- emperor of Vietnam Bao Dai; Crazy House; hill-top pagoda; mountains and valleys; lakes, falls.
- French hill station; fresh air; stands at 1475 m; temperatures range from 15 °C to 24 °C; dry season, rainy season; Easy Rider (local man with a bike); Emperor Bao Dai's Summer Palace. <http://www.vietnam-travel-guide.net/central-highlands/dalat/>
- Dalat is quite different from anywhere else you'll visit in Vietnam; French Alps in springtime; cooler climate; lakes, waterfalls, evergreen forests and gardens; local products include silk, garden vegetables and flowers; favorite honeymoon spot. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/vietnam/central-highlands/dalat>
- City of Loves, the Foggy City, the Pine Forest City, the Flowers City, Le petit Paris; mountains and forests; 1500 m above sea level; temperate all year round; the best romantic city in Vietnam; wonderful scenes with natural lakes, mountains, valleys, pines forests and hundreds kinds of flowers. Many pine forests were gone, replaced with new constructions or farm of agriculture. The old romantic city has been replaced by a modern “self- developed” city, without planning. <http://www.amitourist.com/Vietnam-destinations/Da-Lat.asp?cmd=reset>
- An elevation of 1500 m; Old French city; resort town; natural and artificial lakes; bordered by lines of pine trees; Dalat Flower Gardens; Dalat Flower Festival; cherry blossom; ancient villas. <http://travelvietnam.info/viet-nam-places/da-lat-the-city-of-love-and-flower-in-viet-nam/>
- The altitude of 1500 m above sea level; invigorating and temperate climate; rivers and streams; hill and mountain terrain; cascades and torrents; landscaping lakes; pine forests; romantic and attractive place for tourists; a unique city planning of an urban space for “forests within city and city within forests”; a specific combination of all regions from the north, central, and south parts with the local people; original culture, art; historical vestiges of the ethnic minority tribes; various cultures; craft villages; an attractive place for cultural–festival tourism. <http://www.saigondalathotel.com/AboutUs.aspx>

Appendix C. Distinctive features of Dalat identified by local suppliers (n = 37)

Most frequent attributes identified by local suppliers	Frequency	Percentage
Climate	31	83.78
Landscape (romantic landscape)	11	29.73
Local people	9	24.32
Mountain topography	7	18.92
Nature	7	18.92
Vegetables	6	16.22
Transportation without traffic lights	6	16.22
Flowers	5	13.51
Indigenous culture	3	8.11
Attractions	3	8.11
Harmony of nature, people and climate	3	8.11
Souvenirs (fired-pen pictures)	3	8.11
Food	3	8.11
Agriculture	3	8.11
Many ethnics living together	2	5.41
Local products (Dalat wine)	2	5.41
Forests of pines	2	5.41
Architecture	2	5.41
Culture	2	5.41
Coffee	2	5.41
Lifestyle	1	2.70
Distraction	1	2.70
Health tourism	1	2.70
Fertile soil	1	2.70

Appendix D. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.04.004>.

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