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# Research on the Improvement of Hainan International Study Travel Destination Competitiveness Based on RCEP and Free Trade Port Policy

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of accelerating regional economic integration and international education service trade development, international study tours have emerged as a vital platform for nations to enhance educational soft power and cultural influence. With the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the deepening development of Hainan Free Trade Port, the province has gained new institutional opportunities to expand international study tours targeting the Asia-Pacific region. This paper systematically examines theories on destination competitiveness in international study tours, analyzes the practical foundations and key constraints for Hainan's development of such tourism, and identifies challenges including insufficient international market recognition, underdeveloped internationalized product systems, and incomplete supporting infrastructure. Based on these findings, the study proposes a competitiveness enhancement strategy: institutional openness as the driving force, optimization of product and curriculum systems as the core focus, and service/governance capacity improvement as the safeguard. This framework aims to provide actionable insights for Hainan's development into a globally influential destination for international study tours.

**Keywords:** RCEP; Free Trade Port; International Study Tours; Destination Competitiveness; Hainan

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## 1. Introduction

With the accelerating internationalization of education worldwide, study tours have increasingly evolved from traditional extracurricular experiences into a comprehensive educational service model that integrates formal learning, cultural exchange, and tourism experiences [1]. Such programs not only provide opportunities for students to acquire knowledge outside the classroom but also foster cross-cultural understanding, social adaptability, and global perspectives. In particular, under frameworks that promote regional economic collaboration and international cooperation, study tours have become important channels for youth exchanges, the dissemination of cultural values, and the expansion of educational service markets [2]. Compared with conventional tourism, international study tours emphasize structured educational objectives, well-designed curricula, and measurable learning outcomes. The competitiveness of a destination for such programs depends not only on its natural landscapes and cultural heritage but also on the quality of its institutional environment, educational infrastructure, and the comprehensiveness of its service ecosystem [3].

The formal implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2022 has provided a more stable institutional and regulatory framework for cross-border mobility, academic collaboration, and the trade of educational services within the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, the ongoing development of the Hainan Free Trade Port has introduced significant innovations in facilitating international travel,

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opening up educational opportunities, and supporting cross-border service industries [4]. Hainan is therefore positioned with the dual mission of becoming both an international hub for education and a global center for tourism and consumption. Within this context, international study tours have the potential to serve as a critical bridge between educational openness and cultural-tourism integration, creating synergies that can enhance both the learning experience and the destination's global visibility [5].

Despite these policy advantages and strategic initiatives, Hainan's international study tour industry remains at an early stage of development [6]. The current competitiveness of the destination shows a significant gap when compared with the opportunities offered by its free trade port status. Challenges include limited high-quality educational resources, relatively underdeveloped service systems, and insufficient international recognition among potential students and partner institutions [7]. Therefore, a systematic analysis of strategies to enhance Hainan's destination competitiveness in the context of RCEP and free trade port policies is of both practical importance and theoretical value. Such analysis can inform targeted policy formulation, guide investment in infrastructure and services, and help design educational programs that meet the evolving needs of international learners. Moreover, understanding these dynamics contributes to broader discussions on how emerging educational destinations can leverage regional economic agreements and innovative institutional frameworks to attract and retain global talent [8].

## **2. Theoretical and Policy Background of International Study Travel Destination Competitiveness**

### *2.1. The Connotation of the Competitiveness of International Study Travel Destinations*

The theory of destination competitiveness emphasizes that the attractiveness of a tourism or educational destination derives not only from its natural and cultural resource endowments but also from institutional support, service quality, and the capacity for continuous innovation [9]. As a specialized form of education-tourism integration, international study tours place particular emphasis on the educational value embedded in curriculum design, the organization of systematic learning experiences, and the facilitation of effective cross-cultural communication [10]. Destinations that are able to offer clearly defined educational themes, structured and stable curricula, and professional management capabilities are more likely to establish sustainable competitive advantages in the increasingly globalized market for study tours [11]. Furthermore, the long-term competitiveness of a destination also relies on its ability to continuously adapt to changes in international student demand, technological innovation in educational delivery, and evolving service expectations, creating a dynamic environment in which high-quality experiences are consistently provided.

### *2.2. Institutional Impacts of RCEP on the Development of International Study Tours*

The implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) reduces institutional transaction costs and establishes more predictable regulatory environments across member states, generating positive spillover effects in areas such as educational cooperation, personnel mobility, and cross-border service trade. Within this framework, the natural demand for educational collaboration, language learning, and cultural exchange among RCEP member countries provides a stable pool of potential international students, while also creating a favorable policy environment for the expansion of regional study tours [12]. For Hainan in particular, RCEP member countries—including ASEAN nations, Japan, South Korea, and Australia—represent significant and strategically important markets for attracting study tour participants. The agreement's provisions enhance institutional transparency and reduce bureaucratic barriers, thereby supporting long-term partnerships between educational institutions and facilitating student mobility in a manner that was previously more complex and uncertain.

### *2.3. Education and Tourism Open Effect of Hainan Free Trade Port Policy*

The Hainan Free Trade Port has adopted policies that prioritize both educational development and tourism innovation. In the educational sector, the policies support the establishment of international schools, the introduction of diverse academic programs, and the promotion of cross-border learning initiatives. Simultaneously, Hainan's tourism policies emphasize internationalization, premium service standards, and the integration of cultural-tourism experiences. This dual approach has created an institutional framework that is highly conducive to international study tours, offering both regulatory support and service infrastructure. The synergy between educational and tourism policies gives Hainan a distinct advantage in developing innovative models for global educational travel, enabling the region to combine high-quality learning experiences with culturally rich tourism offerings. By leveraging this policy environment, Hainan has the potential to attract not only individual students but also institutional collaborations, short-term academic programs, and thematic cultural-educational tours, strengthening its position as a competitive destination in the international education-tourism market.

## **3. The Realistic Foundation of International Study Travel Development in Hainan**

### *3.1. Location and Resource Advantages*

Hainan is strategically positioned as a key node in the Asia-Pacific region, offering clear comparative advantages with RCEP member economies due to its geographical proximity, well-developed air route networks, and connectivity to major regional hubs. Its tropical island ecosystem, characterized by diverse landscapes, rich biodiversity, and distinctive marine environments, provides an ideal natural laboratory for ecological studies and environmental education programs. In addition, Hainan possesses valuable maritime cultural heritage resources, including historical ports, traditional seafaring practices, and local cultural festivals, which can be leveraged for immersive cultural learning experiences. The province also has emerging technological resources, such as aerospace technology and innovation hubs, offering opportunities for integrating science and technology exploration into educational travel programs. When combined with the distinctive institutional framework of the free trade port, these factors create diverse thematic settings that support experiential learning, interdisciplinary exploration, and hands-on educational programs tailored to international study tours.

### *3.2. Education and Cultural Tourism Industry Foundation*

In recent years, Hainan has actively promoted the development of an international education innovation island by introducing a wide range of Sino-foreign cooperative educational programs and global educational resources. These initiatives provide curriculum design support, teaching resources, and programmatic frameworks necessary for international study tours. At the same time, Hainan's cultural and tourism industries have experienced continuous improvements in infrastructure, including international-standard accommodations, transportation networks, and visitor reception facilities. The enhancement of service quality, multilingual support, and experiential cultural offerings has significantly increased the province's capacity to host international study tour groups. Together, the synergy between education and tourism infrastructure creates a comprehensive foundation that ensures both the logistical feasibility and educational effectiveness of international study tours.

### *3.3. Development Opportunities from Policy Overlapping*

The convergence of RCEP's regional cooperation framework with the institutional innovations of Hainan Free Trade Port policies has created a unique development opportunity for international educational exchanges and study tours. By lowering institutional and regulatory barriers, facilitating cross-border mobility, and supporting service trade in education and tourism, these policies provide a highly favorable

environment for the province to attract students and institutional partners from across the Asia-Pacific region. This overlap of regional and local policy advantages positions Hainan to establish itself as a premier destination for study tours, offering a combination of natural beauty, cultural richness, technological resources, and high-quality educational experiences. By effectively leveraging these policy synergies, Hainan can accelerate its integration into the international education-tourism market, attract diverse student populations, and foster innovative educational program models that align with global standards and expectations.

#### **4. Main Problems Facing the Competitiveness of Hainan International Study Travel Destination**

##### *4.1. Lack of International Market Recognition and Brand Influence*

Although Hainan has achieved a certain degree of recognition within China's domestic study tour market, its visibility and brand influence in the international sector remain relatively limited. The province's educational tourism profile currently lacks a distinct and easily recognizable identity, making it challenging to differentiate Hainan from well-established global study tour destinations in the Asia-Pacific region. This lack of international branding affects the ability to attract high-quality international students, institutional partners, and specialized programs, thereby constraining the growth of Hainan's presence in the global educational travel market. Building a strong and recognizable international brand is therefore essential for enhancing Hainan's competitive positioning and fostering long-term development in international study tourism.

##### *4.2. Limited Internationalization of Study Tour Products and Imperfect Curriculum System*

At present, Hainan's study tour offerings are primarily designed to serve the domestic student market, with limited adaptation to international standards in areas such as curriculum language, teaching methodologies, and evaluation systems. Many study tour activities still focus on sightseeing and superficial experiential visits, with insufficient emphasis on in-depth educational content, cross-cultural engagement, and systematic learning outcomes. The curriculum design often lacks international accreditation or benchmarking against global educational practices, reducing the perceived academic value of study tours for overseas participants. Enhancing the internationalization of programs—including multilingual instruction, globally relevant teaching approaches, and robust evaluation frameworks—will be critical for Hainan to elevate its educational quality and establish a reputation as a credible destination for global learners.

##### *4.3. Comprehensive Services and Governance Capacity Require Strengthening*

The successful operation of international study tours depends on effective coordination across multiple sectors, including education, tourism, and international student services, requiring advanced organizational management and risk mitigation capabilities. Currently, Hainan faces challenges in areas such as visa facilitation, cross-cultural support services, emergency response mechanisms, and the quality supervision of educational programs. Insufficient integration of these services limits the overall competitiveness of the destination and may affect the satisfaction and safety of international participants. Strengthening governance capacity, improving service coordination, and establishing robust mechanisms for quality assurance are essential steps to ensure that study tours are well-managed, professionally delivered, and able to meet the expectations of international students and educational partners.

##### *4.4. Insufficient Integration of Educational and Tourism Resources*

In addition to the above challenges, the integration of Hainan's educational and tourism resources remains incomplete. While both sectors have individually advanced, the synergistic development required to create holistic educational-tourism experiences is

still at an early stage. For example, opportunities for combining local cultural heritage, ecological exploration, and scientific learning into cohesive programs are not yet fully exploited. Developing more comprehensive, interdisciplinary study tour products that combine education and tourism can significantly enhance the attractiveness and uniqueness of Hainan as an international study tour destination.

## **5. Competitiveness Enhancement Pathways Based on RCEP and Free Trade Port Policies**

### *5.1. Creating an International Study Travel Development Environment through Institutional Openness*

Hainan should fully leverage the dual advantages provided by RCEP and free trade port policies, actively exploring more flexible, open, and convenient institutional arrangements to facilitate international study tourism. In critical areas such as visa approval procedures, mutual recognition of academic programs, and entry-exit management, efforts should focus on achieving higher-level international alignment and cooperation, thereby significantly reducing institutional barriers and operational costs for incoming study tour groups. Beyond procedural efficiency, enhancing institutional transparency and predictability can further increase the confidence of foreign educational institutions and students in choosing Hainan as a study tour destination. Simultaneously, strengthening policy coordination and communication with RCEP member states is essential to ensure stable flows of educational and tourism resources, sustain long-term cooperative relationships, and create a reliable, transparent, and welcoming development environment for international study tourism in the province. These measures not only facilitate the smooth operation of study tour programs but also establish the foundational conditions for long-term competitiveness in the regional and global markets.

### *5.2. Consolidating Core Competitiveness by Building Product and Curriculum Systems*

Hainan's unique ecological, cultural, and technological resources-including ecological civilization initiatives, maritime heritage preservation, aerospace technology applications, and institutional innovations under the free trade port framework-can serve as the foundation for developing a systematic and distinctive educational curriculum framework. This framework should integrate global perspectives with regional characteristics, emphasizing both theoretical knowledge and hands-on experiential learning. By continuously enriching course content, diversifying experiential formats, and introducing thematic and interdisciplinary programs, Hainan can elevate the educational quality, professional standards, and international adaptability of its study tour offerings. Clear learning objectives, robust process evaluation mechanisms, and scientifically designed outcome assessment systems will help transform study tours from simple sightseeing activities into in-depth, learning-oriented experiences. This shift enhances Hainan's unique appeal, promotes intellectual engagement, and strengthens the province's competitive edge in the international study tour market.

### *5.3. Enhancing Overall Competitive Advantage through Service Capability and Collaborative Governance*

To fully realize the potential of international study tourism, Hainan should establish a robust, multi-tiered collaborative governance system that coordinates across government departments, educational institutions, tourism enterprises, and social organizations. Key initiatives include improving safety and risk management systems, standardizing teaching and program delivery processes, and raising hospitality and service standards to meet international expectations. In parallel, efforts should focus on integrating resources from diverse stakeholders to jointly develop and promote Hainan's study travel brand. Comprehensive marketing and promotion strategies-including multi-channel, multilingual, and culturally tailored initiatives-will help enhance global

recognition and brand influence. By fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, investing in professional services, and continuously refining program quality, Hainan can strengthen its overall competitive advantage, positioning itself as a leading destination for international study tours in the Asia-Pacific region and attracting a wide range of global students, academic programs, and institutional partnerships.

#### *5.4. Leveraging Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Competitiveness*

In addition to institutional, educational, and service improvements, Hainan can further enhance its competitiveness by leveraging innovation and digital technologies. Integrating digital platforms for program management, virtual learning supplements, and interactive cultural experiences can enrich the study tour experience and attract technologically savvy international students. Technological integration also supports data-driven program evaluation, participant feedback systems, and dynamic curriculum adjustments, ensuring that study tours remain responsive to global trends and participant expectations. By embedding innovation into both the educational and operational aspects of study tours, Hainan can achieve sustainable competitiveness while enhancing the overall quality and uniqueness of its international study travel offerings.

### **6. Implementation Challenges and Strategic Considerations**

Despite the favorable policy environment provided by RCEP and Hainan Free Trade Port initiatives, several challenges remain in the practical implementation of international study tours. First, while institutional openness and regulatory frameworks have improved, ensuring consistent and efficient execution across multiple sectors—including education, tourism, and public administration—requires high-level coordination and continuous monitoring. Differences in standards, administrative procedures, and operational practices among departments can create bottlenecks, potentially affecting the efficiency and quality of study tour programs.

Second, the integration of educational resources with tourism offerings presents practical difficulties. Designing programs that are both academically rigorous and culturally immersive requires cross-disciplinary expertise, careful scheduling, and resource allocation. Balancing the dual objectives of education and tourism without compromising either is a complex task that demands strategic planning and adaptive management.

Third, the internationalization of study tour products faces challenges related to language, teaching methods, and participant diversity. Ensuring that programs meet the expectations of students from different cultural and educational backgrounds requires continuous curriculum refinement, teacher training, and evaluation systems that are both robust and flexible.

Finally, maintaining high standards of service quality, safety, and participant satisfaction is essential for sustaining Hainan's international reputation. This requires investment in professional development, risk management systems, and technological platforms for program administration, monitoring, and feedback collection. Additionally, marketing and brand-building efforts must be carefully designed to communicate Hainan's unique educational-tourism advantages to diverse international audiences.

Strategically, addressing these challenges involves coordinated policy execution, investment in human and technological resources, and continuous evaluation and adaptation of programs. By anticipating operational obstacles and proactively implementing governance and quality assurance mechanisms, Hainan can ensure that the theoretical advantages offered by RCEP and free trade port policies are fully realized in practice. These considerations are essential for the long-term sustainability and global competitiveness of the province's international study tour sector.

## 7. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the RCEP framework and the institutional innovations of the Hainan Free Trade Port, Hainan possesses a favorable policy environment and a solid practical foundation for the development of international study tours. By systematically improving institutional openness, strengthening the quality and internationalization of study tour products and curricula, and enhancing comprehensive service systems alongside multi-level governance capabilities, Hainan is well-positioned to establish itself as a sustainable and competitive destination for educational tourism in the Asia-Pacific region. These measures not only facilitate smooth operations and high-quality learning experiences for international participants but also contribute to the province's long-term reputation and global visibility in the international education-tourism market.

Looking forward, future research could conduct empirical evaluations of the actual impacts of international study tours on educational exchange, cultural understanding, and regional economic development. Such evidence would provide more targeted guidance for policy refinement, program optimization, and strategic planning, ensuring that Hainan continues to advance as an internationally recognized hub for study tours that combines educational excellence, cultural richness, and high-quality tourism services.

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