

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - EXPERIENCE IN THE WORLD AND PRACTICE IN VIETNAM

Abstract

Tourism, a fast growing industry, has become one of the key economic sectors in many parts of the world. For our country, the Party and the State have affirmed the extreme importance of the tourism sector in the national economy, defined the objectives of developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector of the country and issued a large number of consistent guidelines and policies throughout the years. However, in order to achieve the sustainability in tourism economic development, many issues need to be resolved, namely policy making, legal improvement, infrastructure investment, human resources training and so on. In the current context of international economic integration, more and more extensive opportunities are open for Vietnam's tourism sector to learn and share experience in the sustainable tourism economic development.

Key words: tourism economic sector, sustainable tourism, tourism, sustainable development

1. Introduction

The tourism sector, a new and highly efficient economic sector, has been increasingly developing in each country today. It is a synthetic industry with in-depth inter-sectoral, inter-regional and highly socialized characteristics. The tourism economic development not only meets the highly increasing demand of tourists but also makes a significant contribution to the export of local resources, products and services abroad. In addition to enormous contributions to the economic growth of the country, the tourism economic development creates incentives for the development of other industries, increases more employment and income opportunities for local people, and promotes the image of the country to the world in the context of integration as well.

During the past years, the Vietnamese tourism industry has made an impressive progress and achieved remarkable results. In 2016, the direct contribution of the tourism sector and its total contribution to GDP were 6.8% and 14% respectively.^[1] Tourism plays an important role in socio-economic development in Vietnam, and always receives special attention of the Party and the State. On January 16th, 2017, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 08-NQ / TW on developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector with five points of view and eight specific solutions.

1. Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW of the Politburo on developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector, 16.01.2017.

In the context of international integration, our country is concentrating all resources to accelerate the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. The tourism development has raised some issues that need to be resolved to make the most of the comparative advantages of the sector, to effectively exploit the resources of each locality and economic region and the whole country. In order to boost the non-smoke industry into a spearhead economic sector, focusing on infrastructure investment, policy formulation and sustainable development strategy. To do this well, it is essential to conduct specific studies in the spirit of objective science, learn experience from sustainable tourism models in the world and in the regions, study the similarities on culture, nature and socio-economic conditions, etc. through which frame policies for the sustainable development of the local and regional economy in which the South Central Coast - Vietnam is considered a key economic zone needing to be studied and applied.

2. The role of sustainable tourism development in socio-economic growth

In the context of increasingly international economic integration, tourism becomes an economic sector with the highest level of attracting foreign investment capital that contributes to accelerating the integration process, to effectively implementing multilateral diplomacy policy and directly impacts on the policies of socio-economic development in each region and locality.

First of all, the tourism sector makes a great contribution to speeding up the division of labor, regional and international cooperation. Today, the division of labor has gone beyond the borders of a nation due to the powerful development of its productive forces and of the entire world economy. The more vigorously the globalization evolves, the more powerfully the division of labor takes place. The division of labor and the international integration become more apparent in tourism activities. Tourism is an industry whose products are combined with a chain of different services. In order to obtain quality products for the market requirements, there should be the division of labor and high specialization in the stages and segments of tourism products. Cross-country tourist routes which are linked together to satisfy the visitors' demands of a transnational tour require highly internationalized tourism products and services as the bridges between domestic market and foreign market.^{1 2 1} The current trend requires countries to interconnect in economic development in general and in tourism in particular. Thus, it is said that the tourism industry participates in hastening the division of labor, regional and international cooperation.

In addition, the tourism sector contributes to enhancing the exchange and integration between localities, regions and the world. Countries and regions themselves cannot meet all requirements for the tourism economic development.

2 . Coathup, D. C (1999), "Dominant actors in international tourism", International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 11 Iss: 2/3, pp.69 – 72.

Under the interaction of many factors such as natural conditions, social psychology, living environment and tourists, the tourism sector always develops constantly. The old-line ideas which bind to the familiar motifs of local tourism has resulted in the failure of the entire industry in general and the local and regional sector in particular. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the linkage and cooperation in tourism development between the different localities, regions and countries in the world.

For the local suppliers of tourism products and services, in order to satisfy the demands of different target groups they need to expand their relationships to learn and exchange experience to create various and particular products that can make the most of comparative advantages between regions. For local residents, they can exchange and update the cultural values of different places through tourism activities in their localities. It means that the people are both the subject and the object of cultural exchange. They are those who bring their local cultural values to the world and who receive selectively the cultural values of various regions and countries all over the world.

Besides, the tourism industry also participates in the attraction of foreign investment capital for local socio-economic development. The trend of economic restructuring in the world today shows that the value of the service sector increasingly accounts for the high proportion of total social product. So, when businessmen look for the efficiency of their investment, tourism is an attractive business area compared to many other industries. The tourism sector produces high profit margin, not only because of the relatively low investment capital in tourism compared to heavy industries and transportation, but of the quick ability of return on investment, uncomplicated techniques and the low level of risk. Specially, in the field of additional services, the demand for investment capital is not as great as that of basic services. Regions and countries can make the best of their advantages to attract foreign investment capital through international and regional cooperation in tourism activities. It is noteworthy that the more people care for a comprehensive life with improved health and closeness to nature, the more resorts with high revenue emerge. Therefore, in recent years, the system of luxury resorts has been expanded in large scale, ensuring the high quality investment. Foreign companies can invest in the supply of tourism products and services, fund for resort infrastructures, or build their own resorts. These investment activities have been greatly accelerating the socio-economic development in regions and localities throughout the country.

Furthermore, the tourism sector is also involved in enlarging the domestic and international markets for itself and other economic sectors. With the characteristics of a synthetic, inter-sectoral, inter-regional and transnational industry, tourism economic development in the condition of international cooperation is inevitable. That the tourism industry itself produces branded products in combination with local cultural values, security and people's friendliness... will incentivize tourists to return, widely

promote the image of the country tourism sector to the world and greatly boost the growth of the local, regional and national tourism. Tourism development will be accompanied by the development of other economic sectors in the region and the country as tourism is a synthetic and inter-sectoral industry – a combination of many areas in the economy. When a region becomes a tourist destination where visitors everywhere gather will lead to a significant increase in the needs for “additional goods and services”. Based on this demand of visitors, the industry is constantly widening tourism activities through inter-sectoral, inter-regional and international relationships. Therefore, the tourism economic sector is involved in expanding the domestic and international markets for itself and other economic sectors.

3. Experience in sustainable tourism development in the world and the regions.

The tourism economic sector in the world is entering a period of powerful integration and becoming a borderless industry. Most of the developed countries have affirmed that tourism is a key economic sector and investing in tourism is a smart investment with sustainable profitability. In the process of studying of models of sustainable tourism development in the world and in the region, some experience can be learned and applied in Vietnam.

Firstly, most countries have always affirmed that tourism development is a national policy for socio-cultural and economic development, which always attaches great importance to the regional economic development. Typical for this trend are Singapore, Korea, India and China. These four countries pay extra attention to building a national strategy for the tourism development of regions, focusing on promoting the advantages and potentialities of economic zones in order to diversify and improve the quality of tourism products.

The Singaporean government prioritizes a number of policies on tourism economic development which is considered one of the key strategies in the socio-economic development of the country. Based on the features of a synthetic, inter-sectoral, inter-regional and highly socialized industry in company with natural conditions, culture and history, the government takes advantage of opportunities and resources of the tourism sector. The government has adopted a system of synchronous mechanisms and policies to mobilize all resources for the fast and sustainable development of the tourism sector. From 1965 up to now, Singapore has built and successfully implemented six different tourism development programs: the “Singapore Tourism Plan” (1968), the “Tourism Development Plan” (1986), “Strategic Development Plan” (1993), “Tourism 21” (1996), “Tourism 2015” (2005), “Tourism Boundary 2020” (2012) ^[3].

3. Hoang Thi Mai (2016). “Experience study in the development orientation of tourism products of some ASEAN countries”, <http://www.itdr.org.vn/vi/nghiencuu-traodoi/1347-nghien-cuu-kinh-nghiem-trong-dinh-huong-phat-trien-san-pham-du-lich-cua-mot-so-nuoc-asean.html>

In the plan “Tourism 2015”, Singapore focused on expanding major tourism markets with the motto of better understanding about Singapore, developing Singapore into a “must-visit” destination by improving service quality, upgrading tourism infrastructure, developing professional tourism human resources, diversifying tourism products ... In 2012, Singapore funded 300 million Singapore dollars (SGD) for organizing tourism events, 340 million SGD for tourism product development, and 265 million SGD for the development of tourism human resources. In 2015, Singapore invested 2 billion SGD in the Fund of Tourism Development, welcomed around 17 million international tourists and gained 30 billion SGD in tourism revenue. ^[4]

In recognition of the importance of sustainable tourism development in economic development, South Korea has implemented synchronically a range of important policies towards green growth. A series of new policies towards sustainable tourism development have been issued such as ‘Low Carbon, Green Growth’, ‘Green Energy Industry Development’, ‘Comprehensive Plan on Climate Change Response’ (2008); ‘Basic Law for Green Growth’, ‘New Project of Green Growth’, ‘Comprehensive Measures for Green Technologies R & D’ (2009). The government promotes a five-year plan on green growth, implementing three strategies and ten direct policies with the vision: a green country model - by creating a moral harmony between the environment and the economy. There are three strategies to execute: measures for climate change response and energy independence; creating a new driving force for growth; improving the quality of life and the status of the country. Ten policies to directly implement: transforming the development model towards a society with low greenhouse gas emissions; green technology being the engine of future growth; strengthening the competitiveness of enterprises and aiming to be a new exporter of green industries; creating green jobs; the Green Revolution; Education and green culture policy; the model of green taxation and active financial support; South Korea - a global pioneer in green economy growth; contribution to the international community. South Korea's Green Growth Strategy is a comprehensive national vision, including energy reform and job creation, environmental revitalization, enhancing the competitiveness of enterprises and changing lifestyle of every citizen. South Korea's Green Growth policies have strongly promoted the growth of the country's tourism industry and successfully executed the strategy on sustainable tourism economic development in association with environmental protection, socialization and reproduction in the tourism sector.

Launched in 2009, India has implemented a model of environmental protection in the field of tourism, called ETM (Ecology-Tourism Matrix, ETM). The ETM model is applied to the Munnar Special Tourism Zone, Kerala (India). The main purpose of using the ETM model is to design a plan of tourism development based on

4. Doan Thi Trang (2017). “Lessons from tourism economic development in some countries”, <http://tapchitaichinh.vn/nghien-cuu-trao-doi/bai-hoc-tu-phat-trien-kinh-te-du-lich-o-mot-so-nuoc-106539.html>

conservation and sustainable development of the resource (or balancing between tourism development and environmental protection) for the Munnar Special Tourism Zone (Munnar STZ).^[5] The model attempts to achieve a balance between the infrastructure development and the conservation needs of a destination that does not simultaneously reduce values of essential infrastructure for tourists. The model has been expanded and applied in many developing countries.

Meanwhile, China has determined tourism to be the key economic sector which should be prioritized for development investment. The country has set a direction to boost international tourism, encourage domestic tourism and bring tourists abroad in a modest way through exit policies. To attract international and domestic visitors, the Chinese tourism industry has produced unique, diverse travel products with topics arranged by year. Thereby, the number of international tourists to China is dramatically increasing and a great amount of foreign currency flows into the country. China has defined a goal to become a world tourism power by 2020.

Another country in the region, Malaysia, does not have a master plan for development but only “Malaysia Tourism Transformation Plan 2020”. In Malaysia's general strategy on economic transformation, the tourism industry has created a plan on tourism development transformation by 2020 focusing on developing products and markets with the main objectives of the highly affordable market, boosting consumer spending. The main points in the tourism development are environmental conservation and protection, green tourism development, focusing on balance and sustainability, special attention to ecotourism development.

Secondly, countries are deeply sensitive to the orientation and building of multi-sectoral development policies as a prerequisite and strong impact on tourism. Of inter-sectoral policies, Thailand's entry and exit policy is initiated by simplifying procedures for issuing tourist visas to Thailand. For travel purposes and stay no more than 30 days for each visit, visitors can arrive in Thailand without a visa. This has been widely applied to citizens of 55 countries and territories. Thailand also grants 15-day visa exemption for citizens of the countries travelling to Thailand through entry points in countries bordering Thailand, especially Malaysian citizens are granted visa-free travel to Thailand for a period of up to 30 days. Thailand has a bilateral visa waiver agreement with countries such as Brazil, Chile, South Korea, Peru and Argentina which allow holders of normal or diplomatic passports of these countries to get 90-day visa –free for each trip to Thailand.

In addition to immigration policy, Thailand is at the forefront of tax policy for tourism. The Thai government exempts local craft merchants and travel agencies with revenue below 600,000 baht from value added tax (VAT). For tour operators earning between 600,000 and 1,200,000 baht, they have the option of either paying 1.5% of

5. Tribe, J. (2016). “The Truth about Tourism” *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 31, No.2, pp. 280.

their sales tax or paying normal VAT ^[6]. Travelers arriving in Thailand on a tourist visa will be refunded a value-added tax (7%) on goods purchased at stores with a “VAT Refund for tourists” sign. This is one of the factors that make up the attraction of shopping in Thailand.

Today, many countries attach special importance to green growth; it also means that they pay particular attention to the development of economic sectors towards environmental protection. Developed countries such as the Netherlands, Japan, and Canada have been focusing on agricultural modernization in connection with the development of community-based tourism. This model is currently applied in a lot of countries in the region, including Vietnam.

Thirdly, countries focus on building and developing high quality human resources, renewing awareness and action of the people, attaching great importance to the training and organizing the management machinery of the tourism industry.

Thailand established the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) as the highest governing body responsible for the promotion and development of Thai tourism. TAT is an independent agency under the government. The head of TAT is Governor who is assisted with the Governor's Office, the Advisory Council, the Institute of Hotel and Tourism Training, the Bangkok Tourism Development Office, the Tourism Management Board and the Internal Finance Inspectorate. TAT operates very effectively, because it has the strategy and knows to focus on market research and promotion before giving directions and specific solutions for enterprises to implement. In addition, the thriving tourism industry of Thailand derives from the change in perception and actions from the King, the Government to the Thai people. In this country, both the King, the Government and the people work together for tourism. This is also one of the countries successfully making the model of community-based tourism with various types such as agri-tourism, “homestay” tourism. Thai people always keep a smile on their lips, from drivers, waiters to officers and policemen with a friendly and hospitable attitude; every Thai person can be a real tour guide. The Thai tourism sector has teams of highly-qualified experts and staff and a huge number of well-trained tour guides, especially a Thai guide can usually speak three foreign languages. For the human resources and labor market in 2015, Thailand's competitiveness index ranks 29 out of 141 countries, with a value of 4.98 ^[7].

In Malaysia, the State Administration of Tourism is the Tourism Promotion Board under the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, including the Departments of Development, Department of Promotion, Department of Research and Training, Department of International Seminar Management, Department of General Affairs,

6. Nguyen Xuan Thien & Ha Minh Tuan (2016). “Thailand's tourism development experience and some suggestions for Vietnam”, <http://baodansinh.vn/kinh-nghiem-phat-trien-du-lich-cua-thai-lan- d29000.html>

7. Nguyen Xuan Thien & Ha Minh Tuan (2016). “Thailand's tourism development experience and some suggestions for Vietnam”, <http://baodansinh.vn/kinh-nghiem-phat-trien-du-lich-cua-thai-lan- d29000.html>

Offshore Offices and Information Centers. The Malaysian government has soon recognized the importance of tourism in the national economy and the significance of organizing the machinery of tourism management and development, so the Malaysian tourism industry is greatly booming. The Malaysian tourism sector always make surveys of the labor market in tourism, producing early forecasts and linking training high quality tourism human resources for each region.

Indonesia has a policy of developing community-based tourism. The government facilitates the development of tourism potential by granting a cheap land lease to local community for tourism and at the same time providing guidance and training locals in tourism professionalism. One of the success factors of the tourism industry in Indonesia is the respect for local people's ideas and customs, raising their awareness of tourism development in a certain process with strict regulations of tourism knowledge. In addition, the state requires people to maintain and preserve traditional cultural values. Accordingly, each citizen becomes both a manager and a friendly tour guide. Policies on short-term tourism professional training for local people are of constant concern.

Fourthly, countries focus on activities of tourism promotion and propaganda, investment in the market development of tourism. The National Tourism Authority of Thailand always coordinates closely with other ministries and sectors related to tourism in order to direct enterprises to carry out tourism activities as well as propose and request the Government's approval for the policies, strategies, campaigns and programs of promoting each specific tourism market in each certain period. Thailand has achieved a lot of success in tourism marketing with a great deal of unique promotional campaigns and creative slogans over the years. The National Tourism Authority of Thailand has opened more representative offices abroad to promote Thai tourism image internationally.

Currently, Thailand has 27 overseas representative tourism offices located in four continents: Europe, Asia, America and Oceania. Thailand also conducts tourism marketing through interviewing tourists and posting their interviews on the internet; inviting celebrities to visit Thailand and promote the events on the media; at the same time, encouraging the publicity of goodwill visitors and Thai nationals to introduce the image of the country.

In Indonesia, the Department of Marketing under the Indonesian Tourism Promotion Board is responsible for monitoring market developments, orienting and organizing activities of tourism promotion at the national level.

Malaysia attaches extreme importance to tourism promotion activities on the basis of diversified products to satisfy the demands of tourists. At the same time, the Malaysian Government regularly improves facilities for the tourism industry (annually spending millions of ringgit on this work), preserves national culture values and protects the ecological environment. Malaysia concentrates on promoting tourism

products and services such as leisure, shopping, sport and entertainment activities in resorts, recreation centers and shopping malls, particular attention to developing medical tourism, education tourism and MICE tourism.

4. Some solutions for sustainable tourism development in Vietnam from experience in the world.

Vietnam is a developing country in which tourism is one of the sectors with high growth rate and makes an increasingly major contribution to the national economy. However, in addition to encouraging results the tourism industry also exerts negative impacts on the natural and social environment in many tourist destinations in the country directly and indirectly. Therefore, the study of models of sustainable tourism development in the world on the basis of seriously assessing the situation of the country's tourism industry towards building a sustainable tourism economic sector is a crucial requirement in the current development orientation of the country. By examining tourism models of some countries in the world and in the region, especially the models of Thailand and South Korea, we propose some solutions for sustainable tourism development in Vietnam today.

First, changing the thinking and awareness of authorities at all levels and local people about the role and importance of sustainable tourism development. First of all it is necessary to renovate the thinking about tourism development according to the laws of the market economy, ensuring consistency from the viewpoints, objectives, and action programs by breakthrough policies in institutional mechanisms to meet the requirements of developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector. In addition, it is recommended to raise the awareness and understanding of enterprises and local people in building tourism image, protecting the environment, contributing to sustainable tourism development, enhancing the prestige and brand of Vietnamese tourism. Renovation of thinking and awareness of the role and magnitude of tourism economic development must be materialized into specific action programs, first of which is the innovation of thinking about regional linkage to effectively exploit tourism potentials.

In addition to the innovation of thinking of authorities at all levels, the awareness of local people plays an extremely vital part in sustainable tourism development. It is necessary to disseminate tourism-related legal documents in local community as well as educate the people to execute the Law on Tourism effectively; build and implement the Tourism Codes of Conduct which regulates that organizations and individuals in tourism activities have to keep their professional ethics, to be friendly, sociable to every visitors not discriminate between domestic and foreign tourists, keep prestige with tourists, sale of originated goods at listed prices and quality assurance. Specially, it is advisable to encourage the people's participation in tourism-related policy-framing and decision-making to greatly enhance tourism economic development.

Second, focus on improving the capacity and efficiency of the state management for sustainable tourism development. Strengthening of the state management apparatus on tourism should be done synchronously through the administrative reform, the allocation of sufficient staff to specialized sections on tourism and inter-sectoral coordination between the tourism management agency and other agencies in planning, formulating policies on sustainable tourism development in order to effectively exploit and preserve tourism resources. Plans and policies on tourism economic development should be constantly amended and renewed in accordance with the principles and requirements of sustainable tourism development and in observance of legal regulations of planning in the whole construction process as well as in determining the specific contents of the planning.

Third, aiming to build a model of environmental protection in the field of tourism, focusing on green growth with sustainable development of the industry. By studying the tourism patterns in the world, it is realized that most of them set a target of solving the “conflict” between tourism development and environmental protection, between systematic approach and sustainable development. It means that environmental conservation and protection is guaranteed “balanced” with tourism, socioeconomic development and vice versa. This is considered a sustainable development direction for the tourism industry, reproduction in the industry. However, the implementation in Vietnam is very difficult. Vietnam is a developing country that focuses on economic objectives and exploitation of natural resources so it is difficult to concentrate on sustainable growth targets. Although this means making negative impacts on the environment, we need a clear orientation for future green growth, environmental protection in combination with efficient utilization of tourism resources.

Fourth, research and implementation of inter-regional solutions to develop tourism into a spearhead economic sector in each key economic region. Localities in the economic zones need to examine and assess their potentials to build reasonable strategies for developing tourism products, avoiding duplication and monotonousness in local tourism products. In contrast, each province concentrates on their strengths and highlights to create their own local products to enhance the strength of regional linkage. The economic zones should actively issue plans and projects on developing and perfecting tourism products and services namely marine and island tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, MICE tourism, eco-tourism, culinary tourism, medical tourism, wellness tourism, handicraft villages, sports, shopping, entertainments and so on; ensuring that the products are unique, distinctive and highly professional meeting the regional and international standards in the direction of sustainable development, environmentally responsible tourism and green tourism.

Fifth, constantly designing training policies to improve the quality of tourism human resources. Accordingly, there should be strategic human resources planning quarterly and periodically on the basis of the total number of tourist arrivals and

tourism development policy of each region. It would be better to develop a network of centers for training and fostering regional tourism human resources, especially training centers in key tourism sites of the economic zones. It is encouraged to open non-public training establishments and institutions with foreign investment capital, diversifying types of schools, classes and centers for training and cultivating tourism human resources at many levels in the whole region. The State, enterprises and the labors work together to step by step socialize the training of human resources in tourism in order to ensure the quantity and quality of tourism human resources. In addition to the training and fostering of local human resources, the local people's awareness, communication ability and behaviour should be enhanced.

Sixth, application of science and technology to tourism economic development. The application of science and technology to the tourism development in the region should strengthen the coordination between research institutes and universities to design application programs and develop technology in the field of tourism. Specifically: e-government model in the tourism management; applying information technology and communications (internet, building a television channel for tourism, promoting on popular television channels ...) in the tourism promotion; online travel business models (trading hotel rooms, booking tours online ...) to gradually move to the e-tourism model when the conditions of technology infrastructure and legal corridors are fully supplied.

Seventh, strengthening the programs of regional and international cooperation for tourism economic development. Linkage, cooperation and international cooperation are indispensable trends for the common development as well as the tourism economic development in all regions and countries. Vietnam is no exception, so Vietnam should establish linkage and cooperation in tourism development under the plan 'two corridors and one economic circle' with China. Specifically: cooperating in Vietnamese tourism promotion as well as in investment opportunities for tourism development in all regions of the country; organizing programs and events abroad and participating in events organized by foreign partners, joining in fairs to promote tourism products; actively inviting foreign experts to consult in tourism planning and framing projects on marine and island tourism, ecotourism, cultural and spiritual tourism; implementing policies on tourism encouragement and foreign investment incentives, creating favorable conditions and environment for foreign enterprises to invest in and develop technical facilities and tourism products; promoting linkage and international cooperation in training and developing human resources for tourism and scientific researches.

5. Conclusion

Tourism is a synthetic industry which is inter-sectoral, inter-regional and highly socialized with deeply cultural values. The tourism sector has become an increasingly important factor contributing to the socio-economic development.

Developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector to create the driving force for the development of other industries is a significantly strategic orientation of the Party and the State. However, as a developing country, the demand for tourism into a spearhead economic sector in Vietnam has faced a lot of difficulties due to the priority of economic development objectives. For that reason, it is essential for Vietnam to study models of sustainable tourism development in the world in order to overcome the initial difficulties and to change the perception and thinking of officials and people in tourism economic development aiming to develop a sustainable tourism industry and build a prosperous country.

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