

## **Tourism Products Development Based on Tourism Resources in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam**

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**Abstract:** Tourism is major economic sector and its production has always been considered a core issue on research and investment in tourism development activities. The development strategy of Vietnam's tourism includes: developing highly valued tourism product, ensured sustainability and competitiveness, as well as attracting the greater market and tourism investors. Mekong Delta in VietNam (also called the Region) has abundant potential resources for tourism development and special advantages. Greater Competitiveness in tourism development among localities, between regions and among countries increase tourism production and there by tourists to the locality, region and country.

The purpose of this article is to analyze a potential location for tourism resources and tourism development based in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam and to come up with some solutions for tourism development drawing on tourism resources in the Region.

**Keywords:** Toursim products, tourism resources, Mekong delta of Vietnam

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Mekong Delta region of Vietnam is formed by the alluvial of Mekong River, one of the seven largest rivers in the world. The Mekong Delta in Viet Nam is located in the southernmost part of Vietnam, adjacent to Ho Chi Minh City and Southeast region in the Northeast, which has the most dynamic development in country with strong economic exchange. The Northwest of Mekong Delta shares a border with Cambodia, providing good condition for commerce with courtiers in the Mekong Delta Basin. The Southwest, the South, and the Southeast of the Mekong Delta share a border with the Gulf of Thailand and the East Sea. Mekong Delta is one of seven major regions in Vietnam for tourism development. Mekong Delta is the fourth largest region of Vietnam with over 40.500 square kilometers. The region is comprised of Can Tho - one province-level municipality and twelve provinces such as Kien Giang, An Giang, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang, Ca Mau, Hau Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Ben Tre, Tien Giang and Long An.

The Mekong Delta region is diverse tourism resources is well-known for its waterway landscape and floating markets. The Mekong Delta region is likened to miniature Vietnam with its abundant natural resources and diversified ecosystem of biomes such as plains, forests, mountains, seas, islands, beautiful beaches, landscapes, and famous historical and cultural monuments, unique festivals and traditional handicraft villages. There are many advantages to developing the Mekong Delta is tourist attraction destinations, which have the capacity to compete not only in the country but also in the Region and the world. In other words, the future of the area of the Mekong Delta is the key to the future of Vietnam's tourism, and a commitment to investment will improve the overall socio-economic development of the region.

However in order to turn the inherent advantages of tourism in the Region into opportunities for tourism development and contribute especially to socio-economic development, one of the most critical tasks required is conduct and implement research into building a system of tourism production, a system capable of competing and matching the demand of the market. The Mekong Delta has developed its tourism based on many advantages such as infrastructure, tourism facilities, human resources, tourist-friendly policies and ecosystem of tourism resources. However tourism development in the Region has not been yet measured up with its inherent potential. One of many reasons is that the Region has not yet developed a wide range of tourism products associated with these inherent, local advantages. Therefore, it is essential to have a deeper analysis of tourism resources, production and development based on the Mekong Delta's tourism resources, from which one can brainstorm and offer reasonable solutions towards the development of tourism resources in order to bring high socio-economic efficiency to the Region.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

Some main methodology required for implementation, as discussed below:

- Secondary information collection method: The information is gathered from the work of internal and external researchers, leading the overview of theoretical issues and research framework for this article regarding tourism resources and conditions for the Mekong Delta's development.
- Social investigation method: The information resource used in this articles conclusion is drawn from primary and secondary information. The primary information is gathered and processed directly from surveys on the status of not only The Mekong Delta's tourism resources but also the opinions of the community as well as investors interested in taking advantage of tourism opportunities in the Region. Obtaining expert opinions concerning tourist activities in the Mekong Delta will be extremely valuable ideas, which help to solve obstacles in addition to find out how to most effectively implement the objective research.
- Statistical method: This method is mainly used in the study of the subject, combined with the use of both types of statistical analysis, qualitative and quantitative analysis.

In my study, using statistical indicators on the number of tourism resources, the number of tourists, revenue of the Region's tourism development, as well as activities of tourist attraction will provide a more vivid description of exploitation in Mekong Delta's tourism sector, grant better analysis, and help to recognize influencing factors.

## **III. POTENTIAL FOR NATURAL TOURISM RESOURCES IN MEKONG DELTA OF VIET NAM**

### **1. Natural tourism resources**

Mekong Delta is characterized by extensive and flat alluvial plains, which have attractive and varying scenery. With relatively low terrain and no system of dykes, Mekong Delta's floating water is attractive tourists and has become a unique and indispensable location for tourism production for the Region. Especially unique, the Kien Luong area of Kien Giang Province also has a different limestone terrain compared to the South region of Vietnam. Mekong Delta has many natural advantages such as fertile land, a moderate climate, warm and sunny weather all year around, which are all important factors for the formation of stone landscapes, forests and caves, fresh environment, fresh fruits during all four seasons of the year and many other natural properties. Mekong Delta still maintains virgin land, unspoiled, and great condition to develop eco-tourism, one type of tourism favored by many developed countries all over the world. The Region also has the ecological landscapes of plains and Sea Island. The variety of the Region's terrain has attracted tourism of various types, including: rock climbing tourism, sea and island leisure tourism, sports tourism on the water-face, sightseeing, eco-tourism, and so on, attracting major crowds domestically and from overseas.

It is said that water resources of the Region are the richest in Vietnam because of the Mekong River. With its interlaced network of river and canal systems at a total length of 4,900 km (average 0.12 km/km<sup>2</sup>), the Mekong River is a one of a kind hydrological system and offers a large amount of fresh water all year around. Thanks to this terrain, Viet Nam has been provided with favorable conditions for the Region's tourism to develop highly diversified products and competitive eco-tourism.

The ecosystem of the Mekong Delta has a many advantages to exploit and protect as it become a key the area of economic development and eco – tourism for Viet Nam in the integration period. Currently, tourists enjoy visiting and exploring tourist attractions such as national parks, nature reserves, and special – use forests.

Mekong Delta has been recognized by UNESCO as including three biosphere reserve areas (Kien Giang, Mui Ca Mau, Tram Chim), five national parks (Mui Ca Mau, U Minh Thuong, U Minh Ha, Tram Chim, Phu Quoc), three nature reserve areas (Hon Chong of Kien Giang province, Lang Sen of Long An province, Thanh Phu of Ben Tre province), three species conservation areas (Lung Ngoc Hoang of Hau Giang province, birds area Dam Doi of Ca Mau province, birds area of Bac Lieu province), seven habitat conservation areas (Go Thap of Dong Nai province, Nui Sam – Thoai Son – Tra Su – Tuc Dup of An Giang province) and one forest area for experimental research (Minh Hai centre for applied research mangrove forest in Ca Mau province). These resources for eco - tourism are not only found in Mekong Delta but also in the greater Vietnam, which has provided attractions for tourists as well as domestic and foreign scientists.

The entire region has more than 700km of coastline, over 145 islands with special tourism value on 5 islands, 43 islands of people living on and nearby 20 beautiful beaches with white sand and blue water, of which the most famous island is Phu Quoc (Kien Giang Province), also known as Pearl Island with pristine beauty. In addition, there are many natural resources such as forests, mountains, rivers and diversified marine eco-systems such as seas and islands with aquatic resource abundances. For these reasons, this place has many potential advantages in becoming a tourist paradise of international stature.

## **2. Humanities tourism resources**

Mekong Delta of Vietnam has a rich history and culture that has contributed abundantly to Viet Nam's diverse tourism resources and high value for tourism activities. The Region is dominated by 4 ethnic groups including Kinh, Hoa, Khmer and Cham. Living conditions, cultural characteristics, and customs of each ethnic group is different from the others. Viet Nam's ethnography contains special culture, rich traditions, diverse custom, ancient architecture, festivals, costumes, cuisines all of which are ripe for development and investment by the tourism industry.

Mekong Delta of Vietnam is one of the regions with quite large human resources. According to statistics from 2018, there are currently a lot of places for human tourism region with focused density of human resources including 6 special national monuments, 1 national monument being nominated, and 202 national monuments.

The system of cultural and historical monuments is most valuable for the Region's tourism activities, which contain archaeological monuments, historical monuments, and beautiful landscape. Furthermore, museums and souvenir shops are also tourist attractions. There are 17 museums in the Region including 1 public museum. Moreover, the many festivals which take place throughout the regional provinces are held throughout all seasons of the year. There are longstanding craft and handicraft villages in Mekong Delta. Core resources of the Region's tourism are human resources combined with natural resources in order to create huge advantages for development of the Region's tourism product, contributing to development of the Region with national and international stature.

## **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The assessment result of realities of tourism products development based on tourism resources in Mekong Delta of Vietnam**

With the huge potential of tourism resources, there are many advantages for localities in the Mekong Delta for developing. Currently, the Region mainly exploits these resources as listed and discussed below:

Eco-tourism: Take an eco-tour and learn about local people at some places including the dunes, island, orchards and floating markets. For example, the dune called Long – Lan – Quy - Phuong, Thoi Son Island, Ngu Hiep Island, Tan Phong Island (Tien Giang province, Ben Tre province), Au dune, Son dune, Khuong dune (Can Tho province), Ong Ho – My Hoa Hung island (An Giang province), Dung island (Soc Trang province), Tan Loc island (Can Tho province), Ngheu dune, Quy dune; paddy field of Kinh people and Khmer people (Soc Trang province, Tra Vinh province) upland rice field of Khmer people (Tinh Bien province, An Giang province), ghost rice field of Dong Thap Muoi, orchards and Cai Rang floating market (Can Tho province), Cai Be floating market (Tien Giang province), Ca Mau floating market, Phong Dien floating market. These floating markets are places where trade activities and culture exchanges have long taken place between local people and tourists.

- Visitation of national parks, nature reserves, and Viet Nam's eco-systems of wetland have been exploited in various ways including picnic grounds, discovery and scientific research at Mui Ca Mau National Park, U Minh Thuong National Park, U Minh Ha National Park, Tram Chim National Park, Phu Quoc National Park, 3 nature reserves at Lang Sen, Lung Ngoc Hoang conservation areas and species, Dam Doi birds area and Bac Lieu bird garden.

- River tours: In addition to yacht activities, river tours have been developed steadily and become attractive for domestic and foreign tourists, especially the implementation of Seam Reap – Phnompenh – Chau Doc City of An Giang Province – Vinh Long Province – Tien Giang Province – Ho Chi Minh City river tours.

- Combination eco-tourism with sea tourism: The Region has 5 islands with high tourism value: Nam Du Island, Tho Chu Island, Ba Lua Island, Hai Tac island and An Thoi island. Additionally, there are beautiful beaches with white sand and blue water, located at Tra Vinh Province (Ba Dong beach), Ca Mau Province (Khai Long beach), Ben Tre Province (Thua Duc beach) and Kien Giang Province (Phu Quoc District, Ha Tien District, Kien Luong District, Kien Hai District) such as Sao beach, Khem beach, Dai beach, Truong beach, Ong Lang beach, Vong beach, Rach Vem beach, Vung Bau beach, Ganh Dau beach, Cua Can beach, Chen beach, and Mui Nai beach). The region's tourism products now include: resorts, island homestay, eco-tourism such as watching coral and sea grass carpet, marine tourism such as diving, surfing, fishing, sailing and swimming. Furthermore, the biological diversity of Kien Luong Limestone Mountain is actually needed to attract investment towards exploration and the thematic tours.

- Other tourism products include the historical monuments, the cultural works and landscape: There are many recognized historical monuments, cultural works and landscapes which serve as precious resources and are extremely important to attract visitors. Some historical monuments are well-known such as Rach Gam – Xoai Mut Victory Relic (Chau Thanh Dist., Tien Giang Province), Phu Quoc prison historic monument (Phu Quoc Island Dist., Kien Giang Province, Chuong Thien Victory Relic (Vi Thanh City and Long My Dist., Hau Giang Province), Go Thap Relic (Thap Muoi Dist., Dong Thap Province), Oc Eo - Ba The archaeological and

architectural Relic (Thoai Son Disy., An Giang Province), Memorial House of President Ton Duc Thang (An Giang Province), the Temple of Nguyen Trung Truc, the cultural and historical relic of Binh San Mountain, Tao Dan Chieu Anh Cac, and Moso Cave. These historical monuments are considered mainstream resources and have been exploited in order to bring high efficiency.

Craft village tourism: The products of craft villages are also focused on exploitation and has brought success to the Region's tourism. Examples include: water hyacinths knitting village, fish sauce making village, Sim wine making village, Phu Quoc's pearl farming and production village, Ham Ninh fishing village, Cu Lao May rice paper making village, Ca Hom sedge mat weaving village, Vinh Yen and Long Binh flower cultivation village, Binh An drum making village, Long Khanh weaving village, and Pho Tho – Ba Bo flower cultivation village. These craft villages are actually valuable tourism resources, which can be exploited, and further develop tourism production as its relates to the Region's culture.

Mekong Delta has the potential for developing a rich variety of tourism such as cultural tourism, religious tourism, eco-tourism, nature tourism, and adventure tourism.

Although overall planning of Vietnamese tourism development to 2020 and vision to 2030, overall planning of Mekong Delta tourism development to 2020 and vision to 2030 and by some scientific researchers have been oriented quite clearly regarding typical tourism places and promotion in the Region, actual development has not yet reached the expected, influencing the region's overall tourism status and competitiveness.

By comparing visitation to the Mekong Delta with visitation to the greater Vietnam and the total tourism income of the region, one can get a better understanding of overall competitiveness. According to data of Mekong Delta Tourism Association, in the year 2018, the Region welcomed 40.745.296 tourists, up 16.82% compared with 2017 year including 3,420,109 foreign tourists increased nearly 19.8% and 37,320,187 domestic tourists, and the Region's total income from tourism was reached 23,782,744 million dong, up 38% compared with 2017. In fact, the Mekong Delta's tourism development has changed quite drastically, but not yet matched to the tourism potential the Mekong Delta River projected during the integration period.

In spite of abundant resources for tourism development, generally Mekong Delta's tourism products are mainly based on currently available tourism resources. These tourism products are attractive but monotonous, raw products, yet not diverse. Moreover, making differences for similar products among localities in Mekong Delta is still limited, especially products of village tourism. There is a lack of tourism products for foreign tourists, especially high quality accommodation services. The quality of tourism products are not high, and compete on a low level. There is a lack of special tourism products of a national and international significance. For these reasons, the attractions for tourists, especially foreign tourists, have been reduced and are incapable of convincing tourists to stay a long time, or to persuade them to come next time. Developing tourism products, especially tourism products with a competitive market approach have not yet been fully considered with the persuasion of scientific arguments. There is a lack of essential services such as tourism infrastructure, quality of services and basic goods. Promoting tourism destination has not yet been broad enough in its form and content, and has not yet readied into the international market. Coordinating on some tourist activities has not yet been effective as desired. The service quality of tourism staff is also more limited. Implementing between the planning of tourist development and the overall planning of socio-economic development and other sectors has also been low. One to these important reasons, the Region's tourism has not been able to make a breakthrough or contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the Region as hoped.

## **2. Some solutions for tourism products development based on Mekong Delta's tourism resources.**

According to research of Mekong Delta's tourist resource system, it finds that the Region's resources are relatively concentrated in accordance with defined tourism space. Thus, it is convenient to exploit and develop tourist products. Based on the direction of tourism space development; it is possible to develop tourist products based on orientation of tourism resources. Mekong Delta is going to implement main solutions to develop tourism products as follows:

Firstly, the base of tourist resources and the market demand for products finds it. Necessary to come up with a solution toward the development of the tourist products system. The Mekong concentrates on 3 groups of tourism products: special tourism products, main tourism product, and additional tourism products. In short term, the main tourist products can contribute more to quantity of customers and sales. However, in the long term, the special tourism products actually create the competitiveness and the brand for the Region's tourism. The special tourism products have prominent advantages when developing tourism in accordance with of environmental sustainability. The Region focuses on development as a priority for special tourism products of international and national stature according to the direction of developing tourism resources recognized by UNESCO as well as special national monuments. In addition, the development of special tourism products depend on resources such as river tourism, sea tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism and religious tourism, etc. Simultaneously, diversifying different tourism product system among eco-tourism, community tourism, island

resort, discovery, and spiritual tourism attracts more tourists to visit and explore. Moreover, creating the close link between tourist destinations and connecting national tourist attraction with international tourist attractions strengthens the competitiveness of the Region's over all tourist attraction

Secondly, the development of tourism products will pay attention to quality assurance and meet the demand of tourists. There are many ways to focus on development of tourism products, such as market research, demanding identification of market segment for tourists, competitor analysis, building products, and in media, selling products and providing services. Accordingly, the products must be placed at the focus and the supporting factors closely coordinating with each other. The aim of tourism product development should be placed on eco-tourism, community tourism, and cultural tourism, keeping in mind the conservation of traditional, cultural values. Moreover, developing tourism products associated with local communities creates local tourism products that complement the Region's tourism product systems.

Thirdly, upgrading the infrastructure and facilities serves tourism as well as the most popular transportation hubs of the Region, including sea ports, airports, river ports, bus stations, tourism stops, the 1A national highway, the 80 highway, and international gates. Opening new national routes as well as new international direct routes, and increasing the frequency of flights to 4 airports of the Region (including Rach Soi airport, Ca Mau airport, Can Tho airport, Phu Quoc airport), will better meet the demand of the tourism product system. It is absolutely necessary to implement some means of upgrading infrastructure in term of quality and quantity, building luxury resorts with sustainable model for resort development aimed at the wealthy, investing in international convention center and tourism products of MICE. Some projects, such as building a sustainable tourism development strategy, using clean and green technology products, collecting waste and planting trees, have promoted a close relationship between tourism and the environment. Therefore, it has allowed the Region to diversify local tourism products and exploit advantages of the Region with HaTien international border gate in Kien Giang Province. It is necessary to promote the connection with countries in the ASEAN, foremost with Cambodia in order to create regional tourism programs (within the Greater Mekong Sub region Sustainable Tourism Development project as well as build cross-border tourism programs, thereby connecting local tourist attractions in the Region with tourist attractions on territory along the Cambodian border.

Fourthly, service quality will be improved according to international standards in order to create better mechanisms for tourism development in general in addition to the Region's tourism products, which will promote the cooperation and participation of all economic sectors. Building policies to attract foreign investment, for instance, tax reduction and exemption, will create an attractive environment for investors who are eager to develop tourist projects in the Region. The implementation of social investment in tourism products will be encouraged in order to mobilize capital from economic sectors inside and outside of the country, supported by investment policies in infrastructure and boundary planning for national tourist destinations, and potential tourist destinations in the outlying regions and islands.

Fifthly, it is necessary to increase investment from the state budget for tourist product development as identified in the overall plan for Mekong Delta tourism development. Moreover, mobilization of financial resources will be enhanced from domestic and foreign institutions to ensure enough investment capital for tourism development in general, the Region's tourism products in particular, tourist community development, eco-tourism development, cultural tourism development, and regional tourism development. Furthermore, environmental preservation, resources preservation, and sustainable development are significant factors contributing to the development of a diverse tourist product system.

Sixthly, training tourism staff for professional qualifications should be the focus in order to achieve high service quality, especially in regards to the attitude of tourist staff, as it affects the satisfaction of tourists as well as the service quality of the entire tourism program. On top of that, it is critical to include these tasks including training for local people in order to develop tourism professionally, promote to investment attraction, create a favorable environment, and give orientation to the development of tourism products. At the same time, it is necessary to raise awareness among state officials at all levels and enterprises regarding the important role of tourist promotion and propagation. Linking reputable media agencies, both domestically and internationally, present a diplomatic representation to countries all over the world, which in turn serve as markets for promotion. Participating and hosting international events (such as cultural exchanges, sport exchanges, domestic and international trade fairs) are essential activities for market research, brand, and promotion of tourist attraction.

And finally, enhancing state management efficiency must be implemented for sectors such as the management of the Region's tourist product quality, the management of construction organization and the implementation of planning, the management of product development, the management of tourist promotion, the management of investment promotion, the management linking core tourist destinations in Mekong Delta localities. Capacity building managers, by providing information channels for tourists, not only help reflect the quality of services, quality of tourist products as tourists come for sightseeing, but also rectify the quality of tourist products in order to ensure the rights of tourists.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on Viet Nam's abundant tourist resources, the Mekong Delta is home to a great deal of potential opportunities for the development of diverse tourist products, especially advantages such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, island tourism and resorts. Over the years, the reality of developing tourism products in the Region has actively changed yet the requirement of tourism development has still exceeded the output of the localities in the Region. In the future, it will be essential to strengthen the development of regional tourist products in an optimal way. The development of tourist products based on tourism resources needs to be strongly associated with the preservation of natural landscape, with ecological preservation and with the conservation of humanities resource to ensure sustainable development, thereby utilizing the particular tourism products of the Region, and having the ability to compete in regional and international markets.

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