

Improving Tourism Products for Sustainable Economic Development: A Case of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: As a large city with advantages in tourism infrastructure, Ho Chi Minh City is always considered the leading tourist centre of the country. The most important task of city tourism today is to improve quality and diversify products, making this industry one of the key economic sectors. Tourism potentials and advantages have not been effectively exploited to become a unique and attractive tourism product of Ho Chi Minh City. Some tourists seem to still only consider this as a stopover or transit point because there are large international and domestic routes before reaching other destinations in Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh City tourism is gradually losing this advantage when key tourist areas are completing international airports and convenient road transport infrastructure. In addition, Ho Chi Minh City tourism has also developed over the past time, but there are not many typical products. Therefore, before losing its advantages and its potential, Ho Chi Minh city should focus on building a unique and diversified tourism product system to attract tourists. This paper analyses the challenges that Ho Chi Minh City is facing and mention some recommendations. The results of the paper through the analysis process show that the tourism industry of Ho Chi Minh City has advantages and disadvantages that need to be overcome in order to build a more sustainable tourism brand.

1 INTRODUCTION


Being a modern city with strong growth in many aspects as well as an important international trade gateway of the region and the country, Ho Chi Minh City is always a destination for many international tourists to choose when coming to Vietnam. However, in order to retain long-term tourists to learn and discover the unique identities of local people in a methodical and profound way, the tourism industry of the city still has many things to do (Ryan, 2002).

According to statistics of the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism, in 2020, international visitors to the city are 1,303,750 arrivals, down 84.8% over the same period in 2019, reaching 14.49% of the 2020 plan. Domestic tourism to Ho Chi Minh City was 15,879,000 arrivals, down 51.5% over the same period in 2019, reaching 46.7% of the plan in 2020. The total revenue of the tourism industry reached 84,512 billion VND (a decrease of 39, 6% over the same period in 2019), reaching 57.4% of the plan for 2020. However, it is due to the Covid-19 epidemic, the city has had a pretty good growth compared to

compared with the years 2000, 2020 or past years (Fan et al., 2019).

2 METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on sources and data gathered during doing the research, then, the data were analysed and compared. The article also analyses survey results from 40 people who work in the tourism industry. The survey was conducted to gather their opinions as well as their proposed solutions. The results of this survey are then used in research to assess the importance of diversifying and improving the quality of tourism products and services. For the questionnaire samples, the random sampling method was selected so that all participants were equally likely to participate in the sample. At the same time, to ensure sample reliability, the interview questions were conducted in different locations and at different times.

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3 RESULTS

The first seven months of 2018, TP. Ho Chi Minh City welcomes nearly 4.4 million international tourists. Contributing to that result, the city tourism industry has focused on researching and developing different types of tourism products, associated with history, culture and architecture in the area such as shopping tourism, MICE tourism (conference tourism), food, river travel, etc.

River tourism is considered a typical product of the city. Ho Chi Minh City has not been properly exploited with its available potential and geographical advantages. The City Department of Tourism has coordinated with the Department of Transport to implement the program of developing and improving waterway traffic, serving tourism (Gia, 2021).

Through the survey, most say the destinations are interesting (50%), but only 27.5% say "very interesting". This implies that tourism products are still not attractive enough for tourists. From the perspective of an activist in the tourism industry, but specifically tour guides, tourism products need to be further improved so that visitors will come back and experience them again and again. There are a few "Rather Interesting" options (20%), which needs to be rethought as the tourism product needs to be perfect to attract tourists, especially the fastidious ones (Figure 1).

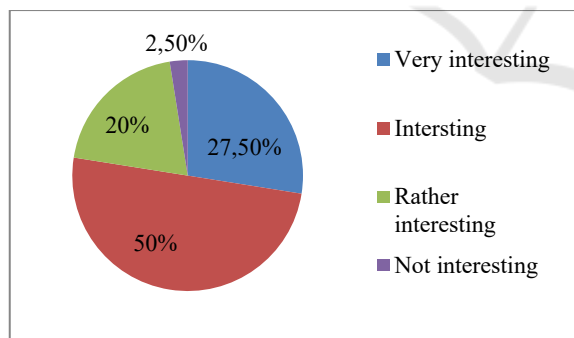


Figure 1: Respondents' assessment of the attractiveness of tourism products in Ho Chi Minh City.

Some of the respondents (30%) also mention the option "more good products", that is, the outstanding product play a rather important role. Tourism promotion and promotion activities are large, invested in content, in-depth, specialized for each market segment and bring high efficiency (27.5%). Many activities to link domestic and foreign tourism development cooperation have been effectively

implemented (Mai et al., 2019). The development of new tourism products and forms and improving the quality of tourism services that are interested in have significantly contributed to attracting tourists, creating many impressions of visitors when coming to Ho Chi Minh City (Phuong and Khuong, 2017).

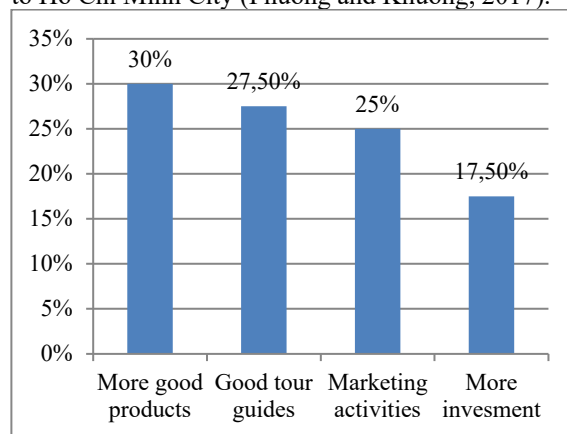


Figure 2: Solutions to develop tourism.

In the above factors, the tour guide is seen as an ambassador. They are the ones who bring the image of the country to international tourists. For that reason, they also need to cultivate more professional skills and knowledge (Figure 2).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Current Status of the Tourism Industry of Ho Chi Minh City

Tourism activities in Ho Chi Minh City are quite active. Here, there are 669 travel agencies, including 357 international travel agencies, 312 domestic travel agencies and eight representative offices of foreign travel agencies. Many businesses have strong capabilities and have built reputable brands in the country and in the world such as Saigon Tourist, Ben Thanh Tourist, Hoa Binh Tourism, Vietravel, Fiditourist, VYC, Vidotour, Apex, Exotossimo, YTC, etc.

Facilities for tourists staying here are also very rich. In the city, there are 1,527 tourist accommodation establishments with 35,000 659 rooms of all kinds, including 860 one-star to five-star hotels, with 25,000 737 rooms. There are 13 five-star hotels, including New World, Sheraton, Park Hyatt, Caravelle, Rex, Majestic, Movempik, Sofitel, Legend, InterContinental, Renaissance, Equatorial, Windsor Plaza; one six-star hotel. In the near future,

there will be other five-star hotel in this city. As a result, every year, more than three million international visitors come to the city, creating favorable conditions for the industry to achieve revenue of more than 40 trillion Vietnam dong (VND) per year (Phuong and Khuong, 2017).



Figure 3: Flower Street Festival in Ho Chi Minh city.

In order to improve service quality, the city's tourism industry has constantly invested in upgrading and building many new hotels and restaurants. In 2010, Saigon Tourist, a private tourist company, put into use quite new and modern hotels. Some other hotels have been upgraded and expanded (Phuong & Khuong, 2017). Although there are not many monuments and landscapes in Ho Chi Minh City, the tourism industry of the city has sought to exploit its strengths in cultural activities such as festivals, festivals, fairs, especially culinary culture and travel events. Domestic and foreign tourists are quite impressed with travel events such as Nguyen Hue Flower Street, Tourism Festival, Southern Fruit Festival, Southern Land Food Festival, etc. (Figure 3).



Figure 4: Jade Emperor Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh city.

The industry used to focus on developing four key tourism products. The first is the program "Ho Chi Minh City - 100 interesting things", the focus is on consulting experts and consultants to contribute to the expansion of 20 criteria of the 2011 program (Figure 4). The second product is a standard travel service program aimed at building good shopping spots to introduce to tourists. To date, the city has more than 100 standard tourist service spots. The third product is an art performance program for tourists. Types such as circus, martial arts are exploited, from historical events and from unique cultural features of Vietnam. In addition, a number of other art units also participate in performing to serve tourists but have not been closely linked with the Citytour programs of travel companies. The product with the strongest growth potential and the most promising results is the river cruise program (Tuan, & Rajagopal, 2019).

4.2 Some Shortcomings of the Tourism Industry in Ho Chi Minh City

The tourism environment of the city still has many shortcomings, especially security issues for tourists. Many street vendors, beggars, lottery ticket sellers, shoe shiners, etc. They often disturb customers without guarantee of quality, causing discomfort for visitors. The most serious is the situation of robbery of property, stealing money carried out by a number of taxi, cyclo, and motorbike taxi. Therefore, the tourism industry needs to closely coordinate the city police, especially the special forces and other functional departments and agencies to restore order and safety in this field to build a city tourism environment. safe, friendly and civilized.

In fact, every time there are visitors from other regions or foreigners visiting, tourist companies usually take them to traditional sightseeing places such as Ben Thanh Market, War Remnants Museum, Independence Palace, Dragon House Museum, Ho Chi Minh City Post Office, Cu Chi Tunnels, etc. In the minds of those who were born and raised in this City, of course, these are places that have been "assigned" as destinations-places tourist must visit. Everyone can easily see the familiar destinations mentioned above. Foreign visitors come to Ho Chi Minh City to stay and it takes them just 1-2 days to be able to explore all the sights in the city. The rest of the time is spent on shopping, transfer and accommodation to other provinces and cities (Phuong, 2019).

Tourists often like to discover new places and new things, however, in order to find a place to experience

the extremely diverse and rich culture and arts of the Vietnamese people in the City, it is still difficult. To find a place for international tourists to experience the culture. admire, admire is really not easy. This is a void that city tourism has not fully exploited.

City tourism regulators also admitted that the city still does not have a fixed, large-scale performing arts venue (while most countries in the ASEAN region have performance centers over 1,000 guests.), and there are no high-quality arts programs to serve the entertainment needs of tourists during their stay in the city (Truong, 2013).

The current entertainment activities are not attractive or commercially exploited through the forms of bars, beer clubs, karaoke, etc. and sometimes there are changes; There is no entertainment product suitable for a modern, dynamic and international city (Ryan, 2002).

4.3 Promising Potentials

One of the current important tasks of the city tourism industry is to focus on developing river tourism in the direction of Can Gio, a coastal district with great potential for ecotourism. Located 50 km from the city center by bird-flying with an area of more than 70,000 400 hectares (one third of the whole city), Can Gio has a coastline of more than 20 km and a mangrove area of more than 37,160 hectares (accounting for more than half of the total area of the district). With about 12,000 hectares of natural forest and more than 20,000 hectares of planted forest, Can Gio mangrove ecosystem has recovered and developed well, recognized by UNESCO as the first " mangrove biosphere reserve area " of Vietnam (Lai et al., 2009).



Figure 5: A boat trip along the river.

This is truly the "green lung" of the city, which is especially important in regulating the climate. Coming to Can Gio, visitors will have a feeling of refreshment and relief when returning to nature

because surrounded by immense forests of all kinds of trees, especially mangroves (Figure 5). The mangrove fauna here is also of high value in terms of biodiversity conservation with more than 200 species of animals, including 24 species of reptile amphibians, birds and other animals. In particular, the Can Gio mangrove forest has up to 11 species of reptiles on the red list of the country. Another attractive feature of Can Gio is the intertwined river and canal system (accounting for nearly one third of the whole district's area), so sailing under the lush green forests will create a distinctive feature of regional tourism (Kuenzer and Tuan, 2013).

There is another interesting thing, that is, the characteristic feature of Can Gio culture is the Nghinh Ong festival (Whale welcome festival), which takes place every year on the occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival, attracting many tourists to visit, play and entertain. This festival is being researched and upgraded to a city-scale cultural and tourist festival. Can Gio also has three unique traditional craft villages. These are concentrated forest villages in Tam Thon Hiep and An Thoi Dong of Can Gio district area.

However, in order to successfully implement the river tourist route in the direction of Can Gio, there are many things to do, especially building infrastructure (Kuenzer and Tuan, 2013). The first thing is to focus investment in the construction of key projects to serve tourism, improve Can Gio marine eco-tourism area, embellish Can Gio coastal urban area (600 ha). In addition, the construction of bridges to connect with the city center should also be focused. In addition, it is also necessary to develop a network of markets, supermarkets, trade centers, and business establishments, food service, accommodation, ecological garden model combined with tourism; specialties serving tourists are also quite important.

5 SUGGESTIONS

From real requirements, a number of solutions to develop tourism products to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourism sector are proposed, focusing on the development of unique and multi diversify the product system, improve the quality of tourism products and services, develop human resources and promote promotion of tourism products (Mai et al., 2019).

First, it is necessary to clearly define the specific tourism products of the region to create highlights and brands for city tourism (Phuong, 2019). With its unique cultural values, Ho Chi Minh City should

focus resources on the development of cultural tourism products to become specific products, and at the same time develop supplementary products to increase the endowed with product systems (Tuan, & Rajagopal, 2019).

Next, the development of tourism products associated with the target tourist market should be focused (Gia, 2021). Product development must be appropriate to each target market, therefore, we need to have effective market promotion strategies and plans. The markets identified in Ho Chi Minh City are international tourist markets (including international tourists and overseas Vietnamese), domestic tourists (Vietnamese and foreign tourists) in addition to live in Vietnam).

In addition, it is necessary to develop a system of tourism products with high integration, that is, we need to link main tourism products with complementary products to create synthetic products that bring high added value. Some links can be created such as culture - ecology - resort; ecology - resort; culture -entertainment; resort - entertainment; MICE - culture – entertainment,etc.

It is necessary to focus on investment and development to build national tourist resorts and key tourist spots in accordance with the proposed plan to create a highlight product for city tourism (Fan et al., 2019). Of course, we need to invest in the development of the tourism infrastructure system, which is essential to develop the accommodation system suitable for each type of tourism product to meet the diverse needs of tourists; that is, we need to develop a system of standard restaurants serving tourists, ensuring the diversity of cuisines and emphasizing the culinary introduction of the city; to develop a system of synchronous technical and material foundations in service of tourists; to build entertainment works, theaters, and convention and exhibition centers of international and national scale and stature. Transport systems need to be upgraded and invested, the high-quality tourist transportation system should be safe, environmentally friendly and friendly with the disabled (Tuan, & Rajagopal, 2019).

In order to improve the quality of tourism products, we should develop a set of standards for assessing the quality of tourism products (regulations for accommodation establishments, tourist attractions, dining establishments, souvenir establishments, tour operators, and transporting tourists) and apply for the whole city (Truong, 2013).

The solution to promote the market, promote tourism products also need to be focused (Gia, 2021). We need to develop plans to promote and attract international tourists in phases and suitable to each

key market; actively participate in international tourism promotion activities; building tourist information systems (websites, maps, guides, tourist information counters, leaflets, etc.) convenient, diversifying information, in major international languages; build programs to promote Hanoi tourism to international (advertise on foreign travel magazine/TV channels, participate in major international travel events, promote Ho Chi Minh tourism in events) international events, etc.). However, the domestic tourism market also needs to be focused, from there, we need to build a suitable tourism product that attracts domestic tourists and has policies to stimulate demand for the domestic market (Truong, 2013).

Last but not least, it is the solution to develop tourism human resources. Tourism human resources with high professional expertise and good professional ethics need to be invested (Hoi, 2020). To do this, we need to give priority to developing the system of tourism vocational training schools in the city; strengthen professional training programs, tourism management skills, and disseminate the city's sustainable tourism development policy to the staff of the tourism industry. Local forces of tour guides need more thorough training in both relevant skills and knowledge (Gia, 2021).

6 CONCLUSION

In the context of the COVID-19 epidemic there are still unpredictable developments in many parts of the world, tourism - the general economy is certainly facing many challenges. However, with efforts to find opportunities right in difficulties, synchronously implementing solutions to promote links, creating highlights from each locality's advantages, enhancing the application of information technology in construction, promoting tourism products and activities of Vietnam in general and Ho Chi Minh City in particular will have more prospects.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest in the paper.

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