

Advantages And Challenges For Tourism In The Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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Abstract— Being a land with great potential and advantages in tourism, the provinces and cities in the Mekong River Delta are making efforts to promote tourism development, especially the construction of specific tourism products. Compared with the potential of the region, the results of attracting and developing tourism are not as satisfactory, not commensurate with the potential. This can be clearly seen in the first 6 months of 2018, the Mekong Delta region can only receive nearly 1.6 million out of more than 7.8 million international visitors to Vietnam, despite the tourism industry. Localities in the region have focused on promoting, connecting with out-of-region tourism centers such as Da Nang, Lam Dong and Ho Chi Minh City. In fact, visitors to the Mekong Delta mainly come and go during the day, short stay time, low spending makes low turnover. Currently, the rate of staying in the region is only 1.95 days with international visitors, 1.7 days with domestic visitors. According to the master plan for tourism development in the Mekong Delta, by 2020 The region will receive about 34 million visitors, of which 3.5 million international visitors and VND 25,000 billion in revenue. In order to achieve this goal, the localities in the region must do so to retain visitors longer, increasing the number of times visitors return. The paper presents the advantages and challenges for tourism in the Mekong Delta.

Keywords— Mekong delta, tourism, sustainability, developing orientation

1 INTRODUCTION

The Mekong Delta (Mekong Delta) is part of the Mekong Delta, consisting of 13 provinces, cities (An Giang, Ben Tre, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Can Tho, Dong Thap, Hau Giang, Kien Giang, Long An, Soc Trang, Tien Giang, Tra Vinh and Vinh Long) with an area of about 40,000 km², a population of nearly 18 million people. The Mekong Delta has a typical ecological

landscape that is characterized by plains and islands, a charming river and water, fruit trees of four seasons, combined with a long tradition of culture and history. With its own characteristics, the Mekong Delta tourism industry has determined to develop a type of river, eco-tourism and garden tourism [1].

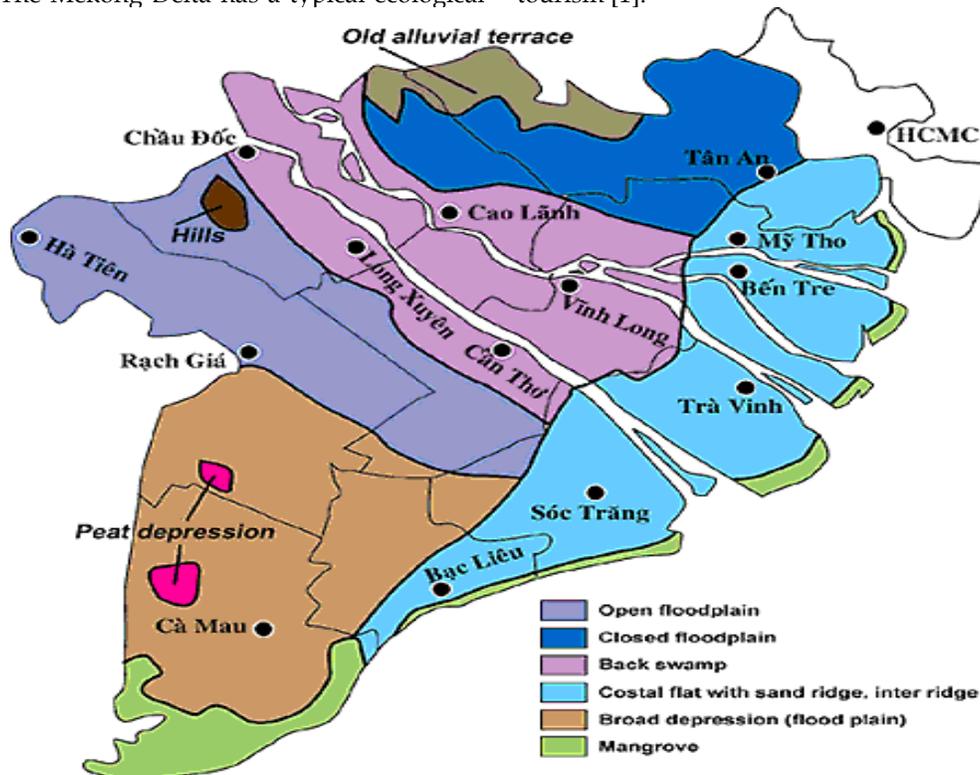


Fig 1. Provinces/cities of Mekong delta in Vietnam

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attracting and developing tourism are not as satisfactory, not commensurate with the potential. This can be clearly seen in the first 6 months of 2018, the Mekong Delta region can only receive nearly 1.6 million out of more than 7.8 million international visitors to Vietnam, despite the tourism industry [2]. Localities in the region have focused on promoting and

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connecting with out-of-region tourism centers such as Da Nang, Lam Dong, Ho Chi Minh City ... Besides, localities have actively participated in the promotion. join many travel events. Notably, according to experts, the fact that visitors to the Mekong Delta mainly come and go during the day, short stay time, low spending makes low revenue. Currently, the rate of staying in the region is only 1.95 days with international visitors, 1.7 days with domestic visitors [3].

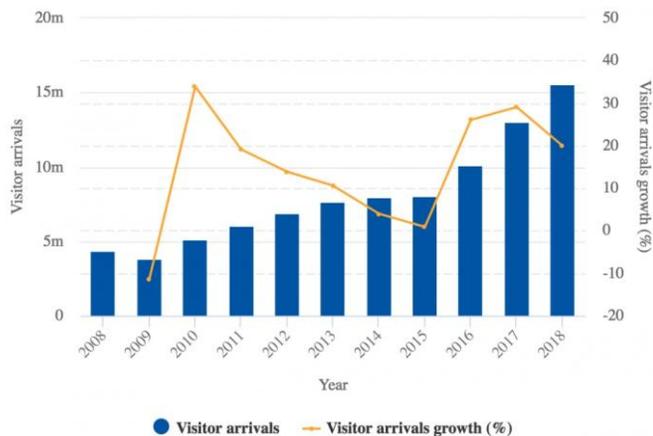


Fig.2. The number of visitors to Vietnam by aviation

According to the master plan for tourism development in the Mekong Delta, by 2020, the region will welcome about 34 million visitors, of which 3.5 million international visitors and VND 25,000 billion in revenue. In order to achieve this goal, the localities in the region must do so to retain visitors longer, increasing the number of times visitors return. Regarding the cause, in the opinion of some travel companies, although the provinces and cities are making efforts to create specific tourism products, they still cannot find solutions to the duplication of tourism products. Because, it is the weather, climate, soil and even cultural conditions that have similarities that have created duplication of tourism resources among localities in the region. Since then, internal competition in attracting tourists among localities and destinations has been taking place daily [4]. Therefore, in order to thoroughly resolve the above situation, the development of specific tourist products of each locality should be placed in the context of building tourism links for each region and sub-region. This will help each locality to research and choose to focus on creating tourism products that promote individual "human values". More importantly, the ultimate goal is to improve the thinking of tourism of the entire community, because this is a general economic sector, interdisciplinary, inter-regional, deeply cultural and calculated high socialization. The Association of Folklore of the province needs to place itself in the role of a tourist to know the needs of new visitors who have suitable tourism products, "hold" visitors, thereby creating resilience for the tourism industry. This is the tourism resource we have available but not much effort to invest. If you make the best use and investment, you will create typical tourism products, contributing to the development of clean and green tourism [5]. However, these resources are still not interested in the local tourism industry. Some experts believe that improving the quality of tourism human resources is an issue that needs to be prioritized first to gradually change the

thinking of tourism in the community [6]. This will be the foundation to create tourism products with different colors for each region in the Mekong Delta. Mekong Delta region is the leading center of production and export of rice, fruits and seafood of the whole country; contributing to ensuring food security, bringing significant foreign exchange revenue to serve the country's development [7]. However, the Mekong Delta is currently one of the areas most affected by climate change (CC) in Vietnam. Besides, the Mekong Delta is also a potential tourism market due to possessing many ecological landscapes, rich natural resources, converging historical quaintness and unique traditional cultural heritages, evaluated as An ideal destination for ecotourism, vacation, travel and discovery. On the foundation of the advantages of the available region, the project proposes 05 strategic themes surrounding the brand "MyMekong" including [8]:

- (i)-Southern land stories, will discover cultural heritage, cuisine, indigenous life;
- (ii)-Mekong River resort including tourism, vacation on the boat along the Mekong River;
- (iii)-Discover Mekong, discover and experience eco-farms;
- (iv) Business destinations to implement a professional MICE service package, modern accommodation facilities combined with indigenous features;
- (v)-Fun and convergence will be unique outdoor sports, golf and entertainment activities.

If developing in this direction, it is estimated that by 2030, tourism in 13 Mekong Delta provinces will achieve USD 3.6 billion spent directly from tourists; the number of tourists to the Mekong Delta increased 3 times, reaching 19 million times (30% of international visitors). Along with that, about 300,000 new jobs will be created in different industries, attracting new workers and labor moving from agriculture. It is expected that the Mekong Delta will affirm its position on the world tourism map, and become a destination of the region, Asia and the world [9]. Mekong delta is recommended building a Destination Management Organization (DMO) on the basis of public-private coordination, chaired by a senior government representative, to play a role in building regulations and managing tourism. Travel calendar and marketing brand for Mekong Delta. BCG also pointed out that there is a need for specific action plans to upgrade transport infrastructure as a foundation for tourism development. For example, upgrading and building new waterway wharves to connect commercial and tourist clues in Can Tho, Ben Tre, Bac Lieu, Dong Thap ...; opening about 20 international direct flights at Can Tho airport and becoming a transshipment airport of the Mekong Delta region to replace HCMC after 2021; upgrade the road system to shorten the travel time between provinces/landmarks to less than 2 hours. For Dong Thap province, tourism development with a symbolic image of the "Kingdom of Lotus and Crane" is recommended. Specifically, in addition to interesting destinations such as Xeo Quyt Relic Area, Tram Chim National Park, Dong Thap Muoi area ..., Dong Thap should create more activities for tourists (learn how to grow lotus and related industries to the lotus, discover the birds at the Mekong bird park ...). In An Giang, there are many famous landscapes and cultural beauty such as Tra Su Forest, Sam Mountain, Cam Mountain, the bull racing festival at Bay Nui, Oc Eo cultural relic. However, tourism products are

not abundant and local human resources are limited. It is worth mentioning that how we will do to promote the advantages of Mekong delta based on the sustainability.

2 ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

In Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2020, vision to 2030 also highlights the typical product of the Mekong Delta: "Ecotourism, exploitation of cultural values of rivers, gardens, resorts, ecology Sea Island...". Accordingly, the Mekong Delta Tourism Development Project by 2020 has been divided into 4 tourist groups, of which, the central cluster consists of Can Tho, An Giang, Kien Giang and Hau Giang with outstanding products are water tourism tours, festival tourism, commercial tourism, high-class sea resorts [10]. Ca Mau peninsula consists of Ca Mau, Bac Lieu and Soc Trang provinces with tourist products that visit the southernmost points of the Fatherland, ecotourism in mangrove forests and cultural tourism, festivals associated with literature. the Khmer ethnicity in Soc Trang. Eastern coastal clusters include Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Vinh Long and Tra Vinh provinces with major products such as river tourism, gardening, home stay, visiting craft villages, revolutionary historical sites. . Dong Thap Muoi cluster includes two provinces of Long An and Dong Thap with typical tourist products are ecotourism in the inundated special-use forests of Dong Thap Muoi inland.

Many tourism industry experts recognize that the local tourism industry in the region has changed, the number of tourists visiting is increasing. However, to achieve the goal of developing the tourism industry into a spearhead economic sector, commensurate with the potential of being one of the seven typical tourist regions across the country approved by the Government in the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy. South to 2020 and vision to 2030, there are many challenges. Many tourism industry experts as well as tourists have evaluated over the past years, the tourism industry in the Mekong River Delta has made positive changes, specific exploitation to have unique tourism products, attracting tourists. than before. For example, An Giang province is focusing on developing 4 types of tourism including spiritual tourism; sightseeing tours, resorts; eco-tourism, river water; Tourism to visit cultural and historical relics [10].

With these 4 types of tourism, An Giang has relied on the strength of typical values from traditional culture, traditional customs and beliefs, or features of topography, biology, climate and talent water to build and renew cultural tourism products associated with traditional festivals, religious beliefs and nationalities, such as Via Lady Goddess of the Mountain of Sam Mountain, and the Seven Mountain bull racing festival. In recent years, the number of tourists to An Giang next year is always higher than the previous year. If in 2010, An Giang received 4.7 million visitors, in 2016 increased to about 6.7 million visitors and in 2017 welcomed about 7.3 million visitors (up 12% compared to the same period in 2016, estimated reaching 107% of the plan).

In Ben Tre province, according, the locality is focusing on building and developing specific tourism products, creating a brand for Ben Tre tourism towards construction. eco-tourism products, river and garden; tourism to visit cultural and historical relics; spiritual tourism; community-based tourism

with a model of residents in convalescent homes associated with trade villages; Marine tourism associated with mangrove eco-tourism. From the beginning of 2018 until now, tourism activities in Ben Tre province have prospered with many new tourism products, so the number of tourists and revenue increased highly compared to the same period in 2017. Specifically, in 9 months 2018, the province welcomed more than 1.2 million tourists, up 24.4% over the same period in 2017 and reached 84.2% of the year plan, of which more than 524,000 international visitors, up 25.69 % compared to the same period in 2017. Total revenue from tourism reached over VND 1,000 billion, up 28.2% over the same period last year. According to statistics from localities in the Mekong Delta, 9 months of 2018, the region has welcomed more than 30 million visitors to visit tourism, up 12% compared to the same period in 2017 [2].

It is worth mentioning that in 2018, Tra Vinh, Ben Tre, Soc Trang, Hau Giang and An Giang are the localities with impressive increase in visitors. Among them, An Giang is the locality that attracts the most tourists to visit tourism with about 8 million times, mainly visitors to the festival, and is the province with the highest tourism revenue, reaching about VND 4,000 billion.

It can be seen that ecotourism development in the Mekong Delta cannot be separated from garden tourism development projects. Tourist garden provides tourism products for visitors based on the centralized orchards, relatively large scale and associated with the river landscape. Localities with conditions for developing garden tourism are mainly concentrated in Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Ben Tre - places associated with famous places such as Thoi Son alcohol, An Binh isle, Phung wine, Tan alcohol. Phong, Ngu Hiep dunes ... with the rich island ranges of four seasons left and right running to the East Sea, or the green gardens are embracing the right bank, describing the Tien river bank.

In fact, the localities in the Mekong Delta have linked to create community ecotourism routes with many typical products such as enjoying specialty fruits, traveling on canals, listening to amateur songs, culinary experiences. folk, handicraft village products, learn the traditional culture of the people in the Southern River, the slap fishing services, visit the island with rudimentary vehicles ... However, in the process Ecotourism development, Mekong Delta is facing environmental pollution problems from tourism activities, as well as environmental sanitation for tourism, resource depletion and the impact of climate change [3]. Besides, rural infrastructure such as roads, fresh water and clean water for tourism is lacking; tourism products rely heavily on nature, exploiting what is available without a long-term investment, association; investment in tourism infrastructure development, tourism human resources and coordination mechanisms, regional links, and tourism value chain integration are limited.

Ecotourism is a specific type of tourism aimed at the main goal of educating the awareness of environmental protection, protecting nature for people [11]. For the Mekong Delta ecotourism to thrive, in the coming time, the tourism industry of the Mekong Delta needs to invest in infrastructure, renovation, conservation of landscapes and natural resources. At the same time, to diversify tourism products and services,

constantly innovating forms to create attraction for tourists. Besides, training a team of professional tourism, skilled and enthusiastic professionals to develop unique tourism products, and implement the regional tourism development strategy in the future.

Tourism is an economic sector sensitive to natural environmental conditions, one of the sectors most affected by the impacts of climate change (CC). Therefore, the phenomenon of climate change will cause strong impacts and play an important role in the competitiveness and sustainable development of the tourism industry.

It can be seen that the phenomenon of prolonged inundation, river bank erosion appeared in recent years and the increase in extreme weather events directly affect the transport of passengers, affecting natural resources, damaging eco-tourism zones, tourism infrastructure to increase the costs of renovation and maintenance. With potential challenges and risks due to the impacts of climate change on the tourism industry, although it is very heavy, for tourism industry in Can Tho, adaptation measures are often based on the response of each enterprise, no collaborative efforts are coordinated in a master plan, while visitors' safety can be seriously affected by extreme weather events and indirect safety impacts, information, health (due to epidemics). It can be seen that climate change is a major challenge facing the tourism industry. It not only negatively affects the tourism business of the enterprise, the income of the workers but also has the potential to directly threaten the safety of the visitors' lives.

In addition to the above limitations, travel businesses also mentioned some problems such as not being upgraded traffic, not meeting the needs of tourists; At the same time, the whole region does not have an instruction and guide system at tourist sites, so it is difficult to provide enough information for visitors to visit. More serious is the problem of waste pollution and environmental pollution. Mekong Delta needs to strengthen inviting experienced professional investors to invest, as well as strengthen in the systematic promotion through social media.

3 THE ORIENTATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF MEKONG DELTA TOURISM

Firstly, improve the construction and implementation of the planning of tourism development inadequate. Currently, the business of travel is confusing, the number and quality of tourist guides do not meet the demand, lack of professionalism. The quality of tourist transportation has not met the diverse needs of customers. Quality management of tourist accommodation facilities is still inadequate. Tourism promotion is still lack of resources, lack of professionalism and efficiency. International cooperation and integration activities are also deployed passively.

Secondly, it is necessary to promote links, connect and promote tourism with provinces and cities with large tourist centers of the country such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Lam Dong and Quang Ninh. , Hai Phong, Da Nang, Khanh Hoa, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Tien Giang, Kien Giang and An Giang. Promote in many forms such as seminars, trade fairs - Tourism. Towards the formation of a national tourism route linking the Mekong Delta with the Central Highlands,

Northwest and Northeast. To build and form a route linking tourism in the Mekong Delta region with ASEAN countries through the trans-Asia route - National Highway 22 through Cambodia to ASEAN countries.

Thirdly, it is necessary to apply and expand the public-private cooperation model to upgrade infrastructure of loading and unloading yards, welcome guests on rivers and seaports, and coordinate provinces and cities in the region / industry in relation to prizes. deciding on dredging Long Ong river (Binh Thuy district, Can Tho city), connecting river routes for tourism. Promote the progress of site clearance for the Trung Luong - Can Tho - Ca Mau expressway to exploit in the Mekong Delta region. Develop mechanisms to encourage the region to participate in investment, construction, renovation of hotels, motels, ecological gardens, forming high-class restaurants, hotels, high-quality resorts, amusement parks, high-end entertainment. Expand and encourage the type of vacation tourism combined with clean and green ecology, giving visitors access to the landscape of the river, orchards in the form of garden houses.

Fourthly, it is necessary to perfect the state management organization on tourism; Coordinate well with tourism associations of provinces, cities and Mekong Delta Tourism Association; Strengthen development management according to planning; Focusing on statistics and construction of tourism management information system; Improving the capacity of cadres and civil servants in state management as well as operating and exploiting effectively tourism, meeting the requirements of human resources in both quantity and quality, the contingent of people working in the field tourism areas must have the ability to communicate, conduct civilized, polite, professional and profound, good at foreign languages, understand history, culture, devotedly serve tourists and promote the image of country, region and provinces and cities.

Fifth, it is necessary to develop specific mechanisms and policies on tax incentives. Priority is given to tax exemption, reduction in delay of time tax and land tax, lending at preferential interest rates for investment projects for tourism development in unspoiled areas and undeveloped infrastructure, and socio-economic conditions are still difficult. Proposing specific incentives on corporate income tax, import tax, land use tax, land rent, special consumption tax, value-added tax for tourism enterprises, to facilitate and Encouraging enterprises to produce high quality and high-quality goods products, improving their competitiveness and meeting the special needs of goods and souvenir products of the region.

Sixthly, develop tourism according to topics. The target customer for this type of tourism was pointed out by the consulting unit as older Western couples, Southeast Asian-Northeast Asian tourists and financially capable households, capable of high spending. If there is enough good preparation of the infrastructure as well as the attentive tour program, it can attract the average spending level of each tourist from 90-100 USD/day. The first topic is tourism to explore nature, creating opportunities for tourists to immerse themselves in nature, escape urban life. Target tourists are defined as young people from Western countries, Northeast Asia and young Vietnamese tourists. The second theme is cultural experience tourism, focusing on historical tours, famous landscapes; learn

local customs and cuisine; participate in activities to experience life in the Southwest region such as picking vegetables and catching fish. Target tourists are families, traveling groups who want to explore the Western region of Vietnam. The third theme is adventure tourism with diverse games like canoeing on the river, exploring the western lands with hot air balloons. This is a tourist theme that is popular with most tourists and has been successful in many countries in Southeast Asia.

Seventhly, it is necessary to focus on expanding and connecting air routes in which Can Tho International Airport plays a leading role. Phu Quoc International Airport, Ca Mau Airport and Co Ong Airport (Con Dao) should be established as a strategic transportation system throughout the region. Localities should pay attention to building complete integrated aviation services such as landing and landing services, aircraft parking yards, security screening systems, goods, flight check-in counters, baggage carousel, ground commercial exploitation service. The whole area to be targeted for 10 years must have at least 20 international flight connections and 10 domestic flight connections.

4 CONCLUSION

The Mekong Delta is fostered by two main tributaries, Tien River and Hau River, all year round, along with a system of intertwined canals interfering with mountains and islands, forming an ecologically diverse and poisonous ecoregion, creating unique landscapes that are not only wild and majestic, close and simple but also full of mysteries. Mekong Delta has rich tourism resources both in nature, culture, cuisine and can be developed in accordance with the major trends in the world such as: exploring nature, cultural and ecological diversity, tourism, health, and agricultural travel experience. This is the potential and advantages are not small for the development of the tourism industry, especially tourism associated with the typical water life of the Southwest region. Exploiting the strengths and potentials, advantages of river, eco-tourism and "gardening" of the Mekong Delta in the coming years is an urgent requirement of the cities in the Mekong Delta, to boost economic growth., restructure the economy, exploit comparative advantages, create breakthroughs, attract tourism to connect local tourism development and proceed to exploit the tourism potential of the Mekong sub-region and ASEAN.

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