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Developing Green Tourism in Quang Ninh Province

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Abstract
The article has analyzed the theory and reality of green tourism activities in Quang Ninh province. This study has synthesized the activities towards the green tourism policy in Quang Ninh province, combining tourism, sightseeing, and experience with environmental protection, natural landscapes as well as contributing to the preservation of historical relics and preserving the fine cultural traditions of the locality. In addition to, analyzing the practical activities being applied by the province, the article also proposes a number of solutions to solve some shortcomings and problems arising in the implementation of this policy of Quang Ninh province, thereby helping the tourism industry to truly become a spearhead economic sector as well as develop in a sustainable direction as proposed by the province and in line with the guidelines of the Party and the State.

Keywords: Green tourism, Quang Ninh, sustainable development

1. Introduction

In the context of Vietnam's tourism industry gradually recovering and making a strong breakthrough after the pandemic, the requirement is not only to develop rapidly, but also to develop sustainably. Faced with the reality of increasing tourist numbers along with potential negative impacts on the environment, culture and landscape at destinations, green tourism is becoming an inevitable and strategic direction for the country's tourism industry.

In recent years, Vietnam tourism has recorded many positive results, with impressive growth in both domestic and international markets. However, the rapid growth rate has also brought great pressure on the natural ecosystem and community life, especially in famous tourist destinations with high tourist density. In this situation, shifting to a green tourism model - environmentally friendly, respecting indigenous cultural values - is considered the "key" to ensuring the balanced and sustainable development of the entire industry. The Vietnamese Government has demonstrated its clear determination to promote green tourism development through specific policies. According to the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030 (Decision No. 147/QD-TTg dated January 22, 2020), sustainable tourism is identified as a key orientation. Next, in the National Action Plan on Green Growth for the 2021-2030 period (Decision No. 882/QD-TTg dated July 22, 2022), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is assigned to take the lead in implementing key tasks, including perfecting green tourism development policies and prioritizing the promotion of types such as ecotourism, community-based tourism, rural tourism, sea and island tourism and adventure sports tourism - all aimed at minimizing negative impacts on the environment and resources.

In that trend, Quang Ninh - one of the key tourist destinations in Vietnam - is also actively keeping up with the green tourism development orientation. With the advantage of possessing many unique natural heritages such as Ha Long Bay and a rich forest - marine ecosystem, Quang Ninh is considered a locality with great potential to build a tourism model associated with environmental protection, preserving cultural identity, and at the same time contributing to improving the quality of life of the local community. The effective implementation of policies, close coordination between the government, businesses and people in protecting tourism resources will be the key factor to help Quang Ninh in particular and Vietnam's tourism in general affirm its position as a key economic sector - harmoniously developing between economic growth and environmental protection in the long term.

2. Concept and role of green tourism development

2.1. Some concepts of green tourism

First, tourism

American economist Michael Coltman gave a brief definition: "Tourism is the combination and interaction of 4 groups of factors in the process of serving tourists, including: tourists, service providers, local residents and the authorities of the place where tourists are welcomed".

According to the Vietnam Tourism Law 2017: "Tourism is activities related to human trips outside the place of permanent residence for a period of no more than 01 consecutive year to meet the needs of sightseeing, relaxation, entertainment, learning, exploring tourism resources or combined with other legitimate purposes".

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO): "Tourism includes all activities of people traveling and staying temporarily, for the purpose of sightseeing, exploring and learning, experiencing or for the purpose of resting, entertaining, relaxing as well as for the purpose of practicing their profession and other purposes, in a continuous period but not exceeding one year, outside the settled living environment, excluding trips whose main purpose is to earn money".

Second, green tourism

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), green tourism is considered a part of sustainable tourism, aiming to reduce the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities, while maximizing economic, social and cultural benefits.

According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), green tourism is a type of tourism that minimizes negative impacts on the environment, uses natural resources effectively and supports the development of local communities.

According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), green tourism is defined as "responsible tourism to natural areas, protecting the environment, maintaining the well-being of local communities and providing educational experiences for tourists.

In short, international organizations all agree that green tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on protecting the environment, supporting the sustainable development of local communities and creating quality tourism experiences for tourists.

2.2. The role of green tourism development

Developing green tourism or sustainable tourism plays an important role in protecting the environment, developing the economy, preserving and promoting cultural identity, raising awareness of tourists and the community as well as orienting sustainable tourism development.

- **Protecting the environment and natural resources**
  Protecting the environment and natural resources is always an important task for any country in the world, especially in the context of climate change that is increasingly causing negative impacts. Therefore, all industries operating in the market must pay attention to this activity. Vietnam is blessed with favorable natural conditions for thousands of species of animals and plants as well as biological systems throughout the country to develop very well. However, without measures to protect the environment and raise awareness among tourists and local communities, scenic spots as well as biological systems are very susceptible to negative impacts. Green tourism will help reduce carbon emissions through the use of public transport or car rental, reduce waste through garbage collection movements at tourist destinations, increase the number of ecosystems by planting trees and afforestation, creating an exciting experience for customers as well as bringing value to tourists and the community.
- **Promoting sustainable tourism development**
  To develop sustainable tourism, the community and tourists at tourist destinations need to raise awareness to preserve and protect relics, landscapes, and cultures where tourism activities take place. When everyone joins hands with practical actions, cultural values, scenic spots, and the tourism industry will always develop and be maintained for a long time. According to a recent survey by the Institute for Sustainable Tourism Development Research, 76% of respondents are willing to reduce waste during their vacation; 62% are willing to consume local products; 45% of tourists are willing to use means of transport that do not impact the environment; 38% of respondents are willing to support the local community. Many international tourists have recently prioritized choosing eco-tourism activities, connecting with nature, enjoying local products, learning about culture, registering for tourism programs with environmentally friendly activities to support sustainable tourism measures.
- **Preserving community culture and increasing local income**
  Green tourism – with a focus on sustainability, environmental friendliness and respect for local culture – is increasingly asserting its important role in preserving community and ethnic cultures, while creating sustainable livelihoods for local people. According to the Party and State's policy, developing green tourism aims to encourage the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values, from language, customs to cuisine, costumes, crafts and folk festivals. When tourists come to experience local cultural life, people are motivated to preserve and pass on heritage values to the next generation. In addition, the number of tourists increases every year and returns to the locality, contributing to diversifying income sources for people at tourist destinations. Instead of depending on agriculture or exploiting natural resources, people can generate income from tourism services such as homestay, tour guide, cuisine, and selling handicrafts. This not only improves the quality of life but also promotes a spirit of ownership and creativity in the community.

3. Research methods

In this article, the author uses the method of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis to study and clarify the aspects and factors that create green tourism at special tourist destinations in Quang Ninh province. Thereby, providing some solutions for the provincial authorities to have measures to promote green tourism activities, increase awareness of the local community and tourists to help this trend spread more and more as well as be shared with the public, creating a butterfly effect and will strongly impact the awareness leading to actions to protect the environment, preserve the landscape and preserve local culture. The data sources used in the article are taken from reports of relevant ministries, departments, domestic and international magazines as well as references

on reputable websites.

4. Current status of green tourism development in Quang Ninh

4.1. Some green tourism activities in Vietnam

Vietnam's tourism industry has had remarkable achievements in 2024. According to the General Department of Tourism, Vietnam welcomed 17.5 million international visitors in 2024, an increase of 29.5% over the previous year and achieved the target set at the beginning of the year. The total number of domestic visitors reached 110 million, total revenue from tourists reached 840,000 billion VND, an increase of 23.8% over the same period in 2023. These are positive signals for the tourism industry, contributing positively to the growth of the service sector as well as the entire economy in 2024. The tourism industry is an interdisciplinary, inter-regional industry, having a great impact on other industries in the economy, not only directly contributing to GDP but also promoting the development of other industries, such as: restaurant industry, hotel accommodation, as well as increased travel demand leading to job creation for the transportation and logistics industries, in addition, entertainment centers also have conditions to develop more strongly. For the local community, people at tourist destinations can take advantage of the opportunity to do homestay business, display and sell local products.

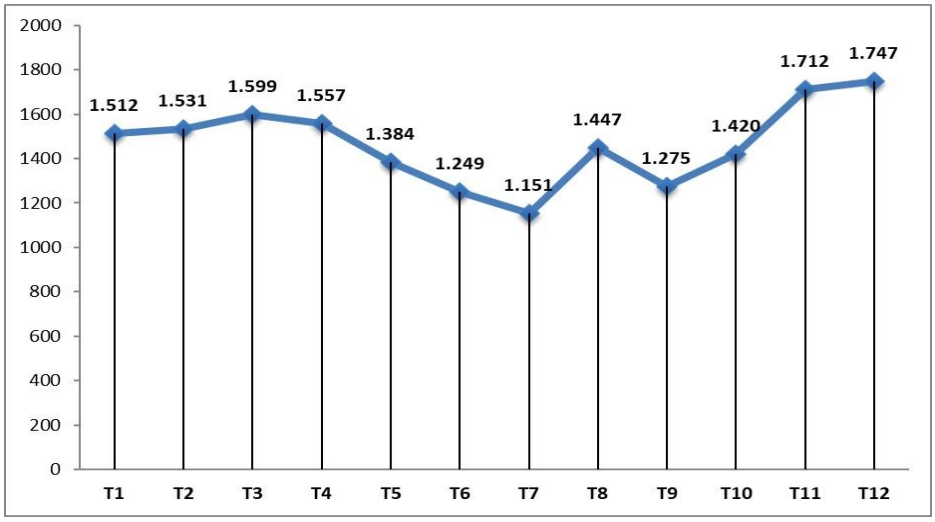


Fig 1: Number of international visitors to Vietnam by month in 2024
Source: General Statistics Office

The above achievements are the success of the correct policies of the Party and the State as well as the tourism industry. Vietnam has been awarded "Asia's Leading Destination" 6 times, "World's Leading Heritage Destination" 5 times, along with many other tourism awards. This has raised the position of Vietnam tourism to a new era, with travel companies focusing on exploiting new tourism experiences such as connecting with familiar local activities: fishing, rice farming, visiting pagodas and temples at destinations, both enhancing the experience for tourists and raising their awareness of cultural values as well as the need to protect the landscape and environment at tourist destinations. These activities have proven that Vietnam has the potential to meet new global tourism trends: sustainable tourism, responsible for the environment and society, also known as green tourism.

In recent years, Vietnam has implemented many green tourism activities, demonstrating the sustainable development strategy of the Party and the State. The National Tourism Year 2022 was held in Quang Nam with the theme "Quang Nam - Green Tourism Destination", followed by the National Tourism Year 2023 in Binh Thuan with the theme "Binh Thuan - Green Convergence". These events have promoted the development of environmentally friendly tourism models in localities with rich ecosystems such as forests, seas and islands. The tourism industry has also set specific criteria for green hotels and restaurants, encouraging accommodation establishments to create green spaces, plant trees on campus and apply measures to reduce plastic waste. The use of public transport, electric vehicles and bicycles in tourism activities is also encouraged. According to a survey by the Institute for Tourism Development Research: 76% of tourists are willing to reduce waste during their vacation; 62% consume local products; 45% use means of transport with low environmental impact; 38% support local communities. The Vietnam Tourism Association has launched the movement "Vietnam Tourism - Joining hands to reduce plastic waste", which has received positive responses from businesses. In addition, seminars and forums on green tourism, such as the Forum "Vietnam Tourism - Green transformation for sustainable development" within the framework of the Vietnam International Travel Mart - VITM Hanoi 2024, have been organized to raise awareness and promote actions on sustainable tourism in the community and businesses.

In 2025, the tourism industry has set a target of welcoming 22-23 million international tourists; serving 120-130 million domestic tourists and total revenue from tourists can reach 980-1050 trillion VND. To achieve that, the tourism industry needs to build strategies and communication campaigns using new tools adapted to the development of information technology, science and technology, applying digital transformation to stages of the service process to help customers feel more convenient, feel truly comfortable and want to come back, as well as help us participate deeply in the global tourism supply chain.

Some green tourism development activities in Quang Ninh

Quang Ninh province is increasingly showing itself to be a leading attractive destination in Vietnam, recognized by UNESCO twice as a world natural heritage in 1994 and 2000.

With strong and steady growth every year, Quang Ninh is gradually maintaining and developing its position as well as moving towards building a green tourist destination, aiming for the goal of sustainable tourism development.



Fig 2

According to a survey by Trip Advisor - a world-famous travel website, it was found that 34% of tourists surveyed would be willing to pay more to stay at hotels that tend to be environmentally friendly, 50% of tourists are willing to participate and pay more for businesses that have environmental protection activities, bringing benefits to the local community combined with nature conservation. Such survey results further confirm that green tourism is the solution to develop sustainable tourism as well as raise awareness for tourists, along with increasing the number of high-income tourists who are conscious when participating in tourism. Quang Ninh province has quickly carried out many green tourism activities, creating unique green tourism products such as eco-tourism combined with protecting nature, environment and ecosystems. Some destinations include: Ancient myrtle forest on Minh Chau island commune; Bai Tu Long National Park; Ba Mun island; Quan Lan island; Ban Sen,.. are places that are not chosen by many tourists, but in recent years, travel companies have designed eco-tourism programs to destinations that still retain the values of landscapes and natural resources. Tourists not only have an enhanced experience but also explore nature, learn about geological values, biodiversity and heroic historical values in the bays of Quang Ninh. Co To island district is also a popular destination with pristine, clean beaches and the province's policy for many years is to implement the project "Co To island district without plastic waste". In many places on the island district as well as local people, there are activities to call for and encourage tourists to raise their sense of responsibility, change their habits of using products that are harmful to the environment, not allowing plastic bags and plastic bottles on the island, classifying waste at the source, regularly organizing activities in combination with tourists to clean the environment in residential areas and beaches. Besides, activities to small islands such as Ca Carp island, Su Tu island, and Co To con island are also being considered and limited to preserve the pristine features of these places.

In addition, agricultural tourism and community tourism models to places such as Cao Son flower garden in Binh Lieu, Quang Long tea hill, Yen Duc village tourist area, etc. have also brought many strange and interesting experiences to tourists. Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee has also issued Plan No. 125/KH-UBND on the implementation of the Project "Preserving and promoting the fine traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities associated with tourism development" under the National Target Program on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas for the period 2021-2030,

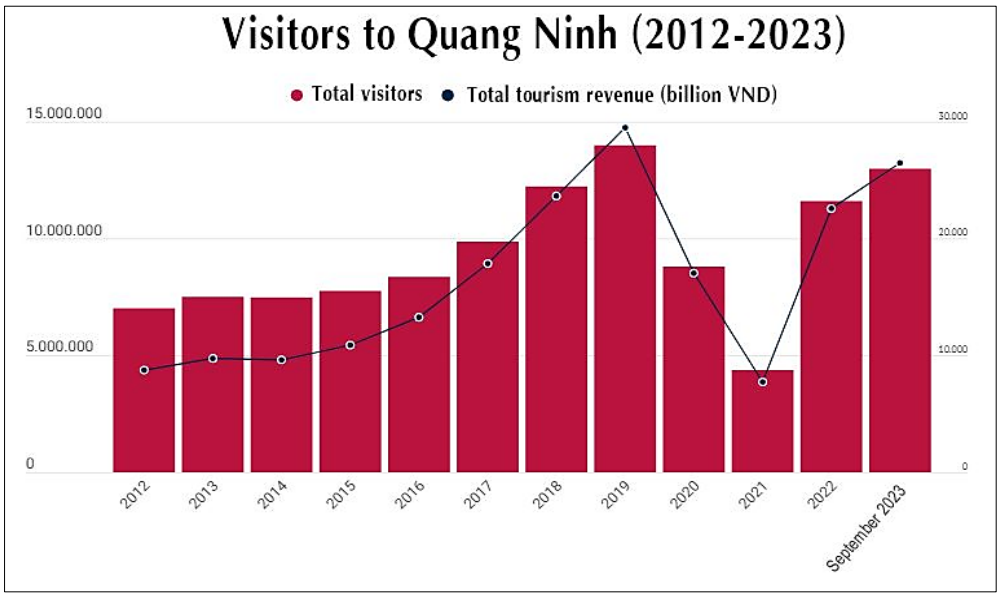


Source: Tourist Information Center

Fig 3: Ha Long Bay is a World Natural Heritage recognized by UNESCO.

Phase I from 2021-2025 (implemented in 2024-2025), this is also a driving force to promote local cultural values to be preserved and developed sustainably. Quang Ninh Province also regularly organizes garbage collection campaigns in Ha Long Bay, calling for the participation of local communities, especially after Typhoon Yagi. A system of trash bins with waste classification compartments is installed in urban areas, tourist attractions, along with 19 floating trash bins at places with socio-economic activities on the Bay. Waste on the Bay is collected and processed on the shore during the day. One of the most important activities for environmental protection in Ha Long Bay is to reduce plastic waste. The report of the Bay Management Board said that implementing solutions to reduce plastic waste at the Heritage site, effectively implementing the program "Ha Long Bay without plastic waste" from September 1, 2019 with the content of not using single-use plastic products in service and tourism activities on the Bay, has reduced 90% of single-use plastic waste that must be collected at tourist attractions on the Bay, replacing 94% of foam buoys on floating structures on the Bay.

The positive effects of strong tourism growth also bring about direct consequences for the landscape, environment and local culture. To achieve the goal of turning tourism into a spearhead economic sector of the province as well as a green tourism destination, the province must establish a green network for the tourism industry, connecting localities, businesses, organizations and individuals with the same goals, towards sustainable tourism development. Actively promote, promote and share activities through the media, diversify ways of conveying information to tourists about the value of the landscape and environment, the beauty of local culture, green messages and at the same time encourage them to join hands in cultural and environmental conservation activities.



Source: Baoquangninh.vn

Fig 3: The number of visitors to Quang Ninh 2012-2023

4.2. Opportunities and challenges in developing green tourism in Quang Ninh province

Over many years of development, tourism has become a key economic sector of Quang Ninh province, while facing many challenges in environmental protection, cultural and natural conservation, avoiding "exhaustion" of heritage, and improving the province's competitiveness in the process of international economic integration.

4.2.1. Opportunity

In terms of natural conditions, Quang Ninh province possesses abundant natural resources, which are important factors for developing green tourism, diverse in terrain, geomorphology, and an extremely favorable geographical location with more than 1,600 limestone islands, valuable ecosystems such as mangrove forests, coral reefs, and seagrass beds. This is an ideal destination for ecotourism. Nature experiences for tourists such as kayaking, scuba diving, cave exploration, and forest trekking are increasingly popular with tourists, helping people to realize the value of nature conservation and increase awareness of preserving the environment, landscapes, and creatures.

In terms of institutions and policies, the Party and the State in particular and Quang Ninh province in general always pay attention to sustainable tourism development in the direction of green tourism. The 12th Party Congress reaffirmed the policy of "fast and sustainable development" and green economic development: "Ensure fast and sustainable development on the basis of macroeconomic stability and constantly improve productivity, quality, efficiency and competitiveness. Harmonious development between breadth and depth, focusing on depth development; develop knowledge economy, green economy. Economic development must be closely linked with cultural and social development, environmental protection, and proactive response to climate change". According to Decision No. 2256/QD-UBND approving the Project on restoration and sustainable development of Quang Ninh tourism industry until 2025, with a vision to 2030, issued on August 8, 2023, Quang Ninh aims to "develop tourism towards green and sustainable growth, associated with preserving and promoting traditional cultural values; contributing to maintaining national security and border sovereignty; ensuring social order and safety". Following the policies of the Party, the State as well as the province, the leadership as well as the local community are given many favorable conditions to be able to implement the proposed strategies.

4.2.2. Challenges

Management is still loose at local agencies, due to the strong growth in the number of tourists leading to a large number of construction works of motels, hotels, restaurants being built quite haphazardly, in some places will affect the local landscape and environment, so there should be stricter management measures.

Awareness of tourists and the community is still limited, although most tourists coming to tourist destinations are aware of preserving and protecting the environment, historical and cultural relics, but there are still a number of tourists who still litter indiscriminately, in the wrong place, not complying with the regulations of the tourism management board.

Knowledge level of local communities, many local people are not aware of the importance of preserving nature and cultural values, so they unintentionally damage important works of tourist destinations, this requires training and support to improve knowledge for the community at tourist destinations.

4.3. Some solutions for developing green tourism in Quang Ninh province

To implement the policies of the Party and the State as well as the future orientation of the province, Quang Ninh needs to have practical solutions to reform the entire tourism industry towards sustainable development with green tourism development as the core.

First, it is necessary to perfect institutions, policies and tourism management towards green growth, issue specific legal documents and guide implementation at both central and local levels. Each region and tourist destination needs to have its own green tourism development standards because each place will have different geographical and topographical characteristics.

Second, improve the knowledge of stakeholders in tourism activities in Quang Ninh such as leaders, managers, local communities, and tourism businesses about the positive results of protecting the environment, landscape, relics, and culture at tourist destinations by disseminating and organizing seminars and training on green growth measures in tourism infrastructure and services using green energy, green transportation, and green consumption.

Third, strengthen measures to raise tourists' awareness of green tourism through practical activities such as saying no to plastic bags, actively using environmentally friendly products such as cloth bags, paper bags, personal water bottles, throwing trash in the right place, not damaging relics, trampling, plucking trees and flowers indiscriminately, etc., and propagating to people around to join hands in preserving the landscape and cultural works with a long history..

*Fourth***,** diversifying green tourism types such as combining eco-tourism with activities to spread the spirit of restoring environmental damage, contributing to preserving local culture such as cycling tourism to reduce emissions into the environment, tourism combined with farmer activities such as growing rice, growing vegetables, farming, catching crabs, fishing, planting forests... both bring memorable experiences to tourists and better understand the daily life in the locality where they visit. Environmental sanitation activities, cleaning up trash after playing at tourist attractions have been enthusiastically responded to by tourists, especially young people, and strongly inspire the community.

*Fifth***,** Quang Ninh Province needs to have a policy of focusing on investing in infrastructure and communications to create a springboard for green tourism to develop, such as building suitable wastewater and waste treatment facilities, machinery and equipment combined with advanced technology such as AI (Artificial intelligence) or IOT (Internet of things) in controlling and managing environmental protection activities, relics and landscapes at tourist destinations.

5. Conclusion

The Earth has bestowed upon Vietnam in general and Quang Ninh province in particular invaluable natural assets, from the majestic landscape of Ha Long Bay - a world natural heritage, to the diverse forest and marine ecosystems and unique indigenous cultures. These natural and cultural advantages not only create a strong attraction for domestic and international tourists, but also play an important role in identifying the local tourism brand. However, along with the rapid development of the tourism industry are significant environmental and social challenges. The increase in the number of visitors to famous destinations has created pressure on natural resources, infrastructure and local communities. Faced with this reality, many localities - including Quang Ninh - have been gradually transforming themselves, moving towards a green tourism model, sustainable tourism, with the goal of not only effectively exploiting tourism resources but also preserving inherent values in the long term.

Green tourism is not simply a trend, but has become a clear development orientation. This is a tourism development model that focuses on minimizing negative impacts on the environment, respecting indigenous cultures, enhancing community participation and raising tourists' awareness of the responsibility to protect natural and cultural heritage. In Quang Ninh, many eco-tourism and community tourism models have been implemented and initially brought about effectiveness, such as experiential tourism in Cua Van fishing village, community tourism in Binh Lieu, or tours to explore the ecosystem in Bai Tu Long National Park.

Notably, young people are playing an increasingly important role in spreading the green tourism trend. With the ability to quickly access digital platforms and social networks, they are not only a group of customers who proactively choose environmentally friendly forms of tourism but also a strong force of inspiration to the community. Small actions such as limiting the use of plastic products, participating in cleaning up trash at tourist destinations, choosing local handicrafts, etc. are gradually becoming positive habits among the young generation.

The change in awareness of the community, tourists, businesses and local authorities are positive signs, showing that Quang Ninh tourism is on the right track. With the determination to build the image of a "green - clean - friendly" destination, Quang Ninh province has every reason to believe in the goal of making tourism a key economic sector, developing in a sustainable direction, harmonizing economic benefits and preserving natural and cultural heritage.

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