

# Limitations and Solutions for Tourism Development in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

Nguyen Quoc Nghi, Nguyen Thi Tu Trinh

College of Economics, Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam

## ABSTRACT

The Mekong Delta has a system of interlaced canals together with mountains, forests, and islands that form a diverse ecological region. The landscapes are not only wild and majestic but also plain and mysterious. This is the tourism industry's potential and advantage, especially the tourism associated with the river lives in the Southwest region. However, the tourism industry in the Mekong Delta is facing limitations and challenges from within. As a result, this restricts the tourism that has a lot of "great rooms" for development. This study focuses on evaluating tourism limitations, thereby proposing several solutions to develop the Mekong Delta's tourism industry in the future.

**KEYWORD:** *tourism, limitation, solution, Mekong Delta*

**How to cite this paper:** Nguyen Quoc Nghi | Nguyen Thi Tu Trinh "Limitations and Solutions for Tourism Development in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-5 | Issue-1, December 2020, pp.1290-1292, URL: [www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd38202.pdf](http://www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd38202.pdf)



IJTSRD38202

Copyright © 2020 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



## 1. AN INTRODUCTION OF THE MEKONG DELTA'S TOURISM

The Mekong Delta is the southernmost region of Vietnam, also known as the Southwest region. It has one city under the central authority which is Can Tho City and twelve provinces that are Long An, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, Dong Thap, An Giang, Kien Giang, Bac Lieu, and Ca Mau. The natural area is about 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of nearly 17 million people. The Mekong Delta is known as a rich and potential agricultural area for tourism development. Moreover, the Vietnamese tourism industry considers it is one of the seven featured tourist areas in the strategy and master plan on tourism development until 2020 and vision to 2030.

The Mekong Delta has a diverse ecosystem, including marine ecosystems, islands, estuaries, wetlands, mangroves, and islets. Besides, there are many biosphere reserves and protected areas such as Mui Ca Mau, U Minh Thuong, U Minh Ha, Tram Chim, and Phu Quoc National Parks. Also, the Mekong Delta owns invaluable resources which are the southernmost islands of the country. Many destinations have come into the minds of both domestic and foreign tourists, especially Mui Ca Mau area and Phu Quoc Island. The Mekong Delta with a system of rivers and canals combined with fertile soil, favorable climate, and fresh orchards, has plenty of potentials for the development of river tourism. Furthermore, it impresses visitors with the diverse cultural values of the region such as Southern amateur music (Don ca tai tu), cultural festivals, and traditional arts festivals of 4

ethnic groups: Kinh, Hoa, Cham, and Khmer (Nguyen Quoc Nghi, 2018).

The Mekong Delta, with the favor of nature, cultural diversity of ethnic groups, and a long history of traditions, owns a great deal of potential for tourism development. Especially, in the same natural conditions, each locality has its cultural products and specialties (Pham Sinh, 2017). Arriving in Ben Tre Province, visitors can take a boat to visit the scenery on the banks of Tien River and enjoy coconuts which are green and sweet. Coconuts can be made into different products from parts of the coconut tree. Tourists may visit the handicraft village, discover Phung Islet with the charming scenery, and visit Cai Mon orchard with famous durian specialties. Coming to Tien Giang Province, tourists may not ignore Dong Tam snake farm where hundreds of snake species gather. Visiting Vinh Trang ancient pagoda with the combination of Asian and European architecture or enjoying the famous My Tho noodle soup, are surprised experiences to visitors. With Long An Province, visitors have the opportunity to discover the Dong Thap Muoi eco-tourism area. It is a romantic and peaceful place with immense melaleuca forests, vast lotus fields, and hundreds of rare animals such as storks, red-headed cranes, turtles, snakes, etc. Tourists can explore traditional handicraft villages such as sedge mat weaving in Long Cang and Long Dinh Village, silver carving in Phuoc Van Village, wood carving in Tan Lan Village, and fishing boat building in Long Huu and Tan Chanh Village. Can Tho City welcomes tourists with Cai Rang floating market. Besides, visitors can visit the Tay Do night

market, My Khanh tourist area, Ninh Kieu Quay, Bang Lang stork garden, or local orchards. Visiting An Giang Province means discovering high mountains such as the Seven Mountains (That Son) and Sam Mountain. Tourists are recommended to visit Oc Eo archaeological site or explore the beauty of birds and the ecology in Tra Su freshwater forest. When coming to Hau Giang province, visitors can visit Phung Hiep floating market, Long My historical site, or Ba Hai relic site. Arriving in Bac Lieu Province, tourists may come to see the "Prince of Bac Lieu" house with unique architectures. Also, tourists should discover the Bac Lieu bird garden, where more than 150 different species of animals are living. Coming to Ca Mau Province, tourists may admire the beauty of Hon Khoai Island and the rare ecological diversity of the U Minh forest. Visitors who love enjoying traditional cuisine may like the grilled snakehead fish or grilled mouse. Dong Thap Province shows visitors the mangrove ecology in Tram Chim National Park with diverse flora and fauna systems, especially the rare red-headed cranes. Visiting Kien Giang Province, tourists can experience Phu Quoc Island which owns a moderate climate all year round. It is a resort paradise famous for the blue sea, white sand, and fresh seafood. Visitors may also visit pearl farms, jewelry stores. Tra Vinh Province is a land with many ethnic groups such as Khmer, Hoa, Kinh, etc. Temples here have unique architectures that tourists may like such as Co Pagoda, Hang Pagoda, and Ang Pagoda. Besides, visitors can visit and swim at Ba Dong Beach. Arriving in Soc Trang Province, visitors visit famous temples such as Doi Pagoda or Dat Set Pagoda; or else, go to Nga Nam floating market to enjoy fresh fruits and the famous Pia cake of Southern region. With the last province, Vinh Long, tourists cannot ignore Van Thanh Mieu relic site which is the pride and also the symbol of patriotism and studious spirit of local people (Pham Sinh, 2017).

In recent years, new investment projects have contributed to the completion of tourism infrastructure in the Mekong Delta, increasing the attraction for the tourism of the region. These projects include five-star Vinpearl Resort and Spa Phu Quoc (Phu Quoc Island, Kien Giang Province) and five-star Muong Thanh Hotel (Can Tho City). Vietnam Airlines opens routes from Phu Quoc Island to Singapore and from Phu Quoc Island to Siem Reap (Cambodia). Vietjet opens the route from Can Tho to Da Nang, Vasco cooperates with Vietravel to open the direct route from Can Tho to Da Lat. Worldtrans has officially launched a direct flight from Can Tho to Bangkok (Thailand) in the form of charter flights. Cities and provinces have called for investors in tourism development projects. An Giang attracts tourists by investing in the cable car projects, building the largest Maitreya Buddha statue on Cam Mountain, and the tallest Shakyamuni Buddha statue on Sam Mountain. Bac Lieu has built Cao Van Lau Musician Memorial Park, Ba Non La Theater, Nha Mat tourist resort, etc.

According to the Mekong Delta Tourism Association, in 2019, the number of tourists to this region reached 47 million. The number of overnight guests was 13.5 million. The total revenue from tourism activities reached VND 30 trillion. Some provinces and cities have a steady but small increase in the number of visitors over the years, such as Can Tho, Kien Giang, An Giang, and Dong Thap. The international tourist market of the Mekong Delta includes common

countries such as Japan, the USA, Australia, Korea, France, England, and China. Meanwhile, the domestic tourist market focuses on Ho Chi Minh City, regional provinces, and the Southeast region. These are markets with high demands of the Mekong Delta's tourism products.

## 2. RECOGNIZING TOURISM LIMITATIONS IN THE MEKONG DELTA

In recent years, the Mekong Delta authority has implemented action programs to take advantage of tourism resources and its geographical location to diversify tourism products and tourism types, enhance tourism quality in depth (Nguyen Quoc Nghi, 2013). Especially, river tourism is highly appreciated by most domestic and foreign tourists. However, there exist limitations of the Mekong Delta's tourism industry which are shown below.

### Firstly, investment activities are inconsistent:

The speed of investments in tourism services in the region is limited. This leads to the slow development of tourism infrastructure and the inconsistent investment capital in terms of space and fields. The emergence of low-quality tourist attractions, restaurants, or hotels has affected the quality of service supply chains in the Mekong Delta.

### Secondly, tourism promotion is limited:

The scale of promotional activities for tourism images is small and lacks cooperation between parties to promote tourism potentials. Therefore, most programs are not efficient. The visual content of promotion programs have not been properly paid attention, so not making strong impressions on international visitors.

### Thirdly, tourism products are monotonous:

The same weather, climate, and soil conditions create an overlap in tourism resources among localities. Therefore, the duplication of tourism products in cities or provinces is inevitable. However, the local tourism industry has not found the answer to product positioning problems.

### Fourthly, restrictions on the quality of tourism human resources:

This is reflected by the shortage of professional employees in tourist destinations as well as high-class restaurants and hotels. The local people's ways of doing tourism services are unprofessional, thereby not showing the value of indigenous cultures. Besides, long-term visions and strategies of local tourism managers are restricted.

### Fifthly, environmental pollution and ecological damage:

Tourism waste management is a great challenge for the tourism industry. Moreover, many tourist sites are industrializing and over-exploiting that cause environmental degradation and inconvenience for international tourists. Especially, in the peak season, the overload of tourists at famous destinations affects natural resources.

## 3. SOLUTIONS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEKONG DELTA

From the existing difficulties of the Mekong Delta's tourism, some solutions are suggested to promote the available strengths, take advantage of integrated opportunities to develop the tourism in the Mekong Delta.

**Firstly, attract synchronous investments in tourism development:**

The tourism administrators should diversify forms of investment by encouraging the socialization and types of investment such as BCC, BOT, BTO, BT, and PPP. Attracting investments in potential tourist areas or appropriate regions to complete service supply chains. In addition to this, the local authority needs to pay attention to the development of featured tourism products in each city to do product positioning.

**Secondly, expand the promotion of tourism images:**

From the experience of Singapore and Thailand, tourism promotion is a key strategy in the development of the local tourism industry. Promotion activities should be invested in quality, content, and images. Therefore, these programs need adequate funds. During the 4.0 industrial revolution, the service sector should make the most use of smart technologies which both save money and bring high efficiency.

**Thirdly, maximize "humanities values" in tourism development:**

The overlapping tourism products among regions are inevitable. However, if each tourist site knows how to promote its "human values", which can be the hospitality, indigenous culture, and local specialties, it will help attract and retain visitors. This is also a solution for the local tourism brand positioning. Therefore, improving the community's mindset and the vision of local managers is essential.

**Fourthly, continuously improve the quality of tourism human resources:**

This is a long-term process but it needs to be carried out. Human resources are the core value of all successful

strategies. Therefore, the local tourism industry should consider and evaluate the quality of tourism human resources. Also, developing projects and action programs may help enhance the quality of tourism management staff, local community, and employees at tourist sites.

**Fifthly, raise awareness about protecting the environment and tourism resources:**

The tourism industry should coordinate with media units to diversify forms of environmental protection propaganda for the tourism community and tourists. Besides, it is necessary to raise awareness of the tourism community about the value of natural resources and indigenous resources compared to tourist's needs. These resources should not be modernized and over-exploited. For tourism service providers, they should build the waste control system not to influence the living environment.

**REFERENCES**

- [1] Lück, M. (2005). Sustainable Development of Tourism: A Compilation of Good Practices. Madrid, the World Tourism Organization. *Tourism Management*, 26(4), 633-634.
- [2] Nghi, N. Q. (2013). Solutions for development homestay tourism at the islets in the Mekong Delta. *Can Tho University Journal of Science*, 27, 11-16.
- [3] Nghi, N. Q. (2018). Discuss the development of festival tourism. *Vietnam Travel Magazine*, 10, 42-43.
- [4] Sinh, P. (2017). Tourism in the Mekong Delta: Potential, situation, and development solutions. *Van Hien Viet Nam*. Retrieved from <https://vanhien.vn/news/du-lich-dong-bang-song-cuu-long-tiem-nang-thuc-trang-va-giai-phap-phat-trien-57109>.