

# MANAGEMENT ISSUES OF HERITAGE TOURISM AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER HERITAGE PRESERVATION IN VIET NAM

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**ABSTRACT**— Heritage sites are the most valuable and important resources that need to be conserved properly. Nowadays, many heritage locations have been transformed into tourism products and have become a key tourism economic tool in some countries. Viet Nam has plenty of protected spots and many of them are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites. The increasing number of tourists travel to Viet Nam to visit these places, so heritage tourism emerges as one of the leading tourism activities to bring economic, social and cultural benefits to the country in general as well as local authorities and residents in particular. However, increased number of visits to these scenes result in degradation. Heritage management plays a decisive role in managing visitors to historic places with the purpose of enhancing the visitors' appreciation and experience, but the failure to embrace diverse legacy management practices causes different challenges. This paper aims to identify two key benefits of heritage tourism like economic and social cultural ones, find out negative impacts of tourisms on heritage grounds, present management issues on preserving these sites in Vietnam and propose some recommendations in the areas of heritage management.

**Keywords**—heritage management, negative impacts, tourists behaviors, heritage tourism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Heritage resources are those resources –both human and natural- that are important elements for heritage tourism. Fonseca and Ramos indicated that heritage is the main factors for developing heritage tourism [1] and it can be seen as a tool to generate tourism tours [2]. According to The World Tourism Organization, there are around 40 percent of international trips that are related to heritage and culture and the demand has been steadily increasing every year [3]. Ismail, Masron and Ahmad define heritage tourism as a type of excursion that visitors can experience performing arts, heritage sites, unique landscapes, special lifestyles, traditions, festivals and events [4]. Since World Heritage List was introduced in the late 20th century, heritage tourism has been significantly grown and received lots of attentions from both the demand and supply sides [5]. It is becoming a leading sector of the world tourism industry and the growth of heritage industry has been greatly expanding the scope. Thousands of people are interested in visiting heritage sites every year and it continues to grow rapidly. Corner and Willem said that some of the most scientifically and historically important, aesthetically spectacular, and famous archaeological World Heritage Sites have seen a dramatic increase in numbers of visitors over recent decades [6, p.499]. This increased visits lead to damage at sites and deterioration. It can be seen the significant economic benefits of heritage sites but the reinvestment in protecting and preserving the locations does not match with the economic exploitation of the spots. Douglas and Willem also mentioned large deterioration of heritage sites caused by over-visitation has been reported and the main reason is heritage grounds are not well managed by management boards of many World Heritage Sites [6]. In Viet Nam Heritage tourism emerges as the most important economic activity. In transitioning from a centrally planned to a market-based economy, the Vietnamese government considers heritage tourism as an important sector that brings lots of revenues [7]. According to Nham [8], there are more than 8,000 relics recognized as heritage sites and they are located mostly in the area of Red River Delta. Ha Noi accounts for majority of heritage locations with 3,840. Among types of heritage in Vietnam, the percentage of historical and cultural resources were 51.2%, artistic monuments were 44,2% and archaeological places were 1.3%. Vietnam National Administration of Tourism showed that [9], there are around 40,000 tangible and 60,000 intangible heritages. Eleven intangible cultural heritages of humanity have been recognized as cultural heritage of humanity and five places have gained World Cultural Heritage sites, namely Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long – Hà Nội, Citadel of the Ho Dynasty, Complex of Huế Monuments, Hội An Ancient City, Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary, and the natural-cultural Tràng An – Bái Đính Landscape Complex. Statistics indicated that there were totally around 21 million people visiting eight world heritage sites in 2019[10]. The Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism showed that Tràng An Scenic Landscape Complex had welcomed about 1 million people when it was first designated as a World Heritage tourist attraction in 2012, the number of tourists increased up to 6.3 million people by 2019, following 5 years of being recognized by UNESCO. Meanwhile, only ten thousand people visited Hue Monuments when it was first registered as a global cultural and natural heritage, however, today there are around millions of people travelling to Hue. Another Heritage site is Hội An Ancient town, the

number of tourists went up from around 879,000 in 2006 to over 2.5 million in 2019. Since Hội An became a World Heritage Site, tourism services have significantly boosted local economy and currently revenue accounts for more than 70% GDP [11]. Increased number of tourists to these heritage sites cause some management challenges in protecting and preserving these places. So it is very crucial to have good cultural heritage management in place to prevent negative impacts caused by tourism activities. AlMasri and Ababneh mentioned that heritage management is a complicated concept and an interdisciplinary area comprising many activities, such as site identification and evaluation, tourism development, site interpretation and protection, tourism impacts, and visitor management [12, p.2452]. However, Việt Nam has been facing some significant challenges in managing heritage grounds effectively to protect and conserve them from tourists' damages. The purpose of this paper is to identify some of the main benefits of heritage tourism, analyze current challenges in Vietnamese heritage management and present some recommendations to preserve properly popular heritage attractions in Việt Nam.

## **II. BENEFITS OF HERITAGE TOURISM**

### **A. SOCIAL-CULTURAL BENEFITS**

Heritage tourism increases preservation education of local residents. Actually, it has developed locals' pride in Vietnamese culture. Correja, Kozak and Rodrigues said that people in the community have more motivation to protect their historic, cultural and natural resources when they understand how valuable and beneficial these heritages resources could bring to their life [13]. The deeper understanding and appreciation the locals have, the more serious attention they pay to their heritages. They are like "a guide" to learn and share their cultures and values with other visitors. Lư Thị Dung, a local tour guide, said that local inhabitants are eager to introduce their heritage resources such as natural beauty, history and culture to both Vietnamese and foreign tourists, they are proud to be the "link" between heritage and visitors [14]. Liu and Lindburg also [15] mentioned that local people have a proud feeling of telling others their culture and have more appreciation of their local cultural identities.

Another benefit of heritage tourism is to bring culture together between tourists and local people. It stands to reason that international tourists, domestic tourists and local residents promote the "good image" of Vietnam to foreign countries. Other studies, carried out by Akis, Andereck, Vogt and Chen, found that tourism leads to developing cultural exchange between visitors and local people [16]. In a study conducted by Hai and Catherine, 86% of international tourists and 86.7% of domestic tourists considered heritage as the most important reason to visit Hue [5]. During their trips to Hue, they participated in ritual ceremonies, traditional festival and art forms which contribute to raise awareness and learn about history, culture, beliefs and traditions of Hue. Another research in Ha Long Bay done by Long, respondents participating in his study said that tourism has a capability of bringing culture together. This has been confirmed by a male high school teacher who said that "tourism is another way of bridging people, cultures and languages". A local television reporter mentioned that a large number of foreign tourists come to Ha Long Bay with their own cultures, which allows local dwellers opportunities to learn about their cultures and languages to understand each other and provide better services [16]. Indeed, cultural exchange in tourism has become an effective way to spread the image of the country and the people of Viet Nam to the national and international audience. Former Egyptian Ambassador to Viet Nam, affirmed that Vietnam has been boosting a diverse culture. The cultural events organized by Vietnamese government help to translate literacy works and poems which play a role in contributing cultural exchange. He expressed his intention to expand mutual cooperation through cultural exchange [17].

### **B. ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

Economic benefit is the most obvious one that heritage tourism offers. The Travel Industry Association conducted a study which indicated that heritage tourists spend more time and money when traveling to other countries than other kinds of tourists. They stayed longer because they think excursions with heritage activities are more memorable, educational and interesting [18]. This helps to develop sustainable local economies. It is undoubted that local persons can have big opportunities for employment and earnings while promoting community pride because people need to work with each other to enhance cultural development. Many stakeholders such as tour operators, local authorities, central government, local retail businesses like gift shops, art and craft shops, restaurants, as well as hotels in the communities share revenues from tourism. Thanks to the recognition of The UNESCO World Heritage sites, lots of jobs are created for the natives. Lư Thị Dung, a provider of tourist services in Tràng An- UNESCO Heritage site- mentioned that the only way to earn money for people in Tràng An in the past was to raise livestock and to do farming all year around, but now people can participate in tourist services such as boating, safeguarding, environmental sanitation, souvenir sales, and

working in restaurants and travel agencies to increase their income[14]. Hoang Thi Thu Huong, Deputy Head of the Management Board of Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex, also stated that tourism creates jobs for 1,300 people who work as “boat drivers, mainly women aged 45-60, and their monthly salary is from 5-6 million VND [19]. Hạ Long Bay is another UNESCO Heritage site that has economic benefits from tourism. Besides bringing more employment and earning opportunities, tourism development in Hạ Long has also created opportunities for the locals to develop their own businesses. More and more inhabitants have opened their own motels, hotels, bars, pubs, restaurants, travel agencies, souvenirs shops, vehicles rental services thanks to the development of heritage tourism. Not only are living standards of local people better and better but also local budget has greatly been increased [16]. Hội An- another World Heritage site- local people are motivated to preserve their ancient houses not only to show respect to their ancestors but also to have steady income derived from tourism activities [20].

Apart from creating employment for local people to improve their life, heritage tourism products become a key factor to develop local and national economy. Specifically, in 2017 Trang An Scenic Landscape complex received 6.5 million visitors, earning revenue of over VND1.7 trillion [21]. There were around 3 million tourists of which 1.8 million were international tourists visiting the Complex of Hue Ancient Monuments in 2017 with the total revenue of 320 billion VND from entrance tickets. At the same time, Hoi An Ancient town had around 1.96 million visitors, earning 219 billion VND from tickets. Other well-known heritages such as Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng, Yên Tử Mountain, Bà Đen Mountain and Hạ Long Bay are also developed in terms of number of tourist visits and revenues [22]. Therefore, heritage tourism contributes greatly to the development of tourism industry in particular and to national economy in general. The number of international tourists to Viet nam increased from 5 million in 2010 to 12.9 million in 2017 while domestic tourism rose from 28 million in 2010 to 73.2 million in 2017. Total tourism revenue rose from 96,000 billion in 2010 to 510,000 billion in 2017, an average increase of 26.9%, contributing over 7% of GDP [22]. In short, it is heritage tourism that makes a significant contribution to the economic development of the regions and the whole country.

### III. NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF TOURISM ON THE HERITAGE SITES

The first impact is sites' deterioration due to overcrowding. Many tourism destinations exceed “carrying capacity” which is defined as ‘the maximum number of people who may visit a tourist destination per day/per site, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment’ [23]. Overtourism –the excessive presence of tourists in a tourist destination- cause a rising level of humidity which is a barrier for preserving sandstone. Heritage places are negatively affected by changes in exposure, moisture, and temperature. Stone monuments are eventually eroded by crowds' humidity and temperature fluctuations. [6]. In Việt Nam, Hạ Long Bay, a UNESCO world Heritage Site, has been suffering deterioration because of overcrowding. During peak season in 2018, on average around 5,500 visitors a day to Thiên Cung and Đầu Gỗ caves cause a rise in CO<sub>2</sub> which damages the stalactites and stalagmites [24]. Ba Vì and Cúc Phương National Park welcome about 1,000 visitors on a daily basis and the number goes up to from 5,000 to 7,000 people on special days but the special thing about these two places is that they allow tourists to do what they want in their grounds [25]. Too much tourism means over-exploitation on heritage sites which leads to faster damages.

The second impact is inappropriate tourists' behaviors which are the main causes of damage and general decline of the sites. Touching, sitting, climbing and treading, walking on ancient floors by tourists result in the rock decay and faster failure at the scenes [26]. Tom Paradise, an American Geomorphologist and a Professor of Geosciences at the University of Arkansas, indicated that rock carved features would be lost and disappeared because the shoes with soles tourists wear when visiting the heritage attractions. Half a cubic meter of sandstone has been lost eventually in some years due to tourists sitting, touching, rubbing or leaning on floors, caves and walls [27]. According to Paradise, tests demonstrated that sweaty hands would leave a scum of fat on the wall which causes stearic acid [28]. Actually, frequent touching on heritage sites lead to abrasion. Petra, one of the archeological heritage attractions of the world has been experiencing deterioration. A research was conducted at two areas in Petra within a 10-year period, the Khazneh and Theatre. It found out that the surface of Khazneh has been receded by 40mm in less than 10 years [29]. Moreover, according to A Guide to Best Practices for Archaeological Tourism [26, p.3], archaeological sites and historical places are unique and irreplaceable, so destruction of a site is permanent and irreversible. Heritages sites in Việt Nam would face similar condition due to insufficient tourist management at heritage spots. Besides, graffiti from tourists ruins the magnificent heritage places and can't be removed causing serious management issues. Hội An is famous for the yellow ancient houses lining along the streets of the town that attracts many local and foreign tourists every year. However, graffiti on the walls caused by tourists take away its unique charms and beauty. Lê Quang Trung, the Chairman of People's Committee in Hội An, said that graffiti, banners and advertising are commonly seen on

the yellow lime-painted walls of ancient houses in the last three years. These graffiti are drawn by drunken foreigners. After they drink in the evening, they buy paint and spray on these walls [30]. Inside the caves of Hạ Long Bay, many stones have been carved and sprayed or painted Vietnamese, Chinese and English words [31].

Last but not least, environmental impacts caused by tourists and tourism businesses are the major difficulty that sites' managers are facing. Negative environmental impacts include land pollution and water pollution. First, littering-dropping rubbish on the ground in public places is a serious problem in many well-known tourist attractions. A large number of hard-to decompose waste like plastic bottles, bags and packaging can be easily spotted in these places. Other types of garbage such as mugs, food wrappers, plates, metals, papers, and cigarette butts are seen cluttering in popular tourist destinations in various forms. At the conference "Tourism without plastic waste" organized by Quảng Nam Tourism Association indicated that there are around 660 tons of waste per day in Quảng Nam, and 92 tons in Hội An and plastic waste accounts for 18% to 20% [32]. Second, contaminated water is another environmental threat that tourism businesses create. Hạ Long Bay Natural World Heritage site is facing high levels of water pollution. Tourism development have resulted in water contamination and solid waste accumulation. Hundreds of cruise ships are running in the bay to provide tourists the opportunity to discover and enjoy the beauty of the Bay. The number of cruise ship has risen from 329 in 2006 to 527 in 2013 and boats staying overnight at the bay accounts for 30% around 167 boats [24]. Oil pollution from boat engines is one of the biggest problems in Hạ Long Bay. Tour operators neglect to care about the environment. Their boats discharge oil, leaving black grey substance on the surface of the water. The operation of boats damage the ecosystem of the bay because it stirs sediment on the sea bottom, making the water turbid and affecting marine species like endangered coral reef or sea grass beds [24]. Hội An, a UNESCO Cultural Heritage site, is also facing water pollution. Currently, there is no effective wastewater treatment and disposal system in Hội An. Therefore, raw sewage and wastewater from laundry services, restaurants, hotels and guesthouses flow into rivers and other waterways [33]. This causes degradation to the natural beauty of Ancient Town and affects visitors' experiences.

#### IV. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Poor management is one of the potential threats to the viability of heritage resources. Not only are physical appearances of heritage locations damaged but also cultural values and important characteristics of these places are deteriorated. So, sustainable heritage management is very important to meet economic, social and cultural needs at the present and maintain heritage assets for the needs of future generation. Nevertheless, currently, most of popular tourist destinations with endangered heritage resources in Việt Nam are facing some main management issues that lead to damages. Firstly, the uncontrolled visitors' management cause regular tourists' traffic congestion as well as improper tourists' behaviors. Actually, the implementation of policies on controlling visitors flow at the heritage attractions is not sufficiently carried out. To avoid overcrowding, article 8 of Regulations No.104/2207/QĐ-BNN on management of ecotourism activities in nature reserves requires ecotourism-related businesses to assess social, cultural, natural and ecological impacts of ecotourism activities on tourist destinations and based on these assessments, they must regulate the right number of tourists a day/a site. However, this policy excludes follow-up actions or specific guidelines to implement sufficiently [25]. It is safe to say that the management boards of Ba Vì and Cúc Phương National Park assert strongly and publicly that they have no responsibility to practice carrying capacity management so no regulations have been set in their parks, which means visitors are allowed to do what they want within their grounds. They also have no guidelines about where to go after entering the park even during peak visiting days. When the management feel "overcrowding", they will solve the problem according to the facts of the particular situation [25]. A lack of trained staff to monitor these places and tell tourists not to leave any graffiti, lean, touch, climb or sit on the heritages spots is also a consequential problem in management issues. Le Thi Thu Hien, director of the Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, declared that there are small number of employees working in the field of cultural heritage management with limited management and professional skills [34]. According to Das, tourism schools in Vietnam account for only 60 percent of the industry's demand, which shows clearly the shortage of knowledgeable employees [35]. It is also true that 37.8% of tour guides were assessed to have qualified, clear and professional knowledge about heritage according to the assessment of tourists for Hoi An Ancient town and Temple of Literature done by Huyen [36]. Secondly, sites' instructions provide insufficient information about the protected places. It can also be seen clearly in Huyen's research that only 53.5% of tourists in Hoi An Ancient Town said that instructions and notes of artifacts are clear, detailed and scientific [36], which explains why unintentional damages are unavoidable. Visitor centers lack in the amount of promotional and educational materials needed, in guiding visitors about what to do and what to avoid. Tourists and local people who are deficient in knowledge about regulations of the sites may cause vandalism and other irresponsible behaviors. Last but not least, fine policies are ineffective in

preventing those who fail to follow regulations, especially littering caused by tourists or local businesses at the heritage tourist attractions. A fine from VND500,000 to VND 1 million could be applied to those who discharge garbage and sewage in undesignated areas in any service, commercial and residential centers. The management boards of tourist areas, entertainment venues, parks, railway stations and piers will be fined up to VND20 million if they are unsuccessful in providing sufficient sanitation facilities and ensure waste collection efficiency with enough staff and equipment [37]. These monetary punishments imposed by the government on individuals and organizations should be much more serious to make people change their behavior that is respectful and mindful of rules and laws.

## V. RECOMMENDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

Candrea and ISPAS [37] indicated that tourism is a key challenge for plenty of protected heritage areas since the behaviors of tourists can cause serious problems. A sustainable tourism management should be implemented in heritage attractions in Viet Nam because it can help preserve natural heritage and biodiversity, respect authenticity of host countries and ensure economic operation. Visitor management technique is a way to develop sustainable tourism [38,p.131]. According to Eagles, Mc Cool and Haynes [39], there are about 16 key tools for visitor management some of which will be very helpful to heritage spots' current issues in Viet Nam. The first tool the heritage management board in Viet Nam needs to be taken into account is the "use limits" which restrict directly the number of visitors entering some particular locations due to exceeding carrying capacity. The place which is considered to be very successful in using this method in Viet Nam is Côn Đảo National Park. Its managers proudly talk about their success in applying carrying capacity in their place. What the park has done is to calculate the number of tickets for sale in advance – the maximum number before the intervention point is reached. The management board also figures out the maximum accepted number for every tourism site, both for day visits and night visits using the total site area divided by the average number of total tourist arrivals in the past [25]. The persons in charge of Côn Đảo National Park use the data of 2015 to allow 48 tourists for day tours and 21 for night tours to the sandy beach of Bãy Cảnh Islet in 2016. The second tool is "Area closure" that prohibits tourist use of specific regions since it will remove all negative impacts of human to the heritage resources. Some parts of heritage locations should be closed for some period of time to avoid congestion causing damage and to restore some of damages at the earliest time. The third tool is "A barrier" that is an established obstacle to visitor movement. It will greatly reduce the visitor impacts from climbing, touching, treading, vandalizing and drawing graffiti for the protected areas. The consequences of these actions can be seen clearly in stone warriors at royal tombs in Hue Monuments which have high risk of rock decay because there is no "barrier" to protect them from tourists touching or writing or drawing graffiti. Moreover, information materials should be available to every visitor in English, Chinese, Korean and Japanese at visitor centers of every heritage tourist attraction to inform visitors about the biology, geology, locations of visitor facilities, rules and regulations and to instruct visitors how to conduct in proper manner at heritage destinations. Next, interpretation is one of the useful methods to reduce the tourists' impact on heritage places. Interpretation is both public environmental education and visitor communication and involves in the principles and pragmatics of good practices[40]. Interpretive methods should be used such as developed signage, brochures, hi-tech interpretive media, maps, leaflets or guidelines because they can provide information to visitors in a more stimulating ways to learn and gain more appreciation. For group tours, tour guides are a valuable source of information and advice concerning conditions affecting the environment as well as the visitor experience. Tour guides should be well trained and well cooperated with the management boards to explain the site's resources, significance to the visitors and to instruct people on how to behave appropriately at a site. Finally, to reduce waste pollution, much stricter regulations and enforcement need to be implemented for visitors and tourism businesses. Punishment will depend on the degree of violation like fining or going to court or requesting out of the place they are visiting if violated the regulations. Government should impose higher fines for those visitors or businesses that break the rules. If these violators refuse to pay a penalty, they should be brought to courts for stricter charges. Enterprises in some developed countries in the world want to do tourism businesses, they have to make an action plan and a commitment in environmental protection. From some good experiences of other countries, Vietnam's tourism management centers should set criteria for certification of green tourism with the aim of reducing negative impacts of tourism activities on the environment [29]. Green tourism certification will help businesses gain reputation, ensure environmental protection with responsibility and attract more tourists, especially environmental friendly tourists.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Heritage tourism is one of the growing sectors that appeals more and more tourists every year across the world. In Vietnam, it also has been growing rapidly thanks to its diversity in terms of culture, customs and traditions that have been shaped and practiced across the nation for thousands of years. Most of heritages in Vietnam are related to monuments, temples, nature, pagodas, traditional festivals and art forms [9]. These heritages are responsible for tourism development in Vietnam. Obviously, heritage tourism brings some social cultural and economic benefits. So, it is very important to have good heritage management in place to protect precious heritage assets. However, tourists' management represents one of the most significant challenges in Viet Nam. Its negative impacts on heritage sites are immense and complex including overcrowding, misbehaved tourists' actions and environmental pollution. These impacts are caused by inappropriate and poor current management practices such as unregulated visitors flow, ineffective policies implementation, shortage of human resources for monitoring, incapable local tour guides, lack of sufficient interpretation and ineffective monetary punishment. Some recommendations suggested would be good for better heritage preservation. Firstly, limiting the number of visitors should be applied on heritage sites to avoid overcrowding. Next, more "barriers" ought to be put in fragile protected areas to keep away tourist touching, sitting or walking, and drawing graffiti on heritage sites. Moreover, it would be good for management board to use different types of "interpretation" to inform visitors about the sites and educate tour guides to tell their customers on how to behave appropriately in all destinations they visit. Lastly, much stricter regulations should be imposed on tourists and tourism businesses that fail to obey the rules. Heritage are the pride and strength of a nation [41], so it is very crucial to prevent the monument from damage. More slogans-short, catchy and easy to remember- on heritage protection are supposed to be put in many crowded places like schools, markets especially heritage locations to increase public awareness and encourage people to make sufficient efforts for the protection of our legacy.

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