



## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEA-ISLAND TOURISM IN SOUTH CENTRAL COAST OF VIETNAM**

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### **Abstract:**

Located in the middle position of the country, all provinces/cities in the South Central Coast border the sea. With a total coastline length of 1,430 km, accounting for 43.8% of the whole country's coastline (3,260 km), the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast is now considered a spearhead economic sector, which plays an important role in socio-economic development of this area. In this article, the authors have deeply analyzed the situation and the issues in developing the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast region from 2010 up to now. Thence, findings lead to important practical suggestions to promote the sustainable development of the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast in the coming time.

**Keywords:** tourism, the sea and island tourism, sustainable development, Southern Central Coastal region

### **1. Introduction**

Along with the renovation of the country over the past 30 years, the Tourism industry has made many progresses and achieved remarkable achievements but also revealed certain limitations and shortcomings. The trends of integration, cooperation, global competition, exchange, expansion and enhancement of application of science and technology in the knowledge-based economy in the world have been creating opportunities and challenges at the same time for the tourism development in Vietnam in general and in South Central Coast in Vietnam in particular. The development of the sea - island tourism in the South Central Coast has brought efficiency in many aspects and the community has also received various benefits from this development in recent years. However, there are still many limitations and shortcomings. In order to overcome the limitations and shortcomings and promote the sustainable development of sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast, it is necessary to do research and

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comprehensively evaluate the current status of activities. Thereby, limitations and difficulties are found, and they need to be removed; contradictions that need to be resolved... in tourism activities. Moreover, the article also provides solutions to create a favorable environment for the sustainable development of the island-sea tourism in the South Central Coast.

**2. Research contents**

**2.1. Current status of the sea - island tourism development in the South Central Coast**

**2.1.1. The number of visitors and revenue**

The South Central Coast includes 8 provinces and cities, namely Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, which are defined as tourist areas with basic characteristics of the sea and island tourism. The Prime Minister approved ‘*The master plan on tourism development in the South Central Coast area until 2020, vision to 2030*’. In this plan, the sea and island tourism has been chosen as a spearhead to invest and develop.

The South Central Coast having a coastline of more than 1.400 km, where there are many long and beautiful beaches. All provinces in the region have beautiful seas and island space with their own characteristics. The beaches here have clear, blue, clean and warm sea water year round; long beaches with white, smooth and beautiful sands such as Non Nuoc, Cua Dai, My Khe, Sa Huynh, Quy Nhon, Dai Lanh, Van Phong, Nha Trang, Ninh Chu, Ca Na, Mui Ne...With a tropical climate, mild, warm year-round, gentle beach, strong foundation and clear water, the beautiful beaches become the ideal address for the type of sea resort tourism, leisure and they can be invested to develop into high-class sea resorts with strong tourist attraction. In addition, there are many large islands and peninsulas such as Son Tra (Da Nang), Cu Lao Cham (Quang Nam), Ly Son (Quang Ngai), Phu Quy (Binh Thuan) and two archipelagos of Hoang Sa and Truong Sa, which are very convenient for the development of the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast.

In recent years, tourism in the South Central Coast has been attracting more and more international and domestic tourists to the region's typical tourism type, thus the revenue from tourism increases every year.

**Table 2.1:** Numbers of international tourists come to the South Central Coast and revenue

Year	2010	2015	2018
Total number of visitors	1700	3100	5900
Average length of stay (day)	2.5	3.52	4.45
Total revenue from international visitors (billion VND)	8.347	25.054	68.730

**Source:** Statistical Office of provinces/cities in 2010 – 2018.

**Table 2.2:** Numbers of domestic tourists come to the South Central Coast and revenue

Year	2010	2015	2018
Total number of visitors	4300	7300	9700
Average length of stay (day)	1.5	2.1	2.5
Total revenue from domestic visitors (billion VND)	2.367	12.240	97.650

**Source:** Statistical Office of provinces/cities in 2010 – 2018.

The above data shows that the number of tourists coming to the South Central Coast is increasing. Compared to 2010, the year of 2018 experienced a great surge - a 3.47 fold increase in the number of international visitors, a 2.25 fold rise in the number of domestic tourists. Besides, the length of stay is also longer. As a result, revenue from tourism increased many times. With such growth, it can be seen that tourism in the South Central Coast in general and the sea and island tourism in particular have been developing in accordance with the socio-economic development orientation and in line with the general development trend of the whole country.

**2.1.2. The technical infrastructure for tourism**

The whole region has invested in infrastructure development, has repaired works to serve the people and create favorable conditions for tourism development. The system of accommodation facilities in the region was also invested and developed with the growth rate of hotel rooms in the period from 2010 to 2018 reaching nearly 17%. According to statistics from the General Statistics Office of provinces/cities, as of 2018, out of total ranked accommodation facilities, there are 27 five-star hotels (1.6%); 49 four-star hotels (3%), 100 three-star hotels (6%) and more than 500 one-star to two-star facilities (30%). The accommodation facilities are mainly focused in big cities such as Da Nang, Nha Trang, Phan Thiet, Quy Nhon; where there are various world-class hotels and resorts with strong brands such as: The Furama Resort, Crowne Plaza (Da Nang); Life Heritage Resort Hoi An, The Nam Hai (Quang Nam); Vinpearl Resort Nha Trang, Six Senses Ninh Van Bay (Khanh Hoa); Anantara Resort & Spa, Sealinks Beach Villas (Binh Thuan)...

In addition, the South Central Coast region has strengths in cuisine. The system of catering service facilities here is relatively good, especially in big cities. Most hotels, motels, guest houses, tourist areas have catering facilities with various delicious dishes and regional specialties.

**2.1.3. Tourism marketing and promotion activities**

In recent years, government agencies and tourism enterprises have used multiple different information channels for the propaganda activities so as to promote the image of tourism in general and the sea and island tourism of the South Central Coast in particular, such as: through organizing festivals, fairs, through local travel websites, through travel publications, leaflets, brochure folds; through communication tools such as Internet, newspapers, television, etc. Promotion activity, which is evaluated as the most effective activity, is the Festival of Culture - Sports and Tourism sectors such as Nha Trang Sea Festival, Da Nang Fireworks Festival, Mui Ne Sailing Festival (Binh Thuan),

Quang Nam Heritage Festival, etc. It can be said that marketing activities have contributed to build up and propagate good images of tourism in general and the South Central Coast's sea and island tourism in particular.

#### **2.1.4. Human resources in the field of tourism**

Along with the increase of tourists and the system of tourism technical infrastructures in recent years, the tourism industry in Nam Dinh has continuously increased in both quantity and quality, creating more jobs for society.

According to statistics from the General Statistics Office of provinces/cities, the number of tourism workers in the region increased rapidly, with the average growth rate reaching approximately 20% in the period 2010-2018. By 2018, the number of tourism workers in the region is nearly 120,000. Of the total number of employees, the university-college level accounts for an average of 8.5%, the intermediate level is 15-20%, the rest is for elementary and unskilled workers. In general, the quality of tourism workers has not met the increasing demands of tourism development in terms of professional skills, foreign languages and informatics. However, tourism human resources are also being gradually supplemented and strengthened in terms of quality.

## **2.2. Issues in sustainable development of the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast**

*Firstly*, although the growth rate of tourism is high and accounts for a large proportion in GDP, tourism has not been exploited intensively. Tourism potentials in general and the sea and island tourism in particular have not been promoted. This results in low efficiency and competitiveness, compared to domestic and foreign regions.

The tourism potentials of the province are rich and diverse, but have not been invested and exploited effectively. Tourism products are monotonous, unattractive; service quality and human resources are low. Although tourism brand promotion activities of the region have initially achieved some certain results, these activities have not really grown up. Therefore, the tourism image and brand in general and the South Central Coast's the island-sea tourism image and brand in particular have not yet been built up. Activities of propaganda, promotion and market access so as to attract tourists, especially international tourists, are not really effective. The propaganda and promotion activities are still lack of professionalism. The process of transferring information and the process of communication have not been implemented consistently, regularly and have not a roadmap. The poverty of entertainment services has not been overcome yet.

The management of tourism product development is not consistent with the brand value. Tourism products lack the distinct products which have the high competitiveness in the region and the world in order to attract tourists from the key, high-paying ability markets; and also lack outstanding travel brands. Resources mobilized for tourism brand development are limited. The source of funding from the State budget to invest in upgrading tourism infrastructure, promoting and preserving natural values has not been used effectively.

Secondly, the management and exploitation of tourism resources in general and the sea and island tourism in particular still have many shortcomings. The overlap in management between ministries and branches with local authorities; between sectors on the same territory; and the inconsistency in resource management are some reasons for inefficient exploitation and use of sea-island resources. There is no synchronous investment for resource restoration and conservation. The inconsistency in the management of tourism resources has been demonstrated in the following thing: Most of the current tourism resources are under the management of many different subjects, so they do not cover all issues relating to management and exploitation, but only solve some certain problems and areas. As a result, the management status has been local and not comprehensive; security and safety issues for tourists, and the issue of environmental sanitation have got little care and investment. State management on tourism is still lax; coordination between levels and sectors in implementing goals and tasks is loose and passive.

The development of sea resorts seems to be beyond the control of managers. Service facilities in this area are developed arbitrarily, not in accordance with the plan, which has affected the landscape and environment and in the long term, affecting the sustainable development of the sea and island tourism.

Thirdly, the coordination and cooperation among localities in the region on tourism development is still limited. The main tourism products of the localities are still overlapping, monotonous, not abundant, and lack the accompanying services. Therefore, they have not really attracted tourists, leading to visitors' the short stay time and low average spending, the phenomenon of "not come back" often occurs.

Fourthly, the solutions to protect natural resources and environment in tourism exploitation activities are still lacking and ineffective. The unplanned construction of coastal hotels and resorts deprives the inherent beauty of nature, or ecological tours. This has a major impact on the initial status of primary forests.

### **2.3. Some solutions to develop the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast**

According to the decision approving '*The master plan on tourism development in the South Central Coast until 2020, vision to 2030*' of the Prime Minister, the specific objective is attracting about 15 million visitors, about 4.5 million international visitors by 2020; striving to welcome about 25 million visitors and about 7.5 million international visitors by 2030. Total revenue from tourists by 2020 will about 70 thousand billion VND; striving to reach 160 thousand billion VND by 2030. Tourist accommodation facilities by 2020 will has over 95,000 hotel rooms, of which the rate of 3-5 star standard rooms accounts for about 15%, striving to have about 140,000 hotel rooms in 2030, of which the rate 3 to 5 star standard rooms will occupy about 30%. Employment targets by 2020 will be creating jobs for over 400,000 employees, of which more than 130,000 direct employees, it is expected to create jobs for about 700,000 workers, of which about 230,000 direct workers. From the current situation analyzed above, based on the objectives of tourism development in the South Central Coast until 2020, vision to 2030, in order to develop

sustainably the sea-island tourism in the South Central Coast, the research proposes some following main solutions:

Firstly, do research and evaluate fully and comprehensively the tourism potentials in general, the sea and island tourism potentials in particular of the region as well as of each locality. Thence, there are appropriate mechanisms and policies to mobilize resources of all economic sectors so as to build up synchronously and modernly the essential technical infrastructure for the development of the tourism economy. Each locality in the region needs to invest in the study of various types of the sea and island tourism products with the aim of creating diversified, high-quality products to ensure maximum satisfaction of each visitor's demand.

Secondly, improve the quality of human resources; meet the development requirements of the tourism industry. We know that the success of any activity including tourism, the most decisive role is the human factor, i.e. human resources, from policy making, business strategy to the service process and create value added for tourism products. In order to improve the quality of tourism human resources, it is necessary to strengthen training and transfer knowledge and skills in tourism. Moreover, raising awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism development for all subjects is necessary for both immediate and long-term. Additionally, it also needs to invest in regional tourism training institutions and strengthen on-the-job training. Besides, it is very important to conduct training at the address and encourage, support the recognition of vocational skills for self-training at the enterprise.

Step by step build a team of dynamic and creative managers and entrepreneurs, who are able to effectively manage tourism business activities, adapt special incentive policies to attract talents to serve the tourism industry; encourage local children to return to serve their homeland after graduating from universities. Expand cooperation on tourism human resources training with local and international training institutions and organizations; attach the special importance to cooperating with other provinces in profession training in services and management.

Thirdly, protect resources and environment, ensure the sustainable tourism development. For any economic sector, the sustainable development is also associated with natural resources and the environment. This is even more important for the development of the tourism industry, especially for the sea and island tourism, where resources and the environment are considered vital to determine the existence of tourism activities.

The island and sea tourism environment in the South Central Coast has been affected and degraded due to the economic and tourism activities. Therefore, in order to prevent resource degradation and environmental pollution and to ensure the sustainable development of tourism activities, it is necessary to develop a general plan based on exploiting reasonably and effectively the potentials of natural resources and ensure the sustainable development of the ecological environment at the same time. All plans to exploit natural resources for socio-economic development must be carefully considered on the basis of scientific arguments taking into account the relationship with the relevant economic sectors and the impacts on the natural, economic-social environment.

Fourthly, strengthen propaganda and promotion of the sea-island tourism development in a sustainable way. This is a comprehensive solution to ensure for sustainable development tourism in terms of economy, resources - environment and culture - society. In order to well implement this solution, local state management agencies, as well as enterprises are responsible for organizing propaganda and educating to raise awareness about the sea and island tourism (the sea and island tourism is spearhead economic sector of the whole region) in all levels, branches and people from all classes; create and enhance the image of sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast throughout the country, in the region and in the world so as to attract tourists and capital sources for investment in tourism; raise the awareness of local communities so that they are responsible for protecting and preserving the sea resources and tourism environment.

In tourism promotion, attention must be paid to raising people's awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism development, so that all levels, branches, enterprises and residential communities understand correctly and follow the principles of sustainable tourism development. Link with industries and fields to promote tourism brands in events and activities of sectors and fields, this can create a positive impact on tourism brands. Use the influence of influential individuals in the community as celebrities to support, introduce the region's tourism brand values. Enhance the application of modern information technology such as building websites. Coordinate with mass media agencies, foreign information forces. Set up the tourism promotion offices in key markets (both domestic and international). Enlist the support of the State and the international to do the promotion of the brand of the sea and island tourism of the region effectively.

### **3. Conclusion**

South Central Coast is an area with great potentials for the sea and island tourism. This is a favorable condition to develop many attractive and unique types of tourism, including eco-friendly and highly sustainable tourism such as eco-tourism. In the past years, the development of sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast has achieved certain achievements, which make important contributions to the economy of the localities in the region, create many jobs, increase income for resident communities, contribute to poverty alleviation, economic restructuring. However, the development of the sea and island tourism in the South Central Coast is still weak, not really effective, and not commensurate with the potentials and available advantages. Additionally, the development of sustainable tourism still has many shortcomings that need to be overcome, without the close support of the branches, all levels. Therefore, it is necessary to have a more practical and effective solutions to contribute to the development of sea and island tourism in the South Central Coastal region in a sustainable way for the benefit of the local residential communities.

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