

POLICIES TO PRACTICE IN GREENING ACCOMMODATION AT WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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Abstract

The accommodations sector has embarked on 'greening' as this eco-friendly tendency transforms into a significance for survival and success in a highly competitive market. Despite the increased number of people who travel with green requirements and pressures from national and international regulations, the sector still lacks an understanding of the expectations of lodging managers. The article reports the findings of in-depth interviews conducted with hoteliers, homestay hosts and from reports of local tourism Departments to support a direction for green tourism the Hoi An world heritage site, the perspectives in influences of policies on the green approach are identified. Accommodation owners respond actively and also demonstrate their own initiative in response to the sustainable practice patterns after the Covid 19-pandemic crisis. This study contributes to the hospitality literature as it sought to uncover contemporary challenges in green tourism policies to practice for which obstacles can be addressed in order to achieve the sustainability at a World Heritage Site.

Keywords: Green Accommodation; World Heritage Site (WHS); Green Tourism Policies

Introduction

Tourism is traditionally considered a relatively green industry as a smokeless industry. Because of its associated impacts mainly on transportation and natural, land development, it has become an area of concern (Font and Tribe, 2001). The negative impacts of tourism development in developing countries have recently been discussed, therefore, recommendations and implications on green tourism products have been made by scientists, leaders and stakeholders to regulate the negative impacts of tourism. Indeed, green tourism is one of global efforts and emphasis on environmental and social aspects sustainably, taking into account the needs of industry, tourists and local communities. Much attention is paid to tourism industry development in recent years, particularly to the accommodation sector as an essentially eco-friendly part of the product creation process that determines its quality and competitiveness. An important trend of Vietnamese tourism development is the product differentiation and establishment of a green tourism industry which is recognized to be a driver of sustainable economy and green growth. Following the global trend, the greening processes of the accommodation sector as a tourism product essential component also contributes in strengthening ecological requirements for lodging sector in terms of international green standards.

Quang Nam is the only province in Vietnam with two World Tangible Cultural Heritages: Hoi An Ancient Town and My Son Temple Complex in which there is 01 Representative Intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity is Bai Choi Art; World Biosphere Reserve Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An. Quang Nam is also a place where many world cultures intersect, with more than 400 historical and cultural relics and more than 120 typical folk festivals; hundreds of traditional craft villages and preserving many indigenous cultural features of ethnic minorities in the western mountainous region. Besides, in addition to the 125km long coastline with many beautiful beaches, Quang Nam is also known as a province with rich ecosystems and biodiversity; many areas with poetic natural landscapes along the Thu Bon and Vu Gia river systems; The mountainous region has a cool climate and high forest coverage with Song Thanh Nature Reserve, Pomu forest. All have created the potential to develop many unique types of tourism in the Quang Nam province.

In addition to the negative impacts of tourism development, climate change and especially after a long period of being affected by the Covid-19 epidemic, green tourism development is considered the appropriate direction to recover and sustainable development of tourism industry. In that context, Quang Nam has made a move to invest and pioneer the trend of green tourism development with policy and specific plan No. 5177 of Quang Nam province announced and dated on August 10th, 2021 on green tourism development until 2025-2030 period that aims to enhance new, diverse, attractive tourist destinations and suit the needs of the tourist market. Thereby, the lodging sector also aims to attract a market of tourists with high spending levels, long stays together with conscious and civilized actions to contribute to sustainable development at this World heritage site. After more than 2 years of implementing the plan, green tourism development policies, along with certain achievements, many issues and challenges that need to be resolved.

Using secondary data from local tourism reports and fieldwork's results combined with 16 in-depth interviews with hoteliers and homestay host with subjects related to the green tourism development policies in Quang Nam province, the article aims to address two perspectives in policies to practice: cognitive and practical performance perspectives. The variety of the strategies suggested by Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) and Patton (1990) were applied to enhance the validity in the research methodology of this study. The results also identified a number of issues and challenges that need to be resolved in order for Quang Nam's tourism industry to achieve a green and sustainable development model in general and in hospitality's competitiveness advantage in particular at a World Heritage site in Vietnam. The following parts of the article are doing to present findings and implication in terms of:

- Green tourism and the hotelier's cognitive perspectives towards policies to practice in greening accommodation at World Heritage site in Quang Nam province
- Issues, challenges in greening accommodation process for green tourism development at World Heritage site
- Implications and conclusion

Green Tourism and the Hotelier's Cognitive Perspectives Towards Policies to Practice in Greening Accommodation at World Heritage Site in Quang Nam Province

Green tourism is not a new topic and commonly used to label nature holidays or exotic destinations (Wight, 1994), or used for tourism activities that do not harmful to the environment in which it occurs (Font and Tribe, 2001). Green tourism is a form of eco-tourism development concept and also the term used in the practice of sustainable tourism that secure the future needs of sufficient environmental, economic, social and cultural resources (Sarker, T., & Azam, M., 2011). Green tourism is an important component of sustainable tourism in which attractive destinations are home to diverse flora and fauna and cultural heritage (Furqan et al, 2010). According to Dodds and Joppe (2001), green tourism includes four components: (1) Environmental responsibility; (2) Local economic development; (3) Preserve and promote local cultural diversity; (4) Rich and satisfying experiences, engaging with nature, people, places and cultures. In short, green tourism is responsible tourism development associated with preserving culture, nature and sharing community benefits.

Green tourism is one of sustainable tools and the merits of any sustainability and green policy lie in the ability to implement it in an effective manner. Policy implementation has widely been understood as "the process through which ideas and plans are translated into practice" (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007 p. 170). Ideally, successful sustainable tourism development should involve various government departments, public and private sector companies, community groups and experts (Pigram, J. J., & Wahab, S.; 2005). These aspects have also given the complexities of

destination management with direct and indirect interests in which the dominance of small and medium enterprises (e.g., in lodging sector) with limited resources and expertise and the competing political agendas of local, regional and national governments (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001).

In Quang Nam province, the green tourism development policies has been announced and implemented while a given attention to lodging sector has been highlighted to promote the green tourism at locally, nationally and internationally. The public administration in the Quang Nam Province tends to adopt both a top-down and down-top approach, with the central government directing many local government activities and in some aspects of flexible, and most importantly, viewed as being relevant to local needs if local stakeholders are directly involved in the process to apply policies in the heritage site context (Thu, T. T; et al). One of the significant approaches is the raise the cognitive and awareness of related bodies about the contribution in green tourism development and implementing green practices in accommodation sector in particular. Specifically, how do this 'industry practitioners' understand about green tourism and its policies?

The lodging owners' awareness of green tourism would lead to green tourism practices effectively while it is a fact that not all related bodies have the same understandings and approaches to green tourism (Merli, R., et al; 2019). Results of in-depth interviews with accommodation establishments' owners in Quang Nam province, particularly at Hoi An world heritage site, indicated that middle managers of accommodation establishments believe in the benefits of operating green approach to gain the competitiveness and implementing green tourism policies is the real actions of being green hotels. One respondent shared: "....." This aim to provide customers with not only a clean accommodation environment and good for health, which is common need after the Covid-19 pandemic but also the green establishment standards of green tourism, including: green space, closeness to nature, retaining the eco-friendly soul of the accommodation establishment and local cultural values.....bringing comfort, freedom, and relaxation to visitors..."

Similar comments of other managers mentioned: "Green tourism is sustainable development, greening from space itself, construction materials, energy use and limiting plastic waste, recycling organic waste..., zero plastic waste-free hotel..." (Tra Que Green Homestay's sharing).

Although green tourism has not been fully recognized by all related bodies, in general, officials and the accommodation service business community have a more advanced awareness of building an increasingly civilized tourism environment, environmental friendliness. The strong transformation in changing awareness about green tourism development in Quang Nam province is the result of propaganda efforts to raise awareness and activities to transform the green tourism model in the business community, residents, tourists and state tourism management officials. The adaption process has positively been made day by day. In particular, from on-site observation, many tourist accommodation service businesses have practiced green tourism with specific and practical actions, depending on the business owner's ideal of life and business philosophy, and the internal capacity of the business and awareness of green tourism. With a simple understanding of green tourism, it is shared and observed that "green tourism practices of this type of accommodation only do at some tasks related to the environment, such as: changing the packaging of utilities (one simple time) to easily disposed materials; Or shower gel and shampoo containers that can be reused by refilling; Use biodegradable garbage bags; Carry out waste classification at source and provide organic kitchen waste/food scraps to local farmers for livestock production; Create many green areas in the accommodation area, wooden windows decorated with plant pots with or flowers to naturally block sunlight and

create fresh air... Initiatives on saving energy, saving raw materials and detergents are also encouraged with the goal of reducing operating costs. These accommodation establishments use disposable bottled water (plastic bottles) but can still provide "green" services using glass bottles/glasses at the request of customers when organizing events. Say no to plastic waste event here.”

As the number of businesses subscribing to metrics relating to awareness raising and promoting green and sustainable behaviours, it has been one of the authors’ experiences that compliance with the types of initiatives identified by the certification is significant. The certified property as “green” is one of the practical implementations of green tourism policies in the Quang Nam Province. Homestay is one of the popular tourist accommodation services in Hoi An world heritage site and it seems that homestay’s owners have their “own green understanding’ that comes to their actions more clearly when they are trained about green practices of ‘green homestay” from training programs delivered by Tourism and Hospitality Associations.

Some similar sharing’s from homestay owners in green implementation can be grouped into two broad categories of “place attachment of heritage values”, “perceived relevance of green operationalization. Most interviewees and respondents described the increase in quality tourists, high-end tourist that also have concerns about the environment, have good attitudes toward the environment of a World Heritage Site, tourists are looking for green accommodations. The demands motivate lodging business to perform green operationalization and the sense of place attachment of heritage values is perceived of its relevance along with natural, heritage resources and its local rural atmosphere of accommodation services. One of the common implementations is actually a sense of ‘renovation” to be greener and eco- friendly which could be listed in 6 main aspects as below:

- Take advantages of the unique, available gardener's locations (with front or back garden, near the green fields...) to renovate and turn a homestay into a “green” one with many natural, fresh green trees and local herbal plants that makes that “pure sense of leaf, of each tree in cultural surroundings.
- Utilize kitchen waste to make organic detergents for use in homestays and open workshops on making this cleaning enzyme so that guests can experience and spread its benefits to the community.
- Encourage visitors to bring personal items (brushes, toothpaste...) and only serve when guests announce a need; Place an instruction card if the customer does not need to change the pillowcase cover to limit washing and save water.
- Create a fresh living space, less plastic waste, quiet... targeting tourists with a slow, nature-oriented lifestyle; and as a spillover effect in the opposite direction, customers of this homestay also gradually have the habit of protecting the environment; less discharge into the environment.
- Preserve folk culture and rustic rural lifestyle at the homestay via story- telling, artifacts show, local products’ exhibitions at the receptions.
- Use segregated trash bins in common areas, green tourism practices at this homestay tend to be ecological, creating freedom for visitors and for the staff, too.

On the other hand, green tourism policies and practices have been understood and implemented at certain angles and levels, from small to large scale and in the different stages to be certified as “green tourist accommodation”, and the fact that it has created positive changes in the green direction. As of January 2024, Quang Nam province has 09 businesses/accommodation establishments; 03 travel businesses, and 08 attractions that meet green tourism criteria. This number is still quite limited among the total of 410 accommodation service businesses and 20,707 individual economic establishments providing services,

accommodation and catering in Quang Nam province by the end of 2022 (Department of Statistics). Quang Nam province, 2023). So, what are the challenges in Policies to implementation in greening accommodation at World Heritage site.

Issues in Greening Accommodation Process for Green Tourism Development at World Heritage Site

In general, lodging sector's awareness of green tourism policies is still not really consistent among subjects, it is mainly approached conceptually but has not gone deep into its inner meaning. The initial goal of practicing policies green tourism in accommodation service businesses is actually the 're-decoration, renovation" of physical structures and eco-friendly items and mostly to reduce costs to increase profits, but not really towards the noble goal of protecting the environment. Therefore, the first step of implementing the green tourism development plan over the past two years of Quang Nam province in 2021-2022 is to train tourism entities on the economic benefits from green tourism practices, raising awareness of the economic benefits of green tourism, willingness, and active participation to lead to real actions in the business process of the enterprise. In the new period, to reap more results from green tourism, to lengthen the list of businesses and accommodation establishments achieving green certification, 03 issues and challenges facing Quang Nam province need to be resolved as below.

Firstly, the accommodations are located in the heritage site and in the light of heritage cultural tourism product, not purely a tourist accommodation service and thus must be supplemented by separate regulations for the City People's Committee to prohibit actions in which standards such as integration, password construction, and space organization for each type of accommodation service in the heritage site have to be under the supervision of regulations for preserving heritage values. Thus, it is crucial that the awareness of workforce in this sector plays an important factor in practicing green tourism practices in addition to the pressure of international commitments, climate change and industry trends. Furthermore, it is shared by an official of the Quang Nam Tourism Association that: "The important factor is whether every business can keep up with the globally eco-friendly practices and is willing to change their business model to meet the green trends. Besides, businesses with large (scale) systems are often more difficult to convert than small and medium-sized businesses. In fact, there are large lodging businesses and system-based businesses that have established supply chains of common items for operations (also the identity of the business), which are often difficult to convert to meet the needs of green tourism criteria. Instead, these businesses have plans to "innovate certain steps in the operation, including waste treating, collecting plastic cups for recycling, or contributively participate in environmental protection activities and programs in various scope internally and externally. The issue is that these positive actions need to be recognized and should also be considered a green practice in tourism. Meanwhile, small businesses are more flexible in how they do business and can easily change business plans to keep up with trends. In particular, it will be easier for start-ups to implement green tourism, because they can design green right from the beginning in their startup idea. Therefore, building and having policies to support the green tourism startup ecosystem is a way for green tourism models to be formed and replicated in the province.

Second, the type of tourist greatly influences changes in green tourism practices. In fact, over the years, Hoi An city has good green tourism practices as international tourist groups and experts from Europe as there are high requirements for businesses in terms of social-environmental responsibility. To meet the requirements of this segment of tourists, tourism operators must be self-aware and self-change to survive. Meanwhile, after the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourist market to Hoi An in particular and Quang Nam in general has

many fluctuations, the group of international visitors from Asia tends to increase. On the other hand, domestic tourist groups also have differences, such as: MICE tourists tend to enjoy life's amenities rather than care about services that contribute to environmental protection (which can even be difficult). endure not being fully served with essential needs, or not trusting the quality of replacement materials...); Young tourist groups often follow trends; and the fact that the group of domestic tourists who consider green tourism as necessary and actively practice green tourism is still small. This requires accommodation service establishments in particular and businesses operating in the tourism sector in general in Quang Nam to have a full understanding of the customer market, and to locate customer groups to have changes in green tourism practices, both ensuring to meet customer needs, achieving business efficiency and contributing to the implementation of the province's green tourism plan.

Third, the proactive participation of businesses related to tourism activities in the province is still limited, green tourism practices have not been organized in most areas. This is partly due to the lack of a support mechanism to encourage businesses and tourist attractions to transform their business activities and provide services to meet the requirements of the Criteria or build a tourism model. Built according to green and sustainable criteria. The activities of Plan 5177 only stop at propaganda, guidance, training... on how to practice green tourism, the set of Green Tourism criteria implemented in Quang Nam province, and certifications. Green tourism only has local value; therefore, it is difficult for businesses to find benefits when participating in this set of criteria. The problem in the future is promoting and spreading the program and enhancing the value of Green Tourism certification to the national and international level. At the same time, build a support and incentive mechanism to attract investment resources and cooperation with international organizations to develop green tourism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Quang Nam province is the first model in Vietnam that has been implementing green tourism, responsible tourism for the environment, cultural preservation and for community in both practice and policy with the issuance and announcement of the country's first set of green tourism criteria. After more than 2 years of implementing the green tourism plan and applying the Green Tourism Criteria, the awareness of tourism entities in the province has had positive changes. The transition to green tourism has also been realized through basic small to large, standard green tourism practices in many fields, especially in accommodation establishments and heritage destinations. However, facing world tourism trends, climate change and especially the position of the Green Tourism Criteria, Quang Nam province needs to have solutions on policy mechanisms to promote provincial tourism development towards green and sustainable approach.

Particularly, policy implementation is only as effective as the policy are appealing and possible to operationalize in a meaningful manner as the policies also have SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) with a combined approach as related stakeholders in terms of "who" is involved in green tourism policy from business, local community, visitors, research unit/ schools, tourism administration, UNESCO, UNWTO.. that can define the benchmarks that need to achieve. The objectives would have the stages with indicators of an outcome-based approach, the commitments, responsibilities, the on-going instructions and management so that stakeholders get interested, get involved and get attached progressively to make the change and adaptation for stakeholders in tourism and hospitality industry and for communities at a world heritage site.

At the same time, the on-going orientation, funding, supports, incentives for accommodation sector greening is significant and greening should be considered as a strategic goal of the

nations that have economy national regulatory framework development and also create real opportunities and tools for the involvement of businesses as domestic accommodation establishment' competitiveness has been improved in the domestic and world markets in the future to achieve sustainable development goals. This study was primarily qualitative and more quantitative studies are recommended, whether by hotel characteristic, tourists' behaviours travellers', responsible behaviour in Practical Tips for the Global Traveler in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding green tourism development at world heritage site and to ensure the sustainable ecosystem to support the vitality of the local economy, businesses and communities sustainably while the trend towards value- based green tourism would be increasingly significant approach.

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