

L. VIET NAM

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Viet Nam's tourism sector has existed for 36 years. However, due to various reasons, it has not truly matured. For an initial period of 25 years, Viet Nam's tourism provided services to the Government's foreign guests and expatriate experts who worked in Viet Nam.

Business activities were begun in the mid-1980s, and began booming in the early 1990s. The number of international arrivals to Viet Nam between 1990 and 1995 grew on average about 40 per cent a year. In 1990, there were 250,000 international arrivals, but in 1995 there were 1.3 million, which was a five-fold increase compared to 1990. Likewise, in the same period the number of domestic travelers grew from 1.5 million to 5.5 million. In 1995, there were over 10,000 outbound Vietnamese travelers. These indicate encouraging progress, but in comparison with other countries of the region, Viet Nam's tourism is still in the early stage of development.

To meet the requirements of increasing numbers of tourist arrivals, Viet Nam has mobilized domestic and international financial resources to develop physical and technical establishments, focusing on both quantity and quality of tourism. There are over 50,000 hotel rooms, of which 26,000 are of international standard. There are large, luxury hotels like Metropole, Cuu Long (Majestic), Rex, New World, Omni, Palace, etc. A number of tourism resorts and entertainment facilities have been taking shape and have started operations. Up to the present, Viet Nam has granted licenses to 174 tourism-related foreign investment projects with total registered capital of over \$US 5 billion, ranking second in value after the industrial sector, and accounting for 26 per cent of total investment capital in Viet Nam. Tourist attractions and routes are being better managed than before. Tourism activities have generated 150,000 jobs directly and many more indirectly.

Due attention has been paid to international cooperation and promotion in the field of tourism. Viet Nam has concluded 12 agreements on tourism cooperation with all other South-East Asian countries, China, France, Uzbekistan and Israel. It will sign with other countries as well. Viet Nam is a member of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the Pacific Asian Travel Association (PATA). Many Vietnamese tourism businesses have participated in PATA, JATA and ASTA. There are also business deals with 800 partners.

PATA's Viet Nam chapter was formed in 1994. At present, it is comprised of over 70 members. These efforts contribute to helping Viet Nam integrate with the region and the world in the spirit of "Viet Nam wants to befriend all countries".

The main factors which have given impetus to the burgeoning of Viet Nam's tourism are domestic and regional peace and stability; a favourable international environment; and the renovation process in Viet Nam. These have brought about major achievements, comprehensive economic growth, political stability, bilateral and multilateral open foreign policy and friendships with all countries. This has created an attractive new image which boosts tourism development.

At the same time, it is realized that in an early stage of development, Viet Nam's tourism potential is abundant, but its tourism products are not diversified. Viet Nam's tourism marketing and promotion overseas, especially in major markets, is constrained due to a lack of staff proficient in foreign languages and multilateral cooperation experience. There is also a lack of managerial and skilled workers. Areas for world class recreation, entertainment and tourism resorts are not yet in place. The transportation infrastructure has been much improved, but it still has a weak status, especially in remote areas.

Procedures relating to international tourists need to be further revamped. In addition, with even greater competition in the tourism industry in the region and the world, little or no good preparation has been made in terms of the organizational mechanism, human resource development, technical and physical facilities, experience or expertise in tourism management. All of these elements are needed for Viet Nam's integration into the world tourism community.

Like other countries in an early stage of development, Viet Nam's tourism industry has to seek out all sources for fast, wholesome and sustainable development in order to keep up and integrate with regional and world tourism. In the socio-economic development strategy of the Government, tourism has been designated as "an important economic sector in the strategy for national socio-economic development". In the intensified process of national industrialization and modernization, the State plans to build some spearhead economic sectors, including tourism, and focus on its rapid development.

By a step-by-step, gradual approach, Viet Nam will turn into a regional class tourism destination, trade and service centre. The view is that tourism development must inherit and nourish traditional cultures, national identities and the dignity of the Vietnamese people; properly exploit natural resources and heritages; and protect ecological surroundings. This is what is meant by healthy and sustainable tourism development. Tourism development must bring about socio-economic efficiencies and at the same time guarantee national security, political stability, social order and safety.

As specifically targeted by 2000, Viet Nam should receive about 3 million international arrivals and over 10 million domestic tourists. By 2010, these figures should double. Much emphasis is on maintaining and expanding activities in both international and domestic markets, particularly organizing outbound tours for Vietnamese people.

In only four years, the world will enter the third millennium, and the last four years of this century are extremely significant for Viet Nam tourism as a driving force to enter the twenty-first century. This is why there should be a radical move to give attention not only to high growth rates or large numbers of tourists, but also to appropriate, balanced development; so that tourist flows are in harmony with development nationwide in overall infrastructure, facilities of tourism sites, destinations, accommodations and entertainment areas. This will prevent the tourism environment from being overloaded, maintain long-lasting attractiveness and enable tourists to lengthen visits and increase the number of repeat visitors by two or three times. In short, more importance should be attached to the quality of tourism.

To reach the targeted objectives, Viet Nam is making major efforts to prepare all aspects: promotion and management of planning and building the technical and physical facilities. By 2000, there needs to be 25,000 more hotel rooms as part of 10 to 15 tourist complexes located in priority areas such as Hanoi and its vicinity, Ha Long-Cat Ba-Do Son, Hue-Da Nang-Lao Bao, Van Phong Bay-Nha Trang-Ninh Chu-Dalat, Vung Tau-Long Hai-Con Dao, Ho Chi Minh and its vicinity, Ha Tien-Phu Quoc and more than 100 beaches along the coastline. There is a need for training and human resource development in tourism, education for tourism awareness among the people, diversification and improvement in the quality of tourism products, increased marketing and international cooperation aimed at expanding and attracting tourist markets. Currently, the Viet Nam Government is emphasizing administrative reform, developing infrastructure, creating favourable conditions for tourists and investors to contribute to the growth of Vietnamese tourism as a whole.

There is a great need for investment cooperation with Viet Nam in the field of tourism. Therefore, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism wishes to receive further support from other governments, international organizations and businesses.

Furthermore, it is noted that countries in an early stage of tourism development should make full use of the advantages of diversified tourism potential, exotic attractiveness, unspoiled tourism environment, and so forth. It is important to work closely under all forms of cooperation in order to help promote and invest in tourism development and share experiences. This cooperation is essential and beneficial as it gives an impetus to properly exploit tourism resources for sustainable development in the future.