

Sustainable Directions for Companies Providing Adventure Tourism in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Quang Binh Province

Nguyen Van Duy¹, Tran Van Trang², Nguyen Thi Huong Lien¹

(1. Faculty of Laws, Quang Binh University, Quang Binh, Vietnam; 2. Quang Binh Customs Department, Vietnam)

Abstract: Despite the harsh climate, Quang Binh has got the advantage of topography, unique geological tectonics and wild magnificent scenery. Including a diverse system of caves, beautiful rivers, and green primeval forests, Quang Binh has been a fascinating destination attracting many domestic and foreign tourists. These characteristics of Quang Binh are extremely favorable for the development of adventure tourism combined with experiential discovery — one of the types that attract a large number of tourists today. However, types of tourism have not been diversified. The promotional activities are limited, and ineffectively linked with localities and businesses. The article gives views and comments on sustainable tourism development, analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of Quang Binh in developing adventure tourism. It both gives appropriate directions to develop this type of tourism in a sustainable way with the desires of tourists.

Key words: Quang Binh Province, adventure tourism, Phong Nha-Ke Bang, sustainable

JEL codes: P, P2, P3

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, tourism not only brings economic benefits, protects the natural environment but also plays a role in promoting and preserving the traditional cultural values of the nation. However, it is the massive development of the tourism industry that has led to the copying of other types of tourism and tourism products such as ecotourism, shopping tourism and medical tourism... In this context, Vietnam in general and localities in particular need a complete new type of tourism to attract tourists and develop sustainable tourism. Quang Binh is a province that possesses advantages with diverse terrain, geological tectonics and a various system of caves, primeval forests, rolling mountains as well. Therefore, besides sightseeing tourism, adventure tourism is also increasingly being exploited and developed by businesses. Conquering one's limits is always attractive to everyone. That is why adventure tourism is more and more popular. Realizing the unique and mysterious geological advantages of the caves in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, travel companies in this area have exploited various types of adventure tourism, turning this place into a tourist destination. It is an attractive destination for adventurous travelers who love to explore.

Nguyen Van Duy, Doctor, Faculty of Laws, Quang Binh University; research areas: political economy, economic philosophy, politics. E-mail: nguyenvanduydhqb@gmail.com.

Tran Van Trang, Doctor, Quang Binh Customs Department; research areas: political economy, economic philosophy, politics. E-mail: trangtv73@gmail.com.

2. Method

2.1 The Method of Data Collection

- Collecting information from published research works, reports, summaries, seminars to get data on travel companies, companies providing adventure tourism services in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Quang Binh Province.
- Collecting data on natural and socio-economic conditions of Quang Binh province at departments related to tourism such as Department of Statistics, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Department of Information and Communication.
- Collecting information from reports, research on sustainable tourism, adventure tourism.

2.2 The Method of Information Analysis

From the advantages and disadvantages of economy, society, nature... in the development of adventure tourism in Quang Binh province, show the appropriate directions and solutions for sustainable development of this type of tourism.

3. Results

3.1 Perspective on Sustainable Tourism and Adventure Tourism

3.1.1 Sustainable Tourism

There is no official concept of sustainable tourism but there are many different perspective on this issue.

“Sustainable tourism development is the process of developing tourism products that satisfy the current needs of tourists, the tourism industry and local communities without compromising nature, future generations” (Lê Văn Minh, 2009, p. 4).

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), this development is concerned with long-term economic and social benefits. Moreover, this ensures the contribution to the conservation and protection of resources, maintains the cultural integrity for the development of future activities; In addition, this helps to contribute to the living standards of local communities.

Clause 14, Article 3 of the Law on Tourism 2017 defines: “Sustainable tourism development is the development of tourism that simultaneously meets socio-economic and environmental requirements, ensures harmony between the interests of the subjects participating in tourism activities, does not harm ability to meet future tourism demand” (Quốc hội, 2017).

3.1.2 Adventure Tourism

According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association, “Adventure tourism is a tourist activity that includes physical activity, a cultural exchange, or activities in nature” (Business Adventure Tourism Organization, 2019, p. 2). Adventure tourism is about connecting with a new culture or a new landscape and being physically active at the same time. It is not about being risky or pushing our boundaries. In fact, it is especially important to know and respect our limits while we are in an unfamiliar area.

This type of adventure tourism can be done domestically, abroad and overnight as well. “Adventure tourism is a journey of discovery, requiring participants to have certain skills to overcome known risks and challenges” (Tourism Bureau, 2015, p. 2).

This type of tourism also emphasizes the natural and cultural environment. Accordingly, participants will have physical activities to visit a new land or culture without having to take risks or push themselves beyond their limits. Adventure tourism is a type of travel through dangerous areas with intelligence, physical strength such as mountain climbing, canyoning, caving... “Adventure tourism is a form of tourism with many elements to explore, and experience different emotions from traveling to dangerous terrains, so the danger is also increased. And together with adventure tourism, there are adventure sports that are adapted and suitable for each type of tourism separately” (Business Adventure Tourism Organization, 2019, p. 3).

3.2 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Quang Binh in Developing Adventure Tourism

3.2.1 The Advantages

Adventure tourism has been a current trend that becomes more and more popular in the world. This has attracted many tourists to explore. With the advantage of many hills, caves, rivers and streams, Quang Binh province in general and Phong Nha-Ke Bang in particular has great potential for developing adventure tourism.

(1) Mysterious Caves, Springs System

In Phong Nha-Ke Bang, there is a system of about 300 large and small caves. Phong Nha cave system has been evaluated by the British Royal Cave Research Association (BCRA) as the world’s top valuable cave with the 4 most points: having the longest underground rivers, having the highest and widest cave mouth, the widest and most beautiful sandbanks, the most beautiful stalactites.

Each cave in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park is a different wonder with unique and mysterious geological formations that make the adventure travel journey more interesting and attractive.

No	Cave	Length, height
1.	Son Doong Cave	5 km long and 200 m high
2.	Tra Ang Cave	667 m long and 15 m high
3.	Thung Cave	3351 m long
4.	En Cave	1645 m long and 78.6 m high
5.	Khe Tien Cave	520 m long
6.	Vom Cave	15.05 km long and 145 m high
7.	Dai Cao Cave	1645 m long and 28 m high
8.	Duot Cave	3,927 m long and 45 m high
9.	Ca Cave	1,500 m long, 62 m high
10.	Tiger Cave	1,616 m long and 46 m high
11.	Over Cave	3,244 m long and 103 m high
12.	Pygmy Cave	845 m long

In particular, Son Doong cave is considered the largest natural cave in the world. This cave is located in the Phong Nha-Ke Bang cave complex. Son Doong cave is a part of an underground system that connects more than 150 other caves in Vietnam near the border with Laos. The New York Times ranked Son Doong cave at number 8 out of 52 places on the list of places to visit in 2014. This is a unique adventure tourist destination of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang.

The development of adventure tourism can focus on 3 product groups: Group of adventure tourism products in the air (travel by helicopter, paragliding, skydiving...); Group of adventure tourism products on land (picnic tourism, climbing, climbing cliffs, exploring by car, motorbike, mountain bike, exploring national parks, caves...);

Group of underwater adventure tourism products (boating, rafting, exploring waterfalls, experiencing hot mineral springs ...) Phong Nha's natural features are suitable for implementing these activities of adventure tourism.

(2) Dynamic Travel Agencies

In Quang Binh province, there are 15 destinations for adventure tourism organized by companies providing different types of adventure tourism in Phong Nha-Ke Bang. The highlights are Oxalis Adventure Tours, Jungle Boss, Greenland Travel and Phong Nha Heritage. With their own services and destinations, companies offer tourists different experiences depending on the needs and adventurous nature of the destinations that tourists want.

Greenland Travel and Phong Nha Heritage provide easy-to-use tours suitable for all ages and genders such as camping, fishing, eco-tourism, bird watching... with typical destinations such as Mooc Spring, Phong Nha Botanical Garden, Ozzo Park... Particularly, two companies - Oxalis Adventure Tours and Jungle Boss specialize in organizing adventure tours such as Forest trekking and exclusive tours exploring caves in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park area; surrounding areas with difficulty levels and challenges. Two companies are licensed to operate tourism at the caves: Son Doong, En, Va, Tien, Nuoc Nut caves and the cave system of Tu Lan. In particular, Jungle Boss company is exclusively licensed to explore the Tiger Cave system with 3 large caves: Tiger, Pygmy, Over with the point connecting these 3 caves is Kong sinkhole — the highest sinkhole in the world found so far.

With challenges tailored to each type of traveler, the companies listed above won the 2019 Certificate of Excellence from TripAdvisor, based on the best reviews from customers after experiencing adventure tourism products. These companies are aware that providing adventure tourism products requires a team of experienced consultants, senior technical guides, cave experts, porters team that ensure the safety for visitors. Therefore, all tours are carefully designed. The tour guides are also well-trained by experienced experts of the Royal Cave Research Association. The tours are organized exclusively and their program departs with a maximum of 14 guests per tour. Therefore, visitors will be completely released into nature, mountains and forests. When visitors explore and enjoy the caves, they will be so comfortable without having any noise or jostling. Over the years, travel companies in Phong Nha-Ke Bang have created jobs for local people. Moreover, they attract more than 40,000 bookings to participate in the annual discovery, contribute to bringing Phong Nha-Ke Bang closer than with friends all over the world.

3.2.2 Disadvantages

Quang Binh has a lot of potential to develop adventure tourism, but the product has not been exploited commensurate with its strengths. In addition to the advantages above, the products of adventure tourism, technical facilities, human resources for business activities are still in their early stages. The implementation of adventure tourism programs is often difficult because of the long procedures, high costs and the need for well-trained tour guides. Moreover, the companies mentioned above still find it difficult to reach many tourists because of the adventurous nature of the tours they are exclusive.

In addition, specialized adventure tours are still very limited. That leads to less revenue from this type of tourism. The tourism products are not really diversified. In particular, there are no annual policies to develop adventure tourism from local departments and agencies.

3.3 Sustainable Directions for Companies Providing Adventure Tourism in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Quang Binh Province

3.3.1 Coordinating Between Provincial Authorities, Local Authorities and Companies Providing Different Types of Adventure Tourism

To do this, it is necessary to have a long-term strategy and adequate investments to realize the potential of adventure tourism and develop this type in a sustainable way. This means that the development of adventure tourism must harmoniously share benefits for Quang Binh province, for Phong Nha-Ke Bang, for businesses and especially for local people. In order to know how to do tourism, especially adventure tourism, and how to combine with travel companies, the local authorities need to open classes. The classes will train on tourism work such as welcoming guests, serving the needs of guests: entertainment, travel, dining, accommodation... These classes also consist of teaching English for learners. Developing tourism in general and adventure tourism in particular was not only the task of the authorities, travel and accommodation businesses but also the task of the whole community.

To step up the promotion work, it is so important to strengthen the link between the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, the Tourism Association and Quang Binh Department of Culture and Sport in the construction of tourism promotion strategies, programs and plans. In addition, Quang Binh province need to coordinate with businesses to carry out promotion, link the promotion of local tourism images and brands with the promotion of adventure tourism products of enterprises.

3.3.2 Travel Companies Need to Grasp the Trend of Tourists' Access to Tourism in the Integration Period

The 4.0 technology revolution helps tourists to change the way they travel. They can choose where to stay everywhere and change the habit of finding out tourist information. Instead of using books, newspapers, leaflets... they turned to look up tourist information on the internet. Therefore, companies providing adventure travel services in Phong Nha-Ke Bang need to change to match the trend of the world, from the way of tourism, from management to promotion and advertising, travel services.... Besides managing and promoting the company's image through its own website, it is necessary to promote advertising of its exclusive types of tourism through travel websites and networks, Facebook, Instagram, videos, especially through the posts of famous Travel Bloggers.

In recent years, tourism marketing strategies have emphasized interaction and experience. The obvious manifestation is that the creation and spread of travel videos on social networking platforms Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok ... have increased sharply. Many experts consider the use of social networks as a main tourism promotion tool. It is said that social networking platforms have been still a channel to exploit potential customers for agencies, organizations and businesses in the tourism industry because of their huge user base. However, it is also the most competitive in the technology age in providing travel knowledge and trends. Therefore, besides researching popular markets and changing policies of each social network, it is necessary to pay attention to how to make and create content to catch up with new trends. In addition, when using multiple social networks in promotion, it is advisable to focus on the facilitate management, target identification, market and promotion.

In particular, travel companies needs analyze and research carefully in order to develop, connect with GenZ tourist groups, tourists from new target markets such as India, the Middle East... Moreover, creative and attractive communication campaigns through digital platforms will stimulate the needs of visitors to experience. The task in the coming time is to continue deploying technology applications and approaching new creative communication trends. This helps to carry on the effectively implement of the Digital Tourism Development Plan for the 2021-2025 period.

3.3.3 Combining Various Types of Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism not only includes climbing rapids, deep-sea diving, but also lighter activities such as camping, kayaking.... so that visitors can overcome their limitations in a new destination. Companies should

divide discovery types that are appropriate for different ages and backgrounds. Each tour must always meet different requirements compared to other tours so that customers will feel special. Moreover, in order to become the capital of adventure tourism, Quang Binh in general and Phong Nha-Ke Bang in particular need develop various types of adventure tourism. There are not only caves but also tourism companies need to exploit other types such as mountain climbing, zipline, cycling, trekking, kayaking, paragliding, diving ... This can attract tourists, compete with famous adventure tourism destinations in the region.

3.3.4 Integrating Historical-Spiritual Elements Into Tours

Spiritual tourism exploits spiritual cultural factors in the process of tourism activities that based on tangible and intangible cultural values associated with the history of shaping people's perception of the world, values of faith, religion, beliefs and other special spiritual values. Accordingly, spiritual tourism brings about spiritual emotions and experiences of people while traveling. It's so amazing to know about culture and history of destination where the travelers discover. Therefore, the travel companies should integrate historical-spiritual elements into tours in order to attract many visitors.

The guides of adventure travel companies need to be trained in different languages. This is a careful preparation to introduce the development history of mountains and caves of Vietnam with foreign languages. In the process of experiencing the tour program, Phong Nha-Ke Bang area will attract the attention of tourists, release the stresses in each line of exploring different types of tourism.

In addition, along with the development of the adventure tourism model, companies need to focus on community development by participating in community programs to conserve nature, protect the environment or contribute to the community.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the future, Quang Binh province in general and Phong Nha-Ke Bang area in particular is expected to become one of the centers of adventure tourism and nature discovery attracting many tourists everywhere in the world. The growth of companies providing different types of adventure tourism will contribute to promoting the province's adventure tourism potential. The authorities of Phong Nha-Ke Bang, local people are willing to improve conditions for companies so that they can promote and introduce this type of service to a large number of domestic and foreign tourists.

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