

# Governing about Ecotourism in the Context of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is a sustainable, efficient, and environmentally friendly economic development trend. Many countries worldwide have successfully implemented policies to manage nature conservation, biodiversity, tourist control, education, and raising awareness of ecotourism. Effective management of ecotourism is a challenge between economic development and environmental protection. In this context, the article presents the problem of ecotourism management in Ho Chi Minh City, one of the largest cities in Vietnam today. The article focuses on clarifying the concept, role, characteristics, and contents of state management of ecotourism to help improve this work's efficiency in the future.

**Keywords-** Ecotourism; Governing; Policy; Ho Chi Minh City; Vietnam.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In globalization with increasing climate change, sustainable development and environmental protection have become a top priority for many countries worldwide. Ecotourism accomplishes the three objectives of sociocultural preservation, environmental conservation, and economic development. Ecotourism accomplishes the three objectives of sociocultural preservation, environmental conservation, and economic development. The tourism industry and ecotourism, in particular, are increasingly important in Vietnam's socio-economic development.

Over the years, ecotourism has grown rapidly in many countries worldwide. In addition, it is significant to contribute to nature conservation and biodiversity protection, promote indigenous cultural values, bring significant economic benefits, create jobs, eradicate poverty, and increase income for local communities. Helping to improve people's intellectual level, public health and environmental education, cultural history, rest, and entertainment activities. In recent years, many countries worldwide, including Vietnam, have been focusing on developing ecotourism as a lucrative and

promising business that is important in attracting foreign currency for the country and localities.

Ho Chi Minh City is the largest city in Vietnam, a locality with many potential and advantages in terms of tourism resources to develop many types of tourism, including ecotourism. Ho Chi Minh City, in recent years, has achieved significant results in terms of an enormous economic scale in the country, contributing about 1/5 of GDP and more than 1/4 of Vietnam's budget revenue, being the leading locality in the country in terms of FDI attraction and import and export activities.

Ho Chi Minh City is the center of tourism in the country, with many potential advantages for tourism development. With a total area of more than 2,096 km<sup>2</sup>, there are 22 administrative units, including Thu Duc City, and 21 districts, with a population of more than 9 million people (in 2019). In the center of the City, shopping and culinary areas thrive, cultural and historical relics flourish, and many unique festival events captivate both domestic and international tourists. Ho Chi Minh City has five suburban districts that cover more than one-third of the City's area. Although the population accounts for less than one-fourth, many ecotourism resources need to be exploited.

Currently, Ho Chi Minh City has 366 attractive destinations that are assessed to be able to exploit and attract tourists, focusing mainly on four main groups of resources: natural tourism resources, tangible cultural tourism resources, and tourism resources associated with attractive manufactured works. In particular, ecotourism resources have 13 destinations formed from natural tourism, focusing on primary resources such as the Saigon River, mangrove forests, and sea and islands (Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism, 2021).

From the potential advantages of ecotourism resources, suburban districts of the City are the advantages of developing ecotourism. The combination of humanistic tourism resources in the inner city will be favorable, creating a highlight that will attract domestic and foreign tourists to visit the city more in the coming time.

However, the state management of tourism and Ecotourism during the time of the city's officials still has some limitations, such as some documents related to tourism and ecotourism of the central government and the City's leaders are still slow to be implemented, bringing low efficiency. In some management units, the head has not proposed many practical solutions to support and guide investors, owners of garden houses, points, and ecotourism areas in developing tourism products to improve economic life. In addition, officials and civil servants in charge of implementing and managing state policies on ecotourism do not specialize in training the right ecotourism industry. Therefore, the quality and number of the City's state management team on ecotourism are still limited in terms of expertise. They do not have a deep understanding of the field in charge, so there are few breakthrough solutions to develop effective Ecotourism.

Therefore, in recent years, the management of Ecotourism has faced many difficulties and has not promoted the potential of Ecotourism. Therefore, the contribution rate of this type of tourism to the tourism industry budget is still limited. In order to improve the efficiency of the City's management of ecotourism in the future, based on researching state management policies on ecotourism in the world, draw lessons and experiences to apply to Ho Chi Minh City in the coming time. To carry out the research, the author uses methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, and comparison of relevant domestic and foreign sources to implement the proposed contents.

## II. ECOTOURISM CONCEPT

The International Ecotourism Association defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) defines "tourism that consists in traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the

scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas. This idea, which refers to the goal of ecotourism to study and travel with an appreciation for the natural world and the cultural values uncovered, first surfaced very early. However, the concept does not mention the content of environmental conservation, community participation, and improving the welfare of local communities, contributing to job creation, poverty alleviation, climate change emission reduction, and the application of the information industry to the management and development of ecotourism.

In Vietnam, the concept of ecotourism appeared in the mid-90s of the 20th century. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (1999) defines "*ecotourism as a type of tourism based on nature and indigenous culture, associated with environmental education, contributing to conservation and sustainable development efforts, with the active participation of local communities.*" This definition is the premise for future legal regulations on ecotourism in tourism law.

Le Huy Ba (2000) defines "*ecotourism as a type of tourism that takes specific and natural ecosystems to serve tourists who love nature, travel, enjoy landscapes, or study ecosystems. It is also a close and harmonious combination of tourism economic development with introducing the country's beautiful scenery and education, propaganda and protection, sustainable development of the environment and natural resources.*" The author believes that millennium-based ecotourism serves many different needs of tourists. Associated with economic development, education, propagation, environmental protection, and development in a sustainable way. However, the author has not mentioned the management of ecotourism, attracting the population community, and applying information technology to manage and develop ecotourism sustainably.

Nguyen Van Thanh (2016) stated that ecotourism is a type of tourism based on natural landscapes, artificial landscapes, cultural relics, historical relics, and traditional ways associated with environmental education, contributing to conservation; at the same time, disseminate some basic knowledge of ecology to many different subjects at different levels. Moreover, ecotourism also contributes to exchanges and learning about customs between localities in the country and between countries. The author believes ecotourism can be a type of tourism based on natural landscapes, which are entirely natural but dominated by human management. Ecotourism can be understood as planted forests, high-yield fields, national parks, and artificial lakes. Moreover, historical relics, cultural relics, and revolutionary historical relics are also objects of ecotourism.

The Vietnam Tourism Law 2005 states that *ecotourism is a form of tourism based on nature, associated with local cultural identity with community participation for sustainable development* (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005).

The above concept mentions that ecotourism content is a nature-based content associated with indigenous cultural identity for sustainable development. The term "sustainable development" has had an essential meaning for the formulation and implementation of the national strategy on green growth and sustainable development of the government of Vietnam for many years.

In 2017, the Vietnam Tourism Law 2017 was amended and clarified. *Ecotourism is a type of tourism based on nature, associated with local cultural identity, with the participation of the community, combined with education on environmental protection* (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017). The above concept has inherited the concept of ecotourism in the 2005 Tourism Law but has been expanded in terms of combining education and environmental protection. For ecotourism, this content has a distinctive meaning. The phrase "sustainable development" is eliminated from the aforementioned notion. Nevertheless, the use of the information sector in the administration and growth of ecotourism is left out.

From the analysis of the above definitions, we can conceptualize ecotourism as a type of tourism based on ecotourism resources linked with indigenous cultural values, actively involving the community, and contributing to the sustainable development of the local economy. Associated with a sense of responsibility to educate and protect the ecological environment, not to change the ecosystem and climate, and to minimize negative impacts on the culture and environment of the local community. Contributing to job creation, poverty alleviation, and application of the information industry to manage and develop ecotourism.

### **III. CHARACTERISTICS OF STATE MANAGEMENT OF ECOTOURISM**

State management of ecotourism is using power tools by state management agencies from the central to local levels to influence ecotourism activities to orient, mobilize, and develop to achieve the set goals, at the same time, creating the best conditions for organizations, individuals, and businesses of different economic sectors to operate effectively. Based on relying on the inherent potential of ecotourism to preserve and promote the values of natural resources, humanistic tourism resources, and local cultural identity values, To develop human resources to attract the participation of the population community, create jobs, eradicate hunger, reduce poverty, and improve people's lives, sustainably combining education and environmental protection, contributing to the socio-economic development of the locality and the country.

According to Pasape et al. (2015), good governance about ecotourism is part of sustainable cultural, rural, and natural tourism. Cultural tourism encourages people to visit cultural attractions away from

their usual place of residence in order to gain new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs.

According to UNESCAP (2004), the main aim of good governance is to ensure that organizations achieve their goals and produce valuable results. Therefore, good governance can focus on a top-down approach taken by the national centralized agency with clear bureaucratic procedures or decentralized governance in the form of local agencies acting autonomously through networks and public-private partnerships or cooperation with community organizations. According to UNESCAP (2009), good governance should have six key principles: Purpose and outcomes visible, functions and roles clearly defined, values reflected in stakeholders' behavior, taking decisions and justifying them, developing capacity and capability, and engaging all the stakeholders.

According to Nguyen Thi Huyen Huong (2020), state management of tourism is the impact of state power on tourism activities in order to create unity in tourism organization and activities, ensure tourism development while still conserving resources, maintain and develop culture, protect the legitimate rights and interests of tourists, organizations, and individuals engaged in tourism activities, and encourage all economic sectors to participate in tourism development.

Thus, the essence of state management of ecotourism is that state management agencies from central to local levels use their power tools to influence ecotourism activities to orient, mobilize, and develop to achieve the set goals.

At the same time, it creates the best conditions for organizations, individuals, and businesses in different economic sectors to operate effectively. Based on relying on the inherent potential of ecotourism to preserve, preserve and promote the values of natural resources, humanistic tourism resources, and local cultural identity values, develop human resources to attract the participation of the community, create jobs, eradicate hunger and reduce poverty, improve people's lives; combining education and sustainable environmental protection, contributing to the socio-economic development of the locality and the country.

### **IV. STATE POLICIES ON ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT IN HO CHI MINH CITY**

**4.1. Policies from the Central Government to Ho Chi Minh City:** In order to create a solid legal corridor for the state management of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, in recent years, central agencies and leaders of Ho Chi Minh City have issued many policies, Laws related to ecotourism as follows:

- Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW dated January 16, 2017, of the Politburo on developing tourism into a key economic sector;

- Resolution No. 31-NQ/TW dated December 30, 2022, on directions and tasks for developing Ho Chi Minh City to 2030 and vision to 2045.
- Vietnam Tourism Law 2017;
- Resolution No. 98/2023/QH15 of the National Assembly piloting specific mechanisms and policies for the development of Ho Chi Minh City;
- Decision No. 147/QD-TTg dated January 22, 2020, of the Prime Minister approving the "Strategy for Vietnam's Tourism Development to 2030";
- Decision No. 1528/QD-TTg dated September 14, 2021, of the Prime Minister approving the task of adjusting the general planning of Ho Chi Minh City to 2040, with a vision to 2060;
- Resolution 12-NQ/TU, dated September 26, 2022, of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee on the development orientation of Can Gio district to 2030;
- Decision 1528/QD-UBND dated April 21, 2023, of the City People's Committee on the implementation of the Project to raise public awareness of agricultural and rural tourism in the City to 2030;
- Decision No. 3364/QD-UBND dated August 13, 2018, approving the outline and tasks of the Ho Chi Minh City Tourism Development Strategy to 2030, Along with many other important documents to create a favorable legal corridor for the City government to implement specific mechanisms and policies and develop tourism in general and ecotourism in particular more effectively.

The policies of the management in Ho Chi Minh City on ecotourism have many characteristics as follows:

State management entities formulate, implement and implement policies and laws on state management of ecotourism;

To build and improve the management apparatus and develop human resources for ecotourism to meet the needs of the tourism industry and society, which is considered an effective tool of state management in the fields of social life in general and ecotourism in particular;

Organize the propagation, dissemination, and education of environmental protection policies and laws and raise awareness for subjects participating in ecotourism activities;

Organizing trade promotion, linking domestic and international cooperation to propagate and promote typical and unique eco-tourism products that lead to tourists increase revenue for the local and national tourism industry;

Develop tour programs and typical eco-tourism gifts so that tourists have more options to experience and shop;

Implementing administrative reform, digital transformation, and using renewable technology and applying green technology;

Supervise, inspect, and sanction law violations to ensure security and order in ecotourism activities in the area under their management.

**4.2. The current situation of Ecotourism in Ho Chi Minh City:** Ho Chi Minh City, in recent years, has achieved significant results in terms of an enormous economic scale in the country, contributing about 1/5 of GDP and more than 1/4 of the national budget revenue, being the leading locality in the country in terms of FDI attraction and import and export activities. With nearly 30% of businesses operating nationwide, Ho Chi Minh City plays an important role in the national economy. In the overall economic contribution of Ho Chi Minh City, the tourism industry and the state management of ecotourism are also contributing.

Ho Chi Minh City is the center of tourism in the country, with many potential advantages for tourism development, particularly ecotourism. With a total area of more than 2096 km<sup>2</sup>, there are 22 administrative units, including 01 Thu Duc City, 16 districts, and five districts, with a population of more than 9 million people (in 2019). In the center of the City, shopping and culinary areas thrive, cultural and historical relics flourish, and many unique festival events captivate both domestic and international tourists. In particular, the City has five suburban districts that account for more than 1/3 of the City's area. The population accounts for less than 1/4, but many ecotourism resources must be exploited. Specifically, Can Gio district is about 55 km Southeast of the City center, has a coastline of about 20 km long, has Thanh An island, has thousands of hectares of mangrove forest, is Vietnam's first world biosphere reserve, along with a rich and diverse ecosystem is a potential advantage for ecotourism development. Cu Chi district, with revolutionary historical relics and many potentials for the development of traditional industries, is preserved and developed in association with ecotourism, rattan, and bamboo handicraft villages, rice paper villages, along with many ripe rice fields, garden houses under vast orchards associated with ecotourism. In addition, the districts of Binh Chanh, Hoc Mon, and Nha Be have soon formed eco-tourism points and areas based on natural resource conditions along rivers, canals, Saigon and Dong Nai rivers, orchards, amusement parks, relaxation, rest areas, and rich cultural and historical sites and sites. Currently, Ho Chi Minh City has 366 attractive destinations that are assessed to be able to exploit and attract tourists, focusing mainly on four main groups of resources: natural tourism resources, tangible cultural tourism resources, and tourism resources associated with attractive manufactured works. In particular, ecotourism resources have 13 destinations formed from natural tourism, focusing on primary resources such as the Saigon River, mangrove forests, and sea and islands.

However, the state management of tourism and Ecotourism during the time of Ho Chi Minh City's officials still has some limitations, such as some documents related to tourism and Ecotourism of the central government and the City's leaders are still slow to be implemented, bringing low efficiency. For example, in some agencies and units, the heads have not proposed



many practical solutions to support and guide investors, owners of garden houses, eco-tourism spots, and resorts to develop tourism products to improve economic life; some officials and civil servants who are the subject of state management of Ecotourism have not many professional training in the right ecotourism industry.

Due to the quality and number of Ho Chi Minh City's state management team in Ecotourism, there is still limited expertise lack of in-depth knowledge of the field in charge, so there are not many breakthrough solutions for effective ecotourism development; tourism human resources in general and Ecotourism, in particular, are lacking in quantity, poor quality, and there are many fluctuations in quantity due to the impact of the epidemic situation; the propagation and dissemination of legal education on in-depth ecotourism has not been universal to all subjects. Due to the lack of diversification of forms and creative propaganda content in cyberspace, some markets and territories with potential for ecotourism have not been exploited much. Due to the lack of favorable flight routes, some countries' national security situation is unstable, and service costs are still quite high. Post-inspection work faces difficulties because businesses often change addresses or stop operating without notice.

From the potential advantages of ecotourism resources, suburban districts of the city are the advantages of developing ecotourism. The combination of humanistic tourism resources in the inner city will be favorable, creating a highlight to attract domestic and foreign tourists to visit the city more in the coming time.

## **V. ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT IN THE WORLD AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR HO CHI MINH CITY**

Currently, ecotourism management is called many different names around the world. Depending on the specific characteristics of the situation of each country, different agencies and organizations are established to perform management tasks to bring the highest efficiency. With many rich practical lessons and diverse experiences from countries around the world. Ho Chi Minh City can learn from the successful ecotourism management policies of some typical countries as follows:

Thailand is a country that has achieved many successes in the process of implementing policies to develop ecotourism and green tourism with sustainable development. The Thailand government has continuously strengthened the development of environmental protection strategies, clearly identifying what needs to be done; promoting propaganda to improve capacity, awareness, and awareness of the protection of natural resources and the tourism environment; strengthening the development and implementation of environmental protection schemes and tasks in the field of tourism. To improve the effectiveness of the state management of

environmental protection in the field of tourism; strengthening adaptation and mitigating the impacts of climate change; improve the capacity to control environmental pollution; carry out strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments, and environmental protection plans for tourism development schemes and projects following current regulations; encourage tourism service establishments to use clean energy, renewable energy, recycled and reusable products, apply clean technologies to limit environmental pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Chien Thang, 2019). From there, Ho Chi Minh City can learn from Thailand's experience in developing environmental protection strategies, implementing, and evaluating environmental protection strategies; continue to promote the mobilization of the City's people not to litter on roads, canals, rivers and seas; continue to develop a model of building eco-tourism in Thieng Lien community, Thanh An commune, Can Gio district without plastic waste, linking eco-tourism to the community exploiting traditional salt-making skills in the sea culture.

Malaysia is a country that implements tourism development policies following the resource base, prioritizing unique resources, minimizing the impact on culture, society, and the environment, and bringing benefits to the local community. Many tourism products are associated with nature conservation, environment, opportunities to have jobs, increased income for local communities; encourage households and local people to participate in providing tourism products and services; implementing the Sustainable Ecotourism Development Program; do a good job of communication, promotion, and introduction; investment and development of infrastructure, material, and technical materials; expand the network of protected areas and supplement regulations and policies suitable for the protection of the environment and natural resources; providing and disseminating information on strategies and policies; improve human resource capacity through seminars and thematic training courses (Nguyen Lan Huong, 2020). From there, Ho Chi Minh City can learn from Malaysia's experience in developing tourism products associated with nature and environmental conservation, creating job opportunities, increasing income for local communities in districts in the City, focusing on investment, developing multi-story technical facilities for ecotourism; continue to promote the results of the 2019 Contest of the City Department of Tourism on the Contest "Design and exploitation of ecological and agricultural thematic tourism programs," awarded 07 typical programs.

The Korean government has implemented roads along significant rivers to attract tourists, combining sports and sightseeing with auxiliary works; organizing a camping festival to move by bicycle; developed and operating the programs "The Beauty of Slowness" and "Slow City." Each year, select and support the top ten ecotourism models in the country and prioritize the

development of selected tourist destinations, building green ecological urban areas, providing green ecological entertainment areas for urban people, and improving the quality of life (Mai Thu, 2021). From Korea's experience, Ho Chi Minh City can learn lessons from organizing bicycle camping festivals and implementing eco-trail development projects on beautiful roads in suburban districts. Each year, many ecotourism models of the City will be selected and supported, prioritizing the development of selected ecotourism destinations as typical models for other localities to learn to develop Can Gio district into an eco-tourism City, reaching out to the region and the world-based on planning to build a green eco-urban area, providing green eco-entertainment areas for urban people and improving the quality of life.

Moreover, Ho Chi Minh City can learn from the experiences of the countries of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Scotland, and Sweden on the management and development of ecotourism exploitation of the World Biosphere Reserve, specifically as follows: For the World Biosphere Area of the Rhon Region - Federal Republic of Germany, policymakers and local communities agreed to develop the whole region, grow apples, and raise sheep for tourism. Good management of ecotourism development specialized commercialization; improve the professional skills of officials and people in management related to tourist guidance in protected areas; implement policies and regulations on collecting fees from ecotourism to generate profits to raise funds for conservation and sustainable development. From there, the City can learn from the experience of the Federal Republic of Germany in focusing on training human resources for ecotourism to meet the new situation, improve the quality and quantity of the state management apparatus on ecotourism, develop new tourist areas and attractions to attract the participation of the population community to exploit indigenous cultural traditions for tourism; planning for the development and exploitation of shoals and rivers for aquaculture in mangrove forests to serve tourists.

For the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire World Biosphere Area - the Republic of Scotland, the role of business is clearly shown in the social aspect, not only contributing economically but also having social responsibility, not only stopping at the movement but going into substance, solving practical problems. Implementing a tourism program with the motto "You are part of the biosphere" and "Biosphere Ambassador" or the World Biosphere Area of the Vaner Islands, Kinnekulle – Sweden has launched an initiative to take photos or record clips of the activities of tourists to create album collections, video clip in which they are members of the biosphere. With the help of GPS locators and geographic maps, visitors become "ambassadors," praising the beauty of the biosphere and genuinely becoming an integral part of the biosphere. The City government can study the above model to implement in the Can Gio mangrove forest biosphere reserve and assign the Can Gio

Protection Forest Management Board, which is the forest management unit, to develop a plan to implement the model "You are part of the biosphere" and "Biosphere Ambassador" to try with afforestation activities.

Australia and Norway have done a good job of controlling the number of tourists and environmental impact to manage the number of visitors to environmentally sensitive areas to protect healthy ecosystems. South African and New Zealand countries have encouraged local community involvement in ecotourism development programs and support for indigenous communities. Ethnic minorities, in particular, can play an important role in providing tourism services, conducting tours, or managing nature reserves. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh City can promote sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and the preservation of local culture. For Ho Chi Minh City, it is possible to learn to build and develop community ecotourism destinations to more effectively control the number of visitors according to priority segments to welcome eco-tourists to have time to focus on expanding and developing diverse eco-tourism products to serve tourists and attracting the participation of the local community to provide tourism products about salt making, listening to the Tai Tu song, enjoying seafood specialties, especially attracting ethnic minorities of Cham, Hoa, and Khmer who have lived and worked for a long time in Ho Chi Minh City, to strengthen the role of households participating in providing tourism and ecotourism products and services typical for domestic and foreign tourists.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Based on theoretical issues of state management of ecotourism, the concepts, characteristics, roles, and essential contents of state management have been analyzed and clarified. We can see that the state must manage tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, and this management is necessary and must be viewed from many scientific perspectives. We need to assess the current situation and propose solutions to improve the efficiency of state management of ecotourism for local, national, and international areas in the future. It requires the management entities of countries, including Vietnam, to have clear strategies and plans to meet new needs, creatively apply international experiences to the specific situation of their localities and countries to improve the efficiency of state management of ecotourism and minimize negative impacts on the environment in The development process of ecotourism.

In the context of globalization with the current trend of green economic development, sustainable growth and implementation of ecotourism development management policies have become key factors in countries' development strategies worldwide. The success of many countries worldwide has proven that ecotourism development is the "golden key" to sustainable development. In line with the trend of the times, from a

very early age, Vietnam, in general, and Ho Chi Minh City, in particular, has implemented many policies related to the management and development of ecotourism, from studying the ecotourism management policies of the countries around the world mentioned above with many valuable lessons and experiences that Ho Chi Minh City can learn and effectively apply in the state management of tourism in general, ecotourism in particular. The above experiences are practical solutions for the state management of ecotourism and implementing national strategies for green economic development, sustainable growth, and environmental protection in the long term. Finally, ecotourism can promote other tourist activities in the City, and it deserves to be the center of tourism for the whole country.

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