



MEASURES TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF TOURISM PRODUCTS IN HCMC

by AN CÔNG KHAI & MEcon. ĐỖ THANH NĂM

I. HCMC TOURISM PRODUCTS

The HCMC tourism industry, in spite of effects by the Asian financial crisis in the years 1997- 1999, regained its growth rate in 2000 and sees a bright future. Its products, however, fail to fully satisfy both foreign and local visitors. This failure could be seen in the following facts:

1. Incompetence of workers in the tourism industry: In recent years when supplying services to tourists has become a profitable business, the workforce of this industry became larger but they have different levels of knowledge, skills and philosophy and only a small portion of them received formal education and training. Many tour guides fail to give basic information about local history or culture. Some textbooks in hospitality and tourism used in universities and colleges are merely compiled from foreign sources and they are usually too theoretical and prove to be inapplicable to Vietnam. At present, faculties of tourism of many universities allow their students to serve apprenticeship with tourism companies but no arrangement with these compa-

nies is made and no requirement for apprenticing students is set, therefore this effort didn't produce intended results. In fact, these faculties could help tourism companies with many tasks but some companies are reluctant to cooperate with these faculties.

2. Lack of quality, creativity and uniqueness in tourism products: Local tourism companies can bridge the gap between local and foreign tourism industries by making the best use of foreign experience, but some of them apply mechanically foreign models without paying attention to Vietnamese cultural and economic conditions, some others have tried to create new products but their efforts ended in failure and couldn't meet increasingly high demand of tourists. Many companies only pursue short-term goals and profit, and they have caused damage to tourism resources. Most hotels could only engage in price competition instead of offering better quality of products or services. The supply of bad- quality products to tourists, making them feel deceived, is widespread. That is why many for-

ign tourists had bad impressions of Vietnam.

3. Lack of cooperation between companies and tourism authorities: The lack of cooperation between companies in different provinces prevents diversification of tourism products. Localism found in tourism authorities and the red tape also hinder the development of tourism industry.

II. MEASURES TO IMPROVE HCMC TOURISM PRODUCTS

To improve the quality of HCMC tourism products, the following problems should be solved:

(1) Workforce: This is the most important problem to the tourism industry now. We should estimate the development of a tourism company by its personnel, not by its facilities, because it is the human resource that determines the quality of tourism products. To train a competent workforce, however, requires a lot of time and joint efforts. The tourism industry should reform its management, train (or retrain) its existing workforce and make plan to attract new talent and form an army of under-

studies. Faculties of tourism should innovate their curricula; facilities for study and teaching methods with a view to bridging the gap between theory and practice.

In training new workers, it's necessary to make the best use of help from foreign organizations in all forms: long- and short-term scholarships; exchange of teachers and students, etc.

A close relation between universities and tourism companies should be formed with a view to helping students practice their skills: the university will organize students into groups that serve their apprenticeship with tourism companies according to preset programs; while companies create favorable condi-

tory content of tourism products because they are advantages of tourism industry in Vietnam and HCMC as well. This direction is suitable to the foreign policies adopted by the Government and the Party, and at the same time helps create unique tourism products. Making the best use of past experience is also an important task. We should learn foreign experience and apply any policy or practice appropriate to Vietnamese economic conditions and historical features. To create unique tourism products, tourism authorities and companies should carry out researches into new product development. A perfect tourism product should have high quality and include all related services. The

linked with tourist resorts and their socioeconomic development plan always harmonizes with tourism development plan.

(3) Government control: Tasks of examining, approving and licensing organizations and individuals supplying services to tourists should be beefed up. In making regulations on the tourism industry, joint effort and cooperation between different governmental bodies are necessary and important with a view to struggling against localism, monopoly and unfair competition. All governmental bodies and tourism companies should be aware of common interests and targets so they can work together in harmony.



tions for their practice and recruit new workers among good students and encourage students to take part in researches into new tourism products.

Clubs for tourism workers could be formed to help them exchange experience and knowledge and through these clubs, new managerial methods and skills could be disseminated. Magazines and newspapers published by tourism companies should be improved in the direction of supplying more information and experience needed for tour agents and workers.

Salary scale for tourism workers should be reformed with a view to helping them, especially well-trained ones, feel sure of their career. In addition, preferential treatment scheme is also needed to attract new talent and prevent brain drain.

(2) Quality of tourism products: One of problems worth considering is how to enhance the culture and his-

quality of services in terms of their diversity, comfortableness and availability should be improved. To achieve this aim, new techniques and facilities should be introduced to tourism concerns and prices of services should be set reasonably.

To ensure the feasibility of the product strategy, full attention should be paid to the globalization trend and town planning (combining the plan to develop the tourism business with the HCMC socioeconomic development plan). After planning is done, necessary projects should be carried out to implement the plan. In making development plan, Singaporean and Malaysian experience is worth studying. In these countries, areas are zoned according to the socioeconomic development plan. In making a plan for an area, different projects are worked out on which investment policies are based. That is why all of their industrial estates are

(4) Encouragement to tourism industry: To facilitate the development of tourism industry, the government should ensure tourists a swift passage through customs and immigration formalities, allow all sectors to take part in the tourism industry and educate the public in how to help with tourism growth with a view to attracting more foreign visitors to Vietnam. This effort will reflect changes in approaches and philosophy adopted by the tourism industry.

Improvements in the HCMC tourism industry will contribute a lot to the local economic development. The gap between HCMC tourism industry and its foreign rivals should be bridged. It should offer commercial tourism products that are saleable in both existing and potential markets. This enterprise requires a lot of efforts from various governmental bodies, all tourism companies and the public as well. ■