

Potentials For Tourism Development in Phú Quốc Island

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The Phú Quốc Island has been long known to both nationals and foreigners as Pearl Island because of its mysterious and appealing beauty. Many experts agree that no island in Vietnam or Asia as a whole has better potentials than Phú Quốc for development of ecotourism. The following are some of its potentials.

1. Natural resource

a. Forest

The Phú Quốc forest area is 37,000 hectare. The national park is 31,422 hectares. Most of forests are in the north and northeast of the island. Statistics show that the Phú Quốc forest houses over 530 species of flora and eight of them are endemic to Vietnam. Of 42 species included in the Red List, there are 11 extinct or critically-endangered ones, 20 rare, eight endangered and three near threatened ones. The forests have many kinds of precious wood; over 1,000 precious herbs. As for faunas, there are over 150 species and 23 of them are included in the Red List, such as white-handed gibbon, Siamese crocodile, Malayan honey-bear, and red-giant flying squirrel. As for faunas endemic to Phú Quốc besides Phú Quốc dog (*canis dingo*), there are yellow wagtail and crimson sunbird.

b. Ocean

Phú Quốc is in the Thai Gulf and has abundant maritime resource that supplies some 0.5 tonne of aquatic product a year with exploitability of some 2,000 tonnes. Many kinds of fish are of high value, such as cod, tuna, lizardfish, solopsis, snapper, and especially anchovy that is used as raw material for the well-known

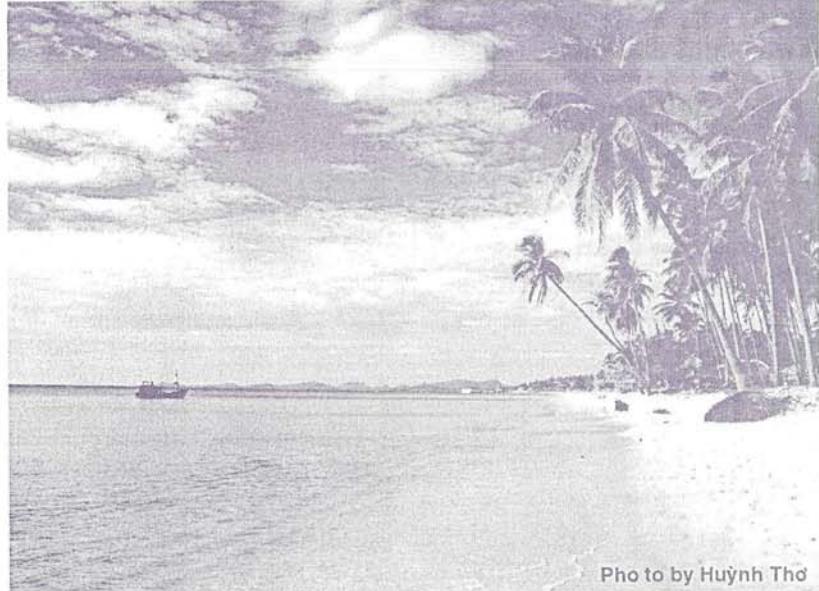


Photo by Huỳnh Thủ

Phú Quốc fish sauce. Many other aquatic products could also be exploited for production and tourism:

- Echinoderms: Thirty-two species of this group are found around Phú Quốc and many of them are of high value.

- Sea weed: There are 98 species of sea weed in Phú Quốc. They become food and accommodation for many kinds of fish and could be used as raw materials for various specialties.

- Dolphin: There are a lot of dolphins around Phú Quốc and Thủ Chu islands. Some schools include hundreds of them. Some common species are Irrawaddy dolphin and striped dolphin. Most of them are killed accidentally. Some 20% of them stay alive after being caught in nets because fishermen return them to the sea. The dead ones are usually left to the sea or buried in land or used as fertilizer.

- Sea turtle: Sea turtle around Phú Quốc includes hawksbill turtle, green turtle, and etc. They

have once been numerous around Phú Quốc but become rare now.

- Pet fish: Fish that could be kept as pet are found in abundance in coral reefs. The most common are damselfish, wrass, and butterflyfish. Damselfish of various orders are dominant among coral reef fishes around Phú Quốc.

c. Freshwater resource

With high rainfall and water area of 456 square kilometers, Phú Quốc has an abundant source of ground water (streams are 0.42 km long per a square kilometer). Most stream and rivers are short and steep and there is no large lake or pond with the result that they cause soil erosion during the rainy season. But they also create many beautiful streams and springs, such as Tranh, Dá Bàn, and Tiên Springs. Reservoirs could be built based on these springs to serve various purposes, including tourism.

d. Habitat

- Beaches: There are 14 beaches that can be developed

into beautiful resorts along with smaller ones in surrounding islets. These beaches are steep enough to serve tourists with various activities. They are still wild places and adjacent to forests where potentials for ecotourism are promising. Some of famous beaches are as follows:

+ Sao Beach: It's in the east of the island and 2.3 km long. It is rather wide and covered with white sand, bordered by some small hills that are from 70 to 150 meters high. The beach is rather even and slightly steep. Local government has made plan to build some 5-star hotels, a golf course and an international conference center.

+ Khem Beach: It's next to the Sao Beach and considered as the most beautiful one in Phú Quốc. It's some 1.2 km long, covered with white sand and separated from other beaches by low hills with beautiful cliffs ideal for fishing and diving.

+ Đất Đỏ Beach: It's in Nam An Thới Commune, some 1.2 km long and covered with reddish sand. The sea water here is blue and clear, and free from winds and waves all year round.

+ Trường Beach: It is 12 km long and adjacent to Bà Kéo- Cửa Lấp Beach. This is the biggest beach in Phú Quốc. According to the development plan, it will become a major trading center and new town. Bungalows could be appropriate to this beach.

+ Bà Kéo – Cửa Lấp Beach: It's near to Dương Đông Town and has yellow sand and clear water. Many resorts have been built here by both foreign and local investors. Due to poor planning and management, its development fails to exploit the beautiful landscape.

+ Ông Lang Beach: It's on the west shore and also near to Dương Đông. It comprises many small and separate beaches creating private spaces for tourists

who want to have full rest and relax. Although the beaches are small, various headlands around them are beautiful and appropriate for fishing because fish is abundant here.

- Islets:

+ Nam An Thới: The biggest group of islets is the Nam An Thới with the Thơm Islet as the largest one. All islets have beach of yellow sand, small but beautiful. Most of them are wild and have no resident, except for the seat of commune on the Thơm Islet.

+ Móng Tay Islet: It is some 500 m from the Dài Beach and belongs to the Gành Dầu Commune. It is still wild and has no resident but some small beach and headlands where one can catch many fishes. At present, some tourists usually go fishing there and enjoy their picnic.

+ Mật Islet: It's adjacent to the Thơm Beach, Hòn Thơm Commune, and has wild and beautiful landscapes. Many investors like this islet because it is separate and ideal for high-quality resorts.

- Coral reefs and sea weeds:

Coral reefs are in abundance in the group of islet Nam An Thới, especially around such islets as Xưởng, Móng Tay, Vong, and Gầm Ghi. They are in the zone protected according to rules of preservation of sea weed and coral reefs. Sea weed is found along beaches from Nam An Thới to Bắc Islet. Statistics show that there are 89 species of hard coral; 19 ones of soft coral, 125 species of fish, 132 species of mollusk, 32 species of echinoderm and 62 species of sea weed. It's reported that hawksbills and dugongs also appear around there.

- Other scenic spots:

+ River: Phú Quốc has more rivers than any islands of Vietnam. The total drainage basin is some 456 square kilometers equaling 77% of the island area.

Main rivers are Cửa Cạn, Dương Đông and Rạch Đàm. Some smaller streams are Tràm, Vũng Bầu, Cá, Cửa Lấp, Cốc, etc. Most of them run from mountains in the northeast to the southwest shore.

+ Spring: Besides primeval forests, beautiful beaches, streams winding between hills and mounts, there are many springs from mountains all over Phú Quốc. They are almost dry in the dry season and full of water in the rainy ones. Tourists can enjoy them because their water is fresh and clear.

+ Mount: The peak Núi Chùa of the Hàm Ninh mount is some 560 meter high with an area of some 40 hectares on its top. From there, ones can see different parts of the island and many islets on the sea. This place can be turned into a tourist attraction.

- Local products:

Phú Quốc is famous for its fish sauce, black pepper and spirit made from rose myrtle fruits. Fish sauce shops and pepper gardens will be tourist attractions.

2. Cultural and historical resources

Phú Quốc is considered as the cradle of the Caodaism. There is an old Caodaist temple in Dương Đông Town. There is only one Catholic church on this island (in the An Thới town) around which one can find many families who migrated from the North in 1954. Buddhist pagodas attract many believers in the full-moon day.

Local residents have many festival and rites. They worship whales in many shrines and temple and hold the Nghinh Ông (welcoming the whale) festival every year. This custom is very common among coastal districts from Thanh Hóa to Kiên Giang Province. Some say it comes from Champa belief while others maintain that it is from Buddhist tradition.

The Nghinh Ông Festival attracts crowds of residents from all over Phú Quốc. It begins in early morning when a group of elders board a big boat covered with flowers and banners along with traditional music band and a lion dance group. They go to a shrine to conduct rites offering incense and spirit. Then they come back to the quay to bring a symbol of the whale to a mausoleum, carry out complicated rites in commemoration of ancestors. A lot of spirit, flowers and tea are used for these rites. At this festival, tourists can see performance shows of lion dance groups, traditional theater group and martial art experts. This festival aims at praying for safety for fishermen on the open sea and good catches of fish, and reminding residents of their obligations towards parents, families and other people.

Pioneers came to Phú Quốc when the Mekong Delta was still a waste and wild area. It was also a base for Nguyễn Trung Trực, a national hero, to fight against French invaders. During the Vietnam War, many revolutionaries were sent to Cây Dừa Prison on Phú Quốc.

3. Some conclusions

Phú Quốc has great potentials for the ecotourism and can offer attractive and competitive tourism products. It can become a good destination for both international and local visitors if the central and provincial governments can work out rational strategy to develop it. At present, the tourism industry there is in its first stage and its potentials remain untapped. To achieve this aim, Kiên Giang authorities must assess exactly its strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities; select tourist products based on its strengths and try to develop and market them successfully; and make plan for its long-term development. A development strategy, even if it is lim-

ited to an industry, should include reasonable viewpoints and attitudes. They will orient development plans in the long run and make them comply with the national development strategy and suitable for local resources and conditions.

In the near future, the central government had better pay attention to the following problems when making plan to develop the Phú Quốc tourism:

- Supplying subsidies to infrastructure projects to accelerate construction speed of major ones, such as Dương Tơ Airport, An Thới and Đất Đỏ Ports, and roads connecting tourism sites Dương Đông, Cửa Can and Bãi Thom.

- Reorganizing administrative levels of Phú Quốc in order to improve their performance, tap existing potentials and making use of resources effectively; helping Kiên Giang and Phú Quốc authorities to attract foreign investors to projects to build tourism facilities (spas, recreation grounds, casinos, etc.); and introducing new mechanisms and policies to mobilize sources of finance for these projects.

- Working out plans to build roads and bridges, water and

power supply systems, vocational schools and hospital in BOT form, and new towns and trading centers according to the policy to exchange the land for infrastructure, and submitting the plans to the provincial government as soon as possible.

- Building resettlement zones in Dương Đông town, Suối Lớn District, and Tràu Nầm fishing village before carrying out land clearance needed for the implementation of investment projects.

- Working out programs to promote investment in the Phú Quốc tourism industry in cooperation with HCMC authorities and developing tours connecting Phú Quốc and HCMC.

Reference

- Socioeconomic Development Plan for Phú Quốc in 2007 prepared by Phú Quốc government in November 2006.

- List of Projects in Phú Quốc Waiting for Investment prepared by the Kiên Giang government in May 2006.

- Plan to Develop Phú Quốc into a Major Tourism Destination in the Western South prepared by the Kiên Giang government in November 2002. ■

