

SOME MEASURES TO PROMOTE AN GIANG PROVINCE'S TOURISM

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An Giang is located in the southwest of Vietnam between Tiền and Hậu Rivers. The east and northeast border on Đồng Tháp Province, south on Cần Thơ Province, west and southwest on Kiên Giang Province and west on Cambodia with the 96.61 km-long borderline.

The province has an alluvial plain and a mountainous area with a length of 30 km and width of 13 km. That is Thất Sơn mountainous area in Tri Tôn and Tịnh Biên Districts. The west of An Giang runs along the Vĩnh Tế Canal built in 1820 linking Châu Đốc and Hà Tiên.

An Giang ranks first among Vietnam's rice producers, in addition, it also has other farm products and fresh water agro-products including fishes and shrimps of various kinds. It is famous for traditional occupational villages such as Tân Châu silk, Châu Đốc salted fish, Chợ Thủ woodwork, Phú Tân glutinous rice chu-

patty, dried beef and consumer goods. Especially the province is well known for Champa minorities' traditional handicraft textiles and raising fish in rafts, a symbol of the river production.

Long Xuyên is the province's township, lying on the right bank of Hậu River, 189 km far from HCMC and established in the nineteenth century.

An Giang is also a renowned tourist destination for local and foreign visitors with such beautiful scenery as: Mount Sam, Bà Chúa Xứ Pagoda, Mount Cấm, caves, historical relics and other fine architectures.

Moreover, An Giang has 12,000 hectares of forest, in particular, natural forests in Mount Phú Cường, Mt Cấm, Mt Cô Tô. They are well preserved and a good environment for wild animals including monkey, pig, weasel, rabbit, python and bird species...The cajuput forests in plain not only protect agriculture but also are ideal sanctuaries to birds. Especially,

tens of thousands of birds and storks including red-head cranes live in Trà Sư Cajuput Forest. In addition to good effects on environment, ecology and climate, forests also create a lot of attractive tourist sites.

Besides majestic mountains and jungles, An Giang has abundant rivers with 2,503 km of waterway, especially large rivers surrounding islets and famous canals including Vĩnh Tế, Thoại Hà...This helps to boost An Giang's river tourism.

The An Giang tourism has planned targets by the year 2010 as follows:

1. To organize tourist activities

Establishment of tourist forms: In the market mechanism, the establishment of tourist forms depends on the law of supply and demand. The Government should manage the industry by institutions, policies, regulations and other factors and should not apply administrative measures. The

state-owned enterprises involving in tourism are required to strengthen their capacity in investment capital, human resource, and facilities. As a result, they will face advantages when trading in accommodation and hotel, transport, entertainment and recreation, sports, travel services...

In the time to come, the provincial authorities should consider to establish more state tourist businesses in combination with focal tourist sites including Mt Sam, Mt Cấm, Mt Sập...in order to fully tap the province's potentials.

Given current conditions of our country, package tours should be encouraged to meet the requirements of national security, social order and environmental protection. Furthermore, this is a measure to enhance the state management in tourist activities and balance the supply of and demand for tourist services.

Strengthening the state management of tourism in the province: The state management of tourism must be specified in terms of functions, tasks and powers of government agencies in the province for close collaboration and combination between the industry and the local government.

Based on determined functions and tasks of state management, state agencies and companies as well as private enterprises involving in tourism should be restructured with the aim to build a favorable tourist environment, attract domestic and

Table 1: Targets for An Giang tourism industry by 2010

	2000	2005	2010
1. Number of visitors	2,500,000	3,474,000	4,516,000
– Foreign ones	16,000	61,420	330,000
2. Tourism receipts (VND1,000)	488,000	2,279,000	6,900,000
3. Share of tourism industry in the provincial gross product (%)	2.02	2.8	4.48
4. Demand for hotel room	678	1,200	3,280
– Rooms of international standard	305	600	1,640
5. Expenditure per tourist			
– Vietnamese (VND1,000)	185	639	1,493
– Foreigner (US\$)	52	123	159

foreign investment capital, and fully exploit the province's tourist advantages.

2. To expand tourist forms

Tourist forms are established on the basis of An Giang's tourist resources including humanity and nature. The provincial authorities has pointed out major tourist forms as follows:

- Cultural tourism (festivals, historic relics...)

- Ecological tourism (rivers, orchards, forests...)

- Entertainment and recreation tourism

- Refreshment tourism

The provincial tourism authorities should pay attention to the following measures to expand tourist forms of An Giang:

- To continue investments in preserving, restoring and upgrading cultural and historical relics which have been recognized by the central authorities, especially those in famous sites including Thoại Ngọc Hầu Tomb, Bà Temple, Tây An Pagoda, Mt Sam, President Tôn Đức Thắng monument, relics in Tri Tôn and Phú Tân districts. This is the greatest advantage of An Giang.

- To expand the ecological system of cajuput and natural forests in the two mountainous districts with the aim to turn them into attractive landscape.

- To encourage businesses to build new tourist forms: tourism of ecology and refreshment, and entertainment and recreation centers in towns.

- To increase scale and attractiveness of the province's tourist forms; make close cooperation with neighboring provinces including Kiên Giang (Hà Tiên beach), Đồng Tháp, Cần Thơ, HCMC, Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu,

Lâm Đồng, even Cambodia...

3. To diversify tourist products

Vietnam tourism in general and An Giang Tourism in particular have been developed on the basis of exploiting natural resources and changing them into tourist sites. Nevertheless, there are so far signs showing lack of investment, preservation, restoration, upgrading and development. This is one of main reasons that tourist products become dull and uninteresting and many tourist sites down-

tourism industry should implement the following measures:

- To conduct a comprehensive survey on the quantity and quality of main tourist products of the An Giang Province and its untapped potentials. The result will be firm ground for making feasible plans on creating high quality products which are able to compete with those of other provinces, countries in the region and the world.

- To soon evaluate and rate hotels and services in line with international standard; issue strict regulations on faci-

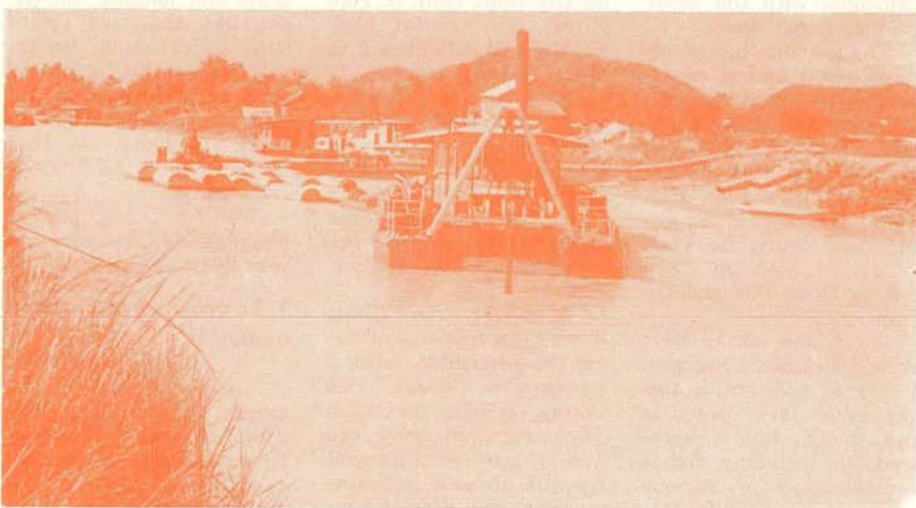
festivals regularly to serve visitors.

- To open fairs and exhibitions of fine art handicrafts, local unique souvenirs with reasonable prices.

- To rearrange traditional occupational villages (growing ornamental and fruit trees; carving; painting; knitting...)

- To cooperate with other provinces rich in tourist resources to open inter-province and inter-region tours to provide high quality tourist services.

4. To develop tourism in



graded.

In regard to cultural resources including traditional music and dance, festivals, fine art handicrafts, the province have not yet made appropriate investments for tourism development for many years. In spite of diversified designs, fine art handicrafts remain low quality and unreasonable prices. The forms of entertainment and recreation are modest, overlapping, and uninteresting. Facilities of hotels are still poor and the service quality is low.

All the above shortcomings have hindered the provincial tourism development. To overcome these restrictions, the

ties and service quality in hotels and restaurants; and finally make regular inspections to secure the quality of services and products.

- To encourage hotels and restaurants to expand many services to attract visitors.

- To give incentives to refurbishment and construction of entertainment and recreation centers; and create original products and services and diversify forms and styles to allure visitors.

- To plan some stages for traditional art performance with a view to meeting requirements of foreign tourists.

- To systemize and organize traditional

line with value of resources

Based on specification of values and allocation of tourist resources, the An Giang tourism will develop special products and establish special sites including recreation and sport centers, beautiful scenery, pilgrimage area, cultural and historical relics...

Nevertheless, the values of tourist resources depend on their uniqueness, attractiveness, infrastructures, facilities, and service quality. These factors also help determine the international, national or local level of these resources. Based on their development potentials, the provincial tourism industry

will concentrate its investment.

Tourist sites of the An Giang Province can be divided into two groups:

+ National level:

a. Tourist sites include Mt Sam, Mt Cấm, Oc Eo archaeological site and Trà Sư Cajuput Forest: They are famous landscape of the province, 60 km far from Long Xuyên Township and 4 km from Châu Đốc Town. Many cultural and historical relics are located in this area including Thoại Ngọc Hầu Tomb, Bà Chúa Xứ Temple, Tây An and Hang Pagoda...

b. The monument of President Tôn Đức Thắng: it is situated in the Mỹ Hoà Hưng islet (Long Xuyên Township).

+ Local level: These sites include Temple of Trần Văn Thành (a military mandarin of the Nguyễn dynasty) in Châu Phú District, Đạo Năm Pagoda, Bà Lê Pagoda and Huỳnh Thị Hưởng memorial in Chợ Mới District, Mt Cô Tô in Tri Tôn District, Mt Sập tourist site in Thoại Sơn District; Giồng Thành Pagoda in Phú Tân District; Champa textile village in Tân Châu District...

5. To build a safe tourist environment

A tourist product though high quality and cheap price is still unsalable if the tourist environment is not safe. As a result, to ensure security for the tourist environment is a must, so the local government has to issue regulations on organization and management of tourist sites across the province. The management of overnight guests should be perfected with simplified procedures with the aim to ensure security both for tourists and local environment. The tourist sites also need security guards. This force is authorized to settle violations of regulations. Furthermore, the government should combine measures of educa-

tion, administration and economics closely to establish a healthy and safe tourist environment in the province.

6. Strategies of marketing and sales promotion

Tourist products usually see less change and the resource is restricted. Therefore, a focal marketing strategy is needed for highest efficiency in the tourist business. To attain this target, the companies are required to consider selecting appropriate products and market strategies as follows:

- Old products, old markets

Over the past years, the province's tourist market has attracted mainly pilgrims, the amount of international visitors has not seen a high growth. Most of these visitors require appropriate quality and price of tourist services and products. However, they have got used to local products. As such, this strategy needs proper policies and investments to improve the quality of local tourist products. In addition, prices of local products need dropping to attract more visitors.

- Old products, new markets

The companies should evaluate new markets to allure international and domestic visitors, and pilgrims who have not been to An Giang before. To implement this strategy, companies should launch advertising campaigns and diversify tourist services.

- New products, old markets

This is a feasible strategy because only product and service expansion can avoid dullness and decline of old markets, at the same time attract new visitors.

- New products, new markets

This strategy requires huge investments in product diversification and advertisement to seek new markets. Given current conditions of Vietnam and

An Giang Province, this strategy finds it hard to get large profits.

7. To develop human resource for the tourism

Like other industries, the human factor is an extremely important and key problem to development of the tourism industry. The tourism is an industry requiring wide and direct contact, so the employees' professional skill, and contact style and behavior, especially attentiveness of guides and receptionists are essential conditions.

The qualifications of current personnel are not compatible with development requirements. Today when Vietnam joins ASEAN and its tourism is integrating into the regional and the world market, the employees' skill must be improved to the national and international standards. To meet the urgent requirement, the Government has to plan comprehensive programs to train and retrain current employees in the industry. The training orientations are as follows:

- To investigate and evaluate professional skills of all employees of the provincial tourism sector with the aim to make detailed and specific training programs.

- To cooperate with other provinces and cities in organization of courses to train workers in accordance with the province's tourism development.

- To expand training forms suitable for human capital and capacity of employees.

- To encourage higher education on tourism for local workers with a view to industrializing and modernizing the province tourism industry in the future.

- To send young employees and university students to developed countries for tourism study.

- To boost exchanges of experience and profession via business tour, seminars, and workshops in countries with developed tourism.

- To enhance the consciousness of tourism for local residents through schools and mass media.

8. To make access to capital sources for tourism development

- Funds from the State budget: mainly used for upgrading historical relics and building more tourist sites.

- Long-term loans from banks: invested in hotel construction.

- Other sources: mobilized from enterprises, individuals, foreign partners, share selling.

- In addition, the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) form should be applied to the sector development.

The An Giang tourism is in the process of development. Especially from 1996 until now, the number of visitors, revenues and facilities of the sector has seen a high growth. Nevertheless, the growth is not compatible with the province's potentials.

Besides its economic profits, the sector also helps introduce the province's people and culture to domestic and foreign visitors.

In the province's tourism development strategy in the 2001-2010, the sector is required to become a key industry which contributing to the province's economic restructuring towards industrialization and modernization. The performance of An Giang tourism is not dissociated from that of other provinces in the Mekong Delta and even Cambodia. This close relation is indispensable to the tourism development of Vietnam in general and the Mekong Delta in particular. ■