

MEASURES TO ATTRACT TOURISTS TO CẦN THƠ CITY

by NGUYỄN QUỐC NGHI & HOÀNG THỊ HỒNG LỘC

1. Problem

A center of the Western South Vietnam, Cần Thơ City has long been named as “Capital of the West” implying that it is the most prosperous city of the Western South. Cần Thơ is situated by the Hậu River on the low plain of the Mekong Delta criss-crossed with canals and rivers that supply water to fruit orchards, vast rice fields and quiet villages. Cần Thơ people are very hospitable and candid and have a unique lifestyle of river-based communities. These features create a simple and impressive picture to visitors to Cần Thơ. This allows us to affirm that Cần Thơ enjoys big advantages of inherent values and potentials, especially for eco-tourism.

In the past, exploitation of potentials for tourism in Cần Thơ has been relatively poor and failed to match its human and natural resources. The present question is, how can a breakthrough in the Cần Thơ tourism be made? The problem can be solved by “enhancing tourists’ satisfaction from tourism products” based on “improvements in such products” and a “reasonable and feasible strategy to attract tourists to Cần Thơ.”

2. Research methods

a. Gathering data: The research group has gathered secondary data from Cần Thơ Service of Culture – Sports and Tourism and Cần Thơ People’s Committee. As for firsthand data, the group applied the nonprobability sampling on a convenient basis by conducting interviews with 180 visitors to Cần Thơ. These visitors were divided into two groups: (1) 55 foreign visitors; and (2) 125 visitors from other provinces.

b. Analyzing data: the research employed the descriptive statistics with various indicators (mean, ratio, and frequency, etc.) to depict activities of Cần Thơ tourism in the years 2004- 2008. In addition, expert method was also used for getting the picture and working out measures to attract more tourists to Cần Thơ.

3. Results and discussion

a. Activities of the Cần Thơ tourism industry in 2004 - 2008:

This period represents a landmark in development of the Cần Thơ tourism industry, which paves the way for the national year of tourism in 2008 named “Life in the Mekong Orchards.” Cần

Thơ is really a destination endowed with preferential treatment from nature. Fertile soil, temperate climate abundant source of fresh water allow development of fruitful orchards and vase rice fields, which serves as a basis for the eco-tourism much appreciated by the World Tourism Organization and international tourists as well. In addition, many disasters, such as political crisis, tsunami, and SARS, in Thailand and neighboring countries have discouraged international tourists. That is why many of them chose Vietnam as a destination for their holidays. To take the best use of this opportunity, the Cần Thơ tourism has tried its best in recent years to attract tourists to Cần Thơ. Advertisement and investments in facilities have been carried out reasonably.

mestic and foreign markets, took part in international tourism fairs and engaged in e-commerce, and as a result, Cần Thơ tourism products became more familiar to foreign tourists. Average stay of visitors, however, is still short (under 1.5 days) because Cần Thơ lacks facilities for entertainment that can host a large number of visitors. Particularly, night activities in Cần Thơ are poor, which fails to encourage visitors to spend. In future, there must be active changes to prolong visitors' stay and provide them with chances to discover local lifestyle and enjoy themselves.

b. Tourists' satisfaction from Cần Thơ tourism products

Table 1: Cần Thơ tourism industry in 2004 - 2008

Indicator	Unit	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Sales	VND million	189,143	231,260	270,980	365,090	455,198
Visitor	person	407,330	462,141	543,650	693,055	817,250
Stay	day	1.14	1.21	1.16	1.23	1.31
Traveler	person	17,769	43,477	45,093	53,997	76,591
Hotel	hotel	89	97	115	135	154
Investment	VND million	385,958	462,750	545,290	1,028,395	1,186,003
Laborer	person	1,900	1,973	2,010	2,025	2,336

Source: Cần Thơ Service of Culture – Sports and Tourism

Generally, indicators of the Cần Thơ tourism industry in 2004 – 08 show an upward tendency. In the past few years, travel agencies in Cần Thơ launched tourism promotion campaigns in both do-

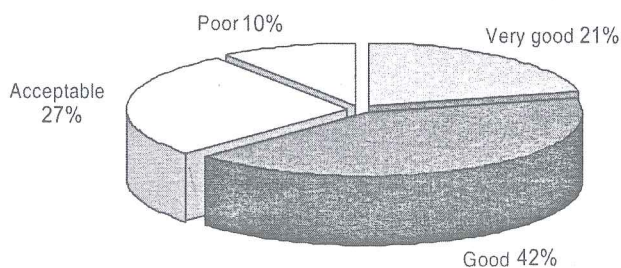


Figure 1: Tourists' estimate of service quality in tourism products

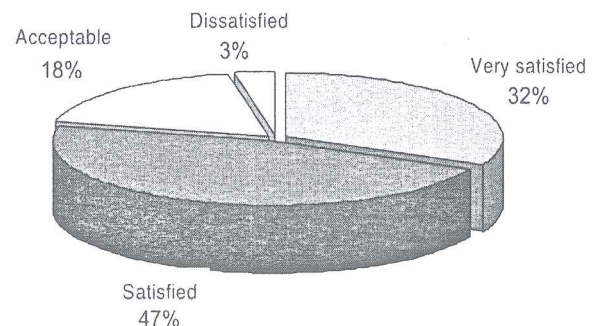


Figure 2: Tourists' satisfaction from Cần Thơ tourism products

Research results show that the best part of tourists estimate the quality of Cần Thơ tourism products as good and very good but 27% of them think it is of medium level and 10% say it is poor. Although 79% of tourists feel satisfied, or very satisfied, with Cần Thơ tourism products, 18% estimate them as acceptable and 3% feel unsatisfied. These figures mean that tourism authorities and suppliers of services in Cần Thơ should re-examine the quality of tourism products and take measures to improve it with a view to ensuring tourists' satisfaction.

sity of recreations, connections between tourist attractions, and diversity of souvenirs and staples. Tourists' estimates reflects shortcomings of the Cần Thơ tourism industry and local authorities should take strong measures to improve performance of the industry in the coming years.

c. Measures to attract tourists to Cần Thơ:

Results of the survey allow the research groups to ask experts for their opinions and suggest three groups of measures to deal with shortcomings of the Cần Thơ tourism industry by making the best use of local potentials.

Table 2: Tourists' satisfaction from factors of tourism product (%)

Factor	Degree					The dissatisfied as %
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	(1)+(2)
	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	
Natural scenery	0	4	17	44	35	4
Security and safety	0	2	9	40	49	2
Food safety	2	5	20	43	30	7
Diversity of recreations	2	18	45	30	5	20
Connection between tourist attractions	4	26	38	28	4	30
Transport system	3	10	15	50	22	13
Telecommunications	0	2	15	43	40	2
Friendliness of local residents	0	0	12	45	43	0
Souvenirs and local staples	3	17	40	30	10	20
Diversity of hotels and restaurants	2	4	20	44	30	6
Tour guide	3	4	25	35	33	7
Behavior of employee	1	3	23	40	33	4
Diversity and richness of food	1	10	32	40	17	11

Source: Data gathered by the research group, 2008 -09

Research results show that factors of the Cần Thơ tourism products highly appreciated by tourists are natural scenery, security, food safety, communications and telecommunications, diversity of hotels and restaurants, behavior of employees, and especially friendliness of local residents. Other factors that don't satisfy tourists are diver-

- Group 1: Beefing up connections between tourist attractions: Distribution of tourism potentials in Cần Thơ, local authorities should accelerate development of the following tourist attractions:

+ Cần Thơ inner city where tourists enjoy shopping and recreations during their stay.

+ Ô Môn – Cờ Đỏ district where tourists enjoy the eco-tourism, visit farms and explore lifestyle of rice planters.

+ Thốt Nốt: Tourists can visit farms, fruit gardens and craft villages, and picnic.

+ Phong Điền: Tourists can enjoy homestay, and visit floating markets; Bình Thủy old village; and historical Vòng Cung Road.

It's necessary to develop staple products for each tourist attraction and their quality must be improved regularly. In gardens and farms included in tours, there must be specialty foods or local fruits in order to create characteristics for the tourism products.

Transport time between HCMC and Cần Thơ should be reduced in order to create connections with tourist attractions in HCMC. Moreover, transport between sites in the same cluster of tourist attractions, and between these clusters, must be also improved to avoid waste of time.

Travel agencies had better combine various activities to make their tours more attractive and challenging. Each tourist attraction or site should be an important stage of the journey. Visits to floating markets, beautiful scenery and fruit orchards can be alternated with visits to craft villages and historical remains to provide tourist with different experiences and feelings.

- Group 2: Developing and differentiating recreations: Tourists usually stay only for a short time in Cần Thơ because tourism products are monotonous; and forms of entertainment and recreations are poor. At night in particular, tourists have

nothing to do but go for a walk along Ninh Kiều Wharf, that is why they get bored quickly and seldom revisit. To encourage tourists to spend more in Cần Thơ, there must be big recreation grounds and amusement parks. Singaporean tourist services are worth studying: large and all-night amusement parks where tourists can play various games, including adventurous and instructive ones. To differentiate Cần Thơ products from others, many traditional games can be presented in amusement parks because Vietnam has plenty of such games: pole pushing, hand and leg wrestling, blind man's pot hitting, carrying water on one's head, jump rope, kangaroo jump, stilt walking, rope pulling contest, greasy pole, bamboo walking and bamboo dancing, etc.

In addition, tourism events can be held in which tourists can take part, such as traditional festivals, street festivals, fruit fairs, lantern festivals, and even national and international conferences and workshops. These events can make tourists prolong their stay and spend more money. All-night markets can be organized in Cần Thơ because tourists like shopping and spend their time in marketplaces. Local authorities must enlarge marketplaces and make them cleaner. The EFC international trade fair building can be turned into a night mall and recreation ground. Pedlar street is an existing advantage for the building of this night mall. Authorities can make the best use of this street by organizing various activities, such as inviting tourists to watch and take part in preparing specialty foods.

Cần Thơ authorities had better form culinary



streets to provide tourists with culinary masterpieces and chances to understand local culture. Traditional dishes and recipes must be restored and these streets must be arranged according to culinary arts. Foods must be made from local farm products in hygienic conditions. In addition, tourists can be provided with information about specialty dishes (ways of processing them, sources of raw materials, ways of enjoying them or their meaning), which helps enhance their knowledge of Cần Thơ.

With potentials for the eco-tourism, Cần Thơ had better develop facilities for health caring and relaxation in order to diversify tourism products and serve better tourists' needs. Accommodation industry must supply such health caring services in areas zoned for the eco-tourism. These concerns can operate as high-class outdoor spas where tourists enjoy fresh air and numerous health caring services (mud bath, sauna, and massage, etc.).

- Group 3: Creating local staples: As compared with other provinces, such as Bến Tre with products from coconut, Phú Quốc with fish sauce, or An Giang with silk, Cần Thơ has no staples of its own. Products for sale in souvenir shops are usually from other provinces while Cần Thơ authorities fail to create a symbol for the city, a mascot for example. They can launch contests with a view to finding out images and products or slogans representing Cần Thơ City and its residents, and encourage production of made-in-Cần-Thơ products, such as basketwork made from water hyacinth,

rattan or bamboo; traditional blouse and stripped towel, hats and hammocks previously used by guerrillas, or scale models of floating market and thatched hut.

Besides souvenir shops, such products can be distributed by travel agencies and in tourism sites. Travel agencies can give such products, along with guide books, as gifts to their customers. In tourist attractions, small gifts, such as fruits after a visit to fruit orchards, or some products made by tourists with help from craftsmen, can be used for reminding visitors of Cần Thơ and their good experiences in this city.

4. Conclusion

This research presents achievements and shortcomings in the Cần Thơ tourism industry through estimates of tourists. With great potentials for tourism development in a big city, local authorities had better take strong measures develop the tourism industry and encourage support from tourism agencies and local residents for a sustainable development of this industry■

REFERENCES

- Cần Thơ Service of Culture – Sports and Tourism (2009), *Tổng hợp hoạt động ngành du lịch TP.Cần Thơ từ năm 2004-2008* (Tourism activities in Cần Thơ City in 2004 – 2008).
- Cần Thơ City People's Committee (2005) *Chương trình xây dựng và phát triển du lịch Cần Thơ đến năm 2010 - tầm nhìn 2020* (Program to build and develop the Cần Thơ Tourism up to 2010 – and 2020 vision).

